Minutes of the Executive Committee

12 December 2016 at 1000 hours
Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)
Councillors Allcock, Aston, Barrie, Singh-Atwal, Cartwright, Mottram, Davis and P Singh

Apologies: Councillors Cartwright and Sealey

10/16 **Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 10 October 2016**

Resolved that with the addition of Councillor Aston to the list of apologies, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2016, be approved as a correct record.

11/16 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

12/16 **Future Governance Working Group Update**

Richard Bacon, Chair of the Future Governance Working Group, attended the meeting. The Group had met twice since the last Executive Committee where he had updated the Members on the progress to date.

The Working Group had been asked by the Authority to develop an options appraisal for the future governance of West Midlands Fire Service and make recommendations to the February 2017 Authority meeting.

It was explained that the Police and Crime Bill sets out the duty for collaboration and efficient and effective working. It

also enabled the Police and Crime Commissioner to put forward a business case for Police and Fire collaboration which extends to a Police and Crime Commissioner taking on the future governance of Fire and Rescue Services. The Working Group looked at the areas for collaboration first of all and how efficiency and effectiveness could be achieved. There had been full involvement from representatives of the Home Office, Combined Authority and Emergency Services and the Chief Executive from Solihull MBC had also attended two meetings. The focus of the first meetings was improved outcomes for the people of the West Midlands.

The Group then went on to look at the four possible Governance options:

Combination of Regional Fire Authorities
Combined Authority & Mayor
Police and Crime Commissioner/Fire Merger
A reformed Fire Authority

A presentation had been received from a senior representative of each option on the legislative and structural considerations of each governance options as well as how they would deliver future governance. The Working Group had been pleased with the quality of thought and analysis provided in the presentations.

Whilst the final assessment and conclusions of the working group are scheduled for the 13th January 2017, the following

<u>Combination of Regional Fire Authorities</u>

The Working Group were in no doubt that this option could provide significant value for money but felt there was little appetite for this option. An opinion shared by Home Office Ministers. The disadvantages of this option were the boundaries and shape of the West Midlands region and the different service delivery models.

Combined Authority and Mayor

The Working Group noted the fixed dates of the Combined Authority and the Mayoral elections would be taking place in May 2017. Mayoral candidates had begun to talk about their campaigns and how they would lead the Combined Authority.

The PCC term will last until 2020 and this may or may not be a factor to be considered. However, the Metropolitan District Councils are Constituent members and the Fire Service and many other councils are Non-Constituent members which is good for collaboration. Currently, Health is not part of the Combined Authority but with the Mayor this may change and there are links to be made but this maybe some way off.

Police and Crime Commissioner/Fire Merger

It was felt that this could be bought about fairly quickly and the Home Office have been made aware of the nine business cases around the country where the PCC wishes to provide governance for the Fire Service. It isn't known how this will engender better collaboration with Authorities and the Health Service and would not be as easy in the West Midlands, but the option is still there.

It was noted that the PCC Governance structure is new and the Combined Authority governance structure is still forming and there are many questions and issues to be resolved. The Group were unaware of any hard evidence on how PCC governance would be more or less effective than other forms governance.

Reformed Fire Authority

It was noted that there was a lot taking place nationally and the Authority has always focussed on value for money, despite the potential for future changes in governance.

The Chair of the Working Group thanked the Clerk and the team for contributing excellently to the work of the Group and for their research in preparing detailed information about future governance options.

The Working Group had carried out a really useful exercise that had focussed their minds on the current position, identifying the governance options and what services and collaboration the Fire Service could deliver in the future. The focus had been on efficiency and effectiveness, as well as operational excellence. The group wanted to preserve this for the future and didn't want to dilute the current excellent service provided to the communities of the West Midlands.

Local accountability and the ability of Members to impact on holding the Service to account and scrutinise decisions was important.

It was noted that Brandon Lewis, MP, the Home Office Minister had made a speech recently where he had set out an expectation for PCCs through the PCCs Association to use the power they have been given through legislation and there was some momentum behind this.

The Working Group had looked objectively at this and felt that the Fire Authority saw its future with the Combined Authority and the Mayor going forward to support the best delivery of services for the future.

The Working Group would be looking at the options in January 2017 to help the Authority shape the way forward. The outcomes would need to be taken into account in any future business cases.

In respect of the Fire/Fire collaboration option, other fire and rescue services appear cautious about deeper collaboration or combination. It may become a more realistic option in the future as budgets come under further pressure. All services would want to avoid any degradation of services to the public.

Any outline business case would need to include options in terms of value for money and inter-operability and more details would be required.

In response to a Member's enquiry about attendance standards, the CFO explained that the Integrated Risk Management Plan provides evidential proof of survivability and that the 5 minute attendance standard to high risk incidents make a difference to survivability, but this is considered in the light of financial constraints.

It was noted that London Fire Brigade and Manchester Fire and Rescue Service are the nearest comparators to the West Midlands and both will be governed under Mayoral arrangements, signalling that change and/reform were inevitable and not optional.

It was noted that both Hampshire and Cleveland Fire and Rescue Services had reformed the size of their Fire Authorities and eight fire services in Scotland had been merged into one national service.

A report on the future Governance of the Fire Authority would be prepared for the meeting of the Fire Authority scheduled for the 20 February.

The Chair of the Group, Richard Bacon, stated that he had worked with local government for a number of years at a strategic level and he felt that the Fire Service's link back to the people of the West Midlands is the best example he has seen. There were threats to the future of Fire Authority, but he felt that the Authority should continue to collaborate with other services and to look afresh at how these continue to improve in the future, following the approval of the Report and in the months that follow.

The Chair thanked Richard for his work and his commitment to the Working Group.

The meeting concluded at 1030.

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