

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**7 January, 2013 at 10.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority

Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Singh Atwal, Auluck, Clinton, Davis,
Delaney, Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Finnegan, Foster,
Hogarth, O'Neill, Quinnen, Sealey, Singh, Spence,
Tranter, Walsh, Ward, Wright and Yardley;
Mr Ager.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service

Chief Fire Officer V Randeniya;
Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer P Loach;
Assistant Chief Fire Officers P Hales and G Taylor (Acting);
Director Resources Mike Griffiths;
Director Human Resources David Johnson;
T Embrey and M Hamilton Russell.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

N Sharma and G Wythes

Treasurer

S Kellas

Apologies: Councillors Aston, Chambers, Davies, O'Reilly and Young.

1/13

Chair's and Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

The Chair indicated that Phil Loach would be acting as Deputy Chief Fire Officer for the six months from January 2013. He thanked Phil Hales who had acted up as Deputy Chief Fire Officer for the previous six months. He also congratulated Gary Taylor who had been appointed as Assistant Chief Fire Officer [Operations]. The Chair indicated that the Authority would be receiving a report later in the year on the Corporate Board structure.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the financial settlement and indicated that Government had responded to lobbying by this Authority and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities for a fairer settlement.

The Chief Fire Officer also referred to a firefighter, Craig Williams, who had made a remarkable recovery from a brain tumour and had returned to operational duty. He also referred to the firefighter Gary Conroy, who had recently died after suffering from cancer. His funeral would be held on 8 January 2013 at Lodge Hill Crematorium. Members stood in silent tribute.

2/13 Provisional 2013/2014 Budget Settlement

The Director of Resources reported that the provisional financial settlement for 2013/14 had now been received. The Authority's percentage grant reduction would be less than the national average for fire authorities. This was the result of successful lobbying and recognition of the unfairness of the settlement in years one and two. The Authority would receive £6m less grant in 2013/14 and provisionally £4.6m less in 2014/15. Even so, from 2010 to 2015 the Authority would suffer an overall loss in grant in excess of £20m. The position in future years was uncertain but it was expected the amount of government grant would continue to fall.

The Government had made concessions to low precepting authorities, including this Authority, by granting an exemption to the requirement to hold a referendum before imposing an increase in precept of more than 2% or an increase per Band D household of more than £5 per annum. The option to claim the council tax freeze grant was still available but it was expected this grant would cease in two years' time.

The Authority had been successful in all its capital bids and would receive £11.6m over 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The Authority at its meeting on 18 February, 2013 would decide which option to pursue in respect of the precept. Members discussed the options available.

3/13 Update on Service Delivery Model for Operations

The Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer summarised how the Service had changed over recent years in response to the deteriorating financial situation. There had been station closures but also the introduction of new types of appliances and staffing models which had helped the organisation adjust to the reduction in firefighter numbers, whilst maintaining the five minute response time to category 1 incidents.

Further changes would be necessary to deal with the continuing fall in firefighter numbers as a result of the recruitment freeze. The proposed delivery model was one fire engine [PRL] at each of the 38 fire stations, supplemented with brigade response vehicles. Technical Response would be replicated at the replacement Wednesbury Fire Station. Dual staffing and local staffing models would continue to be used. Mobilisation would be improved through enhanced resource management in fire control.

A report would be submitted to the Authority on 18 February 2013 on the proposals with regard to brigade response vehicles.

4/13 **Public Consultation – Emerging Results**

Members were informed that as part of the statutory public consultation in relation to the Integrated Risk Management Plan the public had been invited to complete a questionnaire. The full results of the questionnaire would be included in a report to the Authority on 18 February 2013 but an outline of the interim results was provided. There had been a low response to the questionnaire in spite of wide publicity and promotion.

(Meeting ended at 11.40 am)

<p><i>Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121 569 3791</i></p>
