

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**5 February 2018 at 10.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority
Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)
Councillors Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie, Booth,
Brackenridge, Cartwright, Clinton, Craddock, Davis, Hogarth,
Male, Miks, Mottram, P Singh, T Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh,
Williams, and Young
Mr Ager

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
B Brook, J Campbell, J Connor, P Fellows, M Pym, P Shergill, N
Spencer, S Timmington, S Warnes, M Ward-White

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)
M Griffiths (Treasurer)

Apologies: Councillors Allcock, Eustace, and Sealey

Observers: Nil

1/18 Chair and CFO Announcements

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

All Members and officer present congratulated Chief Fire Officer Phil Loach who had been awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal in the New Year Honours list.

The WMFS twitter feed had been very active, and members were reminded to retweet posts if possible.

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

Members were reminded to begin using Office 365 if they had not already, ahead of the move to the reformed Fire Authority in June 2018.

The Director of Policing and Fire Services along with other members of the Home Office had visited the Service in January. They had been impressed and stated that they were not aware of all the activity that the Service carried out to minimise risk and vulnerability.

The West Midlands branch of the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) had launched a campaign called Fired Up which included encouraging people to sign a petition regarding a number of issues such as updated contracts for firefighters, and the additional work involving falls response and hospital discharges. Additionally, Members and the Service had received correspondence from the FBU highlighting concerns raised as part of the campaign.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- Response times continued to decrease with response times at an all-time low, including for category one incidents.
- The Service had received a Fire Peer Challenge as part of the Operational Assessment in October 2016. The peer challenge team had noted that response times were 'impressive'.
- Fleet availability during January 2018 had been in excess of 98%, which was an all-time high. The response time to category one incidents were 4 minutes 40 seconds during quarter two (an all-time low) and 4 minutes 48 seconds during quarter three. Response times to category two, three and four incident types continued to out-perform targets.
- Prevention work included moving upstream to tackle vulnerability and in turn, risk. It was known that users of falls response services such as telecare were more at risk of experiencing a fire, and at a higher risk if a fire did occur.
- Service users overwhelmingly supported the service provided, with the Service able to provide faster response times than previously experienced (in part due to the demands that other services experienced).
- The Service was in negotiations with the FBU to find a local agreement. The local and national negotiation situation was influenced by the FBU engaged in a campaign regarding firefighter pay.
- Members of SET would be able to support Section 41 Members.
- Commissioning had been identified as part of the Service's efficiency plan, with a target of £2 million by the end of the four year period. Falls response was just one element amongst a range of different services. Other examples included the provision of support services for the National Fire Chiefs

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

Council, and potentially developing business continuity plans for Local Authorities.

2/18 Delivering ‘The Plan’

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on delivering The Plan:

2018 would see Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (the Inspectorate) commence its schedule of inspections, following the three pilots which were due to be conducted shortly.

The Inspectorate would examine the following aspects:

- Operational service delivery – prevention, protection, response, resilience
- Efficiency – leadership, training, diversity, values and culture
- Organisational effectiveness – value for money, matching resources to demand, collaboration

The Inspectorate would not inspect the governance model, just the services delivered.

Productivity would be a feature of the inspections, and it was noted that there had been pressure for Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) to utilise retained staff for a number of years, an issue that could be particularly pertinent with the Service being a fully wholetime service.

With regard to matching resources to demand, the Inspectorate had been clear that FRS’s were to manage vulnerability on a risk basis, and resources on a demand basis. There was the potential for the FRS model to be similar to that of Ambulance but levels of demand were massively different. The amount of emergency responses for FRS’s was a small percentage due to the prevention and protection work undertaken by the sector.

The Inspectorate would measure each FRS against four ratings; outstanding, good, requires improvement, and inadequate. It was noted that the Inspectorate were still forming their views of the ratings and what constituted a rating of good

The Inspectorate would apply the PEEL principles (effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy) when conducting inspections. It was believed that efficiency and effectiveness would be a focus.

Although an inspection would be through an efficiency and effectiveness lens, there was a need for the Service to ensure it complied with legitimacy. It was also noted that it was important that

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

the inspection process measured against outcomes and that it was a rounded inspection process.

The Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge in 2016 had been very positive but it was evident that it had taken the members of the Peer Team a while whilst visiting the Service to fully understand and unpick the strategy. Subsequently, the 3PT (Portfolio, Programme, Project, Tasks) approach had been developed to ensure an audit trail.

The Service demonstrated value via the refresh of The Plan (2017-20), the Service Delivery Model, and the Community Safety Strategy which demonstrated to the public where and how the Service reduced vulnerability. Risk based response times were the tie with the public, the Service, and the Fire Authority.

The Service demonstrated value through the protection work it carried out using operational firefighters and the protection team, via the refresh of The Plan to ensure public safety, focussing on the outcomes of the Grenfell Tower report, improving resilience within communities. As part of the Grenfell response, the Service had been involved with Building Research Establishment tests of cladding, the completion of high rise inspections (all 551 residential high rise buildings had received Site Specific Risk Information visits), and visiting three National Health Service sites. The Service had also widened the scope of such visits at high rise premises as evidenced in the report on Metro Court in Sandwell due to be published imminently, which included factors such as vulnerability and dependency. The Service, acting on behalf of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), had setup a 24/7 incident room, providing updates to NFCC twice daily.

