

**Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

**13 January 2020 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority  
Councillor Brackenridge (Chair)  
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Barlow, Barrie, Dehar, Edwards, Hogarth,  
Jenkins, Miks, Miller, Spence, Walsh and Young  
Professor S Brake, G Josan and S Middleton  
M Carter (Unison) and K Rowsell (FOA)  
Mr Ager

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer P Loach  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer Brown  
Assistant Chief Fire Officers G Taylor and S Warnes  
A Afsar, S Burton, J Campbell, P Fellows, M Hamilton-  
Russell, M Price, M Pym, S Timmington, S Vincent

**Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

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

Apologies: Councillors Cooper and Gill  
S Price-Hunt (FBU)

Observers: Nil

**01/20 Chair and CFO Announcements**

Cllr Greg Brackenridge, Chair of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA), welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

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The Guardian had announced WMFS as the winner of the Workplace Diversity category of their Public Service Awards 2019. The Guardian had recognised the work that the Service had done to encourage more people from under-represented groups, including women and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME). It was a fantastic achievement and congratulations to all of the staff involved in particular members of the Organisational Learning, and People Development (OLPD), and the Diversity Inclusion Cohesion and Equality team (DICE).

Fire Magazines 'Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards' saw Coventry Fire Station and a number of our partners pick up the Resilience and Learning from Major Incidents award for the fantastic multi agency work that has taken place at the simulation centre at Coventry University. Rounding off the event was the surprise announcement that Administration's Candy Woods had won the Unsung Hero award for her tireless efforts for charity.

Candy Woods also picked up the Outstanding Charitable Activity award at the Asian Fire Service Association annual awards dinner that took place during their 11th National Conference. Like the 'Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards' the award recognised her continuous charitable activities. Firefighter Wayne Samuels from Smethwick was recognised in the Outstanding Endeavour category for his work with the deaf community, Station Commander Warren Davies picked up the award in the Outstanding Charity Challenge Innovation category and the Fire Authority picked up the Shining Light Executive Team Award.

Former Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Phil Hales, was awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal in the New Year Honours List, recognising his distinguished service.

Yorkshire and the surrounding regions were hit by severe flooding following heavy rain in November. Officers and crews from both Technical Rescue and Sheldon were deployed to the scene. Our firefighters rescued nearly 50 stranded people, helped to move several cars and lorries, and ferried staff to check on business premises. The operation involved night-time searches for submerged vehicles and any stranded livestock.

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The Cultural Review continued to be progressed with meetings of the Cultural Review Stakeholder Group scheduled. An action plan would be formulated and a draft of which would be circulated to Members prior to the next Policy Planning Forum in February. The Chair thanked all staff involved in the Cultural Review and noted the continuing engagement.

Memorandums of Understanding had been agreed and signed by the representative bodies and the representatives would be attending future meetings of the Fire Authority (starting with the next meeting in February). The representatives from Unison and the Fire Officers Association were welcomed to the meeting. It was noted that the representative from the Fire Brigades Union had unfortunately needed to send their apologies. There was currently no representative in post for the Fire Leaders Association.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The 'Getting to Know You' session held in December had proved to be successful and similar sessions would be held in the future.

In preparing presentations for the Policy Planning Forum, members of the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) ensured that the information provided represented and were informed by the forefront of national thinking. To do this, SET Members utilised information as a result of their various roles nationally. For example, Mike Griffiths, Strategic Enabler Finance and Resources, held the role of the English advisor to the National Joint Council (NJC) for finance, Sarah Warnes, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, was on the national people's board, and Jason Danbury, Strategic Enabler Digital, was on the national digital and data board. In addition to holding the post of Vice-Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Chief Fire Officer Phil Loach was the chief advisor to the NJC, lead on the strategy and leadership work within the NFCC, and Programme Executive for the Community Risk Programme (which focused on Integrated Risk Management Plans).

