

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Annual Meeting of the
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

21st July, 2014 at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillors Aston, Singh Atwal, Clinton, Collingswood, Davis, Delaney, Douglas-Maul, Edwards, Eustace, Harley, Hogarth, Howells, Idrees, Lines, Mottram JP, O'Boyle, Phillips, Quinnen, Sealey, Shackleton, Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter and Young.

Apologies: Councillors Finnegan and Yardley.

Observer: Mr Ager.

33/14 **Election of Chair**

Resolved that Councillor Edwards be elected Chair of the Authority for the period ending with the annual meeting in 2015.

34/14 **Election of Vice-Chair**

Resolved that Councillor Idrees be elected Vice-Chair of the Authority for the period ending with the annual meeting in 2015.

35/14 **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Edwards declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 47/14 below (Monitoring of Finances).

36/14

Chair's Announcements

The Authority stood in silent tribute to mark the passing of Paul Coburn, a former firefighter, after a short illness. Mr Coburn had been a dedicated firefighter and a stalwart supporter of the fire service family, running a table tennis competition within the service and a major charity fundraiser. Members paid tribute to Mr Coburn and expressed their sympathy and condolences to his family.

The Chair welcomed new members to the Authority. He also paid tribute to Councillors Auluck, Chambers, O'Reilly, Walsh and Wright, who had now left the Authority, for their contribution during their terms of office.

The Chair indicated that 2014/15 and 2015/16 would be relatively stable years financially for the Authority and that credit was due to members and officers for achieving a balanced budget following a difficult period. He congratulated members on their foresight in maximising the precept increase, and officers for providing first class financial and operational information which had assisted forward planning. This foresight and planning had provided for this period of stability. He anticipated, however, that the period 2016/17 would be difficult as a further 14% reduction in government grant was forecast. It would be a massive challenge to operate with the consequent £11m shortfall in funding, which would impact on the front line service.

The Chair indicated that in the previous year the Service had rescued 351 people from fires, and more than 400 people from road traffic accidents. He was proud that the Service had maintained this excellent performance.

The Chair reported that the new Haden Cross Fire Station would open officially on 6th September, 2014, delivering the Authority's commitment to provide a state of the art community fire station to local people. All members would be invited to the event.

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The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service had managed to provide a limited emergency response cover during eight days of discontinuous industrial action. He gave assurances to members that Fire Control had dealt appropriately with all calls received during the period of the industrial action, prioritising those that required an emergency response.

He also thanked those members who had attended the official opening of the new high rise facility of Oldbury Fire Station. The training provided at the facility would support the Service in delivering an effective response. The Chair indicated that a further visit would be arranged for those members who had not been able to attend.

37/14 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th April, 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

38/14 **Membership of the Authority 2014/2015**

The Clerk reported on the membership of the Authority for 2014/15.

39/14 **Questions on the Discharge of Functions**

Resolved that the following Councillors be nominated under Section 41 of the Local Government Act, 1985, to answer questions put in the course of proceedings of constituent councils on the discharge of the Authority's functions:-

	<u>Lead Councillor</u>	<u>Substitute Councillor</u>
Birmingham	Idrees	Clinton
Coventry	O'Boyle	Howells
Dudley	Aston	Mottram JP
Sandwell	Edwards	Tranter
Solihull	Davis	Hogarth
Walsall	Young	Phillips
Wolverhampton	Singh	Collingswood

40/14

Governance of the Authority 2014/2015

The Authority considered a report on governance of the Authority for 2014/15. The report set out draft terms of reference for committees and panels; member role descriptions; a calendar of meetings for the year and the Members' Allowances Scheme.

Minor changes were proposed to the terms of reference of the Executive Committee. A change was also moved to the calendar of meetings. No other substantive changes in governance arrangements were proposed.

