

<b>Notes of the Policy Planning Forum</b>
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**26 March 2018 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

**Present:** Members of the Authority  
Councillor Edwards (Chair)  
Councillor Idrees (Vice Chair)  
Councillors Allcock, Aston, Atwal Singh, Barlow, Barrie,  
Booth, Brackenridge, Clinton, Craddock, Davis,  
Douglas-Maul, Eustace, Hogarth, Male, Miks, Mottram,  
Sealey, P Singh, T Singh, Spence, Tranter, Walsh, and  
Williams  
Mr Ager

**Officers:** West Midlands Fire Service  
Chief Fire Officer (P Loach)  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales)  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor)  
B Brook, J Campbell, J Connor, M Hamilton-Russell, P  
Fellows, M Pym, P Shergill, N Spencer, S Timmington,  
M Ward-White, S Warnes

**Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

K Gowreesunker (Clerk)  
S Sahota (Monitoring Officer)  
M Griffiths (Treasurer)

**Apologies:** Councillors Cartwright and Young

**Observers:** Nil

**5/18 Chair and CFO Announcements**

Cllr John Edwards, Chair of WMFRA, welcomed all attendees to the Policy Planning Forum.

All Members and officers present congratulated Cllr Clinton on her becoming the next Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

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Cllr John Edwards wished all Members well who were standing for election.

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, advised Members that the new recruitment drive was proving positive, with the percentage of females and people from Black, Minority and Ethnic backgrounds being at a level which was becoming increasingly representative of the population of the West Midlands, for example, the number of females equated to 40% over the last three recruitment processes.

### **6/18 Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority Progress and Public Consultation Outcomes**

Mark Hamilton-Russell, Strategic Enabler Corporate Communications, delivered a presentation on the progress of the Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the public consultation outcomes:

In early 2017, members commissioned and were part of the Future Governance Working Group which was formed with a view to provide options on future governance models and enable an evidence based decision to be made, alongside the results of the public consultation on the integrated risk management plan. The Mayoral WMCA model was put forward as the recommended option. The option was put forward to the WMCA in March 2017 and in September 2017 the WMCA agreed that a governance review be undertaken and a Scheme prepared.

The WMCA carried out a public consultation on the governance proposals from 11 January to 8 March 2018. It was based on the Scheme and consisted of five key areas:

- Proposed governance
- Role of the Mayoral Fire Advisory Committee
- The Chief Fire Officer to be accountable to the Mayor
- Lead to a more joined up and focused service
- Meets the Secretary of State's key tests

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The first three areas were regarding the proposed changes. The latter two areas were statutory requirements in line with government guidelines.

The public consultation was led by the WMCA and supported by the seven Local Authorities. As part of the consultation, an animation was created to describe the issues that the consultation was concerned with, including one in an audio format to assist people with visual impairments. The public consultation was promoted using social media and press releases. Each of the questions were in the same format with tick box answers (strongly agree/agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree/strongly disagree, don't know), plus a free text box to allow further information to be added.

1161 responses were received in total. Answers were broken down as per the table below:

	Strongly Agree/Agree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Disagree/Disagree		Don't Know	
Consultation Questions	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%
1. Proposed Governance Arrangements	529	47	102	9	468	42	30	3
2. Role of Fire Advisory Committee	667	59	73	6	369	33	17	2
3. Chief Fire Officer to be accountable to the Mayor	604	54	96	9	397	36	22	2
4. Lead to a more joined up and focused service	477	42	141	13	473	42	36	3
5. Meets the Secretary of State's Key Tests	440	39	171	15	467	42	50	4

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A more detailed analysis of the questions was presented which showed the outcomes aligned to the consultation questions, (questions 1-3) supported the proposals contained in the scheme, and that the statutory tests questions (5 - 6) demonstrated a potential lack of understanding in how the proposals would support local improvement.

The next stage would be for the outcomes of the public consultation to be considered by the constituent councils (during March / April).

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The public consultation exercise cost approximately £16000, a cost borne by the WMCA.
- It was a statutory requirement for the public consultation to be held.
- Analysis of respondents indicated 53% were from public sector, 47% non-public sector?
- Letters received from interested parties indicating support for or against the proposals would be included within the report which would be submitted to the Secretary of State, and made public in the process.
- The report to the Secretary of State would be submitted to the Authority in April for Members to note.

### **7/18 Delivering against The Plan 2017/20**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, delivered a presentation on the strategic priorities:

- Response

Response had not just been maintained but had been improved over recent years by streamlining and evolving the Service Delivery Model (SDM). Getting to incidents as soon as possible was the cornerstone of everything the Service did.

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Underpinned by independent academic research, it was known that it took on average 19 minutes 22 seconds from a fire beginning, developing and then being discovered, through to the arrival of the fire service. There was a five minute section in the cycle which represented the mobilisation and travel time of the fire service. The Seconds Do Count approach adopted by the Service enabled marginal gains to be made in reducing this time.

When PI 1 The Risk Based Attendance Standard was reintroduced, the average response time to category one incidents was 5 minutes 2 seconds. It had now been reduced to 4 minutes 44 seconds. It was a small change that would save lives and property, as well as making it safer for firefighters by arriving at an incident earlier.

Response times were broken down further into call handling, reaction times and travel time to enable rigorous monitoring. The breakdown of the response times was made publicly available allowing transparency and openness.

The delivery of falls response had not had any impact upon response times, which had continued to reduce during the same period.

Call handling targets were originally set at 90% of calls handled within 90 seconds. This had been re-examined and the target had been reduced to 80 seconds with the introduction a sub performance indicator (PI1a). Performance was currently 77 seconds.

