

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

16 November 2015 at 12.30pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Tranter (Chair);
Councillor Spence (Vice Chair);
Councillors Barrie, B Singh, P Singh (substitute for Hogarth), Skinner, Young and Ward

Apology: Councillor Hogarth

Observer: Not applicable

22/15 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 August 2015, be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- Apology: removal of Councillor Barrie (who had been noted as having been present and having sent apologies)
- Minute 20/15 Dispute resolution: the sentence 'It was acknowledged that the next stage following an appeal would be industrial tribunal' amended to read 'It was acknowledged that the next stage following an appeal would be employment tribunal'

A Member enquired if the 'Effective Manager Series' training had been confirmed. Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler People Support Services, confirmed that the training would be delivered and that the opportunity had also been offered to members of the Joint Consultative Panel.

With reference to minute 21/15, David Gardiner, Facilities Manager, had provided a briefing note on the Estates Strategy which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting (attached to these minutes).

A Member enquired about the 'Old Bank' property in Bloxwich which was seemingly in a state of disrepair and asked if there were any plans to address this.

David Gardiner advised that the 'Old Bank' property had been discussed. It was believed that it would cost approximately £50,000 to make the property habitable. Cyclical maintenance is planned but not until spring 2016, due to the weather and the work that is required to be carried out.

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, advised that the Service currently did not wish to sell any of its properties with the exception of the Academy. The review of estates is undertaken on a yearly basis, and the views raised could be taken to the Fire Authority as part of this review at the relevant meeting.

Agreed the 'Old Bank' property in Bloxwich, and the views that have been raised, to be included in the estates review and presented to the Fire Authority.

23/15

Review of Partnerships

The Committee received a report on the 'Review of Partnerships'.

Jim Whittingham, WMFS Strategic Hub, presented an overview of the report, its findings and proposals:

A Member led working group was established in March 2015 comprising Councillors Tranter, Spence and Hogarth, to review all aspects of the Service's partnerships arrangements.

Partnerships are a key priority of the Service, integral to the delivery of the outcomes of 'The Plan', delivering our services, making our communities safer. Governance is important in ensuring the Service initiates and develops the correct partnerships and in the correct manner.

It is important that the Service has the right people and systems in place to deliver these activities. Fire Service personnel contribute 40% of their time delivering prevention work within partnerships, for

example firefighters delivering Home Safety Checks (recently re-launched as 'Safe and Well Checks'), and the additional work undertaken by Partnership Officers and Risk Reduction Officers.

Having already made savings of £28 million, the future financial landscape will need to be taken into consideration, in maintaining the 5 minute response standard and the vital element of prevention work (upstream firefighting), of which partnerships have an essential part to play. It was acknowledged that this area is becoming more difficult and complex and the continuing cuts mean that the Service may not be able to deliver services in the same way.

There is a requirement to consider commissioning as part of the review, ensuring the correct systems and governance are in place in readiness for, and to support, this area of work.

An action plan will need to be developed and the Service will need to identify the best way to achieve these improvements.

The Command partnerships structure reflects the best structure at a service delivery level, promoting effective engagement and liaison with partners and enabling local relationships. However, there may be a requirement for new skills and methods to be adopted, whilst ensuring that the service delivery model is maintained.

It is clear that there is need for improvement of the governance arrangements, including clear terms of reference, a greater understanding of not only why the Service is involved in specific partnerships but also an understanding of the required outcomes, and the development of exit strategies.

The proposals that have been identified fit broadly into three areas:

- Recognising the need for WMFS to make savings.
- A leaner and more effective management structure.
- The opportunity for change, including the opportunity to consider commissioning.

Going forward, subject to approval of the report by the Committee, the following next steps had been identified:

- The development of an action plan, to include the enabling of high level strategic ownership, progress of which will be monitored by the Scrutiny Committee.
- Submission of the report to the Executive Committee for approval.

