

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**3 June 2019 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

- Present:** Members of the Authority
Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)
Councillors Barlow, Brackenridge, Dehar, Hogarth,
Miks, Miller, Spence, Walsh and Young
Gurinder Josan
Mr Ager
- Officers:** West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
B Brook, S Burton, J Connor, P Fellows, M Hamilton-
Russell, M Pym, S Taylor, S Timmington, S Vincent, S
Warnes
- Clerk and Monitoring Officer**
K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)
M Griffiths (Treasurer)
- Apologies:** Councillors Barrie, Craddock, Jenkins and Tranter
Professor Simon Brake
Sarah Middleton
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)
- Observers:** Councillors Cooper and Gill

9/19 Chair and CFO Announcements

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA), welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

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Policy Planning Forum

3 June 2019

Councillors Aston, Craddock and Tranter would not be returning to the Authority and a thank you was placed on record for their contributions during their respective terms.

Councillors Cooper (Walsall MBC), Gill (Sandwell MBC), and Miller (Dudley MBC) were welcomed to the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Loach, thanked the departing councillors for their contributions and noted that he looked forward to working with the councillors joining the Authority.

Councillors who attended the opening of Coventry Fire Station on 2 June were thanked for their support.

10/19 Delivering the Strategy

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on 'Delivering the Strategy':

The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was the basis of all risk analysis. The effective deployment of resources through the IRMP and the integration of response, prevention and protection was enabling the delivery of the Strategy (The Plan) and the continuing current trend of performance results.

The Grenfell Tower incident had increased the focus upon the prevention and particularly protection. The protection programme was put under pressure following the Grenfell Tower incident. As a result, Officers presented a report to the Fire Authority outlining a need to invest in protection (against a backdrop of financial pressures / budget reductions). The subsequent investment had resulted in the recruitment of 11 members of staff. It was anticipated that there would be further buildings to test and put support in place for as part of a second round of inspections. The Service managed the first round on behalf of the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) and could do the same again.

With regard to staffing, the target for in-year savings of £750K had been met. The five minute risk based attendance standard had been maintained during this period. The average attendance time for category one incidents was under five minutes. The average

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Policy Planning Forum**3 June 2019**

attendance times for category two, three and four incidents were all above below the respective targets.

The number of accidental dwelling fires was below target and represented the lowest total since 2016. The number of incidents during quarter three was the lowest number since the Service had started collecting such data (1998/99). The performance was bucking the national trend which was observing increases in the number of incidents.

The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners was 45.6%, below the target of 55%. It was evidenced that such referrals were effective in achieving referrals to the most vulnerable people within our communities, and there was a need to continue to build upon these. The withdrawal from falls response had impacted negatively upon the referral pathways but the Service was striving to improve these.

The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Service, at 302,036 was above the target of 300,000, as a result of effective targeting.

Deliberate fires; the number of deliberate vehicle fires, deliberate fires in dwellings, and deliberate non-domestic property fires were all below target and within the tolerance levels. The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings was below the target and below the lower tolerance level. The number of incidents had plateaued in recent years and the Service's Fire Investigation Teams were one of the best nationally, supporting other agencies such as the Police. Additionally, there had been a significant reduction in the number of incidents experienced at HMP Birmingham.

The number of false alarm equipment calls was over target and above the upper tolerance level. 98% of such incidents start and remain an unwanted fire signal, with the remaining 2% of incidents resulting in a fire. The Service attended premises and supported the owners / responsible person(s) responsibilities with regard to the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO).

The number of accidental non-domestic property fires was below target and within the tolerance levels.

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Policy Planning Forum**3 June 2019**

Site Specific Risk Inspections (SSRI) - high rise and cladding inspections: To mitigate risk, all residential high rise buildings received SSRIs and Fire Safety inspections. All buildings identified with flammable cladding have been inspected. Additionally, support had been provided whilst cladding was being dealt with. The extra work load resulting from the inspections, etc had impacted upon the risk based protection programme and the number of audits carried out in high risk premises, hence the need for recruitment to be undertaken.

Strategic considerations:

- Continue to perform effectively and efficiently in emergency response
- Increased demand, as a result of Grenfell, fire safety complaints and referrals continued impact audits completed in high risk buildings
- Meeting timelines for building regulation consultations continues to be challenging due to high demand incorporating large scale projects
- Achieving Timelines for Building Regulation Consultations continues to be challenging - high demand & complex developments
- Appreciate risk and implement mitigation methods across prevention, protection and response
- Reduction in health agenda has reduced engagement activities to the most vulnerable members of the community

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

- The Service had put a lot of effort into the recruitment rates of females and people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and great progress had been made. However, it would be a long journey to achieve the required outcomes.
- The Service would continue to support the work around high rise and cladding inspections, including locally via lobbying through the Local Authorities, and nationally via the NFCC. The Service would provide support to affected premises including the provision of extra cover, a sleeping watch, etc.

