

<p>Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority</p>
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18th April, 2011, at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Hinton (Chairman);
Councillor Eustace (Vice-Chairman);
Councillors Alden, Bennett, Chambers, Clinton,
Davies, Delaney, Docker, Douglas-Maul, A Hill,
Idrees, Jackson, Jones, Mulhall, O'Neill, Ryder,
Singh, Spence, Stevenson, Tagger, Turner and
Walsh.

Apologies: Councillors Andrew, Foster and M Hill;
Mr Ager.

20/11 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chairman announced that this would be his last meeting of the Authority as he was retiring as an Elected Member in May 2011. He had served on the Authority since November, 1999 and had been Chair of the Authority from 2001 to 2007 and during the current municipal year. He thanked Members and past Members of the Authority for their support during what had been a difficult period and paid tribute to the way in which members of all political parties had worked together in the best interests of the Service. He also thanked the Chief Fire Officer and his staff.

Members responded and presented Councillor Hinton with a small gift to commemorate his service with the Authority. They wished him a long and happy retirement and congratulated him on his contributions to the work of the Fire Service, nationally, regionally and locally. He had played a key role in the West Midlands Regional Management Board, the Local Government Association Fire Services Forum, and the Fire Control Local Authority Controlled Company, and had also overseen the relocation of the Service to the new Headquarters.

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The Chief Fire Officer thanked Councillor Hinton for his contribution and for providing leadership through demanding times. He referred to his passion, commitment and belief in the Service for which he had been a powerful and vocal advocate, well regarded on the national stage. He presented Councillor Hinton with a small gift and a framed photograph of the new Headquarters, on behalf of the Service.

21/11 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th February, 2011, be confirmed as a correct record.

22/11 The Plan 2011-15

The Authority considered the final draft version of the Plan 2011-15 which set out the strategic direction for the West Midlands Fire Service, and proposed key performance indicators and targets for 2011-12.

Members referred to previous discussions with regard to recovering a greater proportion of the cost of providing emergency cover outside the West Midlands area, and moving towards shared services, and asked whether the Plan took account of this. The Chief Fire Officer reported that discussions with other Fire Authorities had not yet been concluded. Members stressed the importance of ensuring that costs were recouped to avoid any adverse impact on service within the West Midlands.

Officers were also asked to revisit the statistics within the Plan with regard to the diversity of the area. The Chief Fire Officer responded that it was unlikely that these statistics could be updated until the results of the 2011 Census were announced.

Resolved:

- (1) that 'The Plan 2011-15' be approved;
- (2) that the key performance indicators and targets for 2011-12 be approved.

23/11 External Audit Work Programme and Scale of Fees 2011/12

John Gregory, the Authority's Relationship Manager with the Audit Commission, was present for this item.

The Authority noted a report from the Audit Commission setting out the outcome of the recent national consultation on their proposed fees and work programme for 2011/12. The Authority had submitted a response to the consultation seeking clarity on the methodology for determining fee levels and asking why the fee reduction for fire authorities was lower than that for single tier and county councils.

The Audit Commission response to local authorities indicated that it would not impose an inflationary increase in 2011/12; that a varying reduction in scale fees would apply in respect of local value for money audit work; that local authorities including fire authorities would receive a 3% reduction to reflect lower auditing costs following implementation of International Financial Reporting Standards, and a rebate of up to 3% on the previous year's fees to reflect the ending of the Comprehensive Area Assessment. In view of comments made as part of the consultation process, the Commission had also agreed, subject to affordability, to make additional rebates in 2011/12 of up to 8%.

The Audit Commission was to be abolished in due course but the nature of the new local public audit framework and the transitional arrangements to the new framework were not yet clear.

The Authority also noted the Annual Audit and Inspection Fee Letter 2011/12 which set out the work the Audit Commission proposed to undertake within the Service in 2011/12 and the fee for the delivery of this work, which would be £85,860, representing a reduction of 8% on the 2010/11 fees.

