

## Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**4 September 2018 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority  
Councillor Edwards (Chair)  
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Aston, Barlow, Brackenridge, Dehar,  
Hogarth, Jenkins, and Tranter  
Sarah Middleton

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)  
A Afsar, H Begum, B Brook, S Burton, J Connor, J  
Danbury, M Hamilton-Russell, P Fellows, N Spencer, S  
Timmington

### **Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

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

Apologies: Councillors Barrie, Craddock, Miks, Spence, Walsh  
and Young, The Police and Crime Commissioner  
Professor Simon Brake

Observers: Nil

### **15/18 Chair and CFO Announcements**

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

New Co-opted Member Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium, was welcomed to the Authority.

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Andrew Campbell, Policy Consultant from the Local Government Association was currently working on the review of the Members expenses. Mr Campbell would be visiting the Service on 17 September and this would provide the opportunity for Members to discuss the review with him. Alternatively, Members could discuss with Mr Campbell via telephone.

All present were informed of the unfortunate news that Cllr Young had suffered a bereavement within her family. Cllr Brackenridge suggested that the Authority send a letter expressing Members condolences. Cllr Edwards confirmed that such a letter would be drafted and sent to Cllr Young. Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, expressed the wishes of Officers to extend their condolences to Cllr Young at this difficult time.

### **16/18 Trade Dispute**

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, provided an update on the trade dispute.

Progress to date and next steps:

- National Joint Secretaries facilitated discussions had moved to direct Fire Brigades Union / Chief Fire Officer discussions
- Commitment to close dispute by 20 August. Progress had been delayed, awaiting progress on:
  - Withdrawal of Employment Tribunal
  - Health and Safety Framework review
  - Issued industrial relations framework
- A further meeting was scheduled for 5 September
- Expected closure of the Trade Dispute week commencing 17 September

### **17/18 Governance Update**

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, provided a Governance update.

The Scheme had been submitted to the Home Office in June. The Home Office were now developing the draft Statutory Order. Local agreement was required by 21 September.

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Three areas of challenge had been provided by the Home Office:

- Ring fencing of budget and reserves (one of the red lines)
- Chief Fire Officer as Head of Paid Service (one of the red lines)
- Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee (MFAC) - allowances

The Home Office considered the ring fencing of the budget and reserves, this was hard to achieve from a legislative / statutory perspective and that it would require local agreement. Local constitutional assurances were being developed with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Any changes to the WMCA constitution would require approval of the seven Leaders, via the WMCA Board.

Public authorities could only have one Head of Paid Service. Work was being undertaken to strengthen the Chief Fire Officer's accountabilities and ensuring that specific areas of accountability were being identified within the Order.

Work was ongoing regarding MFAC allowances.

Six of the Leaders had agreed to progress the identified ways forward (ring fencing and Chief Fire Officer's accountabilities). One Leader had queried the inability for the Home Office to meet the ring-fencing red line. Local agreement was still to be established.

The next steps to progress approvals of the Statutory Order:

- Reports submitted to:
  - WMCA Programme Board – 31 August
  - WMCA Board (approval in principle) - 14 September
  - Fire Authority – 17 September
- Local approval of ways forward and Order – 19 September
- Agreement of draft Statutory Order - preparation for laying in Parliament – 21 September
- Parliamentary process – October to December
- Statutory Order issued – January / February 2019
- Governance transfer – April 2019

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

- There was the possibility that any local agreement and local assurances could differ in the future. The Service was looking for assurances regarding the financial elements and ensuring the focus of the Mayor.
- The Service was confident that approval of all seven Leaders would be confirmed in time to meet the proposed timelines.
- The Lead Member role had been included.

### **18/18 Revisiting the Strategy 2018 - 2022**

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on revisiting the strategy 2018 to 2022.

Three reports would be submitted for consideration by Members at the meeting of the Fire Authority on 17 September:

- Revisiting the Strategy 2018 – 2022
- Delivery of Strategy 2018 – 2021 and Associated 2018 – 2019 Budget Adjustments
- Strategy Options 2019 – 22

The presentation was separated into three sections (based broadly in line with the three Fire Authority reports):

- 'To date' - background information covering the progress made to date in implementing transformational service changes, including the Financial Efficiency Plan (approved by the Fire Authority in October 2016) and the anticipated savings reflected within that FEP which effectively formed the basis for the Fire Authority' Plan.
- 'In year' - a need for the Fire Authority to identify the immediate in-year (2018-2019) preferred option(s) to enable financial management, delivery of a balanced budget and revisions to The Plan.
- 'Future Strategy' - a need for the Fire Authority to consider and identify the preferred option(s) to enable the above for 2019-2020 and beyond.

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

- In answer to a question regarding recommendation of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (the Hackitt Review) of the establishment of a Competent Authority:
  - This had been progressed at a national level, and it had been suggested that it could be a role undertaken as part of the Chair of National Fire Chief's Council. However, dialogue continued at a local level; the national model could provide the blueprint for local arrangements but there were concerns regarding ensuring consistency of approach and achievability.
- In answer to a question regarding the potential for reconfiguring the crewing of appliances and that safety implications must be key:
  - Health and Safety was always a priority of the Service and would be at the forefront of any review of the Service Delivery Model.
- In answer to a question regarding what the experiences were of services who had reduced the number of crew on appliances (for example, to a crew of four):
  - Any such service would had to have evidenced that such a decision was an effective delivery of services. It was noted that such an approach was an effective delivery service but it was a more defensive type of service. A crew of four on an appliance could result in more incidents likely to start from a defensive position.
  - It was noted that such a reconfiguration of appliance crewing was an option, but it would be a significant downgrade in the Service Delivery Model.
- In answer to a question regarding the arrangements for on call firefighters and the possible detrimental effects on response times:

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- A five minute period for on call firefighters to get to station to crew an appliance and then to respond was the accepted norm. This does have a significant detrimental effect on response times. The Service had previously conducted an exercise into analysing the feasibility of implementing such a model using existing firefighters and it had proved not possible to form a crew for an appliance.
- It was often claimed that on call firefighters were a less costly model. However, if the training was compared like for like (10 to 12 hours for a wholetime firefighter compared to three hours for an on call firefighter) there was very little difference in costs between the two models.
- It was acknowledged that the on call firefighter duty system was effectively used in rural areas.
- A Member noted that the community first responder scheme worked well in rural areas but not in larger urban areas.
- A Member noted that the closure of stations would significantly impact upon response times and concurred with the view that the Service was spread appropriately across the West Midlands.

The meeting closed at 12:16 hours.

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