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

- With regard to 40% of firefighters time delivering prevention activities, there is a need to expect more from firefighters from the balance of the budget, such as the delivery of commissioning activities, working with firefighters to deliver different things.
- 40% of a firefighter's time dedicated to delivering prevention activities will not change, however, the number of staff will. It will be a question of how does the Service maximise the time available to firefighters. The 40% will remain under the current model and if the proposed additional shifts are implemented. However, if there is a reduction in fire cover in the future, there would be a reduction in prevention and protection work, with reductions experienced across the board.
- The Strategic Enabling Team (SET) has identified commissioning as a source of revenue and it is planned into the next three years to help meet the Service's financial deficit.
- With regard to commissioning, the Service acknowledges that the majority of partners are in a similar position financially, with most subject to cuts in their respective budgets. Fire and Rescue Services are gradually building capability, for example formal recognition by Marmot, and working nationally to engage with and gain access to health services.
- The best method of working with health services is to engage with them regarding the problems they face, and to work in close liaison to identify solutions, rather than to provide an 'off the shelf' solution. Evidence of this approach can be seen in some of the pilots that WMFS are currently trailing.

- The Telecare pilot in Coventry continues to be progressed and the possibility of similar projects in other areas have been and continue to be explored. The possibility of providing a service for the discharge of patients from hospitals is being explored, with the potential for this to naturally fall in line with the 'Safe and Well' checks that firefighters already provide (a 'Safe and Well' visit could be carried out which would allow an individual to be discharged from hospital). There is the potential for such an arrangement to be beneficial to both organisations.
- With regard to the 40% of a firefighters time dedicated to delivering prevention activities, the amount of time taken up by commissioning work will not have a derogatory effect. It is not an either / or situation for the Service. When carrying out a safety visit, this will be adding value to it. The Service is advocating to the health sector that if an individual is a priority for them, then that person is most likely a priority of the Service as well. It is common for both the health sector and fire sector to be dealing with the same people. Additionally, the health sector is gaining the experience that firefighters have, and the trusted band that they represent.
- The Service is considering the employee change journey carefully. The pilots are being closely monitored to gauge the potential impact of these new areas of work. People Support Services Business Partners will work closely with staff to support them during this period. Change is inevitable, and all public services are currently facing similar situations and challenges. The Service is identifying those areas where a natural synergy exists.
- The Service has a desire to engage with the most vulnerable persons in our communities. These are potentially the next fire related injuries or fatalities. Commissioning could equal £2 million per year which would help maintain the service delivery model. Training has been implemented (online and in the form of a video) and WMFS is leading nationally in this area on behalf of Chief Fire Officer's Association. The relation with our staff and the representative bodies is critical. The National Joint Council has been involved as part of the trial, the outcomes of which are being fed back at the national level. This has been recognised by the Fire Brigades Union.

- The Service is currently engaging predominantly with local authorities and the health sector, where natural synergies already exist. However, the commissioning strategy is broader in its approach and the Service is also exploring opportunities in the education sector and those agencies that work with and support vulnerable adults. Social value also promises to provide opportunities, for example, under the guise of corporate social responsibility. Additionally, all procurement contracts now include a 2% social value element.
- Engagement with the private sector, for example the provision of risk management services, is a possibility. There are examples nationally, one particular Fire and Rescue Service provides such services but the local geography / composition of business in that area have mainly enabled this (the area the Service covers features a number of large petrochemical plants and installations). However, the makeup of the West Midlands is somewhat different but large multi-national businesses are located in /operating within the area, which WMFS are working with to promote a better understanding of what the Service can do for them.
- There is no prospect for the commissioning of a firefighting /rescue capability at airports. Airports have their own fire services as part of the requirements for a civil licence. For example, Birmingham International Airport has the resources in place for an incident 'on site' but WMFS has a duty to have adequate response plans in place. However, it is important to note that the most significant aircraft incidents occur off site.
- There is a risk that the Service does not share enough data with other agencies, and vice versa. There is a need for a consistent data sharing protocol. It would seem logical that the sharing of data would be enabled via integrated ICT systems, although it is acknowledged that ICT integration has been fraught with problems in the public sector and would require an appropriate level of scrutiny. The review of partnerships highlights the need to review the area of data sharing (previously agreed by the Scrutiny Committee to follow the review of partnerships).

Resolved that the review of partnerships report and its proposals be approved.

Resolved that the review of partnerships will be submitted to the Executive Committee for approval (meeting scheduled 14 December 2015).

