



Report to
Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

16th July 2014

Report of
Councillor Seamus Walsh

Title
Report Back on the Work of Outside Bodies – West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
2013/2014

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 2014-15.

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 is 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 2013-14, 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 Council's 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 2013-14 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 3 and Councillor Auluck has attended 4.
- 5.2 Members of the Authority receive a £3,500 basic allowance per annum.

List of background papers

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Schedule of City Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

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

8th April 2014

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

1. Financial Update- Key points

- WMFRA increased precept by £5 a year (at band 'D') in current year
- Produced £3.2 million into base budget
- Enabled balanced budgets in years 2013/14 and 2014/15

- Increased precept by 1.99% for 2014/15
- Gain over 'freeze grant' - £245k in 2014/15 rising to £344k in 2017/18
- Cost to Council Tax payer (band 'D') of precept increases during 2013/2015 is 12p a week
- WMFRA still levies the lowest Band D precept of all 46 Fire and Rescue Authorities

1a. Financial forecasts for 'CSR2' 2015- 2018

WMFRA has already received a provisional grant settlement for 2015/16 which delivers a further cut of £5.84 million. The Chancellor has also indicated further public sector cuts of 14% during 2016/18.

DCLG seems determined to continue capping precept increases at 2% or less. The combination of these 'knowns' would result in deficits in the budget of WMFRA of:

- £.921 million in 2015/16
- £4.057 in 2016/17
- £7.043 in 2017/18

Members will be aware from previous reports that the Fire Authority has already produced savings of £21 million to deal with unprecedented cuts of

26% in formula grant in 2011/15. This has been achieved through recruitment freezes, reshaping our front line fire appliance fleet, reductions in administrative and management costs and through collaboration and shared services with other FRAs. During all this we have protected our front line services, our target 5-minute response time to life-threatening incidents and the vital prevention and protection activities that reduce risk in the community.

1b. Further Cuts and Referendum Option

Finding further cuts of £12 million during 2015/18 will not be possible without serious degradation of the fire and rescue service and will mean a reduction in firefighters and fire stations, a consequent increase in response times and a significant increase in risk to life, property and the local economy. It will also mean the service delivering less prevention and protection activities.

In the event of there being no change in government policy on cuts and precept capping, WMFRA will need to give serious consideration to a consultation exercise and a referendum in May 2016 in order to enable people to take a view on the quality and effectiveness of the fire and rescue service they are prepared to fund through local tax.

2. Industrial Action

Members will be aware that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has staged a number of strike periods as part of its national dispute with government about changes to pension arrangements.

Action is suspended at the current time while further negotiations take place between FBU and DCLG

Although this dispute is not with WMFRA or other employers, along with other colleagues on the LGA and NJC, we have been as constructive as possible in attempting to facilitate a solution.

3. Chief Fire Officer

Members may be aware that the previous CFO left the employment of WMFRA last November. With the current acting-CFO Phil Loach we are carrying out a further detailed review of Corporate Board and other senior managers. This will produce further significant saving and is in line with our priority of delivering a lean, accountable and cost-effective management structure at a time of severe financial pressures.

4. Firefighter Recruitment

In the current year (2013/14) and in 2014/15 WMFRA will continue to carry out limited firefighter recruitment to replace some of the 60 uniformed members of staff who leave the service every year, mainly through the normal retirement process.

This will enable us to maintain our numbers of rider-staff at 1322 which supports our operational model, keeps our minimum numbers of fire appliances on the run and our 38 stations operational.

Members will recall that we have reduced our number of pump rescue ladders, which need a crew of 5, from 61 to 41 and added 19 smaller Brigade Response Vehicles (BRVs) operated with a crew of 3.

This enables us to cope with diminished resources and fewer firefighters.

5. HS2 Impact on Fire Service HQ

The Authority has been made aware of proposals by HS2 to CPO a substantial amount of land and car parking facilities at Fire Service HQ in Vauxhall Road, Birmingham. Given the impact on the building of the CPO and future construction works it is anticipated that the Fire Authority will wish to argue that the Service is adversely affected to such a degree that the premises should be acquired in its entirety. Agents are negotiating on our behalf to protect the position of the Authority.

6. Haden Cross Community Fire Station

Building work continues on the new replacement fire station to serve communities in Cradley Heath and Halesowen on the site of the previous Municipal Building, adjacent to Haden Hill Leisure Centre. The station is now expected to be operational by summer 2014.

7. Performance

Performance information for the current year to January is below.

Worryingly the number of house fires continues to be above target in the current year.

It is however, worth noting that to January this year 295 people have been rescued from fires and assisted to safety by fire service personnel.

The service has also attended 1724 road traffic collisions and extricated 359 people who were trapped in vehicles.

This is a reflection of the work carried out by professional staff who deliver effective, efficient and assertive fire fighting and other emergency interventions.

The same crews also deliver a protection and community safety programme which has driven down fires, deaths and injuries significantly over the last 15-years.

As funding from formula grant continues to diminish along with the budgets of our partners in Local Authorities, partnership schemes to reduce emergency incidents are becoming difficult to maintain. This will inevitably lead to increases in incidents and risks to communities.

WMFRA will continue to put the case for the fire sector to the current Government, and to the people who may form the next one, in order to secure the fairer funding and greater local financial flexibility needed to continue to deliver an excellent service.

	Actual 2012/13	Target YTD 2013/14 (Jan)	Actual YTD 2013/14 (Jan)
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	1668	1341	1433
The number of injuries from accidental fires in dwellings	61	56	47
The number of arson fires in dwellings	268	285	223
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	612	531	442
The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises	166	188	139
The number of arson vehicle fires	563	661	550
The number of arson rubbish fires	2486	3043	2207
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	2876	N/A	2259
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms in non-domestic premises	3195	2732	2444
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms in dwellings	3149	2626	2880

	Actual 2012/13	Target YTD 2013/14 (Jan)	Actual YTD 2013/14 (Jan)
Number of evacuees with brigade assistance from fires (not casualties or rescues)	493	N/A	257
Number of rescues from fires (excluding casualties who are rescued)	58	N/A	38
Number of RTCs attended	2092	N/A	1724
Number of extrications from RTCs	443	N/A	359

Fire deaths in 2011/12

Accidental Dwelling Fires	18
Arson Dwelling Fires	8
Non-Dwelling Fires	2
TOTAL	28

**Councillor Seamus Walsh
Section 41 Member,
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority**

April 2014