

## Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**06 November 2017 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Members of the Authority  
Councillor Edwards (Chair)  
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Allcock, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie, Booth,  
Brackenridge, Cartwright, Clinton, Craddock, Davis,  
Eustace, Male, Miks, Mottram, P Singh, T Singh,  
Spence, Tranter, Walsh, and Young

Officers: West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)  
B Brook, J Campbell, S Taylor  
S Timmington

### **Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

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

Apologies: Councillors Aston, Hogarth, Sealey, and Williams  
Mr Ager

Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)

Observers: P Fellows, H Nightingale, M Pym

### **23/17 Chair and CFO Announcements**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the passing away of Kevin Pearson, Chief Fire Officer of Avon Fire and Rescue Service.

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The Chair and Chief Fire Officer had released a joint press release regarding the complications of fire funding.

A new briefing document was due to be launched by the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities. The document would be distributed to key stakeholders including Members of Parliament and the Government.

The relocation of Fire Control within Headquarters was due to commence over the next few months.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services would come into effect on 1 April 2018. The introduction of the inspectorate would coincide with the refresh of the Fire and Rescue National Framework which would include changes regarding to governance, assurance, and the powers of the Secretary of the State to intervene.

### **24/17 Governance Update**

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, provided an update on the subject of future governance:

A hard copy of the draft West Midlands Combined Authority Scheme was distributed at the meeting. It provided details of what governance would look like beyond 2018.

The report on the future governance of the Service was currently going through all seven Local Authorities and had already been presented at some Cabinets (not all Local Authorities were intending to take the report to full Council, opting to deal with via their Cabinet).

A number of key 'red-line' areas were raised as fundamental to the Scheme including:

- Effective ring fencing of future core funding and precept income (essential for protecting the budget for the delivery of prevention, protection and response activities by the Service)

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- Establishment of the Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee (MFAC) of 15 Members (essential for retaining and broadening Local Authority connections with the Service, retaining lead member principle, and retaining links with other fire service influencing bodies e.g. Local Government Association, Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities, National Fire Chiefs Council)
- Appointment of the Chair of the MFAC (ensuring due regard to the views of the leaders of the 7 WMCA constituent member councils, the Committee, and the political balance across the West Midlands)
- Ensuring the Chief Fire Officer maintains full accountability for operational functions of the Service

Members were encouraged to engage with their Local Authority chief executives and legal officers in these items.

Members were advised that if there were any questions or issues raised related to the key 'red-line' areas, that they should be addressed to John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, and Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority.

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

- It was confirmed that there was intention for reserves to be protected from transfer to wider use by the West Midlands Combined Authority. Reserves were currently earmarked for the Aston Fire Station and Coventry Fire Station rebuilds, and the vehicle replacement programme.
- In the event that the Home Office was to reject the outcomes of the public consultation of the governance scheme and local authority endorsement, it was currently an unknown and options would be investigated into the relevant action to take. However, it was noted that the government did have a desire for local agreement.
- The Service had received a letter from the Police and Crime Commissioner (the PCC) to exercise his right to sit on the Authority. The request would be considered

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at the Authority meeting scheduled for 20 November. The PCC had indicated that he wished to delegate his attendance to an officer. This request was being checked with the Home Office for clarification regarding possibility to do this and implications regarding voting rights.

- The political balance of the MFAC would be directed by the controlling group of each council. It would need to be proportionate to the numbers sitting on all external and advisory bodies (as required by legislation).

### **25/17 How we are Progressing in Delivering the Objectives of The Plan**

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on how the Service was progressing in delivering the objectives of The Plan:

The Plan was underpinned by the five minute risk based attendance standard, backed up by survivability evidence. However, demand was starting to increase. Forecasting also indicated that the increase in demand was speeding up.

As part of the Service's commitment to transparency, the Community Safety Strategy, available via the Service's website ([www.wmfs.net](http://www.wmfs.net)), was an interactive tool which allowed members of the public to enter their postcode to discover what was going on in their local area, for example, types and numbers of incidents (including road traffic collisions), response times, and other activities.

The five minute attendance time was not a flat rate for all. Attendance times are risk based targeting specific areas regarding vulnerability, and linked to survivability. Some areas experience higher attendance times. This is delivered through The Plan and the Service Delivery Model (SDM).

