

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

23rd April 2007, at 11.00 a.m.
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Hinton (Chair);
Councillor Hogarth (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Alden, Bowen, G Davies, S Davis,
Eustace, Foster, Gazey, Howard, Hussain, Idrees,
Jackson, Jones, Rogers, Ross, Ryder, Singh,
Spence, Stevenson, Tagger and Ward.
Mr Topliss.

Apologies: Councillors Birbeck, Douglas-Maul and Mulhall.

16/07 Chair's Announcements

Members noted that this was the last meeting of the municipal year. Members thanked the Chair for the efficient way in which he had conducted the business of the Authority and wished him well in the forthcoming municipal elections. In return, the Chair thanked members for their support.

Members also noted this would be Councillor Rogers' last Authority meeting as he was not standing for re-election. Members thanked him for his contribution to the work of the Fire Authority and wished him well for the future.

17/07 Member Attendance at Conferences, Seminars and Visits

The Authority considered a report setting out new arrangements for authorising attendance at conferences, seminars and visits.

To streamline the process it was proposed that in future, a schedule of conferences, seminars and visits for the forthcoming year would be submitted annually to the Authority for approval.

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It was proposed that approval be given in principle for attendance by nominated members at three conferences per year, and to make provision also for the approval of attendance by members at other ad hoc events, subject to the necessary budgetary provision being available. For the purposes of an audit trail the Clerk would authorise attendance at each individual event.

Notification had been received that the Local Government Association Annual Conference and Exhibition 'People and Places' was being held at the ICC in Birmingham from 3rd to 5th July 2007. The conference would focus on the practical ways in which local government can improve people's lives, and featured a number of high profile speakers. As this was a local venue and a good opportunity to raise the profile of the Authority, it was proposed that attendance at this conference in 2007 be approved, in addition to the three conferences normally attended.

Approval had previously been given for members to undertake one fire station visit per quarter. It was proposed to increase this to up to two visits per quarter. As previously agreed, members would be required to submit monitoring information to the Authority's Public Relations Office following each visit.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the new arrangements for authorising attendance at conferences, seminars and visits be approved;
- (2) that the events for 2007/08, as set out in the appendix now submitted, be approved for the purpose of the payment of travel and subsistence allowances and conference fees (where appropriate), subject to the necessary budgetary provision being available;
- (3) that, in addition to the schedule of events now submitted, approval be given for the Chair and Vice-Chair (or their nominees) to attend the Local Government Association Annual Conference and

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Exhibition 'People and Places' to be held at the ICC in Birmingham from 3rd to 5th July 2007.

18/07 Annual Audit Inspection Letter

The Authority noted its Annual Audit and Inspection letter, which confirmed that the Authority had retained its 'Good' status.

During the last year the Authority had been subjected to three different types of Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission, the Department for Communities and Local Government and external auditors, KPMG. The three assessments included the Use of Resources judgment, a Service Assessment including an assessment of performance against Best Value Performance Indicators and a Direction of Travel assessment, which again included an element of value for money, but measured progress since the initial CPA assessment, when the Authority had been rated as a 'Good' performer.

19/07 Partnership Funding - Coventry

The Authority noted the receipt of funding of £20,000 from New Deal for Communities and £2,000 from Coventry Youth Offending Team to support two projects in Coventry and was asked to approve the acceptance of further funding to support two additional projects.

Coventry City Council had proposed funding of £25,000 to provide a Community Advocate to give fire and safety advice to hard to influence communities within the City. The funding would be supplemented from the Fire Prevention Grant to provide the post for two years.

Coventry Community Safety Partnership had proposed funding of £41,000 to second a Watch Manager to a position of full time Youth Worker. The post would be based in Coventry and would support the expansion of youth work as part of the FIRE project

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run by the Young Firefighter's Association (YFA) and deliver a number of programmes related to anti-social behaviour and youth inclusion activities.

The funding would supplement existing resources and support the Authority in delivering its corporate objectives.

Resolved:-

- (1) that approval be given to accept funding of £25,000 from Coventry City Council to support the provision of an additional Community Advocate to be based in Coventry;
- (2) that approval be given to accept funding of £41,000 from Coventry Community Safety Partnership for the provision of a Youth Worker to be based in Coventry.

20/07 Fire Control and Fire Link Project Update

The Authority noted a report outlining the background to the Department for Communities for Local Government's (CLG) decision to revise the timescales for the implementation of the Regional Control Centres (RCCs).

Having recently signed the contract for infrastructure services for the National Firecontrol project, CLG had now provided clarity on the national position for the planned roll out of Firecontrol and Firelink and the proposed dates for installation of the necessary equipment. The planned cut over date for West Midlands was now March 2010 and Firelink installations for the Brigade were due to commence during August 2007 and be completed by September 2008.

CLG had acknowledged that the period of operation for interim Firelink communications solutions would now vary from 25 to up to 46 months up to the point of cut over, which was far longer than originally anticipated. In view of this, CLG had agreed to take responsibility for and meet the costs of any appropriate enhancements to the interim solutions.

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A Task Force had been established by CLG to work with FRSs to understand which option would provide the most appropriate interim solution to meet their specific operational needs and requirements. The Brigade had advised the National Firelink Project Team that it was unhappy with the interim proposals and had requested an early meeting to resolve the issue.

In view of the extended timescales for the planned cut over to the RCC, it was necessary to undertake a further risk assessment to determine the necessary measures to ensure that the Brigade could maintain a resilient command and control system for a period of at least 4 years. The outcomes of this risk assessment would be reported in due course, identifying any consequent budget pressures.

21/07 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2007 be confirmed as a correct record.

22/07 Minutes of the Executive Committee

The minutes of the meetings held on 5th March and 2nd April 2007 were received.

23/07 Minutes of the Standards Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2007 were received.

24/07 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the meetings held on 5th March and 2nd April 2007 were received.

(Meeting ended at 11.44 am)

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