

Draft Minutes

30th January, 2009, at 11.00 am
New Bucks Head Stadium, Wellington

Present: **Representing Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority**
Councillors Brigadier Jones;
Representing Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Councillors Box, Holyoak and West;
Representing Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority
Councillors D Davis and Tolley;
Representing Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Chattaway, C Davis and Hobbs;
Representing West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Councillors Howard and Jones.

Advisors:
Chief Fire Officer Brown (Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Chief Fire Officer Dartford (Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service);
Deputy Chief Fire Officer Phillips (Hereford and Worcester Fire and
Rescue Service);
Acting Chief Fire Officer Randeniya (West Midlands Fire Service);
Chief Fire Officer Taylor (Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service).

Lynda Bateman (Treasurer);
Sue Phelps (Clerk) and Georgina Wythes;
Steve Worrall (Programme Manager).

Visitors: Philip Purssey, ACFO Christine Walker and D Walton.

Apologies: Councillors Bean, Bloomer, Hinton and Udall.

1/09 **Declarations of Interest in Contracts and other matters**

Councillors Box and Chattaway declared a personal interest in Minute No 11/09 below (National Framework: Common/Specialist Services Review) in that they are both IDEA peer assessors.

2/09 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Vijith Randeniya to his first meeting as Acting Chief Fire Officer for the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chair reported that Chief Fire Officer Brown was retiring imminently and that this would be his last Regional Management Board meeting. The Chair, members and officers thanked Mr Brown for his major contribution to the work of the Regional Management Board and wished him all the best in his retirement.

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3/09 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th July, 2008, be confirmed as a correct record.

4/09 **Notes of the Programme Board**

The Board considered the notes of the meeting of the Programme Board held on 23rd October, 2008.

Resolved that the recommendations of the Programme Board as set out in the notes be approved.

5/09 **Audit Commission Report – ‘Rising to the Challenge’**

The Board considered a report indicating that the Audit Commission had published a report concerning the Fire and Rescue Service entitled ‘Rising to the Challenge’ which made reference to Regional Management Boards. The Board considered a summary of the Audit Commission’s observations and recommendations and its conclusion that:

‘Fire services can also become more efficient and more effective by building on existing collaboration with one another and with other local agencies. There are good examples of fire services working together. But such collaboration is not systematic within the fire service, and national and regional initiatives have not encouraged it. RMBs in particular need to be refocused or abolished.’

The Chair indicated that he had attended the regular meeting of Regional Management Board Chairs organised by the Local Government Association and held on 28th January, 2009, where the Audit Commission report had been discussed. Opinion had been divided on whether regional management boards should continue.

Members discussed what had been achieved by the West Midlands Regional Management Board and quoted examples of excellent practice. It was acknowledged that there were probably other areas where regional working could be employed. It was noted that regional collaboration could occur outside a formal structure, and that this RMB already had a legacy of informal regional groups. Regional collaboration had taken place successfully on a voluntary basis through the previous Regional Fire Forum. It was suggested that collaboration could be driven by Chief Fire Officers at service delivery level. Some authorities were also collaborating with other Fire and Rescue Services outside the region.

It was noted, however, that RMBs were embedded in the Fire Service National Framework as a mandatory activity.

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Resolved that arrangements be made for Chairs and Chief Fire Officers to meet informally to discuss this matter further and to report back to the next meeting of the Programme Board on proposals for a way forward.

6/09

Progress Report – Resources and Development Project

Christine Walker presented a progress report on the activities of the Resources and Development Project Board. The project had looked at the potential for regional or sub-regional personnel, human resources and training and development functions; raising awareness of the retained duty system; and development of a common approach to equality impact assessments. This workstream had already achieved many efficiency savings, but resources had been diverted to Fire Control matters which had delayed other project work.

As a result of the project there was now regional working on a number of key functional areas and regular practitioner meetings. A regional HR strategy had been developed from which an action plan was being progressed. Training and development staff were represented on functional working groups, and a co-ordinator had been appointed to roll out the regional assessment and development process. Sub-regional recruit training was taking place, and proposals were in hand for regional breathing apparatus training. Employer packs had been developed on the retained duty system (RDS), and it was hoped to roll out work carried out by Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service on an RDS national toolkit for regional implementation.

A regional equality and diversity strategy had been established, supported by a regional practitioners group, following a successful bid for capacity building funding. Three constituent authorities had achieved ESLG Level 3 in a recent assessment and staff across the region had been trained as peer assessors. A regional equality impact assessment template had also been introduced.

The project board proposed to:

- Review all regional HR strategies during 2009
- Develop a common policy framework for key HR policies
- Build HR capacity and network through joint training activities
- Develop links with representative bodies and under-represented groups for future consultation.
- Support the development and dissemination of good practice on community engagement and service delivery
- Review regional ADC processes and tools
- Develop a regional approach to in band selection processes.

In response to a question on preparation for forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessments, the Board was informed that a former project board had carried out preparatory work for previous inspections, and that this project board could be reformed if necessary to assist with forthcoming inspections.

(Councillor Chattaway declared a personal interest in this matter.)

