

## **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

**23 January, 2012 at 10.00am**  
**at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

**Present:** Councillor Edwards (Chair);  
Councillor Eustace (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Alden, Chambers, Clinton, Davis, Douglas-Maul, Foster, Idrees, O'Neill, Ryder and Singh.

**Observers:** Councillors Ali-Khan, Davies, Delaney, Docker, Finnegan, Griffiths, Hogarth, Sandy, Spence, Tranter, and Turner.  
Messrs Denny and Topliss.

### **1/12 Consultation with Non-Domestic Ratepayers**

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Committee met to consult with representatives of non-domestic ratepayers on the setting of the Authority's budget and precept for 2012/2013.

No representatives of non-domestic ratepayers attended the meeting.

### **2/12 Lead Member Reports**

The Committee received verbal reports from lead members on the work they had been involved in over the last quarter:-

#### **Equality and Diversity**

Councillor Spence, Councillor Edwards and the Director of Human Resources had visited Avon Fire and Rescue Service in December, 2011 where they had met with senior managers and a lead elected member from Avon FRS and discussed and shared best practice. One of the considerations arising from the visit was for WMFS to establish an equality and diversity steering group. The group would be chaired by Councillor Spence and would include a range of stakeholders and would consider progress against the Service's equality objectives.

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Work was underway to produce and publish equality objectives and actions for the Service as required by the Equality Act.

On 2 February, 2012 the Service, in partnership with West Midlands Police, would be hosting a conference at the Training Academy on 'Managing Disability in the Workplace'. The conference would include workshops on dyslexia, cancer and dealing with mental health issues.

Having already received the CIPD award for its work in relation to equality and diversity, the Service had also been shortlisted for a National Distinction Award in Human Resources, again for its work on equality and diversity. The winner would be announced on 24 January, 2012.

**Asset Management**

Work was underway to consider options for new facilities to replace Cradley Heath and Halesowen stations and a report would be submitted to the Authority in April, 2012.

An updated Property Asset Management Plan would be presented to the Authority on 13 February, 2012.

The letting of empty office space at headquarters would commence in late January/early February, 2012.

**Human Resources**

Consultations with trades unions on revisions to the Employee Relations Framework were now complete and the revised document would be considered by the Joint Consultative Panel at its meeting on 23 January, 2012, prior to its submission to the Authority in February, 2012.

Councillors Chambers, O'Neill and Turner had attended training on 'Conducting Fair Hearings' in December, 2011. The course had been run in-house and had received excellent feedback.

Councillor Chambers would be chairing a steering group consisting of a range of internal stakeholders to lead on the preparation for the Service's assessment against the Investors in People standard.

A review of the Service's performance against the corporate human resources indicators would soon be taking place along with ensuring that appropriate targets were set for the next financial year.

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Changes of personnel were taking place within the senior trades union structures recognised by the Service and efforts would be made to ensure that constructive and open dialogue was maintained with any newly elected branch officials.

**Member Development**

The Academy had hosted an informative visit for elected members on 8 December, 2011 where members had been able to observe and improve their understanding of the range of activities undertaken at the Academy in support of key service delivery objectives.

Following the recent presentations to the Policy Planning Forum on health and safety and risk management, members were requested to inform Councillor Foster, or any other member on the Member Development Working Group, of any other topics on which they would like to receive a presentation.

Early work had begun on reviewing the induction programme for new members. The Member Development Working Group was keen to ensure that a more targeted and relevant programme was put in place which met new members' needs. Members were asked to submit any views or suggestions they had on the matter to the Working Group for consideration.

Arrangements were being finalised for the visit to Fire Control on 13 February, 2012 and members were asked to inform the Clerk whether they would be attending or not.

**Performance Management**

Seven performance indicators remained on target; three were expected to reach target whilst two remained not on target. The two not on target were arson fires in dwellings and arson fires in non-domestic premises and work continued on how to improve performance in there two areas.

The Corporate Performance Review Team had met on 18 January, 2012 and discussed target setting for 2012/2013. The Team was due to meet again on 25 January, 2012.

Visits were taking place in February and March, 2012 to Bloxwich, Willenhall, Walsall and Aldridge fire stations to meet fire fighters and discuss first hand how the service was progressing. The findings of these visits would be reported to the Committee. Councillor Chambers indicated that he would like to take part in the visits.

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3/12     **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

**Resolved** that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting. This is to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

4/12     **Income Generation**

The Committee was informed of an opportunity that had arisen for the service to generate income.

The exploration of opportunities to develop income was just one of the ways in which the Authority had responded to the financial challenges it faced as a consequence of the recent government cuts.

Many fire and rescue authorities, including West Midlands Fire Service, already made use of existing legal powers to charge (i.e. recover costs) when providing discretionary services to the community. Fire and rescue authorities also had certain powers to trade in activities that were related to their functions (that is, activities that were not mandatory duties). The Localism Act 2011 set out to expand this by granting all single-purpose fire and rescue authorities a 'General Power of Competence' which allowed them to do anything for the purpose of carrying out their functional purpose that was not prevented by law. The new power under the Act was expected to come into force in April 2012 and would significantly widen the type of commercial activities that a FRS could consider undertaking.

Approval was sought to establish a trading company to enable the Authority to take such opportunities forward. The company would be wholly owned by West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority as the only shareholder, and the Authority would also appoint the directors of the company.

The Committee received proposed Memorandum and Articles of Association for the company.

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**Resolved:-**

- (1) that approval be given to the establishment of a company limited by shares wholly owned by the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority for the purpose of undertaking trading and income generation activities;
- (2) that the Chief Fire Officer, the Chair of the Authority and Councillors Eustace, Idrees and Turner be appointed as directors of the company and that those persons represent the Authority's interest as the shareholding owner of the company;
- (3) that the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to take such steps as are reasonably necessary to establish the company and submit bids for appropriate work, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority;
- (4) that a progress report on the establishment of the company and its activities be submitted to the Committee within the next three months.

(Meeting ended at 10.56 am)

<p style="text-align:center"><i>Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3189</i></p>
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