

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

24th November, 2014 at 11.00 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Edwards [Chair];
Councillor Idrees [Vice Chair];
Councillors Aston, Singh Atwal, Barlow, Clinton,
Collingswood, Davis, Eustace, Finnegan, Hogarth,
Mottram JP, Phillips JP, Quinnen, Sealey, Shackleton,
Singh, Skinner, Spence, Tranter and Young.

Apologies: Councillors Delaney, Douglas-Maul and Lines.

Observer: Mr Ager.

72/14 **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Edwards declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 78/14 below (Monitoring of Finances).

73/14 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Barlow to his first meeting of the Fire Authority.

With regard to the continuing industrial dispute, the Chief Fire Officer reported that an early day motion had been lodged in Parliament in respect of the proposed Pension Regulations. He had sent a letter to all West Midland Members of Parliament detailing the resilience arrangements of the West Midlands Fire Service and the impact on morale of personnel which the continued dispute was having. He would share this letter electronically with all members of the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer advised members of the event "Improving Lives to Save Lives" which had been hosted by Sir Michael Marmot.

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Sir Michael had praised the outstanding work of the West Midlands Fire Service and its six strategic priorities and the expansion of its prevention work. He had received good feedback from the event. The Fire Service was currently represented on four of the West Midlands Health and Wellbeing Boards and he asked appropriate members for their assistance in achieving membership of the other three.

Councillor Skinner commented that he had found the event fascinating and that he had not realised the Service's involvement with dementia awareness. Three members of staff at the Coventry Fire Station had received dementia training. He felt that even Authority members were not aware of all the areas of work which the Service was undertaking.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service's image inspired the trust and confidence of the public and that this also linked into the membership of the local authorities Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The Chair added that members should view the video of the event on the Service's web site to see the work of a modern fire service and how it could intervene in the life and wellbeing of its communities.

74/14 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September, 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

75/14 **Membership of the Authority**

The Clerk reported that notification had been received from Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council that Councillor N Barlow would replace Councillor P Harley on the Authority with effect from 27th October, 2014. The change had no impact on the various political groups on the Authority.

At the Annual meeting of the Authority on 21st July, 2014 appointments were made to various Committees and Panels, however, no substitutes had been appointed for Labour members and it was now proposed to remedy this situation.

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Resolved:-

- (1) that Councillor Barlow be appointed to replace Councillor Harley on the Appointments and Standards Committees and as a substitute member for Councillor Douglas-Maul on the Executive Committee;
- (2) that the following Labour members be appointed as substitutes as indicated on the following Committees and Panel for the remainder of the year ending with the Annual meeting in 2015:-

Appointments Committee	
Councillor	Substitute
Chair of the Authority Cllr Edwards	Cllr Tranter
Vice-Chair of the Authority Cllr Idrees	Cllr Finnegan
Cllr Clinton	Cllr Quinnen
Cllr Singh	Cllr Collingswood
Cllr Spence	Cllr Atwal
Cllr Young	Cllr Phillips

Executive Committee	
Councillor	Substitute
Chair of the Authority Cllr Edwards	Cllr Clinton
Vice-Chair of the Authority Cllr Idrees	Cllr O'Boyle
Cllr Aston	Cllr Mottram
Cllr Atwal	Cllr Singh
Cllr Finnegan	Cllr Howells
Cllr Quinnen	Cllr Clinton
Cllr Shackleton	Cllr Mottram

Scrutiny Committee	
Councillor	Substitute
Cllr Tranter (Chair))
Cllr Spence (Vice-Chair))
Cllr Collingswood) Cllr Singh (for all)
Cllr Phillips)
Cllr Young)

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Audit Committee	
Councillor	Substitute
Cllr Singh (Chair)	Cllr Atwal
Cllr Mottram (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Clinton
Cllr Aston	Cllr Shackleton
Cllr Quinnen	Cllr Tranter

Chair's Committee	
Councillor	Substitute
Chair of the Authority Cllr Edwards	Cllr Tranter
Vice-Chair of the Authority Cllr Idrees	Cllr Clinton
Cllr Spence	Cllr Finnegan

Joint Consultative Panel	
Councillor	Substitute
Cllr Clinton (Chair)	Cllr Finnegan
Cllr Howells (Vice-Chair)	Cllr O'Boyle
Cllr Collingswood	Cllr Singh
Cllr Shackleton	Cllr Aston

76/14

Annual Audit Letter 2013/14

Further to Minute No. 61/14 (Audit Findings 2013/14), the Authority received the Annual Audit Letter for 2013/2014 produced by the Authority's external auditors, Grant Thornton.

The report summarised the key findings of the external audit work undertaken for the audit year 2013/14. The audit comprised two elements:-

- The audit of financial statements.
- An assessment of the arrangements in place to enable value for money to be achieved in the use of resources.

Following the Authority meeting, the auditor issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2013/14 financial statements included in the Authority's Statement of Accounts.

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The Chair commented that the Auditors' findings were very positive, particularly in view of the savings the Authority had already made and the need to achieve further savings estimated at £5.8m (8.6%) in 2015/16, £4.4m (7%) in 2016/17 and £4.1m (7%) in 2017/18. The ability to be able to achieve these savings could affect the Authority's response times.