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### 02/20 Our Plan 2020-23 – Our Vision

Making West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier was the vision of the Service. However, not sure all were as engaged with the vision as they should be. A question for Members to consider was if the vision was fit for purpose.

An overview was provided of the strategic influences that influence our rolling three-year strategy:

- External – national, regional and local:
  - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) State of the Nation report outcomes – influencing sector and government expectations of fire sector
  - Grenfell – responding to outcomes and increased focus of protection services and skills of staff
  - National pay / role of a firefighter discussions - impact
  - Pensions ruling – liabilities for Fire and Rescue Services
  - Mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections
  - Continued expectation of fire reform
  - Climate change

The HMICFRS State of the Nation report was due to be published in January and it was expected that its findings and subsequent outcomes would influence the fire sector. The report would make a number of recommendations that would need to be considered at a local, regional and national level.

The Service had been rated overall as good for People by the HMICFRS following its inspection. Five Fire and Rescue Services had been rated as requiring improvement for People and there was expected to be a lot of emphasis on this area. This would align with government expectations and therefore, it was expected that action would be required to be taken to address this area further.

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As a result of the outcomes of Grenfell, the Authority had approved investment enabling an increase in resources in protection. The fire sector had questioned the approach taken to the Grenfell inquiry, in terms of focussing on the incident itself and the actions of London Fire Brigade, to be followed by Phase 2 of the inquiry which would focus on building construction and the regulatory regime. It was acknowledged that the findings and recommendations from Phase 1 of the inquiry were pertinent and valid. Therefore, the Service wanted to embrace the recommendations and measure them against its operational capability. The Service believed that it was ahead of the curve in terms of this.

It was acknowledged that the discussions around firefighters pay and the role of a firefighter could potentially represent the largest impact upon the Service depending on how these progressed and this was managed. It was noted that industrial action had been added to the national risk register. There could be an impact upon the delivery of the IRMP and there was a direct relationship between the IRMP and firefighter activity discussions. A draft agreement 'Broadening the Role' was forming the basis of discussions. Work was being undertaken into the funding of the fire sector which looked at the risks Fire and Rescue Services face. This in turn would indicate what Fire and Rescue Services have to do, which would then allow Fire and Rescue Services to assess existing capability. If new skills were found to be required, then these would form part of the discussions regarding firefighters pay and the role of a firefighter. In the event skills were to be found to be part of existing skill sets, these would be built into the IRMP. If discussions were positive, this work would provide the evidence to form role maps.

The ruling on the firefighters 2015 pension scheme had found the scheme to be unlawful and as a result, pensions were reverting to the 1992 scheme. This had resulted in the rerouting of contributions, 90% of which had been provided by the Government with the remaining 10% the responsibility of the Service (resulting in an approximate net cost of £500k). It was believed that the same arrangement would be in place for this year, but this had not been confirmed at the time of the meeting. It was believed that the

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arrangement would not include inflation, therefore resulting in a slightly higher burden.

Mayoral and PPC elections were due to be held in May. The Authority's Collaboration and Transformation Committee had been established. The Service not only had a legal duty to collaborate, but it was something that the Service wants. There was a need for the Service to maintain and continue to review its position.

There would be continued expectation of fire reform by the Home Office and the Local Government Association, including within the areas of diversity, culture and, efficiency and effectiveness through collaboration. The findings of the inspection of the Service found that the HMICFRS were convinced by the Services commitment and approach to diversity and had found areas for improvement across values and culture. With the implementation of the cultural review, the Service was confident that it had a grip on this area.

It was noted that there was a potential that the HMICFRS State of the Nation report would mention the viability of the number of Fire and Rescue Services within England (currently 45), particularly county Fire and Rescue Services. The Service had examined this subject in the past and had enjoyed success with regards to collaboration, in particular with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Climate change was a subject that was constantly growing. Discussions had indicated that a number of organisations including some Fire and Rescue Services were starting to consider declaring a climate emergency due to the constant impact on resources. It was noted that such a situation had not been reached by the Service yet but further increases in demand was expected.

