

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**17 September 2019 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, Dehar, Edwards, Gill, Hogarth,
Jenkins, Miks, Miller, Spence, Walsh, and Young

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
B Brook, S Barry, J Connor, P Fellows, M Hamilton-
Russell, M Pym, S Timmington, S Vincent, S Warnes,
A Afsar, N Spencer, H Cross

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)
M Griffiths (Treasurer)

Apologies: Councillor Barrie
Gurinder Singh Josan
Professor Simon Brake
Sarah Middleton
Mr M Ager

Observers: Nil

14/19 Chair and CFO Announcements

Cllr Greg Brackenridge, Chair of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA), welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum, which was scheduled to today due to a HMICFRS meeting.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner of London Fire Brigade, Wayne Brown, was recently appointed as the Deputy Chief Fire Officer of West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS). Cllr Brackenridge thanked Jo Simmonds and K Gowreesunker for their assistance throughout

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the process. There were no female applicants but there were eight applicants from BAME members. The Chair plans to introduce DCFO Brown at the next meeting.

The next Authority meeting is to be held on the 30th September, with the JCC panel following on from this.

Members were invited to attend the Emergency Services Show, taking place on the 18th and 19th September.

Members were also invited to attend the WMFS Band concert on 5 October in Shirley. The annual Christmas carol concert is being held on 8 December at St Martin in the Bullring church. J Connor will forward a list of firefighter pass-out parade dates to all members, who were invited to attend.

The Chair thanked all fire stations who have welcomed him during station visits, which allowed for beneficial conversations to take place. The Chair also requested if members could send messages of support to Blue Watch, who had two challenging tours recently.

Following on from the recent HMICFRS visit, WMFS received an outstanding report for response and was the only UK fire service to do so. The Chair expressed thanks to all WMFS staff for this. The second round of inspections is likely to commence in around 12-18 months' time.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, congratulated Wayne Brown on his successful application and appointment as Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and recognised the other applications including that of ACFO Gary Taylor.

The next round of HMICFRS inspections was likely to focus on risk.

The new Police minister also has responsibilities for fire. Considerations to make reductions in fire had been redesignated and members were asked to consider this in the media going forward. Single year settlement was announced and there will be no cuts to public services. WMFS have flat cash settlement, real terms, which will include inflation. WMFS have level of reserves

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committed to unfunded capital programme. The service cannot rely on any council tax flexibilities.

Following a member's question, it was confirmed that the government will not provide any further reserves. WMFS set out a reserve plan setting out how it plans to spend it. As an authority, the reserve strategy is published for review.

The cultural review was extended by one month until 30th September, with invites being extended to additional stakeholders. The findings will be shared with members and would be the subject at the Policy Planning Forum on the 7th October, before being shared with the representative bodies and staff. Around 1,000 staff have answered the questionnaire to date.

Phil Loach echoed the Chair's comments regarding attending the Emergency Services Show as WMFS hosted trauma and extrication competitions. As part of his role as Vice Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Phil was due to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Brazilian Fire and Rescue Service at the show.

WMFS are hosting an International Symposium, welcoming delegates from around the world. This will also provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the West Midlands region.

15/19 Delivering the Strategy

Phil Loach delivered a presentation on 'Delivering the Strategy'.

Members were reminded of the agreement at the last meeting regarding fleet availability and the reduction of six BRVs. WMFS are still achieving the attendance standards. With the 4.5% reduction in fleet availability, WMFS are slightly behind on actual savings but are still in a positive figure for finance overall. Overall, the service is seeking to achieve savings of £3.8m.

There had been a decrease in partnership referral pathways and reduced visibility of WMFS overall in health forums as the service ceased to deliver a number of services for health. The target for 2019/20 was 36.7%. There will potentially be a conference to

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discuss this further. Whilst the reduction of fleet availability is to be considered, WMFS will continue aspiring to meet targets.

WMFS are extremely reliant on referral pathways to ensure engagement with the most vulnerable members of the community. The Chair requested for members to feed this back to their authorities as they can play a strong role in asking their Cabinet Members to speak to the relevant teams and ensure that these referrals are being made.

A Member noted that they had successfully progressed a referral to WMFS from a resident living in a complex living development.

