



Report to
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

17th April 2013

Report of
Councillor Seamus Walsh

Title
Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
2012/2013

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 2013-14.

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 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 2012-13, who are Councillor Auluck, Councillor Foster and myself, as lead member.
- 3.3 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 2012-13 to date, I have attended a total of 5 out of the 5 Fire Authority meetings that have been held. Of the 5 meetings of the Fire Authority and related meetings held during this period, Councillor Foster has attended 5 and Councillor Khan has attended 5.
- 5.2 Members of the Authority receive a £3,500 basic allowance per annum.

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location CH60

Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

COUNCILLOR SEAMUS WALSH
LEAD MEMBER ON THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
FOR COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

1. Annual General Meeting – June 2012

At the Annual General Meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority, held in June 2012, Councillor Seamus Walsh was nominated as the Lead Member for the Council on the Fire Authority. Councillor Walsh also sits on the Appeals Committee and attends the Policy Planning Forums. He has attended 5 out of the 5 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 Malkiat Auluck from this Council.

2. Finance Settlement 2013/14 and 2014/15

Following our grant settlement for 2011-2013 when West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) received twice the average national reduction in formula grant, WMFRA lobbied the government consistently for a fairer financial settlement and as much clarity as possible about long term funding. Working with our colleagues from the Association of Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities and a cross-party group of MP's we lobbied Ministers and civil servants, securing two adjournment debates and a Select Committee hearing on fire service funding where CFO's gave evidence.

I'm pleased to report that the outcome was a "fairer" settlement for WMFRA. The Local Government Finance Settlement 2013/14 and 2014/15 was released on 19 December 2012 and it indicated that WMFRA will receive a cut of £6 million in 2013/14, (9% of grant) and £4.6million, (7.5% of grant) in 2014/15. Critically, these figures are at around the national average, and every fire and rescue authority in England is being expected to play their part, unlike the outcome of reductions in the first two years.

Nonetheless, this will mean that over the entire four years of the CSR period, WMFRA will have lost £20.8 million (26%) of grant funding, the largest reduction of any Fire and Rescue Service in the country.

I'm pleased, however, to report that WMFRA received a significant capital allocation for 2013-15 of around £11.6 million, thanks to a number of successful specific 'invest to save bids'. This money will help to fund innovative projects designed to reduce costs while protecting frontline services as much as possible.

The LGA Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and the Chief Fire Officers Association also lobbied for a cash limit on precept increases for FRA's to recognise the fact that % increases and limits have little real meaning for Authorities with small budgets like the FRA.

This was accepted and formed part of the settlement announcement on 19th December. This change provided WMFRA with the option of increasing its precept by a maximum of **£5 per year (10 pence a week)** for Band D Council Tax payers without triggering a referendum. The Fire Minister in supporting this change pointed out that it would be available only to those eight FRA's who are in the lowest quartile of Council Tax and who deliver what he described as an "exceptionally cheap" service. West Midlands FRA- which has the lowest precept of all FRA's in England- is included in this one-year exception for 2013/14.

This small additional flexibility, which WMFRA agreed on 18 February in setting its budget, will enable us to maintain our network of 38 fire stations and our target of a 5 minute response time to the highest risk life threatening incidents. It will also enable the Fire and Rescue Authority to carry out some limited fire-fighter recruitment in 2013/2014 in the face of a reduction from 1600 to 1230 fire-fighters due to a recruitment freeze that has been in place since 2010.

3. Providing an efficient and effective fire and rescue service

In order to tackle the difficult funding challenge, we continue to seek efficiencies from a number of areas, including procurement and support staff. A number of high level reviews are producing significant savings. A key priority of the Authority is to direct the highest level of resources to our core fire and rescue services of prevention, protection and response; but the front line itself has to be reshaped as the cuts in resources reduce our fire-fighter numbers and the traditional emergency vehicles we can deploy.

Brigade Response Vehicles

Brigade Response Vehicles (BRV's) will form a key part of our strategy to manage a large fall in fire-fighter numbers, as they can be crewed with three rather than the usual five or four. The Fire and Rescue Authority has now agreed the targeted deployment of BRV's during the next two years.

The impact on our fleet from cuts in Government grant and dwindling numbers of front-line staff will be significant with 'traditional' fire appliances (pump rescue ladders) reducing from the 61 currently on the run during the day down to around 38 by the end of 2015. BRV's will replace them in order to deliver the best service we can provide and maintain our response times.

New Fire Station In The Black Country

Progress on the merger of Halesowen and Cradley fire stations continues following confirmation of the site for the new fire station at the former municipal buildings location in Cradley Heath at the junction of Halesowen Road and Barrs Road. Planning permission has been obtained for a multi-bay facility that will include community rooms and integrated training and exercise facilities. It is hoped the new facility will open in April 2014. A capital allocation has been secured to fund the new station. Revenue saving from the merger and reduction to one pump will be in excess of £1 million per year.

Administration Review

This review is now completed and will see a number of posts disestablished with projected revenue savings of £520,000 per year.

Management Review

This review is also now completed and being implemented. It will produce revenue savings of £1.4 million per year.

4. Performance

West Midlands Fire Service continues to deliver significant improvements despite shrinking budgets. We are on target to see a reduction in arson in dwellings, vehicles and rubbish and have successfully driven down the number of false Automatic Fire Alarm calls for second year, thanks to the continued success of our AFA challenge policy.

It is particularly interesting to note that for the first time there have been more rescues from road traffic collisions than from fires. This reflects the changing nature of the range of incidents the Fire Service faces, with non-fire calls, such as flooding, rescues and car crashes taking up a bigger proportion of our time.

Performance Indicator	2011/12	2012/13 target	Actual YTD 2012/13 (Dec)
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	1,773	1,800	1,220
The number of injuries from accidental fires in dwellings	78	87	37
The number of arson fires in dwellings	361	376	200
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	631	607	485
The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises	273	259	123
The number of arson vehicle fires	811	771	428
The number of arson rubbish fires	4,286	4,218	2,035

Performance Indicator	2011/12	2012/13 target	Actual YTD 2012/13 (Dec)
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	3,313	TBC	2,308
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms in non-domestic premises	3,301	3,301	2,478
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms in dwellings	3,103	3,034	2,381
Number of evacuees with brigade assistance from fires (not casualties or rescues)	375	N/A	152

Other News

Alcohols Fire

On 29 November last year fire fighters tackled one of the largest and most dangerous fires of recent times. The incident at Alcohols gin distillery in Oldbury, Sandwell, involved 20 fire appliances and over 100 firefighters at its peak. The highly flammable and potentially explosive nature of the chemicals on site meant this was a very high risk incident, with crews doing a professional job to limit the damage to nearby buildings and prevent any of the large tanks from exploding.

Rescues – Fire and Road Traffic Collisions

WMFRS continues to be a busy and critical service. During the year-to-date, West Midlands fire and rescue crews have carried out 49 rescues from fires and 403 rescues from road traffic collisions across the region.

In Coventry in the last few weeks we have sadly seen one fatality and a six-pump fire which saw an infant rescued by fire crews.

Councillor Seamus Walsh
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

April 2013