

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

**13th April, 2015 at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

Present: Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Clinton,
Collingswood, Davis, Eustace, Finnegan, Hogarth,
Mottram JP, O'Boyle, Phillips JP, Quinnen, Sealey,
Shackleton, Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter and
Young;
Mr Ager.

Apologies: Councillors Douglas-Maul, Howells, Lines and Yardley.

24/15 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) Phil Hales, who had been appointed to the role of DCFO following the unanimous decision of the Appointments Committee on 7th April, 2015.

The Chair welcomed Melanie Dudley, Monitoring Officer, Satinder Sahota, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority and Mike Griffiths, Treasurer, to the first Fire Authority meeting following their appointment to their new roles.

Members were requested to complete the Related Party Disclosure Forms which had been circulated to them and return them to the Treasurer.

The Chief Fire Officer also offered his congratulations to the new officers and welcomed the officers in their new roles.

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25/15 **Minutes**

Resolved that, the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2015, be confirmed as a correct record.

26/15 **The Plan 2015/18**

Further to Minute No. 6/15 (16 February 2015), the Authority received a report on The Plan for 2015/18 and to note the interactive approach to its communication. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided an overview to Members. In line with the approach taken to developing the appropriate priorities, strategic objectives and outcomes, the rolling three year Plan had been refined and updated as opposed to being fundamentally rewritten.

The refreshed electronic Plan was demonstrated. The electronic version was simplified and included interactive infographics. Previous consultation approaches had shown that as part of the wider, continuous engagement and consultation strategy, a web based, interactive element to consultation had been the best way to elicit community involvement.

The Plan would be published on the Service's website www.wmfs.net and the production of paper copies would be limited to requests.

Resolved:-

- (1) that The Plan 2015-18 be approved;
- (2) that the interactive approach to communicating The Plan be noted.

27/15 **Staffing Options and Trials**

Further to the Policy Planning Forum on 2 February 2015 (see note 5/15), members received an update on the Staffing Options and Trials which outlined the implementation of trial staffing models and the potential forecasted savings associated with each model.

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As a consequence of funding shortfall in Government grant and over the Comprehensive Spending Review period (2011/12 to 2014/15) there were grant reductions of approximately £21 million (26%) with a further grant reduction of approximately £6 million (9%) in 2015/16. The reduction of funding had been met previously through the Building Upon Success (BuS) Programme and an ongoing organisational wide efficiency drive. However, further efficiencies were still required with an estimated £14m reduction in grant over the period 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Service would need to include front line efficiencies in order to meet these reduction challenges.

The Service Delivery Model (SDM) is well established and the underpinning principle of the model is that an attendance standard of five minutes will be achieved for the most serious emergencies. The five minute timeframe enhanced the chance of survivability and reduced injuries and damage to property.

The current Service delivery model consists of:

38 Fire Stations
41 Pump Rescue Ladders
19 Brigade Response Vehicles
1322 Firefighters
58 Technical Rescue
61 Fire Safety
Fire Control

The new staffing proposals would not have a detrimental effect on the Service Delivery Model and would complement the current staffing principles of:

- Service Delivery
- Value for Money
- Fair and in line with Core Values

A summary of the models proposed was:

- Merging of Watches – This would involve combining watches at each location to provide a pool of individuals who would self-manage their shifts. Each person would provide 150 shifts per year and Optimum Crewing Levels would be maintained at all times, resulting in no wasted shifts due to over crewing.

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- Re-Calibration of Staff to Crew Ratio (S2CR) – This model would result in a reduction in S2CR at each location. It would retain the current Watch System and the 2, 2, 4 shift pattern.

Both staffing models would require the use of additional shifts to maintain Optimum Crewing Levels. Staff would be required on a voluntary basis to perform up to approximately 10 additional shifts per year. The voluntary additional shifts would be recompensed at a flat rate of pay and would not be pensionable. Utilising the flat rate of pay was key to the sustainability of the proposals.