Resources and fire stations were located where there was a high risk of emergency incidents. Sometimes a resource would be moved temporarily due to demand / risk. The dynamic positioning of resources and the risk based

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attendance times were also a contributing factor to why there were fewer large scale fires. This was reinforced by assertive and effective firefighting, underpinned by extensive training, in what is a technical role (firefighter safety remained paramount to the Service along with the safety of its communities). This was further supported by 99.28% fleet availability and the fact that crews remain available to respond to emergencies whilst undertaking non-emergency tasks such as training and delivering Safe and Well visits.

Prevention work supported safer and healthier communities. The Service works further upstream to tackle issues to reduce fires and vulnerability, which has seen the Service move closer to the health agenda. The safety check that has been developed evolving into its current form of the Safe and Well visit. The Service continues to deliver 30,000 Safe and Well visit across the county however, a reduction in the SDM would likely lead to a reduction in the number delivered.

Protection work supported businesses within the county and delivered the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Order. Business Support Vehicles have been introduced to the SDM, supporting businesses in fulfilling their obligations. This forms part of the Service's commitment to supporting businesses to remain in business safely. Protection was under the spotlight following the Grenfell Tower incident. The Service has managed the communication cell on behalf of the National Fire Chiefs Council regarding building safety and cladding. The aftermath of the Grenfell Tower incident has led to an increase in the workloads within Fire Safety, which was now at tipping point in terms of capacity. An upturn in fire safety work was anticipated. Additionally, fire safety could be involved in more social issues via houses of multiple occupation.

In terms of Response work, the Service has bucked the national trend by responding quicker to emergencies at a time when the majority of response times were increasing. This was due to the contribution and cooperation of all staff.

Service support functions were struggling. These functions including research, policy and procedures. These were all areas that the incoming inspectorate would examine.

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In terms of finance, the Service's core funding had reduced by £28M with a further £10M remaining, resulting in a reduction of £38M by March 2020. It was a testament to the Fire Authority who had committed to the requirements of the Government but continued to provide services.

Meeting the £10M deficit was based on the following:

- £2M increase to Council Tax and Business Rate Distribution
- £1M General Budget Reductions
- £1M Internal Restructures
- £2M Alternative Funding
- £4M Staffing

The monitoring of finances indicated that the general budget reductions and internal restructures were on track, along with the increases to council tax and business rate distribution. However, there needed to be a focus on the other two areas:

- Staffing:
  - Voluntary Additional Shifts (VAS) and the disturbance allowance was working effectively. It was important that firefighters received recognition and reward for the extra work involved. If a firefighter chose to volunteer for VAS, on average they would receive approximately £2200 per annum extra.
  - However, the collective agreement regarding VAS was due to expire on 31 December 2017, and there was the requirement for a new agreement to be in place.
- Alternative funding, in particular falls response:
  - A falls response service was currently delivered in the Dudley, Coventry and Wolverhampton areas. Response times averaged at 14 minutes. With a

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60% reduction in emergency calls over the last 10 years, the Service had embraced a prevention approach. The Service had a low conveyance rate to hospital, Ambulance Service a high rate. It also provided the Service the opportunity to deliver a Safe and Well visit when attending a falls response. However, there was no national agreement in place for falls response, and it was currently being delivered via business continuity arrangements (which included a mixture of uniformed and non-uniformed staff).

- It was also noted some firefighters had struggled to adjust to delivering the service (in that it was markedly different to the typical circumstances around responding to emergency incidents).

The national picture had seen a rejection of the pay offer, further compounded by the withdrawal of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) from a range of trials including emergency medical response trials which falls response fell within. In the absence of a national agreement, there were no local agreements in place. Although work was ongoing to achieve a local agreement, it was proving difficult due to the national stance of no such agreements.

There were a number of things that the Service could do. The aims and objectives were being enabled via a more robust SDM. New recruits were being issued new contracts which included a commitment to the delivery of The Plan, meaning that they would be available and expected to deliver wider prevention work. Additionally, there was a need to rebalance where firefighters were located as part of a more robust SDM (although contracts stated that an individual could work at any location in the West Midlands, custom and practice did not necessarily follow this with staff working at the same location for lengthy periods of time, and therefore it was acknowledged that this proposal could be met with some resistance).

Current forecasts estimated a £1M deficit in the Efficiency Plan. Commissioning, with a forecast of £400K for 2017/18, was not meeting the target.

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There was a certain degree of complexity with regard to commissioning, with the majority of commissioning comprising falls response which was currently carried out via business continuity arrangements.

