

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

3rd March, 2008 at 10.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: **Members of the Authority**

Councillors Alden, Birbeck, S Davis,
Foster, Gazey, Hinton, Howard, Hussain, Idrees,
Jackson, Ryder, Spence, Stevenson, Turner,
Ward, Wild and Wilkes;
Messrs Bagley and Topliss.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**

Chief Fire Officer – Frank Sheehan;
Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Vij Randeniya
Assistant Chief Officers – Alan Brandon, John Brown
and Martin Clark;
Bob Deekes, Mike Griffiths and David Johnson.

Clerk to the Authority

Sue Phelps, Stephnie Hancock and Georgina Wythes.

Treasurer to the Authority

Lynda Bateman.

Apologies: Councillors Bowen, G Davies, Mulhall and Tagger.

5/08 **Introductions and Announcements**

The Chief Fire Officer reported that Operational Commanders had been invited to this meeting to give Members the opportunity to network, particularly with regard to the discussions with about Local Area Agreements. He indicated that Tony Ward had recently been appointed Operational Commander for Wolverhampton. He also advised that Operational Commander Peter Carter would be retiring shortly and expressed his thanks for his long service with the Brigade.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that agreement had now been reached with trades unions with regard to the installation of defibrillators on fire engines and that fitting would commence this month on a rolling

programme.

The Chief Fire Officer announced that funding had been obtained from Birmingham City Council and the West Midlands Road Safety Partnership towards the cost of the Safeside development at the new Headquarters. The move to the new Headquarters would also offer the opportunity to carry out a rebranding exercise.

The Brigade had recently attended a serious fire in Wolverhampton where a child from the Polish community had been severely injured. In the follow up to the incident innovative fire prevention work had been carried out with the Polish community including liaison with the immigration service and targeting spectators at an England/Poland football game.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the recent death of Pat Webb who had worked for many years in Fire Control at Walsall Fire Station and had been very active in the community during her retirement. He had sent a letter of condolence on behalf of the Authority.

He also indicated that he would be reporting to Members in due course on developments with regard to regulation of houses in multiple occupation, and on innovative proposals for services in the Coventry area.

6/08 Local Area Agreements

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Clark presented an overview of the statutory arrangements in respect of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and indicated that there was a growing recognition of the contribution of the Fire Service as a partner in local service delivery. Fire Service targets now featured in most of the LAAs in the West Midlands area. He highlighted fire service initiatives from each of the seven districts which had featured in LAAs.

He emphasised the crucial role for Members in providing a link into their home authority to promote partnership working. The success of partnership working in the future would depend on the capacity to mainstream this activity by incorporating it into the business planning process and evidencing it for future inspection regimes.

Members enquired if there were common targets set out in LAAs across the West Midlands. This was not currently the case but the LAAs covered similar themes. Government Office West Midlands had taken a positive approach to Fire Service input to LAAs across the wider region.

Reference was made to a recent event at Sedgley Fire Station which had illustrated the advantages of partnership working in addressing such issues as youth offending. The Chief Fire Officer indicated that engaging with children and young people was now an established function of all fire authorities.

7/08 **Annual Equality and Diversity Update**

The Head of Human Resources gave a progress report on equality and diversity matters.

Considerable progress had been made in 2007/08 in rolling out core values across the service, and this would continue in 2008/09. Work was also in hand to allow the Authority to progress from Level 2 of the Equality Standard, together with developing performance management standards to enable improvements to be measured. A formal process had also been established for undertaking full equality impact assessments. Equality and diversity training modules had been developed which would now be embedded in core training activity. Peer support officers were also available to provide staff with an additional level of support on equality and diversity issues. Members were reminded that equality and diversity work did not relate only to the workforce but also to community engagement.

Progress had been made in implementing actions under the Disability Equality Scheme. Appropriate training was available; considerable work had been carried out to ensure the new Headquarters was fully compliant with legislative requirements; a disability focus group had been set up to assist with consultation; and significant work had been done with the deaf community. Further areas identified for action were signage, accessible web pages and documentation, disability access audits and encouraging applications and recruitment of disabled people.

The Race Equality Scheme had also been progressed by implementing initial equality impact assessments; reviewing current policies; and working with religious and belief organizations. Targeted actions for 2008/09 were further partnership working with a number of organizations; full equality impact assessments; publication of updates and targets; and encouraging applications from and recruitment of minority ethnic people.

Positive action recruitment initiatives had also been implemented in pursuance of the Gender Equality Scheme and improved flexible

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working arrangements were under consideration for the whole workforce.

The Head of Human Resources indicated that at present 6% of uniformed personnel were from minority ethnic communities, and 3.2% were female. These figures were improving in response to initiatives that had already been put in place. He confirmed that the service did work with organizations such as Connexions.

Reference was made to new developments on signage for the visually impaired, and the Chief Fire Officer undertook to raise this matter with the Headquarters Project Team. He confirmed that the main contractor for the Headquarters project would have been vetted against any equality standards set out in the tender documentation.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that there were opportunities for firefighters to continue to serve after the age of 55 if they were medically fit and competent, and that appropriate support and adaptation of equipment could be provided.

8/08

Chairman's Update

The Chairman reported on progress on his negotiations with regard to the strip of land forming part of the site of the new Headquarters.

He also reported that at a recent meeting of the Local Government Association Fire Services Forum, concerns had been expressed about delay in formulating the final business case for the Regional Control Centres and the escalating cost of the project.

Councillor Hinton reported on a recent political meeting with the Fire Service Minister.

(Meeting ended at 12.05 pm)

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