

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**5 November 2018 at 10.30 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

- Present: Members of the Authority
Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)
Councillors Aston, Barlow, Barrie, Brackenridge, Craddock,
Dehar, Hogarth, Miks, Spence, and Young
Mr Ager
- Officers: West Midlands Fire Service
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)
A Afsar, H Begum, B Brook, S Burton, J Campbell, J Connor, J
Danbury, M Hamilton-Russell, P Fellows, M Pym, N Spencer, S
Timmington, S Warnes
- Clerk and Monitoring Officer**
K Gowreesunker (Clerk)
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)
M Griffiths (Treasurer)
- Apologies: Councillors Jenkins, Tranter and Walsh
The Police and Crime Commissioner
Sarah Middleton and Professor Simon Brake
- Observers: Nil

19/18 Chair and CFO Announcements

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

The Reward and Recognition event would be taking place on Thursday 29 November at West Bromwich Football Club. Section 41 Members were reminded to send another Member on their behalf if they could not attend.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, advised Members that crews from Highgate Fire Station and Technical Rescue had been presented with the Emergency Services Award at the Pride of Britain Awards for their response to a road traffic collision in which a driver was fully impaled on a metal railing.

The Service prided itself on operational excellence; the Technical Rescue Unit had achieved second place in the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation

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(UKRO) challenge, and the Service had received four out of the five awards at the annual Breathing Apparatus competition.

20/18 Governance Update

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, provided a Governance update.

An overview of key milestones between October 2018 and April 2019 was provided. These included the timelines reflecting the parliamentary process and ministerial approval.

The Order had been submitted to the Home Office who were currently waiting for confirmation of the date on which the Order would be laid in Parliament. It was anticipated that the Parliamentary process would continue until February.

Work was being carried out examining the current Fire Authority and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), to identify any possible gaps between the two organisations and to ensure elements such as fire safety were captured.

The Governance and Transformation Committee had begun to consider proposals for the role of the Mayoral Fire Committee.

A joint WMFS / WMCA project team were overseeing the arrangements to implement the transfer.

Next steps to be taken in December included the Governance and Transformation Committee putting forward recommendations for the Mayoral Fire Committee role, finalisation of the constitutional review, and engagement with the Mayor for approval of proposals. The Fire Authority would be updated on progress. It was anticipated that WMCA approval of constitutional arrangements for WMFS would be undertaken in January.

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

- A beneficial aspect of the WMCA was the possibility to access different funding streams. However, this was an area that would require further development.
- Levels of funding for the Service for 2020 and beyond was an unknown. There was an opportunity to make a case regarding the financial pressures the Service faced. Discussions would be held with the Mayor and the WMCA to ensure understanding of budgetary issues and the rationale.
- Objections could be made to the proposed Order / transfer during the Parliamentary process. None were necessarily envisaged or anticipated at the current time.
- All Members of Parliament representing the West Midlands would be written to, explaining the rationale behind the proposed transfer and change in governance, once the Order is laid.

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21/18 Revising the Strategy 2018 - 2022

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, introduced a presentation on revising the strategy 2018 to 2022.

The revised strategy to support the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) continued to be developed, with further work being carried out on the options (as detailed at the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 17 September, and at the Policy Planning Forum held on 8 October). It was noted that the options were crossing over, with the potential for the revised strategy to consist of a combination of the options.

Protection based services across Fire and Rescue Services were stretched following the Grenfell Tower incident, and the cuts to funding. Investment was required for protection.

During the course of the current Comprehensive Spending Review period, changes had been made to functions, in particular Corporate Communications, Information Communication and Technology (ICT), Organisational Intelligence and Innovation, and Organisational Learning and People Development. Investment was now required in these areas, tying in with the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) regime and the subsequent areas for focus. In terms of Corporate Communications, telling the Service's story was becoming more of a burden on a small team. The digital delivery of services was a key aspect of ICT, and there was a need to ensure the Service could capitalise on technological developments such as the imminent roll out of 5G. Additionally, the Service was being sought after as a partner in other areas of legislation, not just within the remit of the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO), to include areas such as housing and safeguarding. As a result, overheads in the learning and development for protection Officers was increasing. There was an anticipated gap in the Service's Efficiency Plan of £3M. Additionally, the amount could effectively rise to £3.6M reflecting the £0.6M investment in support services such as protection. It was expected that the amount could rise above £4M as proposals were developed in readiness for the Fire Authority meeting in February 2019.

