

Minutes

27th January, 2006 at 11.00 a.m.
at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters

Present:

- Representing Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority**
Councillors Bean and G Davis;
- Representing Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority**
Councillors Eade, Hartin and Morgan;
- Representing Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority**
Councillors Banks, Bloomer and D Davis;
- Representing Warwickshire County Council**
Councillor Haynes;
- Representing West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority**
Councillors Eustace, Hinton (Chair) and Hogarth.

Advisors:

Chief Fire Officer Brown (Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service)
Chief Fire Officer Doig (Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Hayden (Hereford and Worcester Fire and
Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Sheehan (West Midlands Fire Service).
Chief Fire Officer Taylor (Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service).

L Bateman (Treasurer);
T Maione and S Hammond-Jones (representing the Legal Adviser);
N Summers (Clerk);
S Worrall (Programme Manager).

Observers: Councillor Christina Jebb; Peter Dartford and Alan Rotchell.

Visitors: Jean Cole (Regional Business Change Manager, Government Office West
Midlands);
Andrew Brodie (Fire Control Project Leader, Office of the Deputy Prime
Minister);
James Kemp (FireControl, Policy Lead Office of the Deputy Prime
Minister);
Mike Reed (Head of Resilience Policy Division, Office of the Deputy Prime
Minister);
Alan Streets New Dimension (Programme Manager, Office of the Deputy
Prime Minister).

Apologies: Councillors Hobbs, Jones and Shilton;
Chris Juckes, John Gregory and Catherine Witham

1/06 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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The Chair on behalf of the Board congratulated Chief Fire Officer Doig on the award of a CBE in the New Year's Honours List.

He also announced that the next meeting of Regional Management Board Chairs was to be held at the Local Government Association in London on Tuesday, 31st January 2006. Councillor Haynes would be attending on behalf of the Board.

2/06 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th October, 2005, be confirmed as a correct record.

3/06 **Meeting of the Programme Board**

The Board approved the notes of the meeting of the Programme Board held on 9th January, 2006.

Members congratulated Senior Responsible Owners and Project Leaders on the presentations made to the Programme Board by the seven Thematic Project Boards (Minute No. 8/06). The presentations demonstrated the substantial progress made in the themes to date and the success of the structure adopted by the region, and provided a benchmark to move forward from. Members also felt that the decision to reduce the number of themes to seven had given more focus to the programme.

Reference was also made to the success of the first stakeholder forum held on 28th October 2005 and it was hoped that this was the precursor to a stable relationship with representative bodies within the region and further dialogue along the same lines.

4/06 **End of Tranche Review 5**

The Programme Manager submitted the End of Tranche Review report for the three months ending 31st December, 2006. The report demonstrated continuing and measurable progress in the regional modernisation programme.

A successful rationalisation of project activity had been undertaken, with 22 project boards being reduced to seven thematic project boards covering the main areas identified in the National Framework. Training had been provided for senior responsible owners, lead officers, business change managers and project managers in their responsibilities under the revised programme. The WMRMB website was also now fully functional. As well as planned activity as defined in the programme plan, the region had also been successful in securing £24,000 through the Capacity Building Programme to support the development of a regional operational quality assurance methodology, which would facilitate the implementation of the national operational assurance toolkit within this region.

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The Chair emphasised the challenging nature of the agenda facing the Regional Management Board, and the pressures this placed on elected members whose responsibility it was to deliver the programme. Jean Cole of Government Office West Midlands informed the Board that further initiatives were expected to be rolled out from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the next six months, and that the Board may need to prioritise its programme further, particularly with regard to the human resources workstream.

Concerns were again expressed about the pressures placed on Fire Authorities by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process whilst maintaining services and delivering regional initiatives, and the uncertainty around the content of future CPA regimes which were likely to be subject to the 'harder test' and additional assessments. Jean Cole confirmed that she had reported the concerns expressed at the last Programme Board meeting in this regard to a recent meeting of Business Change Managers.

The Board noted progress to date within the programme, and asked the Programme Manager to pass details of the review on to constituent Fire Authorities.

5/06

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Consultation – Draft National Framework 2006/08

The Programme Manager submitted for consideration a proposed response to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) consultation on the Draft National Framework 2006/08. The closing date for responses was 10th February, 2006.

The Board considered the proposed response, and congratulated the Programme Manager on clearly identifying where there were changes from previous frameworks. The content of the response highlighted concerns that there was a lack of clarity from the ODPM on where changes were proposed to the framework, and that there was no linkage with the FRSD Milestone Map.

Chief Fire Officers noted that the work that had been carried out on the response had assisted them in drawing up their individual authorities responses to the consultation, and asked that these efficiencies be recorded.

Resolved that the proposed response be approved for submission to the ODPM.

6/06

Finance Review for the period ending 30th November 2005

The Treasurer submitted an update on expenditure to date against the approved budget allocation for 2005/06, and time spent on individual projects to date.