Prior to the implementation of the Localism Act 2011 in relation to standards matters, the Standards Committee was chaired by an independent member. This was no longer the case and it was now proposed to amend the Members' Allowances scheme to provide for the payment of a special responsibility allowance to the Chair of the Standards Committee, who was now an elected member, to give parity with other committee chairs. It was also proposed to defer any review of the members' allowances scheme, and to refrain from increasing the level of members' allowances, in the light of continuing financial stringency.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the terms of reference of committees and panels, as set out in Appendices 1 and 2, be approved;
- (2) that member role descriptions, as set out in Appendix 3, be approved;
- (3) that the calendar of meetings for 2014/2015, as now amended and as set out in Appendix 4, be approved;
- (4) that there will be no increase in members' allowances in 2014/15 by way of indexing or otherwise;
- (5) that the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2014/15, as set out in Appendix 5, be approved;

- (6) that in the light of the current financial situation, no action be taken for the time being with regard to convening an independent remuneration panel to review the members' allowances scheme and that the situation be reviewed in twelve months' time;
- (7) that the Clerk be authorised to make any necessary consequential amendments to other constitutional documents in the light of decisions made above with regard to governance arrangements for 2014/15.

41/14

Political Balance and Membership of Committees and Panels 2014/2015

The Authority considered the constitution and political balance of committees and the assignment of members to committees and panels for 2014/2015.

The Localism Act 2011 had implemented changes to the standards framework and independent members of the Standards Committee had now been replaced by an 'independent person' who must be consulted before any decision was taken on a complaint which had been investigated. The Authority had approved an arrangement whereby the independent persons appointed by Sandwell Council would also be used by the Authority. In 2013/14 these roles had been undertaken by Mr Frederick Bell and Mrs Yetunde Akande. Mrs Akande had not applied for re-appointment but Mr Bell had been re-appointed as an independent person by Sandwell Council for the period expiring 30th June 2016. In view of the low level of complaints activity at the Authority, it was suggested that the appointment of one independent person would be sufficient.

It was noted that at the meeting of the Authority held on 24th June 2013, Mr M Ager had been appointed as an independent member of the Audit Committee for a term of office expiring with the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2016.

Resolved:

- (a) that the political balance and membership of committees and panels for 2014/2015, as set out in Appendix 6, be approved;

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- (b) that the appointment to the roles of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of committees and panels, as set out in Appendix 6, be approved;
- (c) that the appointment of Mr M Ager as an independent non-voting member on the Audit Committee be affirmed;
- (d) that the appointment of Mr F Bell to the role of independent person, appointed in pursuance of Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, for the term of office expiring 30th June, 2016, be approved.

42/14

Appointment of Representatives to Serve on Other Bodies

The Authority considered the appointment of representatives to serve on other bodies during 2014/2015.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the appointments of representatives to serve on other bodies, as set out in Appendix 7, be approved;
- (2) that the Chair (Councillor Edwards), (or his nominee), be authorised to exercise the Authority's Corporate Vote at the Local Government Association General Assembly and that the Authority's General Assembly votes be allocated in accordance with proportionality of the Association.

43/14

Member Attendance at Conferences, Seminars and Visits

The Authority considered a report setting out the arrangements for authorising attendance at conferences, seminars and visits.

Resolved that the events for 2014/2015, as set out in Appendix 8, be approved for the purpose of the payment of travel and subsistence allowances and conference fees (where appropriate), subject to the necessary budgetary provision being available.

44/14

Review of the Principal Management Team

Further to Minute No. 86/13 (25th November, 2013), the Authority considered a report on proposals for the future structure of the Senior Management Team following a review of the Principal Management Team. The proposals were evidence based, had been independently evaluated and would provide value for money. Appropriate consultation on the proposals had been undertaken.

The underlying principle of the review and subsequent proposal was to support the Chief Fire Officer in making more informed, evidence based decisions in line with the delivery of the strategic priorities set out by the Authority in The Plan 2014-17. These decisions would be influenced and shaped through the wider involvement of senior managers from across all professional functions that provided both service delivery and service support. To this end the strategic decision making framework had been re-configured and a new strategic team, to be called the Strategic Enabling Team (SET), would be established. This Team, made up of 15 strategic managers, would replace the current Corporate Board arrangements.

