

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**15th December, 2014 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority
Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Atwal Singh, Barlow, Clinton,
Collingswood, Davis, Eustace, Hogarth, Lines,
Mottram JP, Phillips JP, Quinnen, Sealey,
Shackleton, Singh, Skinner, Spence and Young;
Mr Ager.

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor);
A Asfar, J Connor, M Griffiths, N Spencer and P Wilson.

Clerk and Monitoring Officer
R Jones.

Apologies: Councillors Aston, Douglas-Maul, Finnegan, O'Boyle
and Yardley.

22/14 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair invited members to meet the Strategic Enabling Team at a coffee morning which was to be held in the Headquarters cafeteria area from 10.00 am on Thursday, 18 December, 2014.

He advised that an early day motion/prayer, with 281 signatories, on the 2015 Pension Regulations would be debated in the House of Commons today. It was considered that the Government would debate the motion and ask the Queen to annul the Regulations.

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The Executive Council of the Fire Brigades' Union would meet following the debate and tomorrow to consider what it intended to do next. He felt that the matter was far from resolved. As reported at the last meeting of the Forum the Chief Fire Officer had written to all West Midlands Members of Parliament detailing what effects the situation was having on the Authority and its personnel. He had asked the Fire Minister to try and settle or resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

He would attend a meeting of the seven West Midlands District Leaders on 18 December, 2014 to consider the budget and precept for the next financial year. They would meet again in January, 2015 by which time it was hoped the financial allocation for 2015/16 would be known.

He wished members a Happy Christmas and a healthy New Year.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer submitted the Chief's apologies for the Forum and informed members of the items for today's meeting. He also advised members that the Authority had received successful Crown Court rulings in respect of the two recent fire fatalities which the Chief reported on at the last meeting of the Forum.

23/14 Budget 2015/16

Members received a presentation from the Strategic Enabler for Finance and Resources on the budget position for 2015/16. He advised that much of the presentation would be that provided for the meeting with the seven West Midlands' District Leaders on 18 December, 2014.

Members were reminded of the Service Delivery Model which underpinned the Service's priorities and objectives of Response, Protection and Prevention within The Plan.

Figures for the Comprehensive Spending Review between 2011/12 to 2014/15 for the Authority showed a total grant reduction of £22m or 27%. The percentage funding for the Authority for 2014/15 was 57% Government grant, 34% Council Tax and 9% Rates. The Authority had received the greatest grant reductions of all Fire Authorities in the country.

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Provisional grant reductions for the next four years were forecasted as:-

2015/16	9%	(£6m)
2016/17	7%	(£4m)
2017/18	7%	(£4m)
2018/19	7%	(£4m)

The Authority had the lowest Fire Service Council Tax charge in England and Wales, which for a Band D property was £53.87 per year.

The provisional budget forecast for the next four years, based on maintaining the current service delivery model and Council Tax increases of 2% were:-

2015/16	Balanced
2016/17	- £3.5m
2017/18	- £6.5m
2018/19	- £10m

Discussions were on-going with the External Auditors regarding a proposal on how the Authority might change its debt repayment arrangements. Officers were also considering options for reductions in planned maintenance and insurance fund budget provisions.

The national capital grant for 2015/16 and 2016/17 would be reduced from £70m to £37.5m per year. All capital grant resources had been allocated on a bidding basis and the two bids made recently by WMFS had both been unsuccessful.

The Government's Autumn Statement in December, 2014 had indicated that the coming years would require "very substantial savings in public spending", at higher levels than previously planned for and the Institute of Fiscal Studies had announced that cuts "will be on a colossal scale".

The options for meeting the estimated budget deficits in future years were: further efficiencies, service degradation and a referendum.

A timetable for the budget was also reported.

The following responses were made to a member's questions and enquiries:-

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- The bid for capital resources in respect of Coventry Fire Station had been unsuccessful. However, at the closure of accounts funding had been earmarked for property investment, which the Authority could choose to spend on building development at any fire station. The Asset Strategy agreed last February indicated that the development of Aston and Coventry Fire Stations were the first two priorities. It was likely that the Authority would be asked to decide on these matters in February 2015 when options had been more clearly defined.
- The Comprehensive Spending Review had been allocated in tranches. In years one and two some authorities had grant increases and some had reductions. This Authority had fared the worst. In years three and four there had been a more even spread of reductions, however, this had hit the Authority hard due to its heavy reliance on grant funding.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government would announce the provisional grant position for 2015/16. It would also advise on the percentage increase for Council Tax without incurring a referendum.

24/14 Marmot Update

The Director Service Delivery reported on three recent incidents which had health and wellbeing implications and would have highlighted the Service's work associated with Marmot principles. One involved the outcome of a County Court case whereby an arsonist was convicted and the other two related to fire fatalities, during the recent industrial action, in which mental health, mobility and alcohol issues were evident.

Members questioned various aspects of the cases and were informed:-

- Of the complexity of issues that surrounded persons that hoard. If a property was privately owned the Service worked with Environmental Health; if a care package is in place then work could be undertaken with Social Services due to the risks to carers; rented properties were a little easier due to tenancy agreements.

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The Service was currently working with social landlords to influence tenancy agreements to allow the Service access to properties annually to check fire alarms and inspect for hoarding.

- There were not so many chip pan fires reported now, however, 50% of household fires still started in the kitchen.
- Work was on-going with the Police into more readily sharing information on suspected/known arsonists and their movements. After each Serious Incident Review there was data sharing with partners.
- The Service tried to promote advice at appropriate times with regard to not using Chinese lanterns.
- There were local, community and national campaigns concerning the dangers of the improper use of candles.
- That the primary approach to vulnerable persons was collaborative working.

Members received a presentation from Peter Wilson on the Authority's progress towards Marmot principles through its communication strategy "Improving Lives to Save Lives". This covered three areas – internal, health sector and our communities.

The 18 November, 2014 event had been aimed at the health sector and 54 delegates from external agencies had attended:-

Nationally – from Royal Society for Public Health, Department of Health, Public Health England;

Locally – Clinical Commissioning Groups, Local Authorities, Health & Wellbeing Boards, Public Health

3rd Sector – Sifa Fireside, St Basil's

Academics – from West Midlands and further afield

The key note speaker was Sir Michael Marmot and Dr Ian Banks, President of the European Men's Health Forum, had also spoken. Three firefighters provided case studies as to how the work of the Service helped to tackle health inequalities.

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Members also received a video card which had been used at the event and which helped spread the message of what the Service was achieving.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer emphasised to members the importance of spreading the message to all our communities of all the work undertaken by the Fire Service apart from fighting fires.

The Chair reminded members that they had been informed of member development opportunities and that they should get in touch with Claire Kelly or Julie Connor if they wished to attend. He also asked them to raise any issues which they felt might be appropriate to discuss at future Policy Planning Forums.

(Meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

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