**WMFS Community Risk:**

HMICFRS had rated the Service as outstanding for response, an element that was underpinned by the five-minute risk-based attendance standard. In essence, the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was an improvement plan. The Service can only provide a five-minute response time to just over half of the geographic area of the West Midlands. There was an increased

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expectation to not only look back at where incidents had occurred and risks were present, but also to looking forward and anticipating risks and incidents. Additionally, more effective maintenance under the Regulatory Reform Order was expected.

Safe and Well visits were the most basic contact the Service had with vulnerable persons. The Service may not undertake as many Safe and Well visits as many other services, but the Service was confident that it was targeting the most vulnerable people within our communities. The Service was committed to the Safe and Well principle.

Road safety was considered as part of the maintenance of the IRMP.

There were expectations for the Service to provide increased assurance as a result of the Commonwealth Games in 2022. A legacy from the Commonwealth Games would be the ability to use the framework to developing relations with young people, etc.

The Service provided a level of safety for vulnerable people and the vulnerable in business. The Service took an advice and enforce approach rather than enforce and prohibit. It was in the Services interest to ensure that businesses were kept in business rather than prohibition leading to potential closure. The approach taken by the Service was called Safe and Strong.

The Service continued to invest in the protection function due to the focus from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Inquiry and also the findings of the independent panel and other recommendations which had not come into effect yet. Legislation could be changed which could create extra responsibilities for the Service, and in turn opportunities and burdens.

In terms of budgets, the comprehensive spending review in September would result in a multi-year settlement.

Digital transformation continued and was fundamental to how the Service managed the organisation effectively. The findings of HMICFRS inspections had expressed reasons for services moving

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away from paper-based processes and legacy systems which can be expensive to maintain.

It was noted that a further inspection of the Service by the HMICFRS would take place later in the year (date to be confirmed).

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

- The fire sector including the NFCC were engaged with the Home Office and Treasury. It was evident from discussions that further data and evidence was required by the Treasury. It was noted that the Treasury did not necessarily recognise social return on investment as being more financially focussed.
- The pension liability for the Service had represented a cost of £6.3m with the Service responsible for 10% (net cost of £500k). It was believed that the arrangement for next year would not include inflation. If inflation was the only factor, then the increase in burden on the Service would represent 1 or 2 percent on 5 £500k. However, the funding arrangement was also subject to allocation between Fire and Rescue Services.
- In relation to the topic of climate change, the draw on resources was large, in particularly with regard to water related incidents. The majority of the West Midlands was located on a plateau which meant it was quickly affected by significant amounts of rain but did not suffer such incidents for long durations unlike other areas of the country. These types of incident, including those that were water related, also required the need to apply specialist resources and there was a need to develop the Service's capability in this respect and to consider how it ensured that it had the correct skills in place.
- With the exception of London Fire Brigade, Fire and Rescue Services had not been included within proposed congestion charges, however it was believed that they would be included at some point in the future. The Service would need to look at alternative technologies regarding vehicles and equipment. Initiatives undertaken by the Service to date including energy saving at stations meant that the Service

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was ahead of the curve in many aspects. Additionally, the Service had trialled electric vehicles and continued to carry out research and development. However, it was important to note that the Service no longer received capital funding and there will be a need to ensure that any technology introduced to the Service was correct and fit for purpose, avoiding potential pitfalls of having to keep changing vehicles etc.

- Coventry being City of Culture in 2021 was indeed an excellent opportunity and the Service was keen to not only provide an input into the events but also to maximise the outputs.
- With regard to changes in ambulance location within Solihull, the Chief Fire Officer would discuss with the Chair the potential of writing to the Ambulance Service providing an offer to accommodate such a resource.
- The Service was part of the process in enabling a strong economy, supporting as a link in the chain. The Service ensured buildings were safe via work undertaken in accordance via the RRO, and when business did have a fire, they remained in business due to strong fire plans. Additionally, the Service aimed to reopen carriageways as fast possible following road traffic collisions.

