

**Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

**3 February 2020 at 11.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

- Present: Members of the Authority  
Councillor Brackenridge (Chair)  
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Barlow, Barrie, Dehar, Edwards, Hogarth,  
Miks, Miller, Spence, Walsh and Young  
M Carter (Unison), B Holland (FBU) and K Rowsell  
(FOA)  
Mr Ager
- Officers: West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer P Loach  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer W Brown  
Assistant Chief Fire Officers G Taylor and S Warnes  
S Barry, M Hamilton-Russell, S Timmington, S Vincent
- Clerk and Monitoring Officer**  
K Gowreesunker (Clerk)  
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)  
M Griffiths (Treasurer)
- Apologies: Councillors Cooper, Gill and Jenkins  
Professor S Brake, G Josan, S Middleton  
S Price-Hunt (FBU)  
FLA post is currently vacant
- Observers: A Afsar, J Connor, P Fellows, M Pym

**Policy Planning Forum  
3 February 2020**

Fire Authority Session:

**05/20 Chair and CFO Announcements**

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

The Grenfell action plan was being implemented and actions being progressed. New legislation would be expected as a result of the findings of the Hackett report. Members were asked to liaise with their respective Local Authorities to ensure they were fully engaged within the fire safety agenda.

The Policy Planning Forum would include an update on the budget. It was noted that the Authority was continually making the case for the fire sector with regard to funding and had requested further flexibility around council tax, for example, an 8% increase in the council tax fire precept would equate to an increase of just £5 on a Band E property but would generate additional funding of £3.5m per annum.

The Guardian had announced WMFS as the winner of the Workplace Diversity category of their Public Service Awards 2019, and the award was displayed to attendees.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Members were informed that Ben Brook had been appointed as Assistant Chief Fire Officer at Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. It was noted that congratulations would be sent on half behalf of the Service and the Authority.

The Service had been rated as good against the people pillar as part of the recent Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection, something which was reflected by the Guardian award. Issues regarding recruitment in the sector had been reported nationally. Members were reassured that such issues were not an issue for the Service which had an effective and proactive recruitment policy. The

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Service promoted the use of positive action. Members should feel confident to communicate that the Service's recruitment was strong and confident.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report included a number of recommendations applicable to all of the fire sector. It was noted that the recommendations did apply to the sector as a whole, but in different ways. Some of the recommendations did not apply to the Service to the same extent as other parts of the sector as the Service was not necessarily in the same place as a result of actions taken to date. Additionally, the Service's focus on the assessment of training meant that it had the means to provide evidence of firefighter competencies.

### **06/20 Plan Priorities 2020-21**

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the Priorities 2020-21:

The presentation included the draft priorities and outcomes for prevention, protection and response, and the supporting priority statements for people, digital transformation, and value for money (which included collaboration). The draft priorities and outcomes would be included within the report entitled 'Our Plan' which would be submitted for approval at the February meeting of the Fire Authority.

It was noted that the Home Office had developed the Fire Protection Board which had started to ask for assurance on a range of issues. The National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) were supportive of the Fire Protection Board. However, there was the potential for Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide assurance on things which they could not do or have control over. There were issues that were the responsibility of responsible persons for buildings. It was important that the Authority did not fall into the trap of providing assurances that it could not actually provide, for example, the West Midlands was simply too large in some cases.

To deliver the supporting priority for people, the Service needed a motivated and connected workforce.

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To support digital transformation, Jason Danbury, Strategic Enabler Digital had been moved out from the head of Information, Communication and Technology into digital solutions internally and externally.

Value for money and collaboration continued to be an important aspect.

Next steps:

- 13 February – Authority to approve the Budget and Plan Priorities
- April 2020 – launch of Our Plan 2020-23
- May / June 2020 – Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) consultation
- Continual review to provide Strategic Assurance

With the forthcoming comprehensive spending review, as a metropolitan fire and rescue authority, the Service needed to put forward the best case possible with regard to funding. There was the potential for the flat cash settlement for 2020-21 to provide an impression that everything was ok. However, there were a lot of issues and uncertainties regarding funding going forward.