It was agreed that the action plan would be developed in accordance with the minutes above and presented back to the Scrutiny Committee, along with a progress update, at the next meeting, scheduled for 15 February 2016.

24/15

DICE Performance Report 2012 – 2015 Objectives 2016 - 2019

Preith Shergill, Strategic Enabler for Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) presented an overview of the report to Members:

The Equality Objectives were established four years ago and the report detailed the progress made against those objectives. Additionally, the report sought agreement of the DICE objectives for the next four years. The report is required to be published in January 2016. It was noted that any changes in the workforce profile may alter the contents of the report submitted to the Committee, but no significant change was predicted.

The report highlighted a number of key areas of performance:

- Education and youth team work, including the Youth Emergency Services (YES).
- A team dedicated to issues surrounding deafness, working in close liaison with Vulnerable Persons' Officers (VPOs).
- A number of awards have been received including HR Distinction, Marmot, and a Royal Society of Public Health award.
- Wide range of specialist officers and the front line staff constantly developing their knowledge and understanding.
- The sharing of best practice and knowledge with other agencies and how to deliver the best services to end users, as part of the continuous every day work.
- Leadership and inclusion identified the work of the Chief Fire Officer and the founding of SET which is a large step for the Fire and Rescue Service, with the move away from a Corporate Board (previously 5 people including 1 black and

minority ethnic (BME) staff member, now 14 people covering the majority of the protected characteristics). The approach taken has gained significant interest from other agencies / organisations because of its radical nature.

- Enabling leadership at all levels, identifying how to engage with people from different communities and who represent the protected characteristics. Initiatives include the establishment of a Race Equality Forum, Dyslexia Champions, and a broader disability awareness campaign (currently in the preparation phase). Additionally, the Community Membership Scheme was launched at the end of 2014 and approximately 4000 members have registered up to date. The aim of the scheme is to exchange information with members of the public, informing the public what the Fire Service does (more than just response), what is happening in their local area, and allowing the opportunity for members of the public to become more engaged with the Service.
- Improve accountability and increase emphasis of the DICE agenda with regard to the workforce profile. Challenges include the freeze on recruitment, but this does not mean that there isn't anything that can be done. There are many examples of positive work being undertaken including building confidence amongst female uniformed staff regarding promotion (previously a problem area but there are now a number of female staff in supervisory roles), the 'Unusual Suspects' campaign which was recognised by the Department of Health, and improvements made in recent recruitment campaigns (although it is acknowledged that there has been a limited amount of recruitment during the last 4 years). Progress has included focussing on efficiencies have a disproportionate impact upon female members of staff. There has been an increase in the number of female uniformed members staff and there have been improvements in the number of BME staff, although it is acknowledged this will be impacted upon in the future.
- A key method of tackling the challenges posed by a recruitment freeze is the focus on progression, removing barriers and encouraging role models. Additionally, there is a focus on positive action in readiness for when the Service is in a position to recruit again, including the promotion of female

firefighters and engaging with pupils in a school quiz. DICE are also using data and working with various departments to identify opportunities for vulnerable people in our communities.

- There has been a conscious effort to encourage all members of staff to declare their disability status. The number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender disclosures has increased.
- An area of progress identified was work surrounding social inequality, not just in terms of the DICE team, but including other groups of staff such as service delivery staff and those working within prevention. This will be a significant area of progress going forward.

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

- The report will be made available and communicated in the public arena in a number of different ways, using a mixture of traditional methods plus the use of social media and interactive content available via online.
- There is a dedicated team that work closely with VPOs engaging with and supporting people who are deaf / suffer from hearing loss, allocating resources to them including advice and specialist equipment.
- An outcome of the Community Membership Scheme is to ensure that the membership is reflective of our communities. There is an aim to have firefighters engaging with community members, bringing them onto stations. This happens on occasion with stations liaising with community members but it is more of a vision; with the aim to engage more. A breakdown of community members, including a breakdown by ward, will be circulated to members. It was also confirmed that should members wish to become more involved in the scheme or attend one of the events, they can contact the DICE team or Corporate Communications who will be able to assist.
- The buddy scheme and mentor scheme were labelled together under the umbrella term of a buddy scheme. Previously, the 'Reaching for the Stars' scheme had been a huge success and the Service did not want to finish there and

wished to continue with the progress that had been made. However, due to engagement with members of staff who were potentially disengaged with the Service, it was felt that a formal coaching scheme might put people off from continuing or applying, to take part. The buddy scheme is complimented by a very active coaching and mentoring scheme, plus personal effectiveness courses, and a 'Managing Excellence' program.