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Policy Planning Forum**3 June 2019**

- 551 high rise premises had been inspected to provide public assurance. 14 premises had been identified to feature flammable cladding, and the Service was working with the Local Authorities to enact remedial action for the removal of such cladding.
- The high rise and cladding inspections fell within the remit of the RRO, and therefore the Service was funded already for the work via normal funding methods.
- The RRO was not necessarily always effective legislation to deal with flammable cladding, and other forms of legislation had to be used with Local Authorities to deal with, and issue prohibitions.
- The Service worked with all landlords, from Local Authorities to private landlords including arms-length companies. The legislative reach of the Fire and Rescue Service only extended to communal areas. The Service also relied largely on partnerships.
- The Service had experienced a 50% reduction in its central grant. The number of Inspecting Officers in protection, which discharge the legislative fire safety function of the Service, had been reduced. Following the Grenfell Tower incident, the Service had reviewed what resources were required, the outcomes of which were presented as a report submitted to the Authority. There is no new money available so there was a need to fund the additional resources via the realignment of services. This could lead to the use of reserves dependent upon the outcomes of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.
- With regard to the withdrawal from falls response contracts and the subsequent impact upon referral pathways, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) could have role potentially via the public service reform agenda. Additionally, the Service was engaged within the WMCA Wellbeing Forum.
- The Service's corporate performance indicators were set locally, but reported nationally. The performance indicators were reported within the Service, and to the Authority via the Scrutiny Committee. Forecasting was incorporated into the targets, for example, the building of more affordable homes in the West Midlands.

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Policy Planning Forum

3 June 2019

11/19 National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award and Wider Role Map

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the NJC pay award and wider role map.

Current pay position:

- March 2019 – NJC pay offer: 3 year settlement 2019 – 2022 of a cumulative increase of 13.57%
- April 2019 – NJC pay offer rejected by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
- May 2019 – discussions continue at a national level

The Service had budgeted according to an annual pay rise of 2%.

Activities defined by the FBU as non-contractual were embedded across the strategic priorities of The Plan (Response, Prevention, Protection). A number of examples of activities that could be defined as non-contractual and the potential resulting impact on the Service were provided. The withdrawal from non-contractual work would have a significant impact upon the business continuity of the Service, and the trust and confidence across the community and partners.

Strategic considerations included:

- Ongoing national pay negotiations
- The Service participation through the NJC and NFCC
- Re-evaluate corporate risk
- Validate business continuity arrangements
- Communications and engagement (internal / external)
- Fire Authority consideration:
 - Impact on delivery of The Plan
 - Increased risk to community
 - Non-contractual activities as defined by the FBU

Updates would be provided the Fire Authority as the situation developed going forward.

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

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Policy Planning Forum 3 June 2019

- Business continuity arrangements were in place for all scenarios. The level of confidence of what the impact would be had been reported to the Home Office, with additional work to be undertaken and reported once it was understood what the outcome of any potential industrial action would consist of. Based on the strength of the last ballot, the assessment of the business continuity arrangements through existing staff could not be guaranteed.
- With regard to timescales, the wider role map had been discussed nationally for 12 to 18 months. Going forward, developments were likely to be compressed and to be quite quick. The pay offer was due on 1 July 2019.
- The financial impact of a pay increase constituted £650K per year for every 1% increase. The Service had forecast 2% increases as part of the budget setting process. Therefore, every 1% increase above 2% would represent an additional £650K budgetary pressure.
- In reference to water rescue being non-contractual, the Fire and Rescue National Framework included some support for committing rescues. However, there was some conjecture on how far rescues should go, for example, different levels of response.

12/19 Governance

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, provided an update on governance of the Authority.

Update on the Draft Order:

A number of Local Authorities had not provided consent and therefore the draft Order would not be laid. Responses from Local Authorities were still being received at the time of the meeting and a further update would be provided to Members in due course.

Snapshot of changes to the membership and committees of the Fire Authority for 2019/20:

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Policy Planning Forum

3 June 2019

The Fire Authority would be comprised of 10 Labour Members and five Conservative Members, plus the Police and Crime Commissioner representative and two co-opted Members.

The Governance and Transformation Committee would be replaced by the Collaboration and Transformation Committee. Minor amendments to the terms of reference would be made to the Scrutiny Committee (shared Fire Control strategic governance), and to the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee (pension appeals – appellant attendance).

The changes would be outlined within the governance report which would be submitted to the Fire Authority at the Annual General Meeting on 24 June 2019.

Chief Fire Officer accountabilities:

The Chief Fire Officer accountabilities were aligned to those proposed for future governance arrangements, and maintaining the principles of Fire Authority governance. They would provide greater clarity of the responsibilities of the Chief Fire Officer and would be incorporated into the Constitution. This would be reported via the governance report which would be submitted to the Fire Authority at the Annual General Meeting.

13/19 Cultural Review

Ben Brook, Strategic Enabler Culture, provided an update on the cultural review:

Following a full tendering process, an independent company had been identified to undertake the review.

Terms of reference had been agreed by all key stakeholders.

The review would look at the Fire Authority, the Service, and representative bodies, including relationships and the impact upon the Service and communities.

The review would focus on seven themes:

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Policy Planning Forum 3 June 2019

- Leadership
- Communication and engagement
- Valuing people and embracing diversity and inclusion
- Performance management
- Behaviours and core values
- Learning, development and progression
- Adaptability and approach to change

The review would commence in June and be completed in August 2019. Information gathering had commenced.

The review would incorporate an initial meeting with the Chief Fire Officer, and key stakeholder meetings with the Strategic Enabling Team, the Fire Authority, and the representative bodies.

Outcomes of the review would be comprised of:

- Hot debrief and report with the Chief Fire Officer
- A formal structured report for distribution to key stakeholders
- Identification of specific issues unique to particular groups of staff
- A structured set of recommendations

It was noted that the review could look at all of the Service, in addition to the broad themes as outlined above.

The recent inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services would also shape and inform the outcomes of the review.

The meeting closed at 12:08 hours.

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