

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

5th December, 2005, at 11.00 a.m.
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Hinton (Chair);
Councillor Hogarth (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Birbeck, Bowen, G Davies, S Davis,
Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Foster, Howard, Hussain,
Idrees, Jackson, Jones, Lawrence, Matchet, Pitt,
Rogers, Ryder, Singh, Tagger, Underhill, Wallace
and Ward;
Mr Topliss.

Apologies: Councillors Mulhall, Ross and Stevenson.

61/05 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported that a number of Members had visited the Houses of Parliament on 9th November, 2005. The Chair and Vice-Chair had also attended the Fire Conference in Manchester from 1st to 3rd November, 2005.

Notification had been received from Wolverhampton City Council that Councillor Jevon had resigned from the Authority, and that Councillor Joan Stevenson had been appointed to replace him with immediate effect.

Members' visits to Fire Stations were to commence in January 2006, at a rate of two visits per week in the first instance.

Members were also invited to attend the annual Fire Service Carol Concert at St Martins in the Bull Ring Centre on 11th December, 2005 at 5.30 pm.

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62/05 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September, 2005 be confirmed as a correct record.

63/05 **Annual External Audit Letter 2004/05**

The Authority received the annual external audit letter for 2004/05 submitted by the Authority's external auditors, KPMG. Representatives of KPMG attended the meeting and addressed the Authority.

The Authority noted the contents of the annual audit letter including the summary of recommendations and action plan, and the follow-up report on the recommendations from last year's external audit.

64/05 **Statutory Audit of the Best Value Performance Plan**

The Authority noted the report of the external auditors, KPMG, on the Authority's Best Value Performance Plan for 2005/06. No areas of concern had been raised.

65/05 **Home Fire Safety Checks – Home Approach Policy**

Further to Minute No. 7/05 of the Appeals Committee, a revised policy for approaching residents in their own homes to offer a home fire safety check was submitted for consideration.

The Brigade needed to engage with high-risk groups within the community to achieve its targets for reducing deaths and injuries from fire, and the number of fires in the home each year. This was to be achieved by visiting high-risk groups in their homes and offering to undertake free home fire safety checks. A policy for 'doorstep calling' had been produced to make the initial approach, but the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had registered a trade dispute on the basis that firefighters

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were being asked to carry out 'cold calling'. The Appeals Committee had heard the dispute and had rejected the doorstep calling policy, suggesting alternative methods of carrying out this work with a review after six months.

A review had been carried out which indicated that it had not been possible to meet targets set for home fire safety checks under the arrangements suggested by the Appeals Committee. This had impacted on Best Value Performance Indicators and take-up of central government funding for home fire safety checks. Research carried out as part of the review suggested that the doorstep calling approach generated more demand for home fire safety checks than leafleting.

A Home Approach Policy had been drawn up which incorporated recommendations from the Appeals Committee to ensure that the arrangements complied with the Local Government Association guidelines on doorstep calling, whilst increasing the ability to target high risk individuals who otherwise proved hard to reach.

Resolved that the Home Approach Policy be approved for consultation with the representative bodies.

66/05 **Monitoring of Finances**

The Authority received a report on the monitoring of finances during 2005/06.

The Treasurer reported that there was a projected overspend on the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. The regulations governing the pension scheme would be changed with effect from 1st April 2006.

The financial effects of the recent strike action by the Fire Brigades Union were yet to be quantified, and further reports would need to be submitted on this matter in due course.

Preparation was also underway for the 2006/07 budget process.

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67/05 **Letter to the Authority from UNISON**

The Authority noted a letter from UNISON reporting on activities of the branch since it was provided with the facility of a full-time official in May 2003. The official had been working in partnership with management, delivering a better service to its members and in raising the profile of the West Midlands Fire Service through regional and national activity. The letter indicated that the progress made by the branch would not have been possible without the funding provided by the Authority and thanked Members for their support.

68/05 **Action of a Matter of Urgency – Regional Fire Control**

The Authority noted action taken by the Chief Fire Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, in approving on behalf of the Authority a response from the West Midlands Regional Management Board to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) with regard to the governance of Regional Fire Control Centres. The ODPM had indicated its wish to proceed with the local authority company model of governance for these centres. The response indicated that the Board looked forward to working with the ODPM to bring the project to fruition, whilst stressing that meaningful consultation and a full debate was now needed on the detail of the proposals.

69/05 **Action on a Matter of Urgency – Disposal of Beds and Bedding**

The Authority noted action taken by the Chief Fire Officer, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, in approving arrangements for the disposal of redundant beds and bedding to the Lions Children's Hospital in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Unfortunately these arrangements had subsequently fallen through, but at least 100 beds had been sent to Bangladesh. The remaining surplus stock had been dealt with through the Government's Disposal Services Agency.

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70/05 **Institution of Legal Proceedings**

The Authority was informed that, after consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, legal proceedings had been instituted against a number of companies for failure to comply with the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (as amended), and against one further company for failure to comply with Section 73(3) of the Public Health Act, 1961.

71/05 **West Midlands Regional Management Board**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th October, 2005 were submitted.

Resolved that the acts, proceedings and recommendations of the West Midlands Regional Management Board, as set out in the minutes, be approved and adopted.

72/05 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meetings held on 24th October, 7th and 14th November 2005, were received.

Resolved that with reference to Minute No. 73/05 (Constitution of the Joint Consultative Panel) the following members be appointed to serve on the Joint Consultative Panel for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2006:

Councillor Underhill [Principal Member]	<u>Substitute Member</u> Vacancy
Councillor Ward [Deputy Principal Member]	Councillor S Davis
Councillor Douglas-Maul	Councillor Matchet
Councillor Rogers	Councillor Foster
Councillor Jones	Councillor Jackson

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Vacancy

Vacancy

73/05 **Notes of the Policy Planning Forum**

The notes of the meetings held on 24th October and 14th November 2005 were received.

74/05 **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 Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 relating to negotiations or consultation on labour relations matters and disclosure would be likely to prejudice those negotiations.

75/05 **Agreement to resolve the trade dispute regarding the consequential issues arising from the Technical Advisory Panel over the introduction of a new duty system and shift pattern**

The Authority noted a report setting out the offer made to the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) on 21st November, 2005 to resolve the trade dispute over the three consequential issues arising from the Technical Advisory Panel over the introduction of a new duty system and shift pattern for firefighters. As part of the offer a joint review of the current duty system and shift pattern would be undertaken for completion by 31st March 2006 and implementation as soon as possible thereafter. A previous offer made on 12th November, 2005 would have the status of an interim agreement. The financial implications of the interim agreement were reported.

The FBU were recommending acceptance of the offer in balloting its members and planned strikes had been cancelled. The results of the ballot would be announced on 16th December, 2005.

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The financial implications of strike cover already provided were not yet clear, but these costs would have to be met from the Authority's balances. Further reports on the trade dispute, including the cost of the industrial action taken to date, would be submitted in due course.

(Meeting ended at 12.02 pm)

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