It was acknowledged that the current approach to delivering falls response was not sustainable.

There was a need to invest money to maintain current arrangements and to enable continued transformation. However, to enable this, it would most likely involve the releasing of funds from reserves. The services would be delivered within a balanced budget but there would a requirement to pump prime one or two areas.

In terms of alternatives; no balanced budget would impact upon the SDM. It might be possible to explore a possible reduction in second appliances and some firefighter posts to squeeze the SDM further, but this would have an effect on the five minute risk based attendance standard. Some Fire and Rescue Services had done similar but the Service would see an increase in attendance times, which would lead to an impact upon the vulnerable within our communities, compromise of the Service's whole time model which supports the SDM and move to an increasingly response focus with a corresponding reduction in prevention activity. Additionally, it would have a detrimental effect upon the credibility of the Service, including with the West Midlands Combined Authority / Mayor.

Next steps:

- 20 November – meeting of the Fire Authority (submission of the report 'Delivering Strategy – The Plan 2018 – 2021')
- 22 November – Autumn Budget
- 01 January 18 – New Staffing Local Agreement (investment from reserve)
- 19 February 18 – meeting of the Fire Authority (Approval of The Plan and budget)

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

- The new contract issued to new recruits would become the standard contract. It was hoped that this would eliminate some of the barriers to other types of work. However, it should be noted that over 1100 members of staff would still be remaining on the existing contracts.
- Savings to accommodate the cuts in funding had been made largely from how the Service implemented its SDM including the introduction of new vehicle types (Brigade Response Vehicles) and dual staffing of specialist appliances such as hydraulic platforms. Additional savings had been made via the change in size and makeup of the senior management team (equating to a saving of approximately £250K), efficiencies made in procurement and processes, and the absorption of workloads internally (which had affected all staff). The Service had built upon the Building upon Success (BuS) programme to become a better organisation. However, there was no more room for 'salami slicing' style cuts.
- When attending fires and road traffic collisions everything tended to happen very fast, with little personal contact. However, falls response were carried out in a very different environment, with greater personal contact, family and friends present, and possibly end of life circumstances. Additionally, firefighters could often attend repeat calls which could lead to a connection being formed between them and the individual. As a result, some firefighters had struggled to adapt to this type of work. The Service had a number of support mechanisms in place including on station diffusing, a variety of services provided by Occupational Health, and a Health and Safety Committee was in place to look at how the Service could maintain and improve such services.
- The Service was committed to ensuring all staff, including firefighters were equipped to fulfil their roles.

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Training was provided to all staff who deliver falls response services. A working group had been setup to identify and solve issues before they happened.

- Policies and procedures were consistent across emergencies. However, falls response and similar work could see firefighters responding to medical issues which were not controllable and there was a need for policies and procedures to be flexible to reflect the different scenarios. Falls response calls were triaged and the Service would not attend if an emergency scenario (call would be passed to Ambulance to attend).
- The Service had employed a Medical Director who provided clinical governance.
- The Safe and Well visits carried out as part of the falls response service featured two extra elements; taking an individual's temperature, and taking an individual's blood pressure. This allowed the collation of information to build a picture over time. An ambulance would be requested in the event of any concerns.
- The Service had not received a single complaint from a commissioner about the services delivered, which reflected the high quality of the services delivered.
- No firefighters had left the Service due to the introduction of falls response. However, it was acknowledged that there was a higher level of dissatisfaction amongst a small group of people with regard to the work.
- In terms of commissioning activity, the Service had not focussed purely on falls response and there were a variety of options available with regard to income generation. However, the Service would only consider commissioning related to reducing vulnerability.
- In reference to the fire at the recycling centre in Walsall, recycling fires had become more common (as were such facilities) and due to their nature, were resource intensive.

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- It was agreed that a briefing note on fires at recycling centres would be distributed to Section 41 Members.
- There was no form of recovering costs, even if the Service had attended a premises or site previously and raised concerns with the owner / occupier and relevant organisations, with the exception of incidents of such a size or cost implication that would trigger the appropriate cost recovery scheme.
- The Grenfell Tower incident had put fire safety regulations under the spotlight. Members were in a position to lobby regarding fire safety regulations including those relating to houses in multiple occupation. All new homes built in Wales now featured sprinkler systems whereas not one new home in England did.

The meeting closed at 12:45 hours.

<p>Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680</p>
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