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**Report to**  
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

6<sup>th</sup> April 2011

**Report of**  
Deputy Lord Mayor - Councillor Keiran Mulhall

**Title**  
Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority  
2010/2011

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### **1 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report, together with its appendix (which has been prepared at my request by the West Midlands Fire Service), sets out details of the work of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority over the preceding twelve months and the details of attendances at meetings by the City Council's representatives.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee notes the vital role that the West Midlands Fire Service plays in providing responsive fire, rescue and emergency services and preventative fire safety advice to the Citizens of Coventry.
- 2.2 In view of this vital role, the City Council is requested to continue to appoint three elected member representatives to the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority in 2011-12.

### **3 Information on Work of Outside Body**

- 3.1 The key duty of the Fire Service is to provide emergency cover and to ensure that the number of deaths and injuries from fire and accidents across the West Midlands are reduced, with an ultimate target of zero.
- 3.2 The City of Coventry has four Fire Stations (Binley, Canley, Coventry (Radford Road), and Foleshill), providing a total of seven fire appliances and one aerial ladder. Fire Control is located at the new HQ in Birmingham. In the event of a major incident within the City, Fire Control can call on these resources and also those from across the region, including specialist units to assist. There are reciprocal arrangements for cover with neighbouring fire authorities, and a strong link exists with the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service. In total the Brigade

employs 1,886 full-time uniformed staff, 68 control room staff and 564 non-uniformed staff.

- 3.3 The West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority is a joint board set up by the seven local authorities within the West Midlands Region, including Coventry. Coventry City Council has three representatives on the Board in 2010-11, who are Councillor Walsh, Councillor Foster and myself, as lead member.
- 3.4 I consider that the West Midlands Fire Service is well organised and it has been praised by the Government, with two of its previous Chief Fire Officers having been appointed as Chief Fire Officers to the Government.

#### **4 Benefits to the City Council of the Appointment**

4.1 The Fire Authority is one of the Councils key partners in providing a range of vital services to the region and it also plays a key part in responding to any civil emergency and civil emergency planning within the City. As members of the Authority, the City's three representatives play a key role in shaping policy and are able to influence the provision of fire and safety services to the Citizens of Coventry.

4.2 The Fire Authority is funded by local authority precept and government grant.

#### **5 Attendance Record and Remuneration for the Appointment**

5.1 In the period 2010-11 to date, I have attended a total of 10 out of the 11 Fire Authority meetings that have been held (including the Authority's Principal Officers' Staffing Committee and Planning Forums). Of the 11 meetings of the Fire Authority and related meetings held during this period, Councillor Foster has attended 10 and Councillor Khan has attended two out 5, having been elected in mid-term.

5.2 Members of the Authority receive a £3,500 basic allowance per annum.

List of background papers

Proper officer:

Author: Telephone 024 7683 1039  
Councillor Keiran Mulhall  
(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors:

Colin Swann, Senior Civic Administrative Officer, Customer and Workforce Services Directorate - Telephone: 024 7683 3048

Papers open to Public Inspection

**Description of paper**

**Location CH60**

Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

**COUNCILLOR KEIRAN MULHALL**  
**LEAD MEMBER ON THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**  
**FOR COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL**

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

1. **Annual General Meeting – June 2010**

At the Annual General Meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority, held in June 2010, Councillor Keiran Mulhall, was nominated as the Lead Member for the Council on the Fire Authority. Councillor Mulhall also sits on the Principal Officers' Staffing Committee and attends the Policy Planning Forums. He has attended 10 of the 11 meetings of all types held so far this municipal year. The Authority also welcomed back onto the Fire and Rescue Authority, Councillor Kevin Foster and for the first time Councillor Seamus Walsh from this Council.

2. **International Search and Rescue Team**

West Midlands Fire Service personnel, who are members of the United Kingdom International Search and Rescue Team, provided humanitarian assistance following the earthquake in Haiti. After several days intensive searching in hazardous and unpleasant conditions they saved the life of a young girl who had been trapped beneath the rubble of a collapsed building. Several other acts of humanitarian assistance were rendered. They subsequently attended a reception at Downing Street on 5 February 2010 where their support and achievements in helping the people of Haiti were acknowledged.

3. **Budget and Precept 2010/2011**

The Authority set a budget of circa £119m, with a precept increase of 1.99%, resulting in a Council Tax charge at Band D of £47.83; the lowest charge of all Fire and Rescue Authorities.

