

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**27 March 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, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie,
Bennett, Booth, Brackenridge, Cartwright, Davis,
Eustace, Hogarth, Mottram, Sealey, B Singh, Skinner,
Spence, Tranter and Young
Mr Ager

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
M Griffiths (Treasurer),
A Afsar, J Connor, M Hamilton-Russell, R Ryman, S
Timmington, S Vincent, M Ward-White and S Warnes

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors: Clinton, Craddock, Dad, P Singh, T Singh
and Walsh
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)

Observers: Nil

9/17 Chair and CFO Announcements

The Chair and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

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Cllr Davis had been announced as the Mayor of Solihull. Cllr Davis had expressed his intention to continue as a Member of the Fire Authority. Members congratulated the councillor on his appointment.

Representatives of the Home Office had visited the Service in the previous week and it had been noted that they were impressed with developments and the progress being made by the Service.

An update was provided on the Service's continued support of the Firefighters Charity. March had been charity car wash month with a string of car washes having taken place across fire stations and headquarters. It was hoped that £10k would be raised by the end of March. Members were encouraged to attend and support events where practicable.

10/17A Reformed Fire Authority

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, delivered a presentation and update on the subject of future governance:

Progress to date:

The potential changes of the Policing and Crime Bill (now an Act) for Fire and Rescue Services and particularly West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority had moved the Fire Authority to commission a working group to consider the future governance of West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) with the prime outcome of better collaboration.

The outcomes of the Future Governance Working Group identified that change was inevitable and that the Fire Authority should seek to influence this in many ways, the most prominent being the consideration of its size and structure to support future collaboration, that a two stage change in governance would not be ideal and that future governance through a Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) would offer many opportunities for wider collaboration aligned to the Service's strategy.

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Outcomes of the public consultation, built into the Integrated Risk Management consultation held during December 2016 and January 2017, had indicated that a reformed Fire Authority and Mayoral WMCA were the most desirable options for future governance of the Service. It was also noted that in terms of responses received, the consultation had been the largest consultation held in the West Midlands for some considerable time.

The Fire Authority approved a strategy for the move to a Mayoral WMCA governance model on 20 February 2017. On 3 March 2017, the WMCA Board unanimously approved their support for the strategy.

Next steps:

The formation of a reformed, smaller Fire Authority, acting as an interim arrangement. It is possible that a new governance model tied in with the WMCA and Mayor could be delivered by autumn 2018. As a result, the interim Fire Authority could exist for a brief period.

The key principles are:

- Support future collaboration enabling improved community outcomes
- Diverse membership through co-opted partners
- Reduced membership / size
- Maintain Section 41 principles of accountability and transparency
- Refined committee structures
- Maintain proportionality across the seven Local Authorities

There are three proposals, with the number of elected members ranging from nine to 15, with resultant changes in proportionality.

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Co-opted partners could include representatives from the Ambulance Service, the Mayor's Office and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). Indeed, PCC's have the ability to apply to be join Fire Authorities.

It was important to ensure Section 41 arrangements remained, to maintain the connection between the Fire Authority and Local Authorities. It was noted that there were some differences in the way Fire Authority developments and updates were fed back to the respective Local Authorities and there was a need to reach a shared and joint approach to ensure consistency and to ensure that the leaders of the Local Authorities were aware of what the Fire Authority were doing.

With regard to the timeline for such changes to be implemented, possibly at the AGM in June 2018, there were a number of actions that would need to be undertaken including:

- Fire Authority approval for a reformed Fire Authority option including size and make up enabling a process for reaffirmation of Local Authority consent
- Engagement with the Secretary of State
- Engagement with co-optees

Additional factors could include ongoing conversations and developments regarding Mayoral governance, the roles of the Mayor and West Midlands Fire Committee, learning from other areas including Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service / Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the views of the Government.

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

- A commitment had been provided to the leaders of the seven Local Authorities regarding proportionality
- In terms of proportionality, in all three proposals Solihull would probably have one member on the Fire Authority

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- The proposals were based on what was practical for the Fire Authority and Fire Service, along with the wishes of the Government as well as those of the WMCA and other local partners.
- The possibility for co-opted members to be on the Fire Authority would allow the further development of collaborative opportunities, including the further development of links between organisations.
- The Labour and Conservative mayoral candidates see the benefit of the Fire Service being within the WMCA and both are keen to work with the Service at the earliest opportunity. Both candidates have also stated their opinion that the role of PCC should move across the Mayor's office following the elections in 2020.
- The WMCA had unanimously endorsed the move of the Fire Service across to the Mayor via the WMCA.
- It is envisaged that the Mayor would oversee strategic oversight with responsibilities including setting the budget and council tax precept, as well as strategic plans such as the approval of The Plan. The members, including mayoral nominations, would provide a political steer, undertake Section 41 roles, and fulfil Audit and Scrutiny functions.

11/17 Fire Service Inspectorate

Steve Vincent, Strategic Enabler Organisational Assurance, delivered a presentation on the Fire Service Inspectorate:

The Policing and Crime Act had enabled the establishment of an independent inspection regime for fire and rescue services within England. The Fire Services Act 2004 would be amended to enable fire inspectors to undertake joint inspections with Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (HMIC). The Home Secretary can appoint a Chief Fire and Rescue Inspector for England, approve a framework of inspection and appoint inspectors. Reports of inspections would be published as well as an annual report to Parliament.

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The Home Office had commissioned two pieces of work on a proposed inspectorate; from HMIC and Blue Light Works, both of whom had submitted options to the Home Office. The options had been considered but an anticipated announcement by the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service had been delayed.

The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), including DCFO Phil Hales, had been involved in the discussions regarding the development of both options. The HMIC option was based on the Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy programme (PEEL) and therefore replicated the Police approach. The Blue Light Works option was similar to the approach taken by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED).

Key personnel would be recruited into positions following the announcement by the Fire and Policing Minister. There was still a keenness for inspections to be carried out during 2017/18 although possibly fewer than originally planned.

With regard to the Operational Assessment (OpA) sector led improvement process, it was still seen by the sector as a valuable tool, and an amended OpA was being put forward to compliment the inspectorate.

It was noted that the inspectorate could be resource intensive and discussions were ongoing within this area. There was the possibility that inspections could be undertaken by Fire and Police Officers.

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

- The Home Office had indicated a requirement for a team of 30 inspectors, plus associate inspectors to support the inspections which would include frontline staff (e.g. crew commanders and watch commanders).
- It was most likely that the inspectors would report to Her Majesty's Inspector.
- Both options would see the inspectorate report directly to the Minister.

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- It had been noted that there was currently a gap in governance nationally in terms of what would happen if an inspection led to a poor report and how this would be resolved for the Service in question. The Local Government Association had suggested that it could step in under some circumstances, building upon their experience within this field, rather than the Home Office. However, this was an area which required further development to progress.

12/17 The Plan

Mark Hamilton-Russell, Strategic Enabler Corporate Communications delivered a presentation on The Plan 2017-20, demonstrating the new approach to its publication:

The Plan had historically been published in the form of a PDF embedded on the website. The new revision of The Plan for 2017 – 2020 would see it published on an interactive website complete with videos and info-graphics.

The website was based upon the three principles of:

- What we do
- Why we do it
- How we do it

The change in format had allowed the language used to be toned down and terminology to be explained in further detail. The videos would feature sign language and subtitles would also be available.

It was noted that it was important how The Plan was communicated, to fully utilise all communication channels.

The meeting closed at 12:07 hours.

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