

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

13th February 2006, at 11.00 a.m.
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Hinton (Chair);
Councillor Hogarth (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Birbeck, Bowen, G Davies, S Davis,
Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Foster, Howard, Hussain,
Idrees, Lawrence, Mulhall, Pitt, Rogers, Ross,
Singh, Stevenson, Tagger, Underhill, Wallace and
Ward.
Mr Topliss.

Apologies: Councillors Jackson, Jones, Matchet and Ryder.

1/06 **Urgent Item of Business**

The Chair was of the opinion that the item referred to in Minute No. 8/06 (Unison – Notice of Official Ballot for Industrial Action) should be considered as an urgent item of business in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the notice only having been received since the agenda was dispatched.

2/06 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Joan Stevenson to her first full Authority meeting.

The programme of Members' visits to fire stations had commenced and was going well, with positive engagement at the stations visited so far.

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The Chair reported that Senior Divisional Officer Steve Menzler had recently retired from the Fire Service and paid tribute to his loyal service to the Authority. The Chair had presented Steve with a retirement gift.

3/06 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 2005 be confirmed as a correct record.

4/06 **Budget and Precept 2006/2007**

The Authority considered a report on the Capital Programme for 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09, the prudential indicators relating to the Authority's capital financing requirements, the revenue budget for 2006/07, and consequent precept level and resultant amount for each constituent District Council.

In accordance with the Local Government Act 2003, the Treasurer commented that the budgets presented had been prepared using reasonable and appropriate estimation techniques for both expenditure and income. The budget process was such that all financial pressures faced by the Authority had been considered and resources allocated as appropriate to fulfil the priorities of the Authority. Where resources had not been allocated to identified pressures either; the pressure had been absorbed into the existing budget or the risk associated with not meeting the pressure had been evaluated and appropriate action taken. The robustness of the budget preparation undertaken by the Authority was therefore considered satisfactory.

The Policy Planning Forum had considered the budgetary situation on 30th January 2006. The Executive Committee had met on the same date to consult with domestic ratepayers.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that the Authority's Revenue Budget for 2006/2007 of £108.877m, as now submitted, be approved;
- (2) that the Authority's capital programme for 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009, as now submitted, be approved;
- (3) that the Authority's Prudential Indicators as now submitted, be approved;
- (4) that it be noted that the constituent District Councils have formally set their Council Tax bases for the year 2006/2007 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as follows:

	Tax Base
	£
Birmingham	285,655.00
Coventry	86,957.20
Dudley	96,750.14
Sandwell	83,780.40
Solihull	77,270.00
Walsall	76,095.00
Wolverhampton	<u>70,161.00</u>
	776,668.74
	=====

- (5) that the following amounts be now calculated by the Authority for the year 2006/2007 in accordance with Sections 43 to 48 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-
 - (i) £111,443,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(2)(a) to (d) of the Act.

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- (ii) £2,566,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(3)(a) to (b) of the Act.
- (iii) £108,877,000 being the amount by which the aggregate at (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (ii) above calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 43(4) of the Act as its budget requirement for the year.
- (iv) £75,339,699 being the aggregate of the sums which the Authority estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of formula grant by the aggregate of the sums which the Authority estimates will be received in the year from the constituent District Councils in respect of amounts they have estimated as the surplus on their collection funds for 2005/2006.
- (v) £43.180959 being the amount at (iii) above less the amount at (iv) above all divided by the total amount at (4) above, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 44(1) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

(vi) <u>Valuation Bands</u>	£ (to 6 decimals)	£ (to 2 decimals)
A	28.787306	28.79
B	33.585190	33.59
C	38.383075	38.38
D	43.180959	43.18
E	52.776728	52.78
F	62.372496	62.37
G	71.968265	71.97
H	86.361918	86.36

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (v) above by the number which in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided

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by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 47(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

(vii) that the following precepts be issued to the seven charging authorities in the West Midlands:-

	£
Birmingham City Council	12,334,857
Coventry City Council	3,754,895
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	4,177,764
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	3,617,718
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	3,336,593
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	3,285,855
Wolverhampton City Council	3,029,619
Total	<hr/> 33,537,301 <hr/> =====

being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 1.3.5 above by the appropriate tax base at 1.2 above in accordance with section 48(2) of the Act, as the amount of precept payable by each constituent District Council.

(6) that the precept for each District Council as calculated at 5(7) above be issued in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

5/06 **Monitoring of Finances**

The Authority received a report on the monitoring of finances during 2005/06.

The Treasurer reported a projected underspend of £63,000 on the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and the Authority noted that this area was subject to wide fluctuations arising, in particular,

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from medical discharges, timing of retirements, value of actual pensions and the transfer of pension rights.

6/06 **Review of Charges – Fire Certificates, Petroleum Searches and Special Service Charges**

The Authority was requested to approved revised charges for Fire Certificates, Petroleum Premises File Searches and for Special Service Charges.

The current level of charges had been approved by the Authority in February 2004.

The charges had been adjusted to reflect anticipated inflation affecting the Authority up to March 2007 and, in the case of the Fire Certificates, in accordance with the level of charges recommended in LGA Circular 74/05 and the firefighters' pay award.

Resolved that approval be given to the revised charges for Fire Certificates, Petroleum Premises File Searches and for Special Service Charges, as now submitted, with effect from 1st April 2006.