Members expressed disappointment that it had not been possible to secure a greater reduction in fees, considering the fall in the level of grant received by the Authority, and were concerned that the levels of rebates and reductions were not consistent across the country. There were also concerns that the costs of the re-organisation of the local public audit framework could be passed on to local authorities. Mr Gregory

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responded that the costs of close down were being met from Audit Commission reserves and negotiations were in hand with Communities and Local Government (CLG) for further financial support. Fees were based on a national scale with London weighting. It was hoped to achieve a 15% reduction in fees in 2012/13 but this would be dependent on the financial position and whether support was available from CLG.

24/11 Procurement of Hydraulic Platforms

The Authority considered a report with regard to a proposal to purchase two hydraulic platforms. Two of the four hydraulic platforms had been replaced in the last twelve months. The Vehicle Replacement Programme provided for the replacement of the one further hydraulic platform in each of the years 2011/12 and 2012/13 on the grounds of age and serviceability. However, a cash saving of £60,000 could be achieved by procuring the two replacement vehicles in 2011/12 to avoid a price increase. This would also reduce procurement costs. Purchasing vehicles of the same type would assist training, the move to 'dual crewing' and the rationalisation of servicing and maintenance. The cost of purchasing both vehicles in 2011/12 could be met from the Vehicle Replacement Programme budget for 2011/12.

Resolved that the procurement of two hydraulic platforms in 2011/12 be approved.

25/11 Closure of DCLG Firecontrol Project – Issues relating to the Local Authority Controlled Company

The Authority was reminded that the Firecontrol project was terminated by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) on 20th December 2010. CLG was currently consulting with fire authorities on the future of the Firecontrol buildings.

A local authority controlled company (LACC) had been formed in February 2007 to operate the proposed West Midlands Regional Control Centre. The Board of Directors of the company comprised one Elected Member from each constituent Fire Authority. The intention had been that the

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company would employ the management and control room staff and take ownership of the lease of the building. The Government had committed to meet the cost of developing and running the regional control centres up to the time that they became operational. All the costs incurred by the company and the regional project team in respect of the West Midlands control centre had therefore so far been met from Government grant, with the exception of significant officer time and support 'in kind'. The company did not hold the lease of the building or any responsibility for staff.

The LACC Board of Directors had met in January 2011 and considered the implications of the cancellation of the national Firecontrol project for the company, and decided to take steps towards the closedown of the company. The Board wished to seek further clarification from Government on the financial assets of the company and therefore did not wish to wind up the company immediately. The Board therefore decided to make the company dormant for the time being. The Members' Agreement in respect of the company signed by the constituent fire authorities provided that any winding up would require the mutual agreement of all five fire authorities. Once agreement was reached between the Government and the constituent authorities on the use of the uncommitted regional firecontrol grant and other assets, fire authorities would need to determine whether to support the dissolution of the Company.

Members felt that every effort should be made to recoup an equitable share of the assets of the Company and uncommitted grant aid in consideration of substantial officer time and other unpaid support to the project. The Chief Fire Officer undertook to take this forward as part of the continuing negotiations.

Resolved that the decision of the Board of Directors of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Limited Company of 28th January 2011 that the Company should close down all of its activities and become dormant for a short period of time be endorsed.

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26/11 Minutes of the Executive Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th March, 2011, were received. The correction of the reference to Councillor Eustace in Minute No 10/11 (Lead Member Reports) to read Councillor O'Neill was noted.

27/11 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the meetings held on 14th and 28th March, 2011 were received.

28/11 Minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee

The minutes of the meetings held on 7th and 28th March, 2011 were received.

29/11 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel

The notes of the meeting held on 28th March, 2011 were received.

30/11 Notes of the Member Development Working Group

The notes of the meeting held on 14th February, 2011 were received.

Resolved that the recommendation set out in Note 23/10 (Section 41 Member Role Description) be approved.

31/11 Councillor Foster

Resolved that the Clerk be asked to write to Councillor Foster on behalf of the Authority to express Members' sympathy on his mother's illness.

32/11 **Councillor Mulhall**

The Chair informed members that Councillor Mulhall would be serving as Lord Mayor of Coventry in 2011/12 and would not therefore be serving on the Fire Authority. Members wished Councillor Mulhall well in his Mayoral year.

(Meeting ended at 11.55 am)

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