

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**04 September 2017 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

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

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
M Griffiths (Treasurer),
B Brook, P Fellows, M Hamilton-Russell, Neil Spencer, S Timmington, S Vincent, and S Warnes

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Davis and Young
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)

Observers: Nil

17/17 Chair and CFO Announcements

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

A workshop had been scheduled on 18 September (12:15 to 12:45) for all Members which would cover MS Office 365, MESH (the new intranet), the Committee Management Information System (CMIS), and management of information.

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The Fire Authority (WMFRA) meeting due to be held in April 2018 had been rescheduled to take place on 16 April (previously scheduled for the 9th).

The WMFS Awards and Recognition evening would be taking place on 24 November. Members were reminded that they could make nominations.

Councillor Edwards had been reappointed to the National Joint Council.

The West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had written to the Chair indicating the wish to exercise the right to join the Fire Authority. It was noted that the correspondence indicated that the position would be delegated to a senior officer. It was noted that the full WMFRA would need to consider and agree such a request. Additionally, there was a question regarding a senior officer attending WMFRA rather than an elected role such as PCC or Deputy PCC.

The Chair welcomed and introduced Phil Fellows, Strategic Hub Team Manager, Strategy and Risk.

The Chief Fire Officer welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

The Emergency Services Show was taking place on 20 and 21 September at the NEC. WMFS was playing a large role in the event and Members were encouraged to attend.

The nomination process for the Asian Fire Service Association awards and recognition event was now open. Members were encouraged to participate and provide nominations.

The 'Back Home Safe and Well' initiative had launched week commencing 28 August and had already seen 23 discharges successfully supported. It was noted that Back Home Safe and Wells were delivered by members of staff who were not necessarily operational staff.

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Members were advised that an incident had occurred at Oldbury Fire Station during August where a firefighter had suffered a heart attack following tactical ventilation training. The firefighter had been taken to hospital and was now back home and recovering. All Members wished the firefighter their best wishes and a rapid recovery.

WMFS had been awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award by the Ministry of Defence. The award was the highest badge of honour for organisations which had signed the Armed Forces Covenant and demonstrated outstanding support for those who serve and had served. WMFS were one of only 33 employers to have received the award.

As part of the move to Office 365, a new intranet (MESH) was launching today (4 September), a system that Members would be introduced to at the workshop on 18 September. It was important for the Service to have the right platform to communicate with staff at a time of change.

The Chief Fire Officer provided a brief update on the pay negotiations:

Negotiations continued nationally regarding the pay award. An offer of a 2% pay increase and to work toward a further 3% increase had been rejected by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The FBU Executive had revised their position and would be consulting its members nationally to accept the 2% pay increase and to work with employers to achieve the 3% increase. Medical response trials would continue in the meantime.

A 1% pay award year on year (up to 2020) had been factored into the Service's budget setting and efficiency plan (formulated prior to recent developments regarding pay offers). Increases in pay, particularly a 3% increase if accepted, could create pressure on finances.

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update on governance:

WMFRA had proved it was an efficient and effective Fire Authority. However, the Authority did not have any choice but

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to change. Nine Fire Authorities across England were currently in the process of changing as a result of the Policing and Crime Act. There were other arrangements being developed such as Combined Authorities, for example WMFS and Greater Manchester FRS, plus changes to London Fire Brigade. Additionally, Avon Fire and Rescue Authority were under a best value review.

Understanding of the Fire Service model was still not fully understood. It was still seen as a simple model, for example solely about putting out fires. Little was known about upstream firefighting, prevention, resilience, etc. There was a need for Members to continue to communicate and inform others of the service delivery model, to 'spread the word'. Both WMFRA and the Service were acknowledged as being based in community need but more could be done to further understanding.

18/17 Governance Update

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, delivered a presentation and update on the subject of future governance:

Members had been issued a link to a report on the governance of WMFS which would be submitted to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) on 8 September.

The report covered the following areas (not exhaustive):

- Progress route to WMCA / Mayoral governance
- Agree governance review
- Develop scheme
- Outline future model
- Timeline
- Evidence base for change
- Legal route

The evidence base for change included the work and findings of the Future Governance Working Group.

The main pieces of legislation to enable the Mayoral WMCA to enact a change in governance are:

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- The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
- The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016
- The Policing and Crime Act 2017

The timeline for the move to WMCA Mayoral governance was 15 to 18 months (end of 2018 / start of 2019). As a result, the potential move to a Reformed Fire Authority may not be required, but it was an option that continued to be developed and be ready to implement as an interim measure should there be a need to, for example, if WMCA Mayoral governance timelines increased.

The functions of WMFRA would transfer to the WMCA including all staff who work for the Fire Authority. The new employer would be WMCA and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) arrangements would be implemented (officers were discussing this with staff, particularly as it signalled a significant change). Terms and conditions for staff would continue to be discussed and agreed nationally. Current terms and conditions would continue and no changes were envisaged.

Some functions of the WMFRA would be delegated from the WMCA to the Mayor including budget setting, precept, integrated risk management plan and The Plan, appointment of the Chief Fire Officer.

Operational functions would be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer.

A Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee (MFAC) would be established, a principle embraced by the Mayor and the Local Authority Leaders.

It was proposed that the MFAC would consist of 15 Members (in a similar vein to the proposal for a Reformed Fire Authority).

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The role of the MFAC would include:

- Supporting / advising the Mayor / WMCA
- Lead Member principle
- Leadership / partnerships across the 7 Local Authorities
- Review and Scrutiny of Mayoral decisions
- Leading regionally / nationally
- Lobbying Government
- Ceremonial duties

The Lead Member principle would be similar to the Section 41 arrangements, building on this to establish clearer and stronger links with the Local Authorities.

The Review and Scrutiny role would provide the audit and scrutiny function. It was noted that this role could eventually move across to the audit and scrutiny function within WMCA.

The MFAC would undertake a regional and national role, for example continuing dialogue with the four regional Fire Authorities, and nationally, continued involvement with the National Joint Council, Local Government Association, National Fire Chiefs Council, and the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (which WMFRA now chaired and also included London Fire Brigade).

Lobbying of government would continue on areas such as funding.

Next steps:

- The Mayoral Governance report would be considered at the WMCA meeting held on 8 September
- The Governance Review and Scheme would be submitted to all seven Local Authorities for consideration
- A six week public consultation would take place; planned to commence in January 2018
- The outcomes of the public consultation would be submitted to WMCA prior to submission to Government (potentially April 2018)

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- Government to potentially produce final Order in November 2018

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

- In answer to a question of how the decision was made by the local authorities, by being submitted to full council or cabinets, it was noted that it was the decision of each Local Authority as to what method the decision was made but full council support was required
- The WMCA Scrutiny Committee had called in the Mayoral Governance report and it would be submitted to the Committee on 12 September
- The current membership of WMFRA would expire in May 2018. The number of Members called to sit on WMFRA (27 or 15) would depend on the timing of the Mayoral Governance. If it was potentially to take longer than the 2018/19 timeframe, the option to create a Reformed Fire Authority could be progressed.
- The current proposals would need to be reconsidered if the outcomes of the public consultation indicated no support for them from respondents. The IRMP consultation had indicated support for the Mayoral Governance model but if the consultation outcomes differed, public opinion could not be disregarded.

19/17 How we are Progressing in Delivering Objectives of The Plan

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on how the Service was progressing in delivering the objectives of The Plan:

Priorities:

- Prevention
 - Safer and Healthier Communities
- Protection
 - Stronger Business Communities
- Response

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- Dealing effectively with emergencies
- Maintaining and enhancing 5 minute response time

Delivering the priorities and services with fewer and effective resources.

The Grenfell Tower incident had demonstrated the importance of fire safety regulation / the Regulatory Reform Order. WMFS was always prepared to enforce but also sought to work with businesses.

The Service sought to maintain and enhance the Service Delivery Model (SDM) and the evidence based five minute response time. Other Fire Services had moved away from such an approach to response times, because of cuts to funding and following difficult decisions. WMFS had changed internally but had not moved focus away from response times, and had improved the service to the public. The SDM had reduced the risk of larger fires increasing.

The efficiency plan was developed to meet the £10M deficit between 2016/17 and 2019/20. It was designed to be responsive to an increasingly changing environment. WMFRA remained committed to core services as set out in The Plan. There were greater opportunities through WMCA and collaboration. The medical response trials / falls response helped target the most vulnerable people. It was noted that it would be very difficult to stay on track with the efficiency plan if the Service did not explore and take up further new opportunities.

The falls response service was being successfully delivered in Coventry, Wolverhampton, and Dudley (on an out of hour's basis). It was recognised by the Service that some of the workforce found this work difficult due to the circumstances surrounding many of these incidents, and that they placed an extra burden on firefighters in that such incidents were different compared to emergency response. However, such work was important; there was a direct link between these vulnerable patients and accidental dwelling fires.

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Workforce reform was instrumental in the evolution of the Service. So much change could cause uncertainty amongst the workforce, stations were seeing changes to the type of work they undertook, there was the reform of the Fire Authority, and changes with regard to WMCA. It was important to remember that the 38 community fire stations were the heart of our communities. It was noted by the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge team that the Service was not waiting for change to happen to it, but to help shape that change.

In terms of funding, there was a need to look at options including new ways of working and new types of work to maintain the SDM. The new entrant firefighters were on a flexible contract which build expectations of the new types of work, particularly around business development.

A target of £250K was set for year 2016/17. A figure of £260K was achieved, meeting the target. A target of £1M had been set for 2017/18, however the figure achieved to date was not as advanced this year due to the national discussions regarding medical response and discussions with partners (uncertainties over negotiating contracts). There was a large demand for Back Home Safe and Wells.

The delivery of all Service needs was to be underpinned by a digital strategy. This would enable a connected workforce, across 38 fire stations. It represents an investment to ensure the Service can deliver response, prevention and protection. It comprises a variety of platforms including Skype (videoconferencing), intranet (MESH), Office 365, and social media. Interconnectivity pulls together all the information. It also enables greater transparency which is a key pillar of reform as stated by the Government. Additionally, the Home Office had visited the Service recently and acknowledged that the Service was ahead of the curve.

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

- For falls response to be extended to Birmingham and Solihull, the commissioning organisations would require guarantees regarding service provision. The other falls response services are considerably smaller compared to Birmingham and Solihull. Utilisation of workforce is currently 10% but if a Birmingham and Solihull service was to be provided, utilisation would be approximately 30% to 35%. The Service will need to check the impact of providing such a service of that scale, ensure it can be delivered, and assess the impact upon the SDM. For example, the falls response was delivered using Brigade Response Vehicles and such a move could potentially require more of those types of vehicles.
- The Ambulance Service and Fire Service have a duty to collaborate. The Ambulance Service was under great pressure nationally. West Midlands Ambulance Service was the only Trust rated as outstanding. WMFS could help save lives responding to critical incidents, plus provide support to non-emergency calls, for example falls response.

The meeting closed at 12:07 hours.

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