

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

24th April 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, Hussain, Idrees,
Lawrence, Mulhall, Pitt, Rogers, Ross, Singh,
Stevenson, Tagger, Wallace and Ward.
Mr Topliss.

Apology: Councillor Howard.

17/06 Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded Members that the next Parliamentary Reception would be held on Wednesday, 29th November, 2006.

He also announced that this would be Councillor Wallace's last Authority meeting, and thanked her for her contribution to the work of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Hussain reported that he had recently returned from a visit to Pakistan on which he had delivered a fire engine and a supply of uniforms that were surplus to requirements, and had been donated by the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority. He produced a number of letters of thanks from the authority in Pakistan in receipt of the equipment, together with details of local media coverage.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that 1st to 7th May, 2006 was Deaf Awareness Week, and the West Midlands Fire Service was promoting the availability of smoke alarms suitable for hearing impaired persons that could be provided with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

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The Vice Chair made reference to the excellent media publicity that had been given to the group of West Midlands firefighters who would shortly be visiting Romania.

Members asked what progress had been made with regard to the relocation of Fire Service Headquarters. A further report would be presented to the Executive Committee in May 2006, but in the meantime negotiations were continuing on the preferred option for the new headquarters. A response was still awaited from the Secretary of State with regard to the listing of the existing headquarters.

18/06 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th February and 6th March 2006 be confirmed as a correct record.

19/06 Clerk to the Authority

With reference to Minute No. 16/06, Sandwell Council had been asked to reconsider its decision regarding the Chief Executive acting as Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority, or to consider nominating an appropriate Chief Officer to undertake the role.

The Leader of Sandwell Council had indicated that he was happy to put forward a proposal to the Fire Authority whereby the clerking function be provided by two of Sandwell's Chief Officers.

The proposal was that the Head of Governance Services cover the clerking duties and the Head of Legal Services support her with legal advice and act as Monitoring Officer. Both officers had extensive experience in their field of work and the Fire Authority would benefit from a broader and more flexible clerking support system than previously.

Administrative support to the Clerk would continue to be provided by Sandwell's existing officers.

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It was anticipated that the cost of this proposal could be accommodated within existing budgetary provision. The payment made to the previous Clerk would be utilised to fund the proposal.

Resolved that Sandwell's Head of Governance Services be appointed as Clerk to the Authority and that Sandwell's Head of Legal Services support her with legal advice and act as Monitoring Officer.

20/06 **Financial Regulations and Procedures**

The Authority considered draft revised Financial Regulations. Two major changes were proposed relating to virement and the maintenance of reserves. It was intended to review the Financial Regulations annually in future.

Resolved that the revised Financial Regulations and Procedures as set out in Appendix A be approved and adopted.

21/06 **Forward Looking Annual Efficiency Statement**

The Authority noted its Annual Efficiency Statement for 2006/2007.

22/06 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd April, 2006 were received.

With reference to Minute No. 11/06, (Early Day Motion – Sprinklers in Schools), Members were informed that a letter had been sent to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Authority supporting the Early Day Motion and expressing particular concerns that sprinklers were not to be provided in new-build Academy Schools. A disappointing response had been received from the Minister for Education, to which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer would be replying, and the matter would also be raised

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through the Local Government Association. A copy of the letter from the Minister would be circulated to all Members.

With reference to Minute No. 17/06, (Outcome of Joint Review of the Shift System for Station Based Operational Personnel), Members express their thanks to the Joint Working Party that had carried out the review of duty systems and shift patterns for station based operational personnel. It was hoped that the new duty systems would boost the morale of firefighters, and that a period of stability would now ensue.

Resolved that the recommendation set out in Minute No. 16/06 (Mutual Assistance to Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority) be approved.

23/06 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the meeting held on 3rd April, 2006 were received.

24/06 **Vote of Thanks**

The Chair thanked all Members of the Authority for their support over the last twelve months.

Members thanked the Chair for the able and courteous manner in which he had conducted the business of the Authority in the last year.

(Meeting ended at 11.32 am)

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