In response to members' questions it was advised:-

- That the Authority would need to consider from where it would fund the cost of a Council Tax referendum to increase resources if the public's response was negative;
- That the drawback to using reserves to cover funding shortfalls in any given year was that there would be no further reserves if the Authority had funding shortfalls in future years. The LGA was promoting the devolution of power to authorities to set precepts;
- The Authority did not own land at Birmingham Airport but did hold the Training Building;
- Information so far received was that the Government, in consultation with the Authority, would frame the question if a referendum were to be held
- Information to raise awareness about the Service, particularly its prevention and protection activities, would need to be made available well before any referendum took place as it was likely that there would be publicity restrictions leading up to the given date. The Clerk would inform members of what restrictions would apply.

Resolved that Annual Audit Letter 2013/14 be received.

77/14

Firefighters' Pension Schemes

The Authority received a report on the proposed response to a consultation document which had been received from the Department for Communities and Local Government entitled "Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015: Proposals for new governance arrangements".

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

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The Public Sector Pensions Act 2013 required new arrangements for governance, which included a mechanism to control future costs of pension schemes and for schemes to be more accountable to its members and taxpayers. In order to deliver this objective two new bodies were to be set up by 1st April, 2015 consisting of employer and scheme member representatives. The first board was the national Scheme Advisory Board whose primary role was to provide the Secretary of State and the Department for Communities and Local Government with advice on desirable changes to Scheme regulations.

A second local pension board was to be formed by each fire and rescue authority. These boards might be advised by the national Scheme Advisory Board and were to be set up to assist the Scheme Manager in the efficient and effective administration of the pension scheme. Additionally, the Scheme was also required to publish an employer cost cap and ensure that the Scheme design was changed if a cost cap of two percentage points higher or lower was not achieved.

Following the consultation the Government would publish a response and its final position would be implemented by an amendment to the scheme rules.

Members supported the proposed response and commented on the likely financial implications for the Authority of the establishment of the two boards and the effects of the proposals on firefighters' pensions. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that officers were to attend a pensions' workshop on 5th December, 2014 with Warwickshire Fire and Police, where independent specialist advice would be available.

Resolved that the proposed response, attached as an Appendix to the minutes, to the consultation document from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 'Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015: Proposals for new governance arrangements' be endorsed.

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78/14 Monitoring of Finances

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

In response to a member's enquiry it was confirmed that the 36 new members of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme were those recently recruited to the Service.

79/14 Minutes of the Appointments Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 27th October, 2014, were received.

The Chair and Councillor Davis formally congratulated the Chief Fire Officer on his appointment to the post.

80/14 Minutes of the Audit Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 13th October, 2014, were received.

81/14 Minutes of the Chair's Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Chair's Committee held on 13th October, 2014, were received.

82/14 Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13th October, 2014, were received.

83/14 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel

The notes of the Joint Consultative Panel held on 22nd September, 2014, were received.

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84/14 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the Policy Planning Forum held on 13th October, 2014, were received.

The incorrect spelling of Councillor Quinnen's name was noted.

85/14 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 for the following reasons:-

Minute No. 86/14 – relating to any individual;

Minute No. 87/14 - relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

86/14 Review of West Midlands Fire Service Business Safety Limited

Further to Minute No. 61/14 (Audit Findings 2013/14 – 22nd September, 2014), the Authority received a report on the recommendations of the Board of West Midlands Fire Service Business Safety Limited (the Company) to declare the Company dormant by 31st December, 2014.

The Company was established in February 2012 in order to enable the undertaking of trading and income generation activities through a wholly owned company. However, in the current economic climate and the anticipated, further reduction of Government funding, it was anticipated that the Service would need to focus on maintaining its core delivery function as opposed to income generation. It was therefore recommended that the Company be made dormant and its position reviewed should the economic situation improve or an evidenced based growth strategy materialise.

Members, whilst agreeing with the proposals, questioned whether they were prudent in a time of diminishing resources when income generation would assist the Authority's financial position. Officers advised that certain services, such as IT and training, were provided to the private sector under the current service model and that the Service actively worked with large companies through the provision of fire and safety advice. It was hoped that the use of the Company could be explored in the future, particularly with undertakings through the Social Value Act.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the West Midlands Fire Service Business Safety Limited (WMBS) company board's recommendation to implement arrangements to make WMBS a dormant company by 31st December 2014 be approved;
- (2) that the loan of £198,000 provided by the Authority to WMBS by way of a drawdown facility be written off;
- (3) that the WMBS company board recommendation that all current WMBS income generation streams be absorbed and managed within the Authority's established cost recovery framework be approved;
- (4) that the company decision to terminate the fixed term contract of the Business Development Manager by no later than 31st March 2015 be noted;
- (5) that the agency contracts of one Telesales Assistant and one Marketing Officer be terminated as soon as practicably possible, but by no later than 31st March 2015.

87/14

Planned Procurement Exercises for 2014/15

Approval was sought to a number of planned tender exercises for goods and services during 2014/15, in accordance with Procurement Standing Orders.

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In relation to a query concerning possible works to Coventry Fire Station, the Chief Fire Officer advised that this had been included as one of the partnership transformation bids which had been unsuccessful (see Minute No. 21/14 - Transformation Fund Bids). Other funding avenues were being explored and a further report was likely to be submitted to members in February, 2015.

Resolved that the following tender exercises for the provision of goods and services to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority during 2014/15 be proceeded with:-

- (i) Extension Works at Billesley Fire Station;
- (ii) Fire Ground Radios.

(Meeting ended at 12.20 pm)

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