The Service demonstrated value through the prevention work and alternative health activities it carried out. Health and social care were a key connector to vulnerability and fire risk. The average response time to telecare incidents was 15 minutes, utilising Brigade Response Vehicles (smaller fire engines) to maintain the availability of traditional fire engines (PRLs). Service personnel delivering such activities were trained in falls response and lifting equipment, with operational crews undertaking a Royal Society for Public Health level two qualification in understanding health improvements.

Going forward, progress would be made by:

- Local agreement developed with consultation with staff and representative bodies
- New priorities within The Plan, clearly identifying how the Service are going to reduce risk and vulnerability
- Transformation – ensuring the Service has the right people in the right place with the right skills

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

- Reward and recognition – workforce enabled to carry out The Plan
- Sustainability
- Risk and vulnerability reduced through all of the above

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- Firefighters pay may have fallen behind compared to other services, but the public sector was not receiving any new money without robust business cases.
- Vulnerability changes over time; vulnerability was not the same as twenty years ago, for example the Service rarely attended chimney fires anymore.
- If a person was to suffer a fall in their home, the majority of the public's instant reaction would be to request an ambulance but attendance of the fire service could be requested as well (medical, person entrapped in home). Ambulance Control and Fire Control worked together but more could be done to increase awareness of co-operative working at these types of incidents. Additionally, more communications were required to increase awareness of the public.
- The Service had achieved accredited First Response Emergency Care (FREC) status. FREC Level 3 training would be rolled out to operational staff from January 2018, with Trauma Station Based Trainers trained to FREC level 4 (enabling them to deliver the training).
- As a result of the Grenfell Tower incident, locally the Service had revisited its high rise strategy looking at how the Service provided enforcement and advice. Nationally, the Service had committed people and resources into workstreams and managed the communications flow. The Service was not just looking at physical issues, but also people based issues.

3/18 The Budget and The Plan

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Strategic Enabler
Strategic Hub delivered a presentation on The Plan:

Refresh of The Plan – strategic direction 2018-21:

- Key Priorities and Outcomes – Prevention, Protection, Response
- Supporting Principles and Outcomes – People, Value for Money, Information Communication Technology
- Developing strategic direction 2018-21:
 - Operational excellence leading to assertive, effective and safe response

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

- Health, social care as a key connector to vulnerability and fire risk
- Ensuring public safety focusing on the outcomes of Grenfell
- Improving resilience within communities
- Increasing partnerships and collaboration in delivery of public safety

The refresh of The Plan including the refreshed priorities and outcome statements would be submitted to the Fire Authority for approval at the meeting in February 2018.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- There had been a subtle change to the reference to automatic fire alarms (of which, 95% of such calls were effectively wasted calls) to reflect that automatic fire alarms could be an issue at residential premises, not just businesses which had been the focus in previous years.

Mike Griffiths, Treasurer and Strategic Enabler Finance and Resources, delivered a presentation on the budget:

The provisional settlement for 2018/19 had been received which was broadly in line with the provisional figure indicated for 2018/19 when the four year funding figures were first announced. The Service was currently in the middle of a four year comprehensive spending review period (2018/19 was year 3) and although there were no absolute certainties, it did allow the Service to form an idea of anticipated government funding.

With no significant changes to core funding, the Efficiency Plan remained focused on meeting a £10M deficit via:

- £2M - increase to Council Tax and Business Rate Distribution
- £1M – general budget reductions
- £1M – internal restructures
- £2M – alternative funding
- £4M – staffing

There were a number of budget pressures, namely:

- Pay awards
- Staffing
- Pension costs

Although the public sector pay cap had been set officially at 1%, pressures were increasing to remove / increase the pay cap.

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

Current arrangements regarding firefighter posts and disturbance payments, along with the continuing local and national negotiations, meant that there could be a need to extend the duration that disturbance payments would be paid.

There was the potential for firefighter pension costs to increase in 2019/20 following the three yearly review of the pension scheme.

The impact of the three factors above, had not been considered in the original Efficiency Plan (as they were unknowns at the time).

£1.5M of General Balances would need to be utilised to set a balanced budget for 2018/19, with approximately £7M remaining at the end of that financial year. There was the need for further use of the General Balances in 2019/20 (approximately £1M) and 2020/21 (predicted approximately £700K) due to the budget pressures ongoing, combined with assumed further reductions in Government funding for year 2020/21.

The Referendum limit for increases in council tax, previously 2%, had been increased to 3% for 2018/19 and 2019/20. The proposed increase of 2.99% (to be agreed by the Fire Authority) would equal an annual increase of £1.70 for a Band D property, with the Fire Service charge remaining the lowest in the country for a stand-alone Fire and Rescue Authority.

The fire service nationally no longer received capital funding from Government. Forecasts indicated a £2M deficit in the capital programme in 2020/21 which the Fire Authority would need to consider.