The Service was exploring other ways to achieve improvements such as the use of technology to assist Fire Control. The Service was working with private and public sector partners including the Automobile Association (the AA) to identify potential solutions. The Service was intending to implement a pre-alert system for use by Fire Control which it was hoped would save up to 30 seconds in terms of mobilisation times.

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The Service had developed a new staffing model which was a key part of the Efficiency Plan. The Service operated at an optimum crewing level ensuring that the staff numbers were fully utilised. As a result, the ridership factor had reduced from 15.1 to 12.9. There remained further efficiencies to be made although the ridership factor was affected by factors such as training and leave.

Integrated resilience continued to support fleet availability and competences. Fleet availability had remained consistently above 99%.

A disturbance allowance continued to be paid to staff when undertaking a voluntary additional shift. However, this payment was unfunded and negotiations with the representative bodies to reach a local agreement continued.

- Prevention

A working group of the Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the Service's approach to partnerships. This had resulted in work carried out to tighten up on the Service's approach and procedures with a key outcome that all partnerships were to be aligned to the Service's strategy. A subsequent internal audit undertaken by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council had resulted in positive feedback.

The Chief Fire Officer had been offered a position on the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Wellbeing Board which had been delegated to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. The position provided a good opportunity for the Service to influence and support, particularly as the devolution of health would be held by the board.

All commissioned activities were aligned to The Plan. The most vulnerable people often have underlying health issues, which is why helping vulnerable people was a core part of The Plan. Commissioned activities such as falls response also represented the positive spend of the public pound and were a key component of the Efficiency Plan.

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Falls response had provided an opportunity for non-uniformed staff to upskill and not just support the work but to undertake it. This had allowed flexibility and the Service continued to engage with the representative bodies.

- Protection

Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report of Building Regulations and Fire Safety had been published and contained a number of key recommendations. These included the need to ensure the competency of fire safety professionals, that people undertaking Regulatory Reform Order work require a certain level of knowledge, and that people undertaking fire risk assessments may require a qualification to do this. Additionally, it is recommended that fire risk assessments must be completed on an annual basis or when changes occur, and that the local Fire and Rescue Service must be informed. It was noted that the Service was unsure what level of demand this would create but that it would be monitored. In terms of qualifications and fire safety professionals having sufficient levels of knowledge to undertake RRO work, all Fire Safety officers within the Service are skilled to and sit a level 4 national diploma. The integration of prevention, protection and response work had also resulted in firefighters' upskilled in terms of fire safety knowledge and awareness.

The local response since the Grenfell Tower incident had resulted in 27 buildings being identified as at risk, with four failing the Midlands Building Research Establishment tests and managed quickly.

Fire and Rescue Services were responsible for gathering risk information, known as Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) visits. To date, 551 high rise SSRIs had been conducted. High rise inspections, carried out under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO), provided more focus on the fire safety element and were conducted by local authorities with the support of Fire and Rescue Services (to date 389 of 551 high risk inspections had been completed). The two approaches satisfied fire safety and firefighter safety, and provided assurance to the public.

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The 'stronger' element in the Service's vision of 'Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier' reflected the protection work with businesses. The Service supported business communities by working to achieve a 6.3% reduction in accidental non-domestic fires, and an 8% reduction in unwanted fire signals. Additionally, when an incident did occur, the Service was in a position to provide a weight to the response, reducing the extent of damage and disruption caused to a business, via a swift response, assertive firefighting, and salvage procedures.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- Although the number of automatic fire alarms continued to decrease via processes such as call challenge, the number of such incidents continued to be significant. The introduction of the Business Support Vehicles staffed by qualified Fire Safety Officers had resulted in a positive impact upon the number of repeat incidents at premises.
- High rise SSRIs and inspections were important for both the public and firefighters, for example, a fire door would allow a member of the public to exit a building rapidly but could also be used when tackling a fire in a high rise building.

### **8/18 The Plan 2018/21**

Mark Hamilton-Russell, Strategic Enabler Corporate Communications, delivered a presentation on The Plan 2018/21:

The Plan 2018/21 would be published in April. The Plan had previously been published in paper format and then a more web based format with videos. A mixed approach had been taken this year combining video, text and graphics.

The Plan was demonstrated to Members, highlighting that:



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- The Plan was a key part of the WMFS website and easy to find
- A downloadable version would be available including a version in audio format
- The web based version allowed the ability to change The Plan to reflect changes to the rolling three year strategy

The following points were raised in answer to Members' questions:

- The launch of The Plan was incorporated within the Communication Strategy, with The Plan communicated in different ways to different groups, for example using social media to target specific groups (consumer insight).

### **9/18 Update on negotiations**

Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, provided an update to Members on the negotiations between the Service and the representative bodies.

As a result of the update and in answer to members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The Service continued to remain in negotiations with the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) regarding a wider local agreement but not one involving falls response.
- The Service continued to be in negotiations with Unison and the Fire Officers' Association on arrangements.
- There was no proposal for the Service to impose anything on staff. Proposals were voluntary as are the arrangements for Voluntary Additional Shifts. There would not be any compulsory requirement for existing members of staff to undertake new arrangements.
- The Service was confident that there would be sufficient numbers of volunteers to undertake the new arrangements based on current demand levels.

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- Bespoke training was provided to all members of staff who would undertake falls response work. It was compulsory for volunteers to undertake the training.
- A Falls Improvement Group had been set up which reviewed the service and identified areas for improvement.
- No additional pay had been awarded when falls response had formed part of the national trials because the service utilised existing skills. A pay award had been offered as part of the latest offer.
- Collective bargaining meant the Service had to reach agreement with the representative bodies and then go to the workforce. It was important to maintain the balance and communications continued.

The meeting closed at 12:07  
hours.

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