Further to approving the additional investment in protection, the service's outlook is now more positive. WMFS has been marked as off target with the Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP). The audit was targeted towards high risk premises using a new tool, RIDGE. This shows that WMFS are in the 'green' so are confident that RBIP is being targeted effectively. There had been investment in new staff within protection and they were undergoing training. However, it was noted that it could take several years for an individual to become fully competent.

WMFS support services are still struggling. There has been a reduction in Safe and Well, as well as a reduction in the effectiveness of our partnerships. Whilst the direction of travel is positive, there is still a way to go.

16/19 Business Continuity

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on business continuity.

All members were reminded of the legal responsibilities placed upon the Fire Authority as detailed by the Fire and Rescue Act of 2004.

The pay discussion is currently paused; this is out for consultation.

National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) is to assess key risks and has many risks included within this. Events that could impact

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WMFS delivery of services may include cyber-attacks. There are also many considerations of events that could impact staff directly including pandemic flu, severe weather and strike action. However, in the event of pandemic flu, it is estimated that at least 71% of operational staff will still be available to attend work.

Industrial action has recently been added as a risk on the NSRA. Worst case scenario would effectively lead to loss of life either due to limited resources or by the delay of mobilising resources to those who need them. In 2018, WMFS nearly experienced industrial action (however this was later withdrawn due to an agreement being reached) which may have led to limitations on resource availability

The Home Office (HO) expectation is that Fire & Rescue Services will seek to ensure that at least 30% of normal resources would be available during periods of industrial action. The HO had raised concerns that WMFS had a business continuity plan of only 28.3%. However, further assurance was provided to the HO by WMFRA which was subsequently accepted by the HO as this exceeded the 30% business continuity cover that is expected.

Gary Taylor presented two options for members' consideration:

Option 1 – WMFS contingency workforce

- This option involves WMFRA recruiting, training and retaining a number of contingency firefighters to supplement and work alongside current business continuity arrangements (mixed crews).
- Legal responsibility remains on WMFRA in relation to the ongoing employment and Health and Safety requirements.
- Challenges around ongoing recruitment, retention and training
- This approach would take up to 4 months to implement due to timeframes for recruitment and training.

Option 2 – External Contractor (recommended)

- This option involves an agreement with an external contractor who would supply a guaranteed number of

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qualified staff to supplement current business continuity arrangements but work independently to WMFS (not mixed crews)

- Legal responsibility on WMFRA is managed through an agreed contract where ongoing employment and Health and Safety requirements are the responsibility of the External Contractor.
- This could be implemented within a shorter timeframe due to contractors maintaining competent contingency operatives and needing 7 days' notice to provide the services.

Option 2 is the recommended option. Whilst it will require more investment, it removes some of the risks that are associated with option 1.

It was agreed that these two options are to be scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that overall, as the Service perceived there would be limitations with current business continuity arrangements, there was a level of urgency for the proposed options to be progressed and additional arrangements to be put in place.

The CFO stated that if asked by the Home Office about current resilience levels he would not be able to provide assurance that the required resilience in times of staffing shortages could be met.

17/19 EU Exit (Brexit)

WMFS and the West Midlands Local Resilience Forum (LRF) have worked to identify potential consequences of a Brexit and specifically a No Deal Brexit scenario.

WMFS are considering various scenarios including:

- Travel, freight and borders
- Disruption of services
- Information and data sharing
- Demonstrations and disorder

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Strategic Enabler for Response and Preparedness, Steve Vincent, has been seconded to lead Brexit planning through the local resilience forum, which is centrally funded.

There are many exercises taking place to ensure all consequences are considered. A 'Brexit briefing' is being published on MESH and will also be distributed to all WMFRA members. Overall, WMFS is well positioned in regards to Brexit planning.

18/19 Scrutiny reviews

Members were invited to participate in a workshop exercise to gather thoughts regarding areas for scrutiny over the 2019/20 Authority year.

Following consideration and discussions, it was agreed that the following three areas will be taken to the Scrutiny Committee:

1. Quality vs. Quantity of Safe and Wells, linked with performance management and prevention
2. Business continuity arrangements
3. Operational training and effectiveness
4. Discipline Policy

Note - Further considerations regarding whether points 3 and 4 should form the basis of a Scrutiny review or take the form of a Member awareness session was discussed and would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee in due course.

The meeting closed at 13:25 hours.

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