

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

04 October 2021 at 1100 hours

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via
Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Brackenridge (Chair),
Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair),
Councillor Barrie, Councillor Barlow, Councillor Dehar,
Councillor Hogarth, Councillor Spence, Councillor Padda and
Councillor Young

Virtual: Councillor Ferguson, Councillor Locke, Councillor Miller,
Councillor Miks, Councillor Singh and Councillor Walsh

Mr Wasim Ali (Representative of the Police and Crime
Commissioner)

Professor S Brake, co-opted member – health

Mike Ager – Independent Member (Audit and Risk)

Maurice Carter (Unison) and Steve Price Hunt (Fire
Brigade's Union)

34/21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Richard Merker, Fire Officers'
Association.

35/21 Declarations of Interest

The Chair declared a personal non-pecuniary interest item in item
8, 9 and 10 as per the agenda, due to being a member of the
Firefighters Pension Scheme(s).

36/21 Chairs Announcements

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting of the full Fire Authority.

The Chair advised that Councillor Neil Eustace, a former member and Vice-Chair of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA), has sadly passed away at the age of 65. Councillor Eustace was elected to WMFRA in July 2004 and served for just under 14 years until his retirement in June 2018. He participated across a wide variety of committees during his time.

The funeral took place on 20 September at St Edburgha's Church in Yardley and the family asked for donations to be made to The Salvation Army or Marie Curie, so Members may wish to consider this in Councillor Eustace's Memory.

Our thoughts and condolences go to his family and friends at this very difficult time and to all those who knew him and worked alongside him. A minute silence was held.

The Fire Authority would continue to use a hybrid approach to meetings and committee's where this is a decision-making forum. PPF and JCP can continue take place digitally as these are not decision-making forums. This would be reviewed every 30 days.

Praise was given on the successful implementation of the first phase of Oracle. This had been the result of significant commitment of a number of members of staff across the Service, led by Prakash (Kash) Singh.

37/21 Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

The CFO advised that Councillor Hogarth's 80th Birthday had taken place, a few days prior to the meeting, and wished him a belated Happy Birthday on behalf of the service. A Happy 60th Birthday message on behalf of the service was also given to Mike Griffiths, Treasurer to the Authority.

Best wishes were extended to Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM who had been newly appointed as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Kirsty Tuffin, Democratic Services Officer, was introduced and welcomed by the CFO on behalf of the Service.

HMICFRS would be reviewing the Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTA) and issuing a letter that would be shared with the Authority, once received. Both CFO and Mike Griffiths had also extended their membership for a further year on the Metropolitan Joint Council.

Praise was given to the three West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) teams that participated in this year's National Breathing Apparatus Challenge. Out of 20 teams, 2 of the WMFS teams finished first and second in the challenge, displaying both skills and great knowledge. In the individual awards, Firefighters from WMFS came first place in the Best Entry Control Officer and Best Fireground Operative. A huge congratulations and thanks were given to those who participated.

Following the excitement of the Commonwealth Games, hosted in Birmingham in 2022, the WMFS would be hosting the UK Rescue Organisation's 2022 Festival of Rescue. This is a great opportunity to showcase WMFS as a service at the heart of our communities, whilst demonstrating how we make the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier. Tyne & Wear recently hosted the 2021 event in Newcastle that had great political involvement and encouraged Members to be involved as much as possible.

38/21 **Minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority 21 June 2021**

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 21 June 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

39/21 **Community Risk Management Plan Objectives**

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, provided an overview of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Objectives Report that outlined the progress made with the development and delivery of the strategic CRMP objectives through the WMFS 3-year rolling strategy.

Karen Gowreesunker advised the Authority that following the Authority's approval on the CRMP proposals in February 2021, and further updates in August and September 2021, the Strategic Enabling Team (SET) had developed each proposal into the following 5 objectives:

1. Survivability
2. Review of our approach to responding to Automatic Fire Alarms
3. Establishing a blended approach to the use of our fleet, incorporating reviewing our approach to responding to road traffic collisions and secondary fires
4. Emerging risks
5. Reducing health inequalities

These objectives had been incorporated using the principles outlined within the report and focused on how WMFS would continue to evolve and improve its services to communities. Alternative options to support the delivery of the CRMP objectives had been considered however, some were not aligned to the principles, as per the report, and it had been agreed that these were not viable or desirable options.

Representatives from the Fire Brigade's Union, re-assured Members that the trade unions and WMFS were working and engaging with one another on the CRMP work. The CFO echoed this and advised that all engagements with stakeholders and trade unions on this work had been/would be, conducted in line with the services policies and excel this expectation.

Resolved:

1. That the progress of the evidence-based Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) objectives as a key platform for the delivery of the 3-year rolling Strategy, be noted.

40/21 **Decision taken under ‘Matters of Urgency’ – Retention of Retired Employees**

The CFO advised Members that the amendments made to the policy had incorporated key actions that WMFS had already been conducting. These changes provided the ability to take into consideration the skill set etc, of an individual. These changes are going through the internal consultation process. Both the Chair of the Authority and Leader of the main opposition had been consulted prior to being implemented.

Resolved:

1. That the decision taken and approved under ‘Matters of Urgency’, whereby the new Retention Policy be adopted, be noted.

41/21 **Audit Findings Report 2020-2021**

Mike Griffiths, Treasurer to the Authority, provided an overview of the Audit Findings 2020-2021 Report submitted by Grant Thornton. The report outlined the key messages arising from the external audit work undertaken during the year.

