

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**21 March 2016 at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: **Members of the Authority**
Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie,
Clinton, Craddock, Davis, Dehar, Eustace, Hogarth,
Miks, Mottram JP, Quinnen, Shackleton, B Singh,
Skinner, and Tranter.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach);
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
A Asif, S Barry, B Brook, P Burnham, A Ciclaire,
M Griffiths, M Pym, N Spencer, S Timmington,
S Vincent and S Warnes.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
M Dudley (Monitoring Officer)
S Sahota (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Afzal, Douglas-Maul, Sealey, P Singh, T
Singh, Spence, Ward and Young.
Mr Ager and Mr Bell.
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor).

Observers: Nil

6/16 **Chair and CFO's Announcements**

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

The Chair informed members that the process to substantively appoint an Assistant Chief Fire Officer was commencing and that a report would be submitted to the Fire Authority meeting on 11 April.

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The Chief Fire Officer informed members that he along with the Chair and the Chair of Merseyside FRS, had presented evidence to the Policing and Crime Bill Committee at the House of Commons. Following this, an invite had been extended to provide written submissions for amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill.

WMFS had spent considerable time focusing on Integrated Risk Management and the Community Safety Strategy (the new interactive version of which would be launched in April 2016) which was now paying dividends for the Service as it presents the evidence base reinforcing the service delivery model. The Chief Fire Officer thanked members for their support in enabling this.

Good progress continued to be made with regards to building on the relationships with the seven constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The pilot of the Telecare Falls Service in Coventry continued to go from strength to strength and it was hoped that this would be expanded into the Wolverhampton area (pilot due to commence in April) and other areas in the future.

Presentations to the Forum

The following presentation was given to the Policy Planning Forum:

- Policing and Crime Bill
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Update on Staffing

7/16 Policing and Crime Bill

The Chief Fire Officer delivered a presentation and update on the Policing and Crime Bill:

The Policing and Crime Bill contains a requirement / duty for collaboration between Ambulance, Fire and Police. WMFS already collaborates with both organisations but there are options for further collaboration. The Bill also enables Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC's) to take on governance of FRAs subject to local consent. An

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addition to the Bill is the proposal of a Chief Finance Officer, under a Chief Constable, presiding over a Fire fund.

In the run up to the second reading of the Bill, the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (AMFRA) galvanised and produced paper four, 'Maximising the Value of the Met FRAs', which was provided to all parties. The document was used by the Shadow Home Secretary, Andy Burnham, during the second reading of the Bill, who acknowledged the reduction in core funding of WMFS, and reiterated the views of the Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services that large cities were now beginning to be exposed to high levels of risk.

Following the second reading, WMFS along with AMFRA had been invited to table amendments to the Bill. The Local Government Association had also tabled seven amendments.

The Policing and Crime Bill will receive a third reading and then it will move onto the House of Lords by the end of the year as part of the process to Royal Assent.

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West Midlands Combined Authority

A presentation was provided to Members on the progress of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA):

Ongoing positive collaborative relationships with all seven Local Authorities (constituent members of the WMCA) Leaders and Officers had resulted in the agreement for WMFS to become a non-constituent member of WMCA with 'observer' status.

This development would enable:

- Participation in developing a legislative road map for the Fire Authority to become integrated into the WMCA
- Increased involvement and influence in shaping the agenda for services to communities
- Increased ability to influence direction of the Fire Authority
- Increased opportunity to deliver wider prevention based services

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through joint working and commissions.
Staffing Update

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update on staffing:

The forecasted budget reduction in February 2015 was in the region of £14m over four years. In February 2016, the provisional settlement was confirmed as £10m which remains subject to submission of an efficiency plan. The scale of efficiencies were reduced in a balanced and appropriate manner considering the impact on all areas of the organisation. This allowed the Authority to set a balanced budget for 2016/17.

The Staffing Model proposed is scalable which means the Service had initially planned a reduction of up to 300 station based posts but had now reduced this number to 154 posts.

