

## Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

**2nd February, 2015 at 10.30 am  
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**

**Present: Members of the Authority**  
Councillor Edwards (Chair);  
Councillor Idrees (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Atwal Singh, Barlow, Clinton,  
Collingswood, Davis, Douglas-Maul, Eustace,  
Hogarth, O'Boyle, Phillips JP, Quinnen, Shackleton,  
Singh, Skinner, Spence and Tranter;  
Mr Ager.

**Officers: West Midlands Fire Service**  
Chief Fire Officer (Phil Loach);  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (P Hales);  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (G Taylor);  
J Connor, M Griffiths, N Griffiths, Mark Hamilton-Russell,  
P Shergill and S Warne.

**Clerk and Monitoring Officer**  
N Sharma,  
R Jones.

**Apologies:** Councillors Aston, Finnegan, Mottram JP; Sealey and Young.

### 3/15 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair expressed the sympathy and condolences of members to Councillors Douglas-Maul and Mottram JP who had recently lost their wives.

The Chief Fire Officer also offered his and officers' condolences to Councillors Douglas-Maul and Mottram on their sad losses.

## **Policy Planning Forum 2nd February, 2015**

He asked members to note that the new officers who were attending the Forum were members of the Strategic Enabling Team (SET).

The Chief Fire Officer commented that the Forum today was in keeping for the time of year when budgets were being formalised. It had been a year of stability; achieving further efficiencies whilst maintaining response times. The engagement briefing was encouraging - staff were to use media and social media in particular to tell Our Story to the community. He reminded members that officers would be more than willing to assist them to engage with their communities to this end.

### **4/15 Budget Update**

Further to Note No. 23/14 (15 December, 2014) (Budget 2015/16), the Strategic Enabler, Finance and Resources gave an update of the 2015/16 budget position.

He had reported the Authority's budget position to the West Midlands Leaders meeting on 18 December, 2014 at which three themes had been recognised:-

- Budget savings achievements
- Budget deficit position in future years
- The need for further shared discussions on the issue of a referendum

The 2015/16 grant announcement of £61, 943,000 was received later than anticipated on 18 December 2014 and was slightly worse than predicted being £370,000 less. This was a reduction of £6.2m from 2014/15. The National Resilience Grant which supported the work of operatives was also being reduced by around £105,000. The 2015/16 Council Tax Base would be slightly higher as there were an additional 15,000 properties within the West Midlands area.

Unless another fire and rescue service reduced its precept, the Authority would still have the lowest precept in the country.

The provisional budget forecast for the next three years, based on a grant reduction of 8% per annum, a council Tax increase of 2% each year and the maintenance of the current service delivery model showed deficits of £3.5m in 2016/17, £7m in 2017/18 and £10.3 in 2018/19.

## **Policy Planning Forum 2nd February, 2015**

Capital Programme commitments were reported. Last year's capital bids were unsuccessful so there would be no capital grant awarded for 2015/16 or 2016/17. Resources had, however, been committed from the budget for the next three years so there would be no deficit until 2018/19. Members had previously been told of the investment required for Aston and Coventry fire stations and were advised of the additional considerations for Wednesbury fire station. In order to invest in our assets £9m had been earmarked for this purpose, which would need to be supplemented by savings achieved during 2014/15. Proposals for Aston and Coventry fire stations would be considered at the next meeting of the Authority on 16 February, 2015.

In response to questions and statements members were advised:-

- Income generation was not a major funding source for the Service but something would be included in the budget report against this heading;
- The reduction of grant resources would have a tipping point, however, the calculation of a trigger for a possible referendum depended on several factors – the next presentation would give members further insight into this. Officers were looking to achieve £3.5m in efficiencies by 2016/17;
- The West Midlands Leaders' meeting had listened with interest to the Authority's budget proposals and in particular the possible holding of a future referendum was left very much as an option;
- By 2016/17 the resources breakdown for the Authority would be approximately 40% Council Tax, 10% rates and 50% Government grant. Discussions regarding the disappearance of Government grant to be replaced by locally set funding would be a long term issue.
- The Service was efficient - it had the lowest precept for Band D Council Tax properties even though this was set against the highest risk criteria in the country outside London;
- 2017/18 would be a crucial year for the Authority's finances.

### **5/15 Efficiency Saving Options for 2016/17**

Members received a presentation from Neil Griffiths, Operations Commander for the Black Country South, on staffing options for the Service which were being considered in order to achieve efficiency savings.

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## Policy Planning Forum 2nd February, 2015

His Team had spoken to more than 400 members of staff (over one third of the workforce) and also held on-line and other conversational forums.

There were several options which had been looked at

- Align Core and Lates
- Extend Cluster Crewing
- Recalibration of the Staff to Crew Ratio (S2CR) for each watch
- Combine watches
- 24 hour – “Kelly” Shift System
- Low Risk Flexible Crewing (LRFC)
- Technical Rescue Unit (TRU)

For each option there was an overview and recommendation and comments on how the proposals would affect the performance, trust and finance measures through which the Service operated.

The options of Extend Cluster Crewing, 24 hour – “Kelly” Shift System and Low Risk Flexible Crewing (LRFC) were not recommended for acceptance. From the remaining options the following recommendations were made:-

- (1) Trial a reduction in S2CR (watch strength) but maintain the colour watches;
- (2) Trial an approach that combined the watches (self-rostering);
- (3) Commence negotiations for the removal of 7.5% additional pay for the lates shift;
- (4) Adopt a principle based approach around a local staffing framework.

The recommended timeframes for implementation of the proposals were:

Combine core and lates	April – June 2015
Select trial stations	April – December 2015
Staggered implementation of new staffing models	January – December 2016

## **Policy Planning Forum 2nd February, 2015**

The following responses were made to a member's questions and enquiries:-

- Employees would not be vulnerable to disciplinary action whilst self-rostering trials took place. There would be an operational framework and core guidelines in place.
- The 2/2/4 system involved officers working 2 days from 8.00am to 6.00pm, 2 days from 6.00pm to 8.00am and 4 rota days off.
- The Fire Brigades Union had been consulted on the proposals.
- Watch Commanders could be in charge of more than one location as those watches without a Watch Commander had a Crew Commander within their team.
- Safety procedures would be effectively maintained.
- These proposals were to be trialed and a further more detailed report would be made to the Authority in April 2015.

### **6/15 Advice to Members on Purdah**

At the request of the Chair, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer outlined the implications on the business of the Authority during the period between a Notice of Election being issued and the date of that Election (Purdah). She explained that during this period the Authority must not use its resources to organise business or events which could be regarded as political in nature. It could hold meetings and deal with business as long as the issues discussed were not regarded as political in nature. This was particularly so for members who were standing as a candidate or as an agent for a candidate during this time.

(Meeting ended at 11.45 am)

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