

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**7 October 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, Barrie, Dehar, Edwards, Gill,
Hogarth, Miks, Miller, Spence, Walsh and Young
Professor Simon Brake
- Officers:** West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer B Brook, G Taylor and S
Warnes
S Burton, S Barry, J Campbell, P Fellows, M Hamilton-
Russell, S Taylor, S Timmington, S Vincent

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

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

- Apologies:** Councillors Cooper and Jenkins
Gurinder Josan
Mr Ager
Sarah Middleton

Observers: Nil

19/19 Chair and CFO Announcements

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

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Wayne Brown, who had recently been appointed as Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and Steve Mason, Chief Executive of RealWorldHR, were welcomed to the meeting.

The Authority had a commitment to consult on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) every three years. The Authority would be holding a public consultation from November 2019 to January 2020.

The cultural review had been completed and the final report had been produced. The report would be issued to all staff across the Service later that day.

It was noted that openness and transparency were key, and it was important not to seek to apportion blame.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer welcomed Steve Mason to the meeting. Steve had guided the Service through the process which had been an independent process. As part of the meeting, Steve would talk Members through the process, how the report was put together, and explain its format. Following the Policy Planning Forum, the report would be discussed with the representative bodies. The report would then be sent electronically to all members of staff, followed by a live stream communicating the report to staff.

The proposals for the public consultation on the IRMP would be submitted to the Authority at its meeting in November.

20/19 Cultural Review

Steve Mason, Chief Executive RealWorldHR, provided an overview of the cultural review process, how the report was put together, and explained the format of the report.

The Authority and the Service had noted the level of response to the industrial dispute in 2017 and had wanted to understand the level of dissatisfaction amongst the workforce. As a result, the Authority and the Service requested a comprehensive cultural review.

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The report looked at things from multiple points. Some people would agree with the contents of the reports, others would not. The report provided a view of the perception of reality from staff across all areas of the Service. The cultural review was not an investigation. If it had been, a different approach would have been taken. It reflected the workforce's version of reality; the report did not seek to challenge this but to report it.

The review had found that some members of staff were not happy, and that staff wanted to see change. The report identified dissatisfiers and included a number of recommendations.

The report was comprised of five main parts:

- Views of senior stakeholders and stakeholder groups – what they told us
- Workforce perceptions of WMFS and their own jobs
- Workforce perceptions of what WMFS does well
- Summary of findings by theme
- What staff would like to see changed

The five parts would provide the semblance of an action plan. However, it did not mean that all points had to be addressed.

It was noted that many organisations undertaking a cultural review process would often attempt to build in a debrief mechanism. It was confirmed that the Authority and the Service had not attempted to build in any such mechanism or sought involvement. All participants and the Service as a whole had remained professional throughout the duration of the process, which was unusual for a cultural review. This was a testament to the organisation.

In terms of the methodology used for the review, RealWorldHR had involved a group of individuals to undertake the process who had a vast range of experience of organisational cultures, including witnessing the worst-case examples. These were supported by a team of data analysts all of whom had strong public accountability backgrounds. A qualitative analysis approach was used, and the

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report described the series of tools used that underpinned the methodology of the review.

The cultural review process comprised of the team meeting stakeholders, a survey which included three free text questions, focus groups, and one to one discussions. The survey resulted in 916 respondents, and 61 focus groups were held in which 446 people attended.

A check and challenge approach was adopted to challenge the responses as part of the analysis. Triangulation was used to clarify themes, subjects and context.

Seven themes were identified by the review (part four of the report):

- Leadership
- Communication and engagement
- Valuing people and embracing diversity and inclusion
- Performance management
- Behaviours and core values
- Learning, development and progression
- Adaptability and approach to change
- Feelings of 'them and us'
- IT systems and infrastructure
- Workloads, staffing and recruitment

All of the themes were explained in detail within the report. The three most common themes were 'them and us', IT systems and infrastructure, and workloads.

The section also brought together some of the analysis from the survey, displayed in table format identifying the groups of staff and comments made. These were statistically in line with the percentage of respondents, but it was something that needed to be considered. Additionally, the section included summaries of comments from the survey and focus groups. Some comments had been included within the report and these were effectively a copy and paste, although subtle changes were required to avoid the potential to identify an individual. It was noted that some

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comments occurred throughout and were linked to all seven themes.

The findings of the report found that the areas staff wanted to see improved were recognition, communication, and management and development. It was noted that the Service already had these in place and that it was not a 'broken' organisation. The findings highlighted it was more a case of the level of understanding of staff.

It was noted that the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) featured throughout the findings. However, what was meant by staff was often not actually SET. Station Commanders were also criticised but what staff wanted was already in place.

An example was noted where it had been identified that staff had reported an event to RealWorldHR but when the team went back to the station where the event had happened, it had transpired that the event had been very different to the one that had been reported.

There were a lot of things that the Service could do. It was evident that people did not understand the Service.

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

- The stakeholders were comfortable with being involved in the process. The Fire Brigades' Union were open in their engagement and were very supportive of the process, with a view to how to take the cultural review forward. SET wanted to move the cultural review forward. Members wanted to know that relationships had improved. Some members of staff indicated that they felt a need to move things forward as the situation had not been a healthy one.
- It was acknowledged that the data reported as a result of the cultural review differed to the data and findings of the HMICFRS report and there were a number of reasons for this. The questions used by the HMICFRS were closed questions rather than the open questions that had been used within the cultural review. Additionally, a different definition of a bullying environment had been applied to the two

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processes (for instance the difference between physical bullying and bullying style, for example, the latter being the setting of targets that aren't agreed with by staff). It was noted that some members of staff still felt there was an environment of bullying in the Service. However, there was a difference of attitude when comparing the answers to the questions within the survey and the discussions within the focus groups. It was recommended that the Service examine this issue and attempt to draw any issues out so that they could be resolved.

- The report noted that communication was a common theme and that staff likened it to 'speaking in a different language'. Staff had said that there were a lot of communication channels and didn't know which one to use. Some members of staff said that they did not understand some of the communications, but did not know who to speak to for guidance. It was noted that management speak was not always used in the right context.

Phil Loach noted that this was very much the starting point. RealWorld HR would continue to be available for a period of time to assist developing a way forward. Separately, a large stakeholder group comprised of a wide membership from across the Service had already been formed, which will also support discussion about the report and examine the themes that had been highlighted.

21/19 Integrated Risk Management Plan – public consultation

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, delivered an overview of the planned public consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Fire and Rescue Services were required to undertake a public consultation of their IRMP every three years. Following on from the Authority's last public consultation in 2017, it was now timely for the Authority to consult with its communities, business and partners on its strategy. It was proposed that the public consultation would take place from November 2019 to January 2020.

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A briefing note on the proposals was circulated to Members. Further information would be provided at the Policy Planning Forum in November which would also allow Members to support the formulation of the questions. Members were asked to advise Mark Hamilton-Russell of any thoughts and these could be incorporated into the meeting. A report on the public consultation would be submitted at the Fire Authority meeting in November.

The meeting closed at 12:10 hours.

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