7/06 **Business Plan Section of the Best Value Performance Plan and Business Plan 2006/2007**

The Authority noted changes to the Corporate Aims, the Ten Year Scan, the main departmental objectives for 2006/2007 and the seven objective topics in the Business Section of the Business and Best Value Performance Plan.

Members of the Corporate Board had held their annual business planning day in September 2005 and identified the changes as a result of a detailed planning progress, which analysed budget development figures alongside current objectives.

The Vision and Mission Statements remained unchanged.

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Reference was made to the impending relocation of Headquarters and the need to avoid any unnecessary expenditure on the existing premises.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the amendments to the Authority's Business Plan Section of the combined Business and Best Value Performance Plan, as now submitted, be approved;
- (2) that a further report be submitted to the Executive Committee on arrangements for the Chair, Vice Chair and Councillor Eustace to be consulted on any works proposed to be carried out at the existing headquarters premises over a threshold to be determined.

8/06 **Unison – Notice of Official Ballot for Industrial Action**

The Authority was informed that a formal notification had been received from Unison of its intention to ballot its members for industrial action, under the terms of the Trade Union and Labour relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, in connection with the proposed changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The closing date for the ballot was 10th March 2006.

A further report would be submitted in due course on the implications of any such industrial action for response and business continuity.

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9/06 **Minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th January 2006 were submitted.

Resolved that the acts, proceedings and recommendations of the West Midlands Regional Management Board, as set out in the minutes, be approved and adopted.

10/06 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meetings held on 19th and 22nd December 2005 and 30th January 2006 were received.

11/06 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the meetings held on 19th December 2005 and 30th January 2006 were received.

12/06 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 for the following reasons:-

Minute No. 12/06 relates to negotiations or consultation on labour relations matters and disclosure would be likely to prejudice those negotiations.

Minute No. 13/06 relates to terms proposed for the disposal/acquisition of property or the supply of goods or services and disclosure would be likely to prejudice the Authority.

Minute No. 14/06 relates to a particular employee.

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13/06 **Joint Review of the Duty System and Shift Pattern in respect of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan**

Further to Minute No. 75/05 (5th December 2005) the Authority received a report on proposed amendments to the Integrated Risk Management Plan produced by the Integrated Risk Manager.

A review had indicated that the number of incidents had fallen during certain times of the day and had identified a continued reduction in the average number of fire engines committed at any one time. In addition, it had identified scope to review number of appliances held on strategic reserve.

Overall, the opinion was that this provided the potential for the Authority to propose some amendments to the current arrangements. The proposed changes would not affect the overall number of firefighters required for operational duties each day.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the proposed Integrated Risk Management Plan Action Plan for 2006/7, as now submitted, be approved and issued for public consultation for a period of 12 weeks;
- (2) that the Executive Committee be authorised to approve the Integrated Risk Management Action Plan for 2006/7 following the consultation period at a meeting to which all Authority Members will be invited.

14/06 **National Integrated Clothing Project (ICP) Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

The Authority was asked to consider whether it was minded to commit to the National ICP contract for the managed provision of PPE and other uniform.

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The ICP Project Board had recently written to all Chief Fire Officers in England setting out the indicative ICP project costs and options available for each Authority. The costs were based on a fully managed PPE contract; a non-managed outright purchase of PPE; or a lease option.

The Authority's ICP Project Board had estimated the anticipated costs to the Authority of the fully managed contract and the non-managed outright purchase contract and, at the present time, it did not appear to be financially viable for the Authority to consider. No financial information was available about the lease option to enable estimated costs to be gauged.

It was noted that the Brigade's current contract for managed PPE with Lion Apparel was due to conclude in June 2011. Therefore, if it were minded to approve the National Managed ICP PPE option, the earliest that it could be implemented was June 2011.

It was also noted that the Secretary of State had indicated that he may exercise powers under Section 29 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to compel Fire Authorities to join the National ICP project.

Resolved that the ICP Board be notified that, whilst the Authority generally remains supportive of the ICP project, it is not in a position to commit to the national contract until further clarity is provided about the intended operation of the contract, how it is to be let and the actual costs of procuring PPE and other uniform and clothing to enable informed decisions to be made as to whether or not the contract is affordable and represents best value to the Authority over the fifteen year period 2007 to 2022.

15/06 **Clerk to the Authority**

The Clerk informed the Authority that he would be taking early retirement from his role as Chief Executive of Sandwell MBC, with effect from 19th March 2006.

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It was anticipated that the job description for his successor at Sandwell would not include the role of Clerk to the Authority and therefore alternative arrangements would have to be considered. The role of Treasurer to the Authority would not however be affected by any new arrangements.

Members had a preliminary discussion on the options available.

The Clerk proposed to submit a report to the Executive Committee on 6th March 2006 outlining various options for the clerking of the Authority. Members indicated that they wished the report to be considered by the full Authority.

Resolved that the meeting of the Executive Committee scheduled for 6th March 2006 be replaced by an extraordinary meeting of the full Authority to consider the future clerking arrangements for the Authority and any other business due to be considered by the Executive Committee.

(Meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

<p><i>Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock Democratic Services Unit Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council 0121-569-3189</i></p>
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