A negotiated change in contract would potentially be needed to form part of the implementation for 2016 if agreed by the Authority. Management recognised that in order to achieve a smooth implementation ongoing engagement and early negotiation were required and this negotiation had already begun using the recognised employee engagement framework.

The trials could result in a reduction of up to 30 posts across all of the potential trial locations.

The trial locations were outlined as:

- Aston Community Fire Station
- Highgate Community Fire Station
- Sutton Coldfield Community Fire Station
- Woodgate Valley Community Fire Station
- Bickenhill and Wednesbury Community Fire Station (Technical Rescue Unit).
- Coventry Community Fire Station
- Haden Cross Community Fire Station
- Tettenhall Fire Station
- Tipton Fire Station
- Wolverhampton Fire Station

The estimated full year savings, if each staffing model was fully adopted were:

- Merging of Watches - £3.8m
- S2CR re-calibration - £3.4m

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A blended approach would provide a saving between the two figures.

The trial period would require a number of voluntary additional shifts at each trial location. The cost of this over a full 12 months would be approximately £600k if staffing trials were undertaken at all of the identified locations. The estimated expenditure could be met from budget savings.

Consultation had taken place:

- at the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) on 4 November 2014;
- at a Staffing Continuous Professional development event on 3 December 2014;
- at a series of workshops with 400 staff;
- through a Staffing ideas electronic forum;
- through ongoing meetings with the representative bodies;
- through visits by the staffing team to potential trial stations;
- by a series of visits by Principal Officers to potential trial locations;
- through a paper to JCC on 7 April 2015 which initiated the negotiations;
- through a series of negotiation meetings and joint statements.

Joint meetings would continue during the week commencing 13 April.

No significant negative impacts on any group with a protected characteristic were identified during the Equality Impact Assessment. However, the trial would provide additional flexibility to all members of staff. Following the trials, final agreement would be required by the Authority in April 2016.

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In response to Members' enquiries:

- Officers advised that meetings had been held with FBU previously, no agreement had been reached but negotiations continued and further meetings were being arranged to find an amicable way forward;
- There were currently six watches, Red, White, Blue, Green, Purple and Orange and five firefighters to each Pump Rescue Ladder (PRL) and three firefighters to each Brigade Response Vehicle (BRV);
- The Staffing Model committed to the same numbers and although there might be short periods of less staff due to absences, there was no plan to reduce the numbers.

The Chair commented that he hoped that the negotiations would be successful and following negotiations the Staffing model would lead to a positive outcome. The trials would inform the decision next year. If the staffing trials were made permanent, this could lead to a decrease in firefighters but the reductions would be made through natural wastage and there would be no redundancies of front line staff.

Resolved:-

- (1) that subject to negotiations the two different staffing models would be trialled from April 2015 to provide an evidence based approach to enable decision making in 2016.
- (2) that the engagement with employees and trades unions that started in October 2014 would continue throughout the trial period be noted.

28/15

Implementation of the Living Wage

The Chair welcomed Vic Mallabar, UNISON, and Steve Price-Hunt, Fire Brigades Union, for the item on the Living Wage.

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The DCFO introduced the report on the Living Wage. The Service considered a request from UNISON in late 2014 requesting that the Service considered adoption of 'The Living Wage'.

The Living Wage is based on the amount an individual needed to earn to cover the basic cost of living and is set each year by the Government's Business Secretary on the advice of the Low Pay Commission. Unlike the National Minimum Wage the Living Wage is an informal benchmark, not a legally enforceable minimum level of pay.

The Living Wage is currently set at a rate of £7.85 per hour outside of London. Following a review of all staff pay, it was identified that there were 62 staff paid below the Living Wage. The number equated to 38 full-time equivalent staff.

In considering the request, the Service reviewed the current Pay and Grading Structure and the Ongoing Personal Development of employees.

