



Report

Notes of the WMRMB Programme Board

Thursday, 23rd April, 2009, at 12 noon
West Midlands Fire Service Training Centre, Smethwick

Present:

Cllr Richard Hobbs	Warwickshire County Council
Cllr Peter Howard	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Cllr Brigadier Jones	Hereford & Worcester Combined Fire and Rescue Authority [Chair]
Bob Russell	Representing the CFO Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
Paul Hayden	CFO Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
Vij Randeniya	CFO West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service
Alan Taylor	CFO Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
Paul Fuller	CFO Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
Sue Phelps	Clerk
Steve Worrall	Programme Manager
Georgina Wythes	Sandwell MBC

Visitors

Jon Pryce and Dave Walton	Regional Operations Team
Sue Croughan and Imogen Spencer	Regional Control Centre

Action by

1/09 Apologies
Councillors Davies and West;
CFO Dartford, Lynda Bateman, Chris Jukes, Philip Purssey, and Sian Stroud.

2/09 Chair's Announcements
The Chair welcomed Paul Fuller, who was acting as Chief Fire Officer for the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service on a temporary basis, to his first meeting of the Programme Board.

He also indicated that CFO Alan Taylor would be retiring from his post at the end of June, 2009, and members and officers expressed their thanks to Mr Taylor for his service to the West Midlands Regional Management Board, and

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their best wishes for a long and happy retirement.

3/09 Minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th January, 2009, were noted.

4/09 Matters Arising

None.

5/09 Correspondence

None.

6/09 RMB-LGA Chairs' Meeting - 2nd April 2009

Members reported back on the recent meeting of RMB Chairs at the Local Government Association. The Fire Services Minister had given a presentation, and WMRMB members had challenged the Minister with regard to targets for equality and diversity and the reasons for the regional fire control initiative being confined to England.

7/09 WMRMB Chairs/Chief Fire Officers Meeting 23rd April 2009

The Chair reported that Chairs and Chief Fire Officers of constituent authorities had met immediately prior to this meeting in pursuance of Minute No 5/09 of the Regional Management Board, to consider the future of the RMB in the light of the recommendations of the Audit Commission Report 'Rising to the Challenge'. Arising out of those discussions, it was proposed to recommend that the Regional Management Board meet once per annum in future, and that Chairs and Chief Fire Officers meet three times per year as the Programme Board, which it was proposed to rename. It was also proposed to cease operation of the Programme Office.

The Clerk indicated that the Agreement setting up the WMRMB stated that the WMRMB would hold a minimum of four meetings per year, and that any changes to this arrangement would need to be agreed formally by the five constituent authorities.

It was felt that the time was right for a review of the purpose and function of the RMB, whilst recognizing that it achieved much since its inception. The focus for the future should be strategic discussion and scrutiny with a view to maximizing benefits from regional and sub-regional working and the sharing of good practice.

Resolved that the Programme Manager submit a report to the next meeting of the Regional Management Board setting out proposals for a review of the operation of the WMRMB for consideration by members.

Programme
Manager

8/09 WMRMB Thematic Project Boards – Progress Review

Representatives of the following thematic project boards submitted progress reports.

[a] Resilience Project

Bob Russell presented the report on behalf of the Resilience Thematic Project Board. The Project Board currently had two objectives: to review the effectiveness of cross border integration arrangements; and to review and support the delivery of the Regional Fire Control.

Considerable progress had been made on the first objective. A regional collaboration forum had been established, and all constituent Fire and Rescue Services had signed up to a memorandum of understanding. Regional agreement had been reached with regard to the deployment of New Dimension equipment and a training exercise strategy completed. Inter-agency liaison officers had also been identified. The benefits of this work were considerable, including shared use of resources and best practice, improved operational effectiveness, efficiency and firefighter safety, all contributing to improved service delivery to communities.

The project team were also contributed to a smooth transition to regional fire control, working with the Local Authority Controlled Company on station end mobilizing equipment, the data capture and migration toolkit, and the Firelink digital radio system.

The project team had identified a number of issues which had impacted on their progress but had a programme of forthcoming activity including regional collection of operational data and developing a process of operational response peer review.

[b] Regional Operations Memorandum of Understanding

Jon Pryce and Dave Walton gave a presentation with regard to the development of a regional operations Memorandum of Understanding. Chief Fire Officers had a high level objective to drive this initiative at a strategic level with a view to achieving practical inter-authority operability by the end of 2009. Operational leads from each Fire and

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Rescue Service had worked together on the project, and a web site had also been developed as a resource. A major element of the work had been to establish an incident command process which would allow the seamless mobilization of crews from a number of fire and rescue services at one incident. Work had also taken place with regard to inter-operability of breathing apparatus processes. Review of processes for operational assurance and new dimensions would be carried out shortly.

[c] Resources and Development Project

The report of the Resources and Development Project Board was presented. The current objectives of the Board were to look for opportunities to introduce regional or sub-regional personnel, human resources and training and development functions; to raise awareness of the benefits of the retained duty system to potential recruits and their employers; and to develop a regional Equality Impact Assessment process. This latter objective had been fully achieved and had contributed to constituent authorities achieving Levels 3 and 4 of the Local Government Equality Standards.

Regional employment law sessions had been organized which had achieved budget savings and encouraged networking. Further development of training and development was dependent on approval being given to the funding of an ADC Co-ordinator for 2009/10.

Work on promoting the retained duty system was on hold pending issue of a national toolkit but further activities were planned including regional case management training and inclusion of employment policies on the WMRMB web site.

Resolved that approval be given to funding of the post of ADC Co-ordinator for 2009/10.

ACO Christine Walker

[d] Fire Control

Sue Croughan of the West Midlands Regional Control Centre (RCC) presented a report on progress with establishing the Centre. A staffing structure had now been agreed by the LACC Board, and negotiations had been commenced with the Department of Communities and Local Government with regard to staffing costs in excess of the CLG model which were seen as crucial for operational resilience. Negotiations were continuing with CLG with regard to the lease of the building, and fit out had commenced. Regional consultation was underway on human resources issues, and negotiations were in hand with Sandwell MBC to provide HR and payroll systems.

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Reference was made to the position that would apply if CLG did not agree to meet the additional staffing costs, and the need to clarify how any potential shortfall would be funded. It was proposed to raise the issue of the staffing model at a forthcoming meeting with other LACCs in the first wave of implementation.

9/09 WMRMB Finance Update

The Programme Manager presented the finance review for the period ended 31st March 2009. There was an anticipated underspend on staffing and project work and it was likely that the budget for 2009/10 could be reduced accordingly.

Reference was made to the forthcoming retirement of the current Treasurer, Lynda Bateman.

10/09 WMRMB Regional Improvement Group

The Programme Manager reported on the activities of the Regional Improvement Group, which had been set up following the 2008 WMRMB review with the objective of capacity building through the sharing of expertise and knowledge. The Group comprised accredited peer assessors led by an Improvement Manager. The priority for the Group was the undertaking of peer reviews using the Fire and Rescue Operational Assessment Toolkit.

Training of 16 peer assessors was to take place during May 2009. At the request of some Chief Fire Officers, appointment of the Improvement Manager had been deferred. The Performance Project Board had been reconvened to co-ordinate the activities of the Group and would agree a programme of critical friend/mock peer reviews to take place in June, 2009. Summary outcomes would be presented to the Regional Management Board in July 2009 with recommendations as to a regional way forward to aid the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership had set aside a grant of £175,000 to support this initiative.

11/09 Date of next meeting

Regional Management Board – 23rd July 2009 at West Midlands Fire Service Headquarters

(Meeting ended at 12.58 pm)

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