- Social class may not be included as a national requirement but it is important to understand that people do come from different social backgrounds. This is an example where the Service differentiates from what it has to do, to what it considers it can do in addition to the mandatory requirements.

25/15

Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against The Plan Quarter 2 2015/16

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented an overview of the report to Members:

The portfolio and performance management system, Aspireview, is in place, having been utilised at the last two Quarterly Performance Review meetings. Very good feedback had been received regarding the system.

There had been a focus on PI 1 'The risk based attendance standard' this year, performance of which had improved by 1 second for category 1 incidents.

Performance within prevention (PIs 2 to 12) remains largely positive with the exception of PI 5 'The percentage of Home Safety Checks referred by our partners', and PI 10 'The number of arson vehicle fires', both of which had under-performed.

PI 5 'The percentage of Home Safety Checks referred by our partners': Black Country North was the only the Command to meet the target of 40%, and then that was only due to Walsall over-performing.

PI 10 'The number of arson vehicle fires' was an anomaly compared to the other prevention performance indicators, including those indicators related to arson. However, the direction of travel was good, with performance improving. A task and finish group had been commissioned to examine this area in more detail, exploring

how the Police and Local Authorities work, and the approach taken to hardening historical hotspots. The Arson Task Force work effectively within the local Police and are supported by the WMFS Fire Investigation Team which has been enhanced, including an increase in capacity.

Performance within protection remains very good:

- PI 13 'The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises', one less incident and this indicator would have been blue (over-performance against the upper tolerance level).
- PI 14 'The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment', performance demonstrated the role of the Business Support Vehicles in protecting more appropriate resources for the Service Delivery Model.

Sarah Warnes provided an overview of the People Support Services performance indicators:

PI 15 'The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status', the direction of travel was good with positive progress having been made. The PI remained red but it was acknowledged that the target of 100% disclosure was ambitious.

PI 16 'The number of female uniformed staff' and PI 17 'The percentage of all staff from ethnic minority communities', were both on target. The recruitment freeze means that there is little room for change but progression and retention are areas for focus. 15% of female uniformed staff and 28% of BME staff are now in managerial roles. These members of staff will be positive role models. Work is being undertaken to identify how positive action can be implemented, encouraging confidence and resilience for staff to progress through the organisation.

PI 18 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed staff', remained off-target but attendance levels are still very positive across the organisation. A task and finish group has been set up, looking at people, systems, support and trends within Commands to enable attendance to be examined on a case by case basis.

PI 19 'The average number of working days / shifts due to sickness (non-uniformed and Fire Control staff)', performance is above the

tolerance level (blue) and a noticeable improvement in sickness within Fire Control had been observed.

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

- The disparities between different Commands regarding performance against PI 5 ‘The percentage of Home Safety Checks referred by our partners’ are being explored and reasons identified, such as relationships with social housing providers. Cases of best practice and lessons learned are to be shared across Commands. It is hoped that the performance of PI 5 will improve following the sharing of lessons learned and the implementation of the proposals resulting from the Partnerships Review.
- With regard to PI 15 ‘The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status’, there is a potential that the remaining 15% of members of staff who have not declared their status may fear it could reflect on their employability. All members of staff should feel that they can disclose their disability status, but it is acknowledged that barriers do exist. Additionally, there is the potential for a member of staff to not class a condition as a disability and a lot of work is being carried out to promote this subject including the continued development of the Wellbeing strategy in the organisation, campaigns such as the Unusual Suspects (highlighting dyslexia), and discussing these issues with managers.
- There is a potential risk that new ways of working may affect sickness levels. However, it is likely to be a short term effect if there is one, and changes are managed by line managers in consultation with members of staff. The new shift system will build in more flexibility regarding staffing and sickness should reduce as a result. The majority of absences due to sickness are short term, and support is provided to members of staff via various means including Occupational Health.
- The figures quoted in the report for PI 19 ‘The average number of working days / shifts due to sickness (non-uniformed and Fire Control staff)’, were queried by Members. This was double-checked and the correct figures were circulated as follows:

Figures as reported	Correct figures
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Target: 3.195 (3.14 – 3.25) Actual to date: 3.59	Target: 3.42 (3.25 – 3.59) Actual to date: 3.14
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* Figures in brackets are the lower / upper tolerance levels

- Additionally, the actual to date figure of 3.16 was queried for PI 20 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – all staff', as it was the same figure as quoted for PI 18 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed employees'. It was confirmed that the figure quoted was correct; all staff sickness was normally very similar to the uniformed sickness rate due to 75% of staff being uniformed personnel.

26/15

Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16

The Committee noted the progress of the work programme for 2015/16.

Members of the committee agreed that:

- Action Plan and progress update on the Partnerships Review would be presented at the meeting in February.

(Meeting ended at 12:45 pm)

Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680

Scrutiny Committee 16.11.15 - Briefing Note

Residential Property Update October 2015

A survey to review WMFS residential properties was undertaken during 2014 following recommendations made within the Property Asset Management Plan 2014

Typical factors that were considered;- cost benefits, complexities, aspects of the property regards disposal, practicalities of disposal, including sitting tenants and any on-going issues of disposal.

Sites reviewed:

- King Norton - Flats
- Perry Barr - Houses
- Erdington - Flats
- Bloxwich – The old Bank.

Kings Norton:

Four self-contained apartments and two offices (ground floor) situated adjacent to the station driveway.

Although the apartments are self contained in a stand alone block the main issues are;

- Compromised access via the main station driveway to gain entry at all apartment front doors.
- Parking issues for residents

Options were considered to alter the front door access; the cost to alter the building would be (circa £20k).

Parking for the apartments is not an option as the existing car park forms part of the station facility accessed by the one driveway.

The risk of the only vehicle side entry access being blocked by tenants is high.

In addition if the side access was shared it would have further implications if/when Kings Norton Station was sold in the future.

There is also concern that six three bedroom flats sold with no parking may have a negative effect on the surrounding area with streets/car parks and shop frontages being used by the flat residents for ad-hoc car parking.

Perry Barr:

Eight self contained houses to the rear of the station.

Although the houses are contained within a stand alone block the main issues are

- Compromised access via the station driveway to gain entry to the front doors.
- Parking for residents

It would be difficult to dispose of the assets due to access; therefore further consideration should be given to utilising these properties, possibly cold training or converting to hospitality properties.

It should be noted that there are two existing WMFS secure tenants housed within these buildings and it has been presumed that the tenants will remain, therefore for clarity six properties are available for further consideration.

Erdington:

Due to the complex and expensive nature of trying to create a separate pedestrian access to these properties and the restricted vehicle parking the flats at Erdington are not considered to be a viable option for disposal.

In addition there may be considerable legal implications around each separate flats leasehold and our freehold if we were to sell the site in the future as the flats are integral to the station building.

Possible cold training or refurbishing them and utilising them as hospitality flats or similar would be an option.

Bloxwich – ‘The Old Bank’:

The property referred to as the old bank building stands alone in front of Bloxwich station, the building is currently in a state of dilapidation. The cost to refurbish this property would be circa £50k

The site also lies within the Bloxwich Conservation Area although the fire station behind does not. As a consequence of this designation any proposals to demolish the building would require Conservation Area Consent, and because this building is identified as a focal building within the Council's Conservation Area Appraisal it is considered unlikely that consent would be forthcoming for its demolition.

As a former bank the site falls within Class A2 use (Professional Services). This means it could be used for any other purpose within class A2 (e.g. financial services, estate agents, employment agencies, betting offices etc) without the need for planning permission. It would also be possible for the building to be changed into retail use (A1) without the need for a planning application.

There may be scope for potential alternative uses of this building including a training facility for the WMFS.

Conclusions/recommendations:

- King Norton – Flats – No further action
- Perry Barr - Houses – No further action
- Erdington – Flats – No further action
- Bloxwich – The Old Bank – Option to rent/lease