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

- Deliberate fires were an area of focus for the Service. Prevention worked with partners regarding buildings that were vulnerable to deliberate fires. The Service also worked with the Police regarding suspects.
- It was noted that all of the performance indicators related to deliberate fires were rated as good with the exception of deliberate fires in derelict buildings. The Service worked with Local Authorities to target harden such sites, making them safe and secure.
- It was important that there was a degree of consistency across the Local Authorities in terms of enforcement teams. It was noted that the issue of deliberate fires in derelict buildings was an area in which Section 41 Members could assist by liaising with their respective Local Authorities and

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Cabinets Members. There was an opportunity to protect Local Authority assets and to liaise with private owners.

### **07/20 State of Fire – Report Outcomes**

Steve Vincent, Strategic Enabler, delivered a presentation on the outcomes of the State of Fire report:

The State of Fire report (full title – State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019) published by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was the first annual assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector. It was noted that the next tranche of inspections was due to commence soon with the Service expecting its next inspection to take place in September 2020.

The principle themes of the report were:

- There was a lack of clarity and consensus over what the role of a firefighter was, and what a Fire and Rescue Authority was responsible for.
- National terms and conditions – there was a need for these to be resolved and greater clarity was required.
- The need for Chief Fire Officers to have operational independence – the report had identified eight different governance models and had noted that this was an area that was hindering the sector moving forward.
- Operational response – the report recognised that operational response was the sectors greatest strength.
- Fire and Rescue Services were not doing enough to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations – as a result of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Hackitt Report. Additionally, it was believed that the variations between services with regard to protection was undesirable. It was noted that this was an area that the Service had invested in over the previous 12 to 18 months.
- The on-call model needed attention – although this did not directly affect the Service, the report identified that the model was not sustainable.

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- Staff needed to be treated better – the report highlighted findings of the HMICFRS in some services of a toxic culture, including reports of bullying and harassment. The Service took such issues very seriously and had already started to address some of the issues raised as a result of the cultural review.
- Better performance and talent management was needed.
- Workforce diversity must be addressed by the sector. It was noted that the Service was bucking the trend; approximately 30% of all new recruits this year were female or from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds.
- Wellbeing – looking at how wellbeing services could be extended to all services.
- Some services were financially strapped, and others were found to be inefficient. The report highlighted the benefits of providing greater certainty regarding funding rather than a one-year settlement. The report also referenced that capital funding was an issue.

The report made a number of recommendations for the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the NFCC, and representative bodies, including:

- The need to review and with precision, determine the roles of fire and rescue services and those who work for them.
- Consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform.
- Consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence.
- Should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services.

The report related to the Authority in a variety of ways:

- Reviewing governance and operational roles and responsibilities through the constitution.
- Cultural review touching all areas of the organisation in relation to recommendations.
- Tall buildings incident development developing competency, continually pushing the boundaries towards operational excellence.
- Supporting the NFCC community risk programme.

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- Recognised approach to recruitment that is 'bucking the trend' nationally regarding females.

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

- The State of Fire report covered all English fire and rescue services and diversity was an issue nationally. A number of fire and rescue services were making progress and the Service was one of the best, if not the best performing service in terms of recruiting females and people from BAME communities. However, it was acknowledged that progress was slow and it would take time to achieve a level of diversity that reflected the communities of the West Midlands.
- The report noted that the findings of the HMICFRS had found a blurring of actual incidents of bullying and the perception of bullying, where people stated they were being bullied but when such instances were examined in more detail, it was found that they did not like certain processes, change, management, etc, rather than actual cases of bullying.
- It was agreed that people feeling they were being bullied, whether or not circumstances actually amounted to actual bullying, should not feel that way. It was noted that this was an area of concern that would be addressed via the Cultural Review.

### Multi Stakeholder Session:

#### **08/20 Delivering Against the Strategy**

Simon Barry, Strategic Enabler, delivered a presentation on delivering against the strategy:

- Delivery of the strategy - response

The implementation of a risk-based approach to fleet management was introduced on 1 April 2019, to achieve the savings identified within the Financial Efficiency Plan. This had resulted in reductions in the number of appliances available at any one time. It was noted that the approach was delivering financial savings and was going well although it did present some challenges.