Mike Griffiths advised the Authority that although a substantial amount of the audit had been completed and no audit adjustments had arisen from the audit work so far, the report was not finalised for reasons outlined in Appendix 1 of the report. It was anticipated that the Auditors Annual Report would be issued by 31 December 2021, as a result of the value for money work being in-complete. It was anticipated that the final report would be presented back to the Fire Authority at a later date.

Resolved:

1. That the contents of the Audit Findings Report be noted.

42/21 **Statement of Accounts 2020-2021**

Mike Griffiths provided an overview of the Statement of Accounts 2020-2021 report that provided the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2021.

Mike Griffiths advised the Authority that the draft Statement of Accounts had been taken to the Audit and Risk Committee in July 2021, where a thorough review of the accounts took place. Minor changes were made, and the final Statement of Accounts were approved by the Audit and Risk Committee on 27 September 2021.

The Authority were advised that there had been an increase in both general reserves and earmarked reserves for the 2020-2021 financial year. There had been an increase of £0.015m for general reserves and an increase of £6.780m for earmarked reserves, which included Government funding for Covid-19 and business rates relief grants. The long-term liabilities of the services pension position were also highlighted.

No long-term borrowing was undertaken during 2020-2021. The Authority had a total long term borrowing of £33.7m at the end of the 2019-2020 which had decreased to £31.5m at the end of 2020-2021. This position was expected to improve further during 2021-2022 as no long-term borrowing was anticipated. Members were re-assured that the value of the services long-term assets, partially funded by loans, had a value of £135.2m.

Resolved:

1. That the Statement of Accounts for 2020-2021, as set out in Appendix A, be noted.
2. That the statement of Accounts summary for 2020-2021, set out in appendix B, be noted.

43/21 **Monitoring of Finances**

Mike Griffiths presented the Monitoring of Finances report that outlined the monitoring of the Authorities finances for the current

financial year up to August 2021, for the revenue budget and the Capital Programme.

Mike Griffiths advised the Authority that the revenue budgeted to the end of August 2021 had been compared to the actual figure as per appendix A of the report. The actual spend of the Authority up to August 2021 had been £42.597m compared to the projected budget of £42.825m therefore a favourable variance of £228K was shown.

The Authority were advised that the monitoring statement included the 1.5% pay award for Grey Book Staff, implemented in July 2021. No pay award for Green Book Staff was reflected within the report and if/when approved, would need to be considered in the budget.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee wished to thank members of the committee, the internal and external auditors, and all officers including all members of the WMFS finance team for their continued contributions and support.

Resolved:

1. That the contents of the Monitoring of Finances report, be noted.

44/21 Contracts Awards Summary for Period to 30 September

Mike Griffiths presented the Contract Awards Summary for the period to 30 September. The report summarised the contracts in excess of £250,000 that had been awarded since April 2021.

The Committee were advised that as agreed by the Authority, the 6-month summary report of the tender contract awards had been submitted to the Authority for information purposes. The total spend for each contract was also included in the report as per appendix 1.

Resolved:

1. That the attached appendix summarising the contracts in excess of £250,000 that have been awarded since April 2021, be noted.

45/21 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 07 June 2021

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 7 June 2021 were received.

46/21 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 19 July 2021

Mike Griffiths advised the Authority that following the Chief Fire Officer's recommendation, a revised report had been submitted to Audit and Risk Committee, held on 27 September 2021, to reverse the decision, as per item 25/21 of the minutes, that in line with the legal advice received, the Scheme Administrator continued to apply guidance issued by the Home Office in August 2020 and subsequently updated in June 2021.

The Authority were advised that following the decision in July 2021 to implement the Home Office Guidance, the Chief Fire Officer had recommended the reversion of this decision as the guidance would result in members who have had a contributions holiday being treated differently to other members that fall within the Immediate Detriment category. This could result in the view aligned to the Equality Act that they are receiving less favourable treatment. Other Fire Authorities/Pension Boards were processing contribution holiday scheme members as immediate detriment cases and not further delaying the outcome of remedy.

Steven Price Hunt, Fire Brigade's Union, thanked the Audit and Risk Committee for making the Immediate Detriment decision, as they believed it could have been discriminatory towards members.

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 19 July were received.

47/21 Minutes of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee held on 12 July 2021

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee held on 12 July 2021 were received.

48/21 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 paragraph 3 of the Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 for the reasons stated below:

Included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

49/21 Planned Procurement Exercise for 2021-2022

Mike Griffiths presented a planned procurement report for 2021-2022 that outlined the planned tender exercises and planned routes to market/funding provision as per Procurement Policy 1/8.

Mike Griffiths advised the Authority that in line with the Authority's procurement procedure, all planned procurement exercises over the value of £250k were outlined as per the appendices attached to the report.

[Email correspondence had been circulated by the Clerk to Members providing information on the supply of fire alarms and fuel, with an update report scheduled to be taken to the Policy Planning Forum on 18 October. Mike and his team were corresponding with the suppliers for WMFS fire alarms and talks were underway with other existing suppliers to help mitigate any impact to the WMFS. Members were re-assured that WMFS had been well positioned in light of the fuel crisis.

Following discussions of food banks and referrals for vulnerable people, the Chair recommended that Members visit their fire

stations who would be able to advise on how the Members could assist them and feedback to their Councils. It was agreed that dates would be circulated to Members for them to participate in site visits.

Resolved:

1. That the following tender exercises for the provision of various works, goods and services to West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority during 2021-2022, be approved:
 - A. Doors and Windows
 - B. Energy
 - C. BA Radios

2. That it be agreed that dates be circulated to Members for them to participate in site visits.

The meeting ended at 12.09 hours.

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