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered the presentation on revisiting the strategy 2018 to 2022.

The requirement for the Service to develop an IRMP was laid out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. Risk management crossed over the areas of response, prevention and protection. The Service Delivery Model was complicated and changes to it could lead to effects elsewhere.

The Service Delivery Model comprised 41 pump rescue ladder (PRL) appliances. 36 PRLs were designated as the '1st appliance' at a station, three PRLs were designated as '2nd' appliances at three stations (the busiest three stations in the West Midlands), two PRLs formed part of the technical rescue

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capacity (the latter excluded from the options due to the funding methods and specialist capability). There were 19 Brigade Response Vehicles (BRV) which were a tried and tested approach to supporting category one incidents, attending category two, three and four incidents and therefore protecting the PRLs, and supporting larger incidents.

In terms of performance, the median response times during the quarter were:

- Category one – 4 minutes 38 seconds (target: 5 minutes)
- Category two – 5 minutes 30 seconds (target: 7 minutes)
- Category three – 4 minutes 55 seconds (target: 10 minutes)
- Category four – 6 minutes 30 seconds (target: 20 minutes)

This reflected that the Service was over performing against the performance indicators.

- In-year savings

In year budget pressures had been addressed by reducing the number of riders on the 2nd PRLs and removing BRVs from the fleet. The approach taken was on target financially, with a limited impact on response times, and a limited reduction in the number of Safe and Well visits delivered.

- The Options

An overview of each option was provided which included examples of the various scenarios / configurations of each option, and the impacts of each option if realised (on response times, prevention activities, etc).

Option one – Staff / Resource Availability:

Reduction / removal of Voluntary Additional Shifts (VAS) within the current Service Delivery Model accommodated through a reduction in appliance availability.

Option two – Resource Configuration:

Reduction / removal of VAS within the current Service Delivery Model accommodated by reconfiguring the number on each appliance to expand the concept of a 'blended fleet'.

Option three – Shift Arrangements (Risk Based Crewing):

Shift changes to maximise effectiveness and efficiency, and to mitigate the impact of the chosen option to remove / reduce VAS.

Option four – On Call Duty System:

Three options to be considered:

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- The introduction of a purely 'On Call' workforce as part of the overall Service Delivery Model.
- Using current Wholetime Firefighters employed by the Service to also provide an 'On Call' capability as part of the overall Service Delivery Model.
- Take the option not to pursue an 'On Call' option due to the detrimental impact on the risk based 5 minute attendance standard.

Option five – Management Review:

A blended approach to be taken which will consider:

- Service Delivery (based on outcome of options presented to the Fire Authority)
- Annual review of the Strategic Enabling Team
- Flexi Duty System review
- Department assessment and restructure (potential for investment)

Staff consultation:

The Service wanted all staff to be involved, to understand, and to consider options and put forward ideas. All managers had been tasked with advising staff about the proposals and to gain ideas and feedback.

The project team met with the representative bodies in accordance with the Joint Consultative Framework.

Feedback from staff had indicated that staff thought the proposals were undesirable but understood the rationale for them. Staff had raised concerns regarding the impact of the proposals on a daily basis, impact upon competence, and around the removal of riders.

The representative bodies understood the position in which the Service was in and were not resistant to co-operating.

Consultation with staff and the representative bodies at this stage of option formation would continue until 6 December. The Service would provide an update regarding engagement with staff and the representative bodies.

