

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

24th January 2011, at 9.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: **Members of the Authority**
Councillors Alden, Andrew, Chambers, Clinton,
Davies, Docker, Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Foster, A Hill,
M Hill, Hinton, Hodgson, Idrees, Jackson, Jones,
Mulhall, O'Neill, Singh, Spence, Stevenson, Tagger,
Turner and Walsh.
Mr Denny.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer – V Randeniya.
Deputy Chief Fire Officer – M Clarke
A Brandon, M Griffiths, P Hale, D Johnson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
N Sharma (Designate) and S Hancock.

Treasurer
S Kellas.

Apologies: Councillors Eustace and Ryder.
Mr Ager and Mr Topliss.

1/11 **Chair's Announcements**

Members noted the following announcements:-

- The national Fire Control project had now ended. A consultation had been launched on 13th January 2011 on the future of fire control and the fire control building.
- Members and officers had travelled to London on 11th January 2011 to meet with the Fire Minister to discuss the provisional finance settlement. However, he had been taken ill and so the meeting had not gone ahead. Members were lobbying to secure a meeting with the Director Fire, Resilience and Emergencies.
- Members congratulated the Chief Fire Officer for twenty years service without a day off sick.

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- Assistant Chief Fire Officer Philip Hales would be returning to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority at the end of the month, following a six-month secondment.

2/11 Budget 2011/2012 to 2014/2015

Further to Note 28/10 (16th December 2010) the Director of Finance and Procurement updated members of the current budget position, following the announcement of the provisional grant settlement figures on 13th December 2010.

Measures currently being taken to address the budget shortfall identified at the previous Policy Planning Seminar included: revising budget assumptions, further scrutiny of budgets and consideration of a further efficiency target. It was anticipated that the Authority may receive an estimated £160k from the distribution of surplus council tax and an overall increase in the Council Tax base of the seven district councils

3/11 Building Upon Success Programme

The review of the Service was continuing, with full engagement from staff and stakeholders.

A number of ideas were being taken forward, which included a review of the methods of response to automatic fire alarms. In the majority of cases no action was required; however a full emergency response was currently dispatched. It was therefore proposed to use greater call challenge to ascertain whether a response was required and to dispatch smaller response vehicles. Hospitals and care homes would continue to receive a full emergency response. The revised protocol would possibly have an impact upon response times; however, this was a small risk, outweighed by the benefits in terms of savings in fuel costs and a reduced risk to road users. A publicity campaign would commence on 31st January 2011 to inform the public of the new protocol.

A review of crewing arrangements for special appliances - e.g. hydraulic platforms and prime movers - had been undertaken. Currently special appliances had dedicated staff and it was proposed to make all appliances dual crewed from April 2011. Staff would need training and the location of the appliances would need to be reviewed. Special appliances were not first response vehicles, therefore standards would be maintained in terms of response times. However, more efficient management of crewing arrangements would bring cashable savings of approximately £2.6m.

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Members were informed that the representative bodies were aware of and supported the proposals.

A number of service delivery options were being considered including a review of shift patterns in areas of low activity and different types of response vehicles. It was acknowledged that some investment may be required in order to secure future savings.

Seventeen pieces of work were currently being undertaken on back-office reviews. It was important to ensure that any changes to back-office functions were aligned with front-line services.

The Plan was currently being refreshed for 2011-2014 taking into account the budget position.

4/11 **Regional Fire Control Project**

It was reported that the national Fire Control project had ended on 20th December, 2010. The implications of this were still being considered, however, West Midlands Fire Service had modern and efficient control facilities, and so there was no impact on its ability to mobilise its crews. There were some likely financial implications and staff related issues.

The government had launched a 12-week consultation exercise on 13th January 2011, the response to which would be reported to a future meeting of the Executive Committee. West Midlands Fire Service would be considering options to collaborate with regional and national partners.

Further work was also being undertaken on the future of the Regional Control Centre building in Wolverhampton and the Local Authority Controlled Company.

5/11 **Fire Fatalities**

Members noted with sadness that there had been five deaths as a result of three fires in December 2010 and January 2011.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Philip Hale outlined the circumstances of the three fires. In all three cases response times were on target, however the victims had been dead by the time the fire service arrived. This highlighted the importance of prevention work.

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In all three cases there had been no specific indicators to target resources to those particular areas. However, one of the victims had been known to social services so work was being undertaken with partner agencies to ensure that vulnerable people could be identified and targeted. Community safety work was also being strengthened, as were organisational safeguarding policies to ensure that appropriate mechanisms were in place for referrals to partner agencies.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that there had been an increase in the number of home fires since the economic downturn because more people were staying at home and cooking more often as opposed to dining out. Chip pan fires continued to happen, which created very high density smoke that caused significant pain for those who were fortunate to survive a fire caused by a chip pan. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the danger of using chip pans.

The Brigade continued to carry out 'hot strikes' following dwelling fires to target the immediate community and carry out home safety checks.

(Meeting ended at 11.40 am)

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