The Health and Safety Project Team had requested financial support of £8,056

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towards the production of regional health and safety material. This request was supported by the Treasurers' Group and the Programme Board and could be funded from the Regional Programme Office budget for 2005/06.

The Board noted the financial report.

Resolved that the allocation of £8,056 from the Regional Programme Office budget to fund the production of regional health and safety material be approved.

7/06

Correspondence relating to the Regional Management Board

The Clerk reported that a letter had been received from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) indicating that all regions except Yorkshire and Humberside were prepared to accept in principle the local authority company as the governance model for regional Fire Control Centres. Legal advisers were already examining draft company articles and a memorandum of association circulated by the ODPM, and a further report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Programme Board to be held on 21st March 2006. It was anticipated that issues around Fire Control would be discussed at the forthcoming Regional Chairs' meeting at the Local Government Association. Any decisions made by the Regional Management Board would have to be referred to the constituent Fire Authorities for ratification.

8/06

WMRMB Meetings Planner 2006

The Board noted the scheduled dates, times and venues for WMRMB meetings for the remainder of 2006.

9/06

Presentation - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Mike Reed, Head of Resilience Policy Division at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister gave a presentation to the Board.

He set out the broad responsibilities of his department with regard to resilience. He then outlined current progress with the New Dimension Programme, FireLink and FireControl. His department had recently been reorganised to bring those branches dealing with Fire matters and Resilience together.

Mr Reed then answered questions from members.

Reference was made to recent collaboration by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in dealing with the incident at the Buncefield Refinery. It had been difficult to get pumps to the incident because of poor traffic management, and it was suggested that the potential difficulties caused by traffic gridlock should be taken into account in contingency planning. Mr Reed indicated that there were issues

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about how emergency services co-operate and co-ordinate, and this area was constantly being reviewed. A review of the Buncefield incident was being carried out and there would be lessons to be learned from the review.

Reference was made to this region's success in taking forward regional working, and to the fact that all constituent authorities had been awarded 'good' status in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). There were concerns that Government expected fire authorities to cope with an increasing workload without any clear information about what funding would be made available to support this. The Region now needed to drive the programme forward, but it was likely that this would impinge on the next CPA in terms of performance if there was a resource gap.

Mr Reed indicated that the ODPM met Fire Authorities' additional costs in excess of £100,000 in respect of new legislative burdens, although the scale of new burdens was a matter for negotiation between each authority and the ODPM. Any problems in this regard could be addressed to Mr Reed. Expenditure on the Fire Services was agreed through the Fire and Rescue Expenditure Group, and Mr Reed undertook to provide information on the timetable for their meetings.

Reference was made to the large number of Government initiatives currently in train where Fire and Rescue Authorities had a role to play, such as the Respect agenda and extended schools, and Mr Reed was asked if the New Burdens arrangements would cover these initiatives. Mr Reed indicated that this was unlikely if the ODPM was not directly involved in funding these areas, and advised that it was important that Fire and Rescue Authorities reflected this type of activity in their submissions to the Fire Expenditure Group.

Reference was made to the additional costs incurred by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority in attending the Buncefield incident, which it seemed were unlikely to be reimbursed through New Burdens. This support had been offered as part of the national resilience arrangements, and it was felt that the principle should be established of national funding for such incidents. Mr Reed indicated that he would await a formal approach from the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority on this matter.

Concern was also expressed that the issues around personal liability for firefighters attending terrorist incidents were still outstanding and needed to be resolved urgently. Mr Reed asked for a further letter on this matter to be sent to him.

Reference was made to Mr Reed's presentation which indicated that good progress was being made on the FireControl project. There were concerns within the region about the lack of clarity with regard to the funding arrangements for Fire Control, and in particular what financial support would be available to fire authorities to fund functions deemed outside the scope of the regional control rooms. Failure to keep to the proposed timeline for the roll out of the regional control rooms was also causing difficulties for individual fire authorities who were having to cope with unanticipated burdens and difficulties as a result of the delay.

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Fire Authorities had performed well in delivering their part of the New Dimension programme and it was felt that the Government should recognise this.

Further reference was made to a lack of coherence at regional level in resilience structures. Special arrangements applied in London which were not available in other regions. Other major cities faced similar risks to the capital, but additional resources would be required if the same sort of structures were to be adopted.

Mr Reed recognised the amount of work that Fire Authorities had put into the new programmes. He advised Fire Authorities to ensure that they completed fully the capability survey recently distributed by ODPM and identify where there were gaps in resourcing. This information would then be fed into the comprehensive spending review.

The Chair thanked Mr Reed and his colleagues for their attendance.

10/06

Date of next meeting

Friday, 28th April, 2006 at

(Meeting ended at 12.15 pm)

<p><i>Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes Democratic Services Unit Sandwell MBC 0121-569 3791</i></p>
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