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7/09 **Progress Report – Regional Control Centre/Local Authority Controlled Company**

Philip Purssey, the Regional Control Centre Director, reported that the timescales for roll-out of the West Midlands Regional Control Centre (RCC) had been redefined, but it was anticipated that Staffordshire would still 'go live' in October 2010, with the West Midlands calls being transferred within 30 days, and the remaining authorities fire control functions transferring within five months. The timescale was still very demanding.

The Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC) hoped to have finalised the lease of the premises by the end of March, 2009. The LACC would also be considering staffing proposals shortly.

Consultation was continuing with prospective employees on the vision and values for the organisation, and the web site had proved very popular.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) was currently consulting on Part 2 of the business case for the RCC.

Budget management for the RCC was to take place through a service level agreement with the West Midlands Fire Service, and negotiations were in hand on pension arrangements and the supply of HR systems. Work was ongoing with CLG on training, resource management and financial management.

Stakeholder meetings with elected members had proved popular.

Members thanked Mr Purssey for his report.

8/09 **WMRMB/Leonardo Visit to Helsinki, Finland**

David Walton reported on an exchange visit to Helsinki by regional officers which took place in November 2008 supported by the European Community Lifelong Learning Programme. The itinerary included visits to two Fire Services and a Regional Control Centre, as well as attendance at an Emergency Crisis Management Conference. The main objective of the visit was to evaluate Finland's emergency call handling systems and processes following their reorganisation in 2004.

Although Finland's systems were different to those operated in the UK, a number of important lessons had been learnt, including the importance of recognising regional diversity; the critical role of stakeholder engagement in delivering the project; the value of the UK 999 system as a filter; and the challenge of call handling for three emergency services in one centre.

9/09 **GOWM FRS Lead Officer Report**

Sheetal Panchmatia of Government Office West Midlands reported that she had

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been appointed to act as lead officer for three of the five West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services and had been in post for three months. She was currently mapping the involvement of the five Fire and Rescue Services in Local Area Agreements in preparation for a forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment particularly with regard to work with children and young people. She was anticipating that her role would assist in raising the profile of fire and rescue work at Government Office.

The Board was informed that this post was currently being funded by three of the constituent fire authorities. It was hoped that the profile of the fire and rescue service could be raised, and that the contribution of the service right across the social agenda could be reinforced to Government Office. It was suggested that the Board may wish to look again at regional funding of this post in due course.

10/09 **Finance Review**

The Board noted spend against the approved budget allocation for 2008/09 for the period ended 30th December, 2008. There was an underspend on both programme office expenditure and on projects, plus a contingency sum, which would be taken into account in next year's budget.

In view of the underspend the Treasurer undertook to investigate the possibility of regional funding of the Government Office Fire and Rescue Services Lead Officer and report back in due course.

11/09 **FRS National Framework 2008/11– Common/Specialist Services Review**

The Programme Manager reported that the FRS National Framework required Regional Management Boards to undertake a review to establish any further areas of efficiency that could be achieved through collaborative working and sharing functions at regional or sub-regional level. A review had been carried out in October 2008, including a Chief Fire Officers workshop facilitated by the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (IEWM).

The outcome of the review was that whilst some further small scale efficiencies could be achieved, the real opportunity for capacity building rested in the sharing of expertise and knowledge, and it was recommended that a Regional Improvement Group be established, led and co-ordinated by an Improvement Manager who would be appointed for a period of 12 months. The IEWM had indicated that a grant of £175,000 could be made available to finance this post at Area Manager (A) level and to meet the cost of assessor training and accommodation and subsistence costs for peer assessors. It was anticipated that each constituent fire authority would make available three or four members of staff to form the Regional Improvement Group, at their own cost; and that three reviews would be carried out during 2009, each lasting two to three days.

There was a discussion about the salary range to be applied to the post of Improvement Manager. It was suggested that this should be subject to job evaluation.

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It was also suggested that these proposals could assist the national assessment process and provide a useful cross check of self assessments. It was important to be consistent with the IDEA assessment process.

Resolved that subject to the availability of grant aid from the IEWM:

- (1) the formation of a Regional Improvement Group comprising appropriately trained lay assessors and improvement experts be approved;
- (2) an Improvement Manager to lead and manage the peer review teams be appointed for a fixed term of 12 months and that the salary grade for the post be established through job evaluation;
- (3) that a quarterly report be submitted on progress on this project.

12/09 **Schedule of Meetings 2008/09**

The Clerk submitted a proposed schedule of meetings for 2009/10.

Resolved that subject to any changes arising out of the discussions referred to in Minute No 5/09 above, meetings be held as follows in 2009/10:

Meeting	Date and time [all Thursdays]	Venue
Programme Board	23 rd April 2009 10.30 am [already approved]	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service
Regional Management Board	23 rd July 2009 11 am Annual Meeting	tba
Programme Board	22 nd October 2009 10.30 am	tba
Regional Management Board	21 st January 2010 11 am	tba
Programme Board	22 nd April 2010 10.30 am	tba

13/09 **Date of next Meeting**

23rd July, 2009 – Annual Meeting [Host:tba]

(Meeting ended at 12.27 pm)

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