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

- The response time to category four incidents were just two minutes longer than the response time to category one incidents, and reflected significant over performance. It was confirmed that the dynamic cover tool was used to mobilise resources accordingly.
- An evidence based approach to mobilising included the attendance of a second appliance to ensure safe systems of working for crews (minimum of eight firefighters). Fire Control used dynamic mobilising so that eight firefighters could be mobilised to an incident via a

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combination of two PRLs, or a PRL and a BRV. The focus was on the people, not necessarily the vehicles. Mobilisation was also based on what information Fire Control knew of the incident at the time of mobilisation, such as profiling and the newly introduced 999eye capability.

- BRVs attended the lower category incident types which protected the PRLs, enabling them to be available to attend category one incidents. The BRVs also delivered prevention activities in a more cost effective manner due to the smaller crew size.
- The number of options would be narrowed down as they were developed, with recommendations of the Chief Fire Officer to be submitted to the Fire Authority at the meeting in February 2019. It was noted that allowing the Chief Fire Officer to manage the options flexibly was vital.
- The potential reduction in the number of Safe and Well visits delivered could possibly be rectified via different ways of working. However, quality was more important than quantity and there was a risk of having to do more tasks with less resources. The Service continued to work proactively in the health agenda with partners including the WMCA and Local Authorities. The Service did have a business development strategy which was progressive and had helped position the Service within the WMCA. The Service believed that this could still continue. Nationally, discussions continued regarding the widening of role maps and this could lead to opportunities locally.

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

- The location / removal of a 2nd PRL could be moved on a daily basis. There could be instances where a 2nd PRL could be replaced with a BRV. Additionally consideration could be given to dual crewing, i.e. a 2nd PRL operating as a BRV.
- All scenarios / configurations were achievable via the reduction in VAS, and not via a reduction in firefighters.
- Established safe systems of work and mobilisation protocols would remain the same, backed up by the dynamic risk assessment principle. The Service was confident that health and safety and legal compliance would be maintained.
- In answer to a question asking how often the 2nd PRLs were mobilised, analysis of Highgate Fire Station indicated that 31% of mobilisations of the 2nd PRL were simultaneous with the mobilisation of the 1st PRL, either attending the same incident, or attending a lower category incident. The 2nd PRL based at Coventry Fire Station provided resilience as Coventry was quite remote in terms of the Service Delivery Model. The 2nd PRLs were located at Fire Stations with the highest risk levels.

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

- The option would have impact upon systems of work and mobilisation protocols to ensure the required number of firefighters were in attendance e.g. eight firefighters at a category one incident.
- A blended fleet would represent a scalable approach. The BRVs enhanced the Service Delivery Model. Additionally, Business Support Officers attended incidents on their own, protecting other resources to attend real emergencies.
- Risk assessments were already in place for these proposals. The approach suggested was already in operation in other Fire and Rescue Services.

In answer to Members' question regarding option three, the following points were raised:

- Self-rostering had been adopted by other Fire and Rescue Services as well as other models. Different Services may have bespoke models reflecting their particular requirements / circumstances.

The Chief Fire Officer concluded the meeting, with the following observations:

- It was noted that when all appliances were available, approximately 60% of the West Midlands was covered within the 5 minute response standard. Planning allowed the 5 minutes response standard to be maintained within the high risk areas. The Community Safety Strategy was an interactive tool that displayed this information for members of the public, businesses and partner agencies.
- No proposal would be put forward where a safety assessment had not been carried out. However, this did not mean that the representative bodies would accept a proposal.
- Five riders on a PRL was the accepted gold standard. The Fire Brigades Union was hardening their position regarding four riders on a PRL and do not support the approach. This was an area that would need to be addressed.
- The Service had thousands of deployments which supported the ability to reduce the number of riders.
- The Service had experienced a £38M reduction in funding and still responded to incidents faster than ever. Prevention activities were targeted better than they had been previously. Protection services were stretched. To sustain the Service going forward, there was a need to reframe the Service's position. The Service could not dwell on what it did ten years ago.

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At the end of the meeting, the Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update on developments regarding the national deficit within the Firefighters Pension Scheme and Employer Contributions. Further updates would be provided as developments progressed.

The meeting closed at 12:31 hours.

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