

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

4 April 2017

**Report from member nominated pursuant to
Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985**

1. Summary Statement

- 1.1 The Council, at its annual meeting on 24 May 2011, approved an arrangement whereby members nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions on the discharge of the functions of any joint authority or any joint board of which the Council is a constituent authority (Section 41 members) would report to the Council twice a year on important and contentious matters relating to the joint authority/board, and on any other occasion by exception. Procedural Standing Orders provide that any member of the Council shall be entitled to ask questions of the relevant members and the Council on these reports.
- 1.2 A report is attached in respect of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (Councillor Edwards).

Further details are attached for your information

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report from the Section 41 member in relation to the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority be received.

Darren Carter
Interim Director - Resources

Contact Officer
Trisha Newton
Principal Democratic Services Officer
0121 569 3193

3. Strategic Resource Implications

3.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

4. Legal and Statutory Implications

4.1 Under Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985, arrangements have been made for enabling questions on the discharge of a joint authority's functions to be put in the course of the proceedings of any constituent district council. A member is nominated by the joint authority for that purpