

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**11 June, 2012 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority

Councillors Aston, Atwal, Chambers, Clinton, Davies, Davis, Douglas-Maul, Edwards, Eustace, Finnegan, Foster, Hogarth, Idrees, Lines, O'Neill, Spence, Tranter, Turner Walsh, Ward and Young.
Messrs Ager, Denny and Topliss.

Observers (appointments not yet effective)
Councillors Auluck, Quinnen and Wright.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service

Chief Fire Officer – V Randeniya.
Assistant Chief Fire Officers P Hales and P Loach .
M Griffiths and D Johnson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma and S Hancock.

Treasurer
S Kellas.

Apologies: Councillors Singh and Yardley.

12/12

Announcements

The Chair announced the names of the new members appointed to the Authority for 2012/2013 and welcomed those that were present. Members expressed thanks to the outgoing members for their work on the Authority and wished them well for the future.

The Chief Fire Officer reported on the following issues:-

- The trial following the deaths of a number of junior firefighters from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service at a large fire in Atherston-on-Stour had concluded with a not guilty verdict. This was the first time that fire service officers had appeared in court on charges of this nature. The incident had raised a

- The continued wet weather was causing problems with flooding in north Wales and the situation around West Midlands was being monitored.
- The Jubilee weekend had passed by uneventfully in West Midlands in terms of the number of incidents reported.

13/12 **Overview of Olympic Preparations**

Members were updated on the Service's involvement in the preparations for the 2012 Olympic Games and its involvement in the torch relays that had begun to take place across the UK.

A multi-agency event control suite had been set up, which was manned twenty four hours a day by police and attended by personnel from other agencies, including WMFS, as and when required.

The Service, along with other blue light agencies, was required to report twice daily to a national resilience unit which provided the government with a clear picture of the UK on a daily basis. This was also proving useful to ascertain the impact of the current heavy rainfall on the country in terms of localised flooding.

Two torch relay events had already taken place in West Midlands and had been very successful. Preparations continued for forthcoming events on 30 June and 1 and 2 July, 2012. A multi-agency mobile unit was following the Olympic Torch around the UK to be on hand to deal with any incidents. There were a number of other events also taking place on 30 June, 2012, including an event at Cannon Hill Park following the torch relay; the Godiva Festival in Coventry, and events in relation to Armed Forces Day, which was also 30 June, 2012.

It was also reported that Olympic teams from the US, Jamaica, Lithuania and Pakistan would be based in West Midlands during the Olympics which presented security issues for various agencies to consider.

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) was playing a leading role in the preparations and its good practice was being repeated across

the country.

14/12 Building Upon Success Programme Years 3 and 4

Officers reported on the continuing work with regards to the Authority's preparation for anticipated further budget cuts in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Lobbying of the government for parity of budget reductions continued.

The Authority had made savings totalling £10.2 million in 2010/11 and 2011/12. Further estimated savings for 2013/14 and 2014/15 of £3.2 million were highlighted from a combination of the management review, the fire control project, an administration review, a review of the Academy, the Brigade Response Vehicle trials and a review of allowances and expenses.

Existing practices were being heavily scrutinised in order to review service provision and consider the strategic importance of tasks and the competence that the Service had to carry them out. An approach called 'Stop, Make, Buy, Ally' had been developed which required managers to review all services and consider whether they were legally required and if so, whether or not the Service was in the best position to provide them. The Corporate Board was also currently taking part in a number of challenge days.

A number of options in relation to operational response were being considered, including a review of the numbers and types of appliances on fire stations and flexible staffing models. A risk management approach had been taken to the options appraisal; however, in some cases this would not necessarily lead to continued risk reduction but only the management of tolerable risk.

A review of the occupancy of the Safeside building was also being considered in order to generate more income.

15/12 Authority Priorities

The Chair reiterated that the Authority faced major challenges in the face of further budget cuts and explained that following things would be key priorities for the Authority in preparation for years 2013 to 2015:-

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- numbers of Fire-fighters, stations, appliances, prevention based activity
- maximising the balance in favour of Pump Rescue Ladders on stations as opposed to Brigade Response Vehicles (BRVs)
- the use of BRVs would be on an evidenced basis only
- maintaining current attendance times
- shifting resources to the front line to avoid redundancies and minimising provision in support services
- opening discussions in relation to flexible crewing options
- Low Risk Flexible Crewing would only be an option if it was to prevent station closures

The activities that would be needed to deliver those priorities were as follows:-

- the Stop, Make, Buy Ally process needed to deliver outcomes that stopped all current activities which were not legally required or essential to the front line service
- all models would be considered for support service activities which had to continue, this included reducing management layers, doing the minimum necessary meet legal requirements, outsourcing, shared services
- delivering a management structure and a Corporate Board that was as lean as possible
- consideration of voluntary redundancy policies
- maximising balances to support changes and shrinkage in years 3 & 4

In doing all of this, the key issues to be aware of were:-

- the need for clear member direction on strategies
- members would need to consider a range of options based on Authority priorities
- industrial relations issues during a time of fundamental change
- a fundamental shift in resources from support services to front line services was essential in view of the level of potential budget cuts
- the circumstances in which the Service would no longer claim to be 'effective and efficient'
- the movement of risk set against the Authority's aim of 'Making West Midlands Safer'

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- government representations and the option of a referendum on council tax and the need for credibility in front line/back office balance.

(Meeting ended at 1.09 pm)