The Authority's Pay Policy Statement 2015/16 will be amended to provide a policy statement reflecting the Authority's approach to adopting the Living Wage principles.

The annual cost of meeting the Living Wage requirement to the 62 staff would be approximately £70,000. Funding provision for this amount was made as part of the Authority's 2015/16 budget setting arrangements.

The Chair stated that the majority of staff affected were women and felt that this was the right thing to do. Vic Mallabar was thanked for championing the Living Wage and there was unanimous support for the recommendation. It was felt that this was an excellent example of the Union and the Authority working together to achieve the implementation of the Living Wage.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that an addition to the Pay Policy Statement 2015/16 be approved to include a policy statement detailing the Authority's commitment to the principles of the Living Wage;
- (2) that, subject to (1) above, the Authority implement the payment of the Living Wage to all staff previously paid below that level, with effect from 1st April 2015.

29/15 **Contract Awards Summary for Period 1 September 2014 – 31 March 2015**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a list of contracts in excess of £100,000 which had been awarded between 1st September 2014 and 31st March, 2015.

In response to a Member's enquiry about the difference between the budgeted and actual cost of the contract in respect of the Extension Works at Billesley Fire Station, the Treasurer explained that issues relating to Dignity at Work and civil engineering had caused the budget to be exceeded, however, the additional amount had been financed from savings made from the realignment of other budgets.

30/15 **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2015 were received.

The Chair of Audit Committee made a point of clarification on Minute No. 13/15 stating that the National Pensions dispute was between the Fire Brigades Union and the Government.

31/15 **Minutes of Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2015 were received.

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32/15 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2015 were received.

33/15 **Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel**

The notes of the meeting held on 2 February 2015 were received.

34/15 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the meetings held on 19 January, 2 February and 23 March 2015 were received.

35/15 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under 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 to information which reveals that the authority proposes to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or to make an order or direction under any enactment.

36/15 **Planned Procurement Exercises 2015/16**

Approval was sought to a number of planned tender exercises for goods and services during 2015/16, in accordance with Procurement Standing Orders.

In response to a Member's question, the Treasurer explained that the £1.4m expenditure was one-off in nature and related to the professional fees for architects, structural engineers and services provided by the main contractor. This amounted to ten percent of the total cost and represented a competitive price in terms of the whole project.

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Specialists were employed as the alternative would be to employ an in-house team which would not be as cost effective.

Resolved that the following tender exercises for the provision of goods and services to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority during 2015/16 be proceeded with:-

- (i) Professional Fees (Coventry Fire Station)
- (ii) Professional Fees (Aston Fire Station)

37/15 **High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Bill**

Members were informed that ‘the undertaking’ between the Authority and the Secretary of State for Transport relating to the High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill had been finalised. Members were also informed of and the timeline for review of the relocation of Fire Control by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor.

Further to approval by the Executive Committee on 2nd February 2015 (see Minute No.5/15), the undertaking had been signed by both parties and the process would now commence. The overall process would take up to four months and a further update would be provided when appropriate.

In response to a Member’s enquiry, it was confirmed that the issue of the siting of the rain water storage tank had been resolved.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the finalisation of ‘the undertaking’ between WMFRA and the Secretary of State for Transport relating to High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill be noted;
- (2) that the timeline for review of the relocation of Fire Control by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor be noted.

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38/15 **Closing Remarks**

The Chair wished everyone well in the forthcoming elections. He informed the Authority that Councillor Kath Phillips from Walsall would not return to the Authority as she was undertaking Mayoral duties. The Chair thanked Councillor Phillips for her work on the Authority.

Councillor Phillips thanked everyone for their support and stated that the Fire Authority was run by a good team and it could be assured of the support of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council in any way it could.

Councillor Clinton advised that the meeting of the Joint Consultative Panel following the Authority would be brought forward from 12.30 pm to commence at 12 noon.

(The meeting ended at 11.45 am)

<p>Contact Officer: Julie Connor Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6906</p>
