

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**19 December 2017 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority
Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)
Councillors Allcock, Aston, Barrie, Booth,
Brackenridge, Eustace, Hogarth, Male, P Singh, T
Singh, and Tranter
Mr Ager

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
A Afsar, B Brook, J Connor, P Fellows, J Round, P
Shergill, H Sherlock, N Spencer, S Taylor, S
Timmington, M Ward-White

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)
M Griffiths (Treasurer)

Apologies: Councillors Atwal Singh, Barlow, Cartwright, Clinton,
Craddock, Davis, Miks, Mottram, Sealey, Spence,
Walsh, Williams and Young

Observers: Nil

26/17 Chair and CFO Announcements

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

The Chief Fire Officer, along with all Members and Officers present, paid tribute to the families of those who had been

Policy Planning Forum 19 December 2017

involved in the road traffic collision which had occurred at the weekend. It had been a traumatic incident for all concerned.

The Chair noted the correspondence received from the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) which raised a number of concerns, principally regarding the contracts for new entrant firefighters.

The Chair had acknowledged the correspondence via letter including that it would be discussed at the Policy Planning Forum. The Chair and the Chief Fire Officer would be writing back to the FBU in due course.

All Members were encouraged to raise any questions that they may have with the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer.

A briefing note would be distributed to Members.

27/17 Governance Update and Public Consultation

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, provided an update on the subject of future governance:

The Reformed Fire Authority (RFA) would commence on 25 June 2018 and the reduction to 15 Members had been confirmed. The RFA would consist of one Member from Solihull Council, two Members from Dudley, Coventry, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils, and four Members from Birmingham Council. Additionally, the RFA would feature co-optees including representation from the Ambulance Service, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and health.

The Mayoral governance proposals had been approved through the constituent councils during October to December 2017, and by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) on 8 December 2017. The transition to Mayoral governance would commence in spring 2019.

Policy Planning Forum 19 December 2017

The Scheme had been approved subject to a number of amendments including:

- Ring fencing of budget and reserves
- Mayor to appoint chair of committee in consultation with council leaders
- Composition of Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee (MFAC)

Additionally, a number of key areas would be acknowledged including:

- Importance of enhanced and clear Chief Fire Officer accountabilities
- Importance of the MFAC
- Role of scrutiny

The approval of the Scheme would be taken forward next year, with the amendments made as outlined above. Public consultation would commence in January 2018 on behalf of the Secretary of State, running from 11 January to 8 March. Upon its conclusion, analysis would be undertaken locally and the results of the consultation would be presented back to the constituent local authorities for final approval of the proposals (in April / May, prior to submission to the Secretary of State).

It was expected that the Scheme would be reviewed by the Secretary of State in June 2018. The Government will develop an Order which will abolish the Fire Authority and enable the move to the Mayoral governance model.

The draft Order will be made available to the constituent local authorities and WMCA, allowing the opportunity to ensure the Order meets requirements. It was noted that although there was no legal requirement for the Home Office to do this, indications suggested that they were happy to do so (as of October / November 2017).

The Order would be resubmitted to the Government following any amendments made locally in December 2018 / January 2019 where it would enter the parliamentary process.

Policy Planning Forum 19 December 2017

It was envisaged that the Secretary of State would approve the Order in February 2019 enabling the transfer of the Fire Authority functions to WMCA during March / April of that year.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The West Midlands Mayor had been involved in the development of the Scheme.
- The RFA would be the Fire Authority until it was abolished following the implementation of the Order.
- Members of the MFAC would be nominated by the constituent local authorities. The Mayor would have no veto on Council Members nominated to MFAC but would appoint its chair.

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Strategic Enabler Strategic Hub, provided an overview of the public consultation:

Following the approval of the development of the governance review and Scheme, there would be a requirement to hold a consultation on the proposals.

The consultation would be on behalf of the Home Secretary and owned by WMCA. The consultation would cover two key areas:

- Governance Scheme
- Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 (statutory requirements)

The consultation will consist of five questions; three focussing on the Scheme, and two focussing on the statutory requirements. A number of other questions regarding personal details will also be asked to aid the collation of data.

A web based approach will be taken to the consultation, led by WMCA and supported by the Local Authorities. Hard copies will also be made available, including for use by firefighters / on fire stations.

Policy Planning Forum 19 December 2017

Internal and external communications had been planned to cover the three phases; raising awareness, the consultation, and analysis of results.

WMCA will analyse the results of the consultation, the findings of which will be summarised, however, no recommendations are allowed to be made.

It was noted that the consultation would require support from Members to help engage with communities.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The results of the consultation was important and it was considered that any resounding difference of opinion to the proposals raised as a result of the consultation could not be ignored.

28/17 How we are Progressing in Delivering the Objectives of The Plan

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, presented two videos to Members:

- A video by the Royal Society for Public Health which demonstrated the WMFS Back Home Safe & Well initiative.
- A 'Year in Pictures' – a video which provided a look back of the previous 12 months.

The first episode of the new television show called 'Into the Fire', exclusively featuring West Midlands Fire Service (using footage from helmet and body worn cameras), would be broadcast on 8 January (at 22:00 pm on the Really Channel). All were encouraged to promote the new series.

Phil Loach thanked all Members on behalf of the Strategic Enabling Team for their support and work undertaken throughout 2017.

**Policy Planning Forum
19 December 2017**

The meeting closed at 11:40 hours.

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