A report on the Budget would be submitted to the Fire Authority at the meeting in February 2018 seeking approval of the proposed 2.99% increase in council tax and the use of reserves.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The impact on general balances was recognised within the three year budget strategy. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework stated that General Balances in excess of 5% would need to be rationalised and justified. The proposed Use of Balances over the three financial years 2018/19 to 2020/21 would result in General Balances at approximately 5% by the end of that period.
- The Service would need to consider further changes in addition to those reflected in Efficiency Plan due to the increase in budget pressures and the assumed ongoing Government funding reductions in 2020/21.
- With regard to moving to the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), it was believed that the budget would be

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

relatively healthy over the next three years, particularly given the range and quality of services being delivered but in the meantime, there could be a need to examine further service changes. A General Balance of £5M (taking into account potential further use of general balances during 2019/20 and 2020/21) would still be regarded as reasonably healthy based on the draft National Framework document.

- The Government were identifying FRS balances and reserves, and it had been stated that there would be no extra funding in those instances where there were large reserves.
- The Government had been and would continue to be asked to reconsider its stance on no capital funding or transformational funding for the Fire Service.
- The Service had lost approximately 50% of its Government Funding since 2010/11; it was always going to be difficult to balance the budget and to continue providing such a high level of service without the use of General Balances.
- The change in pay award assumption equated to a full year impact on the budget of approximately £800K per 1%. It was not felt that holding the increase at 1% as part of the assumptions within the budget would be realistic.

4/18 Governance Update

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Strategic Enabler Strategic Hub, delivered a presentation and update on governance:

The proposals for Mayoral WMCA governance comprised:

- WMCA as the governing body
- Mayor to make decisions
- Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee
- Chief Fire Officer to be accountable to the Mayor

The public consultation had launched in January 2018 which would gauge public opinion regarding the proposed changes to the governance of the Service. The consultation was being promoted through Local Authorities, the WMCA, partners and key stakeholders. Approximately 400 responses had been received to date with the opinion of responses broadly balanced. Members were asked if they would be able to participate in workshops and to continue to engage with communities in a bid to increase the number of responses.

The public consultation would close on 8 March 2018. Following some analysis, the outcomes of the consultation would be considered by the seven Local Authorities along with approval of the proposal. If approved, the Service would then submit the proposed governance scheme to the Secretary of State and Home Office.

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

CFO Accountabilities

The governance of FRS's was changing significantly across the country, including the impact upon Chief Fire Officers. It was pertinent for the Service to review the Chief Fire Officer and Officer accountabilities to address external changes, as well as internal changes, due to key influences, including:

- Transformation of services aligned to strategic direction
- Future governance and the move to the Mayoral WMCA
- The Policing and Crime Act 2017 and devolution
- The draft National Fire and Rescue Framework

The current Chief Fire Officer delegations (Constitution articles 4, 15 and Scheme of Delegations) were:

- To control all matters relating to the administration of the Authority's functions under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 and any other enabling legislation which shall include taking and implementing that are:
 - a) Concerned with maintaining the operational effectiveness of the Service, including varying the deployment of resources in order to ensure the effective delivery of The Plan
 - b) Matters incidental to the discharge of the Authority's functions which fall within a policy decision taken by the Authority

It was proposed that the Fire Authority would widen the brief of the Chief Fire Officer by reviewing and developing the Chief Fire Officers accountabilities. The review would seek to maintain the accountabilities to the Fire Authority for the delivery of services for which the Fire Authority was legally accountable. The wider accountabilities would continue to be open to transparency and scrutiny.

Developing the Chief Fire Officer accountabilities would focus on:

- Leading the Service, setting the direction and culture of the Service.
- Delivering against statutory requirements.
- Preparing the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the strategy (The Plan).
- Proposing an annual budget to enable effective and efficient delivery of the strategic priorities.
- Operational independence:
 - Staffing structures
 - Workforce reform
 - Assets, fleet and digital

Policy Planning Forum 5 February 2018

- Engaging in collaborative partnerships

A report to enable the review would be submitted to the Fire Authority at the meeting in February 2018. The Chief Executive Officers of the seven Local Authorities would be notified during March and a further report outlining the outcomes of the review would be submitted to the Fire Authority for approval at the meeting in April 2018.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- Due to local elections being held in May 2018, the April meeting of the Fire Authority would be held during the purdah period. Members were advised that the purdah period would not affect the ability of Members to consider the report, as there was no statutory restrictions on the Fire Authority's decision making, meetings or political debate during the period. Normal day to day business for the Fire Authority would continue through the election period. It was noted that proposals of a sensitive or controversial nature would need careful consideration as it may not be appropriate for such a proposal to proceed during the purdah period. However, the report referenced was not considered sensitive or controversial, nor would it give rise to potential political advantage for any one party.
- It was important to review and commit to the Chief Fire Officers delegations ahead of moving to the Mayoral WMCA.
- The changes to the delegations were aligned to the governance scheme that the Service had taken to the WMCA and Local Authorities. The Service would consult with the Chief Executive Officers of the seven Local Authorities and the Mayor's office.

The meeting closed at 11:56 hours.

<p>Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680</p>
