

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

8th November, 2010, at 9.50 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

- Present:** **Members of the Authority**
Councillors Alden, Andrew, Bennett, Chambers,
Clinton, Docker, Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Foster, A Hill,
M Hill, Hinton, Idrees, Jones, Mulhall, O'Neill, Singh,
Spence, Stevenson and Turner.
Mr Ager and Mr Topliss.
- Officers:** **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer – V Randeniya.
Deputy Chief Fire Officer - M Clark
A Brandon, M Griffiths, P Hales, D Johnson and D Walton.
- Clerk to the Authority**
S Phelps, N Sharma and G Wythes.
- Treasurer to the Authority**
S Kellas.
- Apologies:** Councillors G Davies, Jackson, Tagger and Walsh.

25/10 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman made the following announcements:-

- On 21st October 2010 the Service hosted an Afro-Caribbean Business Fire Safety Seminar. The aim of the event was to educate small and medium sized businesses in their responsibilities to comply with the Fire Safety Order 2005. The evening was a great success and it was hoped that this would be the first of many events.
- Dudley police officers and firefighters recently joined forces to tackle driving offences and educate motorists in Dudley. Drivers who were breaking traffic laws were pulled over into a car park where a team of firefighters and police officers were on hand to show the drivers the potential of their actions. Further joint operations were now planned.

Policy Planning Forum – 8th November 2010

- Coventry based Firefighter Rick Stanton, who was one of the world's leading cave rescue experts, was recently called in to find a diver lost in the cave systems in Southern France. The diver had become trapped after a rock fall in one of the caves. It had been hoped to find the diver alive but unfortunately his body was found by Rick and his dive partner. The Chairman expressed his gratitude to Rick for his rescue effort, despite the tragic outcome.
- Northfield Blue Watch and Perry Barr Green Watch recently took part in the 3rd National Breathing Apparatus Challenge in South Yorkshire. With outstanding performances on the day, Northfield came first and were crowned National Champions, with Perry Barr finishing second. The Chair congratulated all those involved on another excellent result.
- The West Midlands Fire Service would be represented in Ypres at the forthcoming Remembrance Day events at the Menin Gate.

26/10 Building upon Success Project

Members were updated on early indications of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review [CSR]. There were concerns about the impact on the CSR on the Service as the majority of its funding came from revenue grant. Strong representations had been made to Communities and Local Government about the inequitable nature of a 25% reduction in grant across the board. The formal announcement of grant allocation was anticipated in December.

The review of the Service was continuing, with full engagement from staff and stakeholders. Ideas generated by the process were being considered at 'download days' and testing, option analysis and further investigation of proposals was continuing. Reports would be brought forward in due course on proposals arising from the review in the run up to the budget setting process.

A number of the suggestions for service improvement and rationalisation made in a recent Bulletin issued by the Fire Services Minister had been implemented some time ago by the Service, for example, improved sickness management; a recruitment freeze; shared services; rationalisation of procurement. Some suggestions were being progressed as pilots in the Birmingham area and if successful would be rolled out across the service. These included:

- Introducing additional shift patterns

Policy Planning Forum – 8th November 2010

- Revised crewing on specialist appliances
- Revised process for responding to automatic fire alarms

Other suggestions set out in the Ministerial Bulletin would be the subject of further reports to the Policy Planning Forum in due course.

27/10 Benefits of Sprinklers in Premises

The Acting Director of Operations gave a presentation to Members on two recent serious fires that had occurred in school premises in the West Midlands and outlined action taken by the Service in the aftermath of the incidents to reinforce the message that the installation of sprinkler systems could have mitigated the damage to the premises. Work had also taken place with the local communities to raise the profile of arson as a social problem and means of combating it.

The Service continued to lobby at national and local level for the inclusion of sprinklers in new build properties, particularly larger public and community buildings. Members were asked to continue to spread the message in their own authorities, and nationally via the regular Parliamentary visits. Factsheets and copy promotional DVDs would be supplied to Members to assist in this task.

(Meeting ended at 11.50 am)

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