

Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

31st March, 2008 at 10.55 am
at Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: **Members of the Authority**

Councillors Alden, S Davis, Douglas-Maul,
Eustace, Foster, Howard, Hussain, Idrees,
Mulhall, Ryder, Spence, Stevenson, Tagger,
Turner, Ward, Wild and Wilkes;
Messrs Bagley and Topliss.

Officers: **West Midlands Fire Service**

Chief Fire Officer – Frank Sheehan;
Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Vij Randeniya;
Assistant Chief Officers – Alan Brandon, John Brown
and Martin Clark;
Bob Deeks and Mike Griffiths.

Clerk to the Authority

Neeraj Sharma, Stephnie Hancock and Georgina
Wythes.

Apologies: Councillors Birbeck, G Davies, Gazey, Hinton and
Jackson.

9/08 **Regional Control Centre**

Mr Philip Purssey, Director of the West Midlands Regional Fire Control Centre, gave a presentation on progress of the project.

Mr Purssey had been appointed in December 2007 and had taken up his post in February 2008. This was the fourth year of operation of the national project to replace the 46 existing fire control centres with nine regional centres.

Each region had established a project board which worked with the Department of Communities and Local Government [CLG] National Project Team to deliver the project at regional level. CLG was funding the project until regional centres were handed over.

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The West Midlands Control Centre building was now complete and ready for handover, and the Local Authority Controlled Company [LACC] that would run the Centre had been established. The aim was to have the centre ready for operation by October 2009 although the official cut over date for the region was January 2010.

The information software to be used by the Centre needed to be installed and ready for testing by June 2009. The potential for problems in implementing such infrastructure was recognised and robust testing of the system would take place well before the Centre became operational.

Considerable work also needed to be done with regard to staffing arrangements. There had been good partnership working through the Regional Management Board project groups on staffing models. Appointments to the senior management team for the Control Centre were underway. A communication strategy was also being prepared and staff from the five constituent authorities had visited the Centre.

Mr Purssey emphasised that the Control Centre would benefit from state of the art technology but would not merely be a call centre and that the expertise of control room staff was essential to its operation.

He also outlined the risks that had been identified for the success of the project.

Members noted that when the Centre was handed over to the region, under the current agreement this Authority would have to meet 48% of the costs of operation although the five constituent fire authorities had one vote each on the LACC that would run the Centre. The governance arrangements reflected the current governance arrangements of the West Midlands Regional Management Board and were subject to review after an initial three year period. The Chief Fire Officer indicated that he would be investigating governance models in other regions, and this matter would be brought forward for discussion at a future Policy Planning Forum.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the risks identified for the project could also impact on the Authority, and considerable work had been done on mitigating these risks.

Members asked if the control centre management would be learning from the experience of other comparable projects. Assurances were given that this work was already in hand.

Concerns were expressed about the shelf life of the technology to be

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installed at the control centre and who would be responsible for upgrading the system. Members were informed that the software upgrade should be regarded as an integral part of the project and that the matters that had been raised needed to be addressed, perhaps at the national project level.

Members expressed various concerns about the robustness of the proposed staffing arrangements and it was agreed that Mr Purssey would report back to the Policy Planning Forum in two months time with regard to progress on human resources issues. It was noted that there were complex TUPE issues that would need to be worked through taking into account the law and the relevant workforce.

(Meeting ended at 11.50 am)

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