

**Minutes of a Meeting of the  
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

**22nd September, 2014 at 11.00 am**  
**at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

**Present:** Councillor Edwards [Chair];  
Councillor Idrees [Vice Chair];  
Councillors Aston, Singh Atwal, Clinton, Davis, Delaney,  
Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Finnegan, Harley, Hogarth,  
Howells, Lines, O'Boyle, Phillips JP, Shackleton, Singh,  
Skinner, Spence, Tranter, Yardley and Young.

**Apologies:** Councillors Collingswood, Mottram JP, Quinnen and  
Sealey.

**Observer:** Mr Ager.

**57/14      Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Edwards declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 63/14 below (Monitoring of Finances).

**58/14      Chair's Announcements**

The Chair referred to the official opening of Haden Cross Community Fire Station held on 6 September, 2014 to which all members of the Authority had been invited. It was also attended by the new Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt, who advised of her intention to come and visit the West Midlands Fire Service to see in detail how the Service had dealt with its budget reductions.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service continued to manage resilience arrangements during times of industrial action. The Service continued to engage with firefighters' representative bodies and was pushing towards a resolution of the dispute. He also referred to the opening of the Haden Cross Community Fire Station which had attracted wide community attendance, together with that of the new Fire Minister.

The Chair commended the organisers of the Haden Cross event which had proved extremely successful.

59/14      **Minutes**

**Resolved** that, subject to the correction of the name of former firefighter Paul Cockburn in Minute No. 36/14 (Chair's Announcements), the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July, 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

60/14      **Revision to Procedural Standing Orders**

The Authority received a report proposing amendment to Standing Order 1/8 Procurement Procedures relating to the submission, opening and registration of formal tenders; changes to the EU financial tendering thresholds and the level of involvement of Corporate Procurement in procurement activity.

It was proposed that the Chair of the Authority, or his nominated representative, no longer be required to be in attendance at the opening of tenders over £100,000.

**Resolved** that revised Standing Order for Procurement Procedures, attached as Appendix 1, be approved.

61/14      **Audit Findings 2013/14**

The Authority noted the Audit Findings report 2013/2014 produced by the Authority's external auditors, Grant Thornton.

The report highlighted the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2014 and would be used to report the auditor's findings to those charged with governance in accordance with the requirements of the International Standard on Auditing.

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Under the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice auditors were required to report whether, in their opinion, the Authority's financial statements presented a true and fair view of the financial position, its expenditure and income for the year and whether they had been properly prepared in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting. They were also required to reach a formal conclusion on whether the Authority had put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (the Value for Money conclusion).

Auditors found the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources provided a Value for Money conclusion.

Auditors did, however, make four recommendations relating to:-

- the periodic review of the parameters to ensure the correct deductions were being applied for Pensions;
- the review of password settings for the network, system change management controls and the number of 'domain administrators' with significant access, with a view to the implementation of best practice requirements;
- the review of information security policies and procedures at planned intervals or when significant changes occurred to ensure their continuing suitability, adequacy, and effectiveness;
- the review of the accounting and audit arrangements for the Community Interest Company to assess whether more detailed disclosures would be required in the Fire Authority accounts in future.

The Chair commented that the Auditors' findings clearly endorsed the Authority's financial position. The Authority had already made savings of £22m up to 2014/15 and needed to achieve further savings over the next three years estimated at £5.8m (8.6%) in 2015/16, £4.4m (7%) in 2016/17 and £4.1m (7%) in 2017/18.

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The Chief Fire Officer felt that the report acknowledged the efficient and effective way in which the Service was managed. The maximum amount had now been saved from support services and any future cuts would need to be made to front-line services. It was hoped that the Service's model of provision would not have to be comprised, however, there were plans in place to move forward.

In response to a member's enquiry as to the progress of West Midlands Fire Service Business Safety Limited, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that commercial interest had been slow and that he was currently conducting a review of the company, the options for which would be reported to the Authority.

Members felt that the report was clear and easy to follow and the Chair thanked the members of the Audit Committee and all finance officers involved in its production.

In answer to a question, the Chair advised members that it was not yet possible to know whether the Authority would be in a position to increase its precept either next year or the year after. Authorities were only informed of the Council Tax cap shortly before they needed to know. The Authority had the lowest precept of all 46 Fire and Rescue Authorities in the UK.

### 62/14      **Statement of Accounts 2013/14**

A summary of the Authority's Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2014 was submitted for consideration.

A summary of the Statement of Accounts had also been produced and was available on the Authority's website, together with the full accounts.

**Resolved** that the Statement of Accounts for 2013/14 and subsequent letter of representation be approved.

### 63/14      **Monitoring of Finances**

The Authority noted a report on the monitoring of finances to the end of August 2014.

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### **64/14      Contract Awards Summary for Period 1 April – 30 September 2014**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a list of contracts in excess of £100,000 which had been awarded between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2014.

### **65/14      Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 1st September, 2014, were received.

### **66/14      Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 1st September, 2014, were received.

### **67/14      Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the Policy Planning Forum held on 1st September, 2014, were received.

### **68/14      Exclusion of the Public**

**Resolved** that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and information relating to an individual.

### **69/14      Proposed High Speed (HS) Rail 2 Route – Update 3**

Further to Minute No. 32/14 (14th April, 2014) and Minute No. 16/14 of the Executive Committee (9th June, 2014), the Authority received a report and a verbal update on the developments with HS2 negotiations.

A Select Committee was to have been held on 17 September 2014, however, following earlier meetings held in September a draft undertaking had been received from HS2 and the hearing before the Select Committee was deferred to allow for continued negotiations.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that any possible disruption by the proposals to the operation of Fire Control was now the main issue of concern and that Chief Fire and Rescue Advisors were liaising with HS2 to give their opinion on the impact of any potential interruption to this service.

70/14      **Insurance Arrangements**

The Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer reported that the Authority's external insurance arrangements were due for renewal on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2014. All policies had been reviewed by the Authority's specialist insurance broker and a schedule of recommendations for renewal was submitted including an update on the fidelity guarantee insurance.

In relation to a query concerning the level of cover for terrorism insurance the Treasurer undertook to provide a briefing note to all Authority members.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) that the insurance arrangements for the Authority for the period commencing October 2014 be approved;
- (2) that the Treasurer prepare a briefing note for all members on the Authority's level of cover for terrorism insurance.

71/14      **Substantive Appointment to Post of Chief Fire Officer**

Further to Minute No. 62/13 (16th September, 2013), the Clerk and Monitoring Officer submitted a report on proposals to facilitate the appointment on a substantive basis to the post of Chief Fire Officer.

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The options for the Authority to consider when reviewing the current acting up arrangements were:-

- to continue the current acting up arrangements;
- to carry out an external recruitment process;
- to carry out an internal recruitment process;
- to make a fixed term appointment, following an internal or external recruitment process.

Following consultation with Finance and Human Resource officers and based on the findings of an extensive Equality Impact Assessment it was proposed that an internal recruitment process be undertaken.

Members of the Authority welcomed and were supportive of the proposals.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that an internal recruitment process be followed initially for the appointment on a substantive basis to the post of Chief Fire Officer;
- (2) that the job description and personal specification as set out in the report be approved as the basis for recruitment.

(Meeting ended at 12.12 pm)

Contact Officer: Rosemary Jones Democratic Services Unit Sandwell MBC 0121-569-3896
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