The financial business case behind the proposed new staffing model relies on a flat rate of pay for voluntary additional shifts, enhanced with a disturbance allowance (currently set at 25%). There are no proposals to change existing and agreed overtime arrangements. The Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) dispute is that voluntary shifts should be paid at the overtime rate of time and a half. However, this is not achievable because:

- £4m is required from staffing
- Paying time and a half is not cost effective (saves £1k per post)
- Identified efficiency targets (not fully secured)
- £2m from commissioned services (not yet secured)
- Additional costs would impact other parts of the organization
- Funding reductions remain provisional

Full and meaningful engagement had been at the heart of the Service's approach to develop a new staffing model, including:

- Station and Watch engagement x 88
- Staffing Review Team sessions x 39

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- Staffing Team presentations – Middle Managers / Service Support x 5
- Management Briefings x 3
- SET webinars to all Middle Managers x 16
- Staffing website (Forum and FAQ)
- Staffing Newsletters x 5
- Video (including CFO and Chair joint message to all staff) x 4
- CFO Updates page
- Chair's blog
- Survey briefing pack / survey results
- Brigade News
- Staffing Position Statements x 2
- CPD Event: Staffing Review and Future Options x 1

Following extensive engagement, a wide number of options were identified. Options that negatively impacted the Service Delivery Model (SDM) were not supported.

Two options were identified which would maintain the SDM and were the most suitable for staff and the organization. To fully understand the two options, a trial was proposed:

- Reduction in the Staff to Crew Ratio (S2CR): a reduced number of staff on each Watch (which was proposed by staff during early engagement)
- Merging of Watches: having a station with a reduced total number of staff operating as one team with no individual Watches

Both models maintain the SDM whilst achieving the required savings from the staffing budget.

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Management and representative bodies have engaged throughout the development of the new staffing proposals using the agreed Employee Relations Framework. This has included a significant number of formal meetings and additional weekly meetings held outside of this recognized framework demonstrating a commitment to develop agreed solutions in a timely manner. Alongside both representative bodies, management have also engaged with NJC Joint Secretaries to explore any other options to achieve an agreement.

A management questionnaire designed to gauge the level of understanding of staff on critical issues was issued (part one sent to all staff, part two sent to station based staff). The questionnaire comprised two elements:

- A range of questions to measure the understanding of all staff within the organisation surrounding finances and the impact of budget reductions on the SDM
- To allow uniformed staff the opportunity to register interest to volunteer to undertake voluntary additional shifts with a 10% disturbance allowance

Via consultations with staff and negotiations with both representative bodies, management has revised the staffing proposal on a number of occasions. Following return from NJC Joint Secretaries, management further increased the disturbance allowance to 25%, which was accepted by the Fire Officer's Association (FOA) but rejected by the FBU.

January 2016 saw the introduction of the new staffing arrangements using the principle of Optimum Crewing Levels (OCL) to operate staffing in the most effective and efficient manner.

Due to the recruitment freeze and natural leavers, the number of station based staff has now reduced below the OCL of 1322. The new arrangements are working well with local staff managing flexibly to maintain the SDM.

A live debate was held on 6 January 2016 with the CFO, Chair and FBU representatives, to provide clarity to staff regarding the new staffing arrangements. Assurances were also provided regarding leave arrangements and shift systems.

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The FBU balloted members of the union for industrial action. The outcome of the ballot has led to action short of strike (ASOS); effective from 3 March 2016.

With no desire to enter into a long running dispute with representative bodies, management are now at the early stages of considering further alternative options that will maintain the SDM.

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

- The ballot called by the FBU included a number of issues and did not focus solely on the issue of voluntary additional shifts
- It should be noted that the use of voluntary additional shifts was an option that had been put forward by staff during early consultation
- Management and representative bodies have met with ACAS, who suggested solutions should be identified locally and was not the sole responsibility of management, encouraging good relations and all parties working together
- The Service wants, and needs to, employ 1322 firefighters to maintain the SDM. However, funding does not allow the Service to do this at this current time. The funding position could change in many ways with potential changes in the form of future developments such as, the WMCA, forthcoming changes to business rates, etc. Proposals for alternatives to the use of voluntary additional shifts must be put forward, some of which may be considered unpalatable.

(Meeting ended at 12:30 am)

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