#### 4. **Annual Audit Letter and Organisational Assessment**

The Authority had been given a 'Performs Well' rating for its organisational performance. It was noted that the Authority had performed credibly against a new and more demanding assessment. Members noted a number of key successes, including:

- Providing good value for money.
- A good track record of operating within budget.
- Improved service performance whilst delivering efficiencies.
- Promoting and demonstrating the values of good governance.
- The West Midlands is becoming safer from fire.
- Being well prepared to respond to emergencies.

The Committee was informed that as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Framework, all public services in England were subject to an annual Organisational Assessment (OA) by the Audit Commission.

The OA determined how well the Service has delivered against its priorities and objectives contained in the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework. It also assessed how effective the Service was at delivering its prevention, protection and response functions. The OA encompassed three separate assessments:

- Managing Performance
- Use of Resources
- Operational Assurance

The scores arising from the assessment process were as follows:

- Use of Resources – 3 out of 4
- Managing Performance – 3 out of 4
- Organisational Assessment – 3 out of 4

Overall, the Authority performed well.

Since then of course the CAA regime has ceased.

5. **Fire Appliance Attendance Times**

The Committee noted the performance of the Service against its targets for fire appliance attendance times at emergency incidents for the financial year 2009/10.

The Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan stated that the Brigade would aim to achieve an average attendance time of 5 minutes for the first fire appliance to all emergency calls and an average attendance time of 7 minutes for the second appliance, where mobilised. Attendance times for the Targeted Response Vehicles (TRV) introduced to the Service in 2009 to deal with low risk, outdoor fires had been set at 20 minutes to reflect the low level risk attached to such calls and to enable the TRV to respond across a wide area.

During 2009/10 the Service had improved its performance on the previous year, with an average attendance time of 5 minutes 29 seconds for the first appliance and 7 minutes 2 seconds for the second appliance, in response to emergency calls.

At least part of the improvement in attendance times was attributed to the updated Command and Control facility established at the new Headquarters. The sustained improvement by the Service was in contrast to the national picture where attendance times overall were increasing.

6. **Comprehensive Spending Review 20 October 2010**

The Government announced, as part of its Spending Review, that over the four year period commencing 2011/12, the reduction to formula grant, (which, in terms of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority, makes up roughly 66% of the overall funding) will be 25%. Reductions for Fire and Rescue Authorities are weighted to the second half of the spending review period, so that Fire and Rescue Authorities have time to prepare.

In the first year the formula grant reduction that will face Fire and Rescue Authorities collectively will be in single figures (in percentage terms), with the larger proportion of the cuts falling to years three and four.

The Government identified seven areas where potential savings could be achieved:

- Flexible staffing arrangements
- Improved sickness management
- Pay restraint and recruitment freezes
- Shared services/back office functions
- Improved procurement
- Sharing Chief Officers and other senior staff
- Voluntary amalgamations between Fire and Rescue Authorities

The effect of a 25% reduction in grant on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority over the four years would be a reduction in base budget of 17% or £20.2m, reducing the budget from £119m to £98.8m. Because the Authority sets the lowest precept and by a ratio of 2 to 1 the funding comes from Government Grant rather than Council Tax precept, this will have a disproportionately adverse effect on the funds available.

The Service has been preparing for the outcomes of the Spending Review for 18 months and has undertaken a major review of all aspects of the Service and is proposing:

- Working through the wealth of ideas from staff, trade unions and the public from the engagement and scrutiny stage.
- Testing the feasibility of the ideas, drawing up a list of options and commissioning further work.
- Continuing consultation with staff, public, trade unions and Members.

Practical options being considered include:

- Reducing back office expenditure.
- Change staffing arrangements on specialist appliances.
- Additional shift patterns.
- Change to responses to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs).
- Review budget assumptions.
- Overall reduction in establishment by 2011/12.

Some savings have already been made by not recruiting to vacant posts which will provide some flexibility in future budget setting considerations.

## 7. **Budget and Precept for 2011/2012**

The Finance Settlement figures announced in December 2010 and confirmed in January 2011, reflected formula grant reductions for the WMFRA of £7.7m (9.5%) in 2011/12 and £2.5m (3.5%) in 2012/13. This meant that the reductions for WMFRA resulted in the Authority suffering the worst budget settlement of any Fire and Rescue Service nationally. There was no indication regarding what the grant formula allocations would be for 2013/14 and 2014/15. This creates uncertainty for future Service planning and also gives concern for the scale of further grant reductions. This is because the Comprehensive Spending Review indicated that grant reductions would be rear loaded for the national Fire Service and so it is anticipated that the reduction for years 3 and 4 (2013/14 and 2014/15) will be more severe than the reductions in 2011/12 and 2012/13, which could mean drastic cuts to the Service.