In addition to supporting the delivery of The Plan, the proposals would produce annual cost savings of £235,000 or 24% which was in line with forecast Comprehensive Spending reductions for 2015-18. This would be achieved as follows:-

- Disestablishment of ACFO TOps post £161,000
- Disestablishment of a Watch Commander £ 46,000
 B post
- Other salary related adjustments £ 28,000

It was noted that amendments would be required to the constitution to align the new structure and role designations of SET members.

The Authority agreed to make the equality impact assessment in respect of the proposals available as a public document.

The Chair and members of the Authority supported the proposals and congratulated all officers who had contributed to the review. It was felt that the new structure, whilst delivering cash savings, would afford lean, fit for purpose support services.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the proposals now submitted for the restructuring of the Senior Management Team be approved for implementation according to the approach set out in the report;
- (2) that the disestablishment of the post of Assistant Chief Fire Officer Technical and Operational Support be approved;
- (3) that the Clerk be authorised to make any necessary consequential amendments to the Constitution arising from the changes to the structure now approved;
- (4) that the Chief Fire Officer be asked to review the operation of the new structure and report back to the Authority within twelve months.

45/14

The Plan 2014-2017

The Authority considered a proposal to amend the Strategic Objectives set out in The Plan to reflect the realignment of the delivery functions of Protection, Prevention and Response to sit within the Operations Directorate. The restructure of the strategic objectives gave a clear focus on service delivery, and emphasised the contribution of high quality support services and shared services in achieving service delivery.

Resolved that the amendments to the priorities, strategic objectives and outcomes in the Plan 2014/17, as set out in Appendix 9, be approved.

46/14

Financial Regulations

The Authority considered minor revisions to Financial Regulations to bring them up to date. The only substantive change was to increase the value at which items needed to be included on the inventory from £100 to £500. It was also noted that some further revisions might be required to reflect changes to the structure of the Principal Management Team approved in Minute No. 44/14 above.

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Resolved that the revised Financial Regulations, as now amended and attached as Appendix 10, be approved.

47/14 **Monitoring of Finances**

The Authority noted a report on the monitoring of finances to the end of June 2014.

48/14 **Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2013/14**

The Authority received the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2013/14, subject to the correction of the list of meetings held to indicate that a meeting had been held on 9th June 2014. The report detailed the results of the Audit Committee's self assessment/review of effectiveness, together with details on the business undertaken by the Committee during the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

49/14 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2013/14**

The Authority received the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee 2013/14. The report detailed the business undertaken by the Committee during the 2013/14 Municipal Year and its main achievements.

Reference was made to the list of members' attendances and it was suggested that in future years a distinction be drawn in such annual reports between authorised and unauthorised absence.

In response to a question from a member, the Chair indicated that the scrutiny function in fire and rescue authorities was not mandatory and had been relatively slow to develop. Scrutiny had been introduced in this Authority in 2012 and was working effectively, adding value and holding officers and members to account. The Chief Fire Officer indicated that scrutiny, particularly linked to performance monitoring, had been useful in identifying areas for consideration and focus.

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50/14 **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 9th June, 2014, were received.

51/14 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 9th June, 2014, were received.

52/14 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 2nd June, 2014, were received.

53/14 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the Policy Planning Forum held on 9th June, 2014, were received.

54/14 **Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel**

The notes of the Joint Consultative Panel meeting held on 14th April, 2014, were received.

55/14 **Exclusion of the Public**

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 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 relating to action taken, or to be taken, in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

56/14

Action of the Chief Fire Officer in Consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority

The Chief Fire Officer reported on action which he had taken, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to authorise the instigation of legal proceedings for failure to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

(Meeting ended at 12.05 pm)

Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes Democratic Services Unit Sandwell MBC 0121-569-3791