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The ridership factor had an impact. Currently, the ridership factor was above target and 75% of which was due to attendance / sickness. The fleet management was continually reviewed, and the approach adapted as required.

Attendance was not only a key part of the ridership factor but also an indicator of the wellbeing of staff. Workshops had been held to further understanding and to identify ways in which staff could be helped to remain at work. The early indications from the workshops were positive.

Linked to the Service Delivery Model and the digital transformation of the Service, daily staffing was assisted via the staffing dashboard which helped the management of staffing, helping people to understand availability. The staffing dashboard had been developed in response to feedback from staff.

Despite less resources on any given day, very effective performance continued to be delivered against the risk-based attendance standard. Reaction times had been broadly consistent over the last four quarters. Response had increased slightly in quarter three but this reflected seasonal conditions.

- Delivery of the strategy - prevention

The annual target for the percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners was 40%. Reductions in the percentage achieved had been previously reported. However, it was positive to report that the percentage had increased during quarter three and the performance for the quarter was 42.5%. 75% of the Safe and Well visits on the Tymly system (Black Country South only) were from partner referrals. Work continued with the Tymly system with a Tymly 2 update implemented which included a number of additions and improvements. The system would eventually lead to a far more efficient and effective system with the aim to remove the delay between booking and delivering a Safe and Well visit which was currently experienced.

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- Delivery of the strategy - protection

There had been an increase in the number of high-risk premises audits that had been completed (Q1 – 207, Q2 – 230, Q3 – 300) and an increase in the percentage of statutory building regulations timescales achieved (Q1 73%, Q2 99%, Q3 99%).

As part of the investment in protection, 14 new fire safety officers had completed level 4 qualifications in quarter three and a further 16 members of staff were on the progression pathway to qualification ending in July 2020.

Immediate action had included:

- Enforcement action (the Service always took an advice and enforce approach).
- Proactive involvement with buildings identified to have ACM cladding.
- Assurance exercise conducted for the NFCC Protection Board, with the provision of proportionate assurance.
- Fire Safety Audits completed on all risk properties.

### 09/20 Cultural Review Update

Wayne Brown, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the cultural review:

The independent cultural review had been conducted by RealWorldHR and had taken place during June to September 2019.

A series of stakeholder meetings (comprising Officers, Members – Chair, Vice Chair, Leader of the Opposition, and representative bodies) had been held and they had agreed themes, agreed the role for the Steering Group, and were committed to working together. This had resulted in the formulation and issuing of the Joint Stakeholder Declaration.

The Steering Group was comprised of the Authority, Strategic Enabling Team, Representative Bodies, Affinity, Fire Out, Inspire, Asian Fire Service Association, and non-represented staff

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members. The membership of the Steering Group reflected the Service to ensure that everyone's voice was heard. Terms of Reference for the Steering Group had been agreed which included agreement of the Joint Cultural Implementation Plan (JCIP), ongoing monitoring and assurance of the JCIP, and an ongoing commitment to joint working.

The first meeting of the Steering Group had taken place on 23 January. It had proven to be an opportunity to engage with all stakeholders and to seek views on how to populate the JCIP. The JCIP was not owned by any particular group(s) as it was a joint plan, and jointly owned across all stakeholders.

It had been agreed with all stakeholders that the JCIP would be the vehicle to move the cultural review forward. The JCIP was currently in draft form with a view to finalise it in March 2020.

The JCIP was formed around four key themes:

- An inclusive organisation
- Communication
- Relationship management
- Organisational development

The JCIP would be implemented through the Service's programme structure of people, process and culture. Project Executives would be asked to feed back progress to the Steering Group, thereby ensuring clear reporting lines.

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

- Updates on the cultural review including the JCIP would be provided to Members via the Policy Planning Forum and as often as Members required. It was noted that it could take some time to deliver some elements and to make changes. It was suggested that updates could be provided on a quarterly or bi-annual frequency, with any major developments / changes reported as and when required. Additionally, updates would be provided via MESH which Members could access.

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The meeting closed at 12:58 hours.

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