At its meeting on 14 February 2011, the Authority set a budget of circa £111m, a reduction compared to the previous year of £8m. Council Tax at Band D remained at £47.83 because of the application of a zero percentage to last year's figure.

## 8. **Local Initiatives and Performance**

### 8.1 **Young People**

The following initiatives have been completed:

1 Fire Intervention Reparation Education (FIRE) Programme of 15 young people have been accredited through the Open College Network

1 Migrant Group Support Services Programme of 25 young people have received Any Question Answered Accreditation; (New Communities) joint Fire Service led programmes with Voluntary Action Coventry and West Midlands Police (WMP) prevent teams

Several young people on a 1:1 intervention programme relating to fire setting and Road Traffic Collision education, referred from Coventry Youth Offending Teams

Currently underway are:

1 Migrant Group Support Services Programme of 25 young people  
AQA Accreditation (new communities) joint Fire Service led  
programmes with Voluntary Action Coventry and WMP prevent teams

## 8.2 **Schools**

### Your Choice, 'Feel the Heat'

Fire Officers have visited 28 year 8 classes for 12/13 year olds, which covered education on Arson.

### Your Choice on the Road

Fire Officers have visited 24 Year 10 classes, 14/15 year olds and 12 6<sup>th</sup> form groups which covered education in road safety.

### Sparks education

Fire Officers have visited 55 Year 5 classes ages 10/11, to give education on fire safety.

### People who help us

Fire Officers have visited 4 classes in Year 1 for 5/6 year olds, to tell them about how we help them.

### Fireworks

They have also visited 3 classes in Year 2 for 6/7 year olds, to teach about firework safety.

Other school work is an Annual Schools Quiz for 10/11 year olds, where teams compete against each other to represent Coventry into West Midlands final to win prize awards for the school.

## 8.3 **Home Safety Checks**

We target the most vulnerable within our community who, through statistical analysis, are an identified group who are most vulnerable from fire.



Since April 2010 we have proactively visited 5000 homes fitting nearly 6000 smoke alarms to provide an early warning should a fire break out.

#### 8.4 **Health**

Fire Officers have taken part in a carbon monoxide project leading on a national project as part of reducing health inequalities. This is in partnership with Coventry City Council.

One Body, One Life, is a range of family interventions to improving health awareness, held on fire stations

#### 8.5 **Vulnerable Persons' Officers**

Fire Officers have 6 fully trained officers who deal with complex multi-agency cases to enable residents to remain in their own homes safely. Since October the Fire Service have dealt with 47 cases so far.

#### 8.6 **Contact and Connect**

A multi-agency referral pathway is in place, supported by Age Concern and based at Coventry Fire Station; dealing with complex issues for the over 65s from advice on benefits, home safety and housing.

#### 8.7 **Young Firefighters' Association (YFA)**

The YFA operates from Coventry and Binley Fire Stations in the evening with well over 100 members, one of the biggest in Europe. The Service is looking to open a new one at Foleshill Fire Station specifically aimed at vulnerable young people.

#### 8.8 **Coventry Road Safety Partnership**

The Fire Service chair the group with several events taking place at the roadside. These are a multi-agency roadside stop and advise where speeding drivers are given the opportunity to accept an on the spot fine or sit through a roadside Your Choice on the Road presentation. They are also given on the spot fines if caught using mobile phones at the wheel.

## 8.9 **Stop Smoking and Alcohol**

There is a referral pathway in place to support stop smoking campaigns and alcohol awareness through Swanswell Trust.

## 8.10 **Mental Health Partnership**

There is a partnership with Coventry and Warwickshire Mental Health Teams for joint management of complex cases of those who have a history of fire setting.

## 8.11 **Fire Service Statistics**

Accidental dwelling fires has seen a slight rise on the same time last year with a 6.9% increase, 216 incidents as apposed to 202 same time last year. Our target is to reduce them by 4% but we did have a spike in December. The main causes of fire in the home are kitchen related.

Arson vehicle fires are down 2.8% to 139 incidents as apposed to 143 at the same time last year. Whilst this may be a small decrease we have protocols in place for abandoned vehicle removal and restricted zones. We have also worked with our partners to patrol hotspot areas and restrict access to potential dumping grounds

Arson rubbish is a success story in Coventry where in the past we have found it difficult to make an impact. A reduction of 8.5% from 597 to 546 incidents is due to increased partnership work with the City Wardens, rubbish clearance schemes and a campaign for wheelie bin awareness following collections.

Arson in derelict buildings has decreased by 17.5% this year 33 from 40. We work more closely with the city planning teams and enforcement officers proactively seek to secure void premises or demolition. Our most recent multi agency action has been to discuss the Grange.