### 03/20 Budget Overview 2020 - 2023

Mike Griffiths, Treasurer to the Authority and Strategic Enabler Finance and Resources delivered a presentation on the budget.

The Service had received a one-year settlement. However, many issues remained as the Service continued to wait for decisions to be made.

Continued core funding reductions had resulted in a reduction of £38m, the largest reduction in core funding experienced by a service.

A degree of caution was required as the settlement was for one year. The settlement included a CPI increase of approximately 1.6%. The Service allowed for a 2% increase in employee salaries as part of its forecasting.

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In terms of the council tax precept, the referendum principle of 2% remained.

When the budget had been set last year, it had been believed that the comprehensive spending review would take place last September / October. However, due to national issues, the comprehensive spending review would now take place in the September / October of this year. This would include the setting of budgets for all public services. It was known that there was some expectations and commitments made to increase public spending. However, it was not known if any such increases would apply to fire and rescue services. Additionally, there was the fire funding formula to take into account, which dictated the amount of funding that individual fire and rescue services received.

With regard to pay awards, the Service had made the assumption of a 2% increase. However, the Service was mindful of increasing pay award pressures across the public sector and also the pressures around firefighter pay.

The Service had received a grant towards the pension costs last year and a similar grant had been confirmed for the year ahead. Funding beyond this point was currently unknown. Additionally, clarity was yet to be provided regarding issues around the 2015 pension scheme and how they would be remedied.

The outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiry, continued pressures on support services, and appliance availability had resulted in an additional budget of £3.8m and it was assumed that the same figure would be required this year.

The Authority sets the lowest council tax of any fire and rescue service in England. The proposed council tax precept for the forthcoming year was 1.99%. Proposals regarding flexibility on council tax had been deliberated at a national level but the proposals had not come to fruition and due to the timescales, it was assumed that 1.99% would be the maximum amount without triggering the referendum principle.

Forecasts indicated a £2m improvement on the budget position. As a result, it was proposed to defer the use of general balances.

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However, due to the uncertainties that remained, it was possible that there could be a need to use deferred general balances.

It was assumed that the target of £3.8m resulting from appliance availability would remain but the more positive budget meant that the target could be lowered if required.

It was noted that investment in digital would be required going forward.

Capital expenditure was reducing over the year and was funded via earmarked reserves. There was no sign of capital funding being reinstated.

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

- There was an expectation from central government that a Fire Authority had to justify carrying reserves of more than 5%. In broad terms, the Authority held reserves of approximately 5%. There was a need to provide some form of safety net due to the uncertainties going forward, some of which would depend upon the outcomes of the comprehensive spending review later in the year which would provide a more informed view.
- The £3.8m target resulting from appliance availability represented 96% to 98% of the fleet being available (approximately five or six appliances). Brigade Response Vehicles were usually pre-stated off the run as they responded to the lesser incidents. The reduction in appliance availability had a minor impact upon incident types.
- Investment in digital was required as some of the systems used by the Service were legacy systems that were expensive and were not efficient. The Service was utilising a digital approach to improve processes internally, realising cashable savings. Externally, the investment in digital did not provide cashable savings but did provide greater data.
- It was acknowledged that the variations in appliance availability had impacted upon staff. The Service had

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continued to focus on providing the best service to its communities based on risk. The alternative decision to the current approach would be to reduce the fleet, a decision which would mean that resources would be removed from the service delivery model and would never be reintroduced. It was noted that it was a difficult situation and the Service continued to wait for the fair funding settlement and the comprehensive spending review. The Authority needed to continue to make the argument with government regarding funding. There was a need to ensure that the Authority had its say in the fair funding process.

### **04/20 Our Response to Grenfell Phase 1 Outcomes**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the Service's response to the Grenfell Phase 1 outcomes.

Phase 1 of the Grenfell Inquiry had examined the events of the night. Phase 2 of the inquiry would feed into the Hackett report examining the regulatory regime.

The report had been published in October and it included 47 recommendations. Some of the recommendations would be provided a legal basis, mainly for buildings managers. Recommendations were also made in relation to the generic risk assessment for fires in buildings, specifically high rise, and that policies needed updating. Significant recommendations were also made regarding survival guidance. Additionally, recommendations had placed a focus on the operations, communication and training of London Fire Brigade. Although the focus was on London Fire Brigade, the recommendations and findings of the report were to be considered nationally and locally by fire and rescue services.

The main focus was on operational training, communication and command, stay put advice and fire survival guidance, and the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP). It was noted that the issues around training were not whether staff had received training but whether staff were able to implement the training. Communications was focused on the communication at the incident and with Fire Control and other agencies.

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A number of changes to legislation would revolve around information sharing of organisations. It was noted that the Service were in front of the curve regarding this but still needed to be ready for the implementation of the changes.

Recommendations include how the fire and rescue services can improve Site Specific Risk Inspections (SSRI). Legislation would be introduced to ensure that building managers advise fire and rescue services of evacuation plans and any changes to buildings, for example, lifts not working.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) undertook the role of the national operational learning and national operational guidance. The NFCC also provided a mechanism to feed views of the sector back to government. The Service had undertaken the co-ordination of the cladding inspections that had been carried out nationally following the incident, on behalf of the NFCC.

In terms of WMFS assurance, the Organisational Assurance team were assessing the learning from the outcomes of the inquiry and a Grenfell / high-rise action plan based upon the recommendations had been developed, taking an organisational approach. Work was being delivered on a daily basis and not being undertaken in isolation. The Service had not waited for the report to be published, taking a proactive approach, for example the extra investment in the protection function. It was noted that existing in year resources would be required to provide training within this area.

The tall buildings policy had been introduced and enhanced around specific areas. Additionally, the Generic Risk Assessment was being replaced by the National Operational Guidance which was being developed as the sector standard for such incidents. The Service was also ensuring consistency on a regional basis, for example via closely working with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Fire survival guidance and evacuation procedures had been emphasised to be more explicit within the tall buildings policy. Fire

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survival guidance has its place but there was a need to ensure that the signs were known when to order an evacuation.

There was a significant amount of training required to ensure that all staff recognised the changes and knew what to do. Additionally, there was a need for staff to have an awareness of building construction and to understand when a building / fire was not behaving normally. Training also included information on when building features failed such as dry risers and wet risers. Incident command competence was important. The incident command competence risk assessment had been increased to ensure that all officers had to undertake high-rise incident command.

Visits had been carried out all 551 high rise premises and the Service had held a variety of conferences which various organisations and partners had attended. Action plans were in place for all tall buildings within the Service area. It was noted that the Service would use enforcement where building owners would not co-operate and prohibition would be used to force owners to rectify issues quicker. Data on all high-rise premises was now integrated into the Risk Identification Data Gathering Engine (RIDGE) system.

The longer-term strategy was in place which included all of the work outlined above. This work also provided a degree of assurance regarding the corporate risk which reflected that there was a high level of confidence that the Service was in a good position.

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

- Incident command competence risk assessments were applied to all officers, from supervisory to the Chief Fire Officer. It was noted that although this was resource intensive, additional assessors had been bought in with the aim to complete the rollout of the enhanced assessments within a 12-month period (by April 2020).
- The position of the Authority was that it supported the installation of sprinkler systems. It was noted that some Local Authorities had made real positive steps with regard to

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the installation of sprinklers. Birmingham City Council and Wolverhampton City Council had taken steps to retrofit sprinkler systems in their high-rise premises.

- The Service would recommend the fitting of sprinkler systems at the planning stage of a new development as standard. However, it was not possible to enforce such a recommendation.

The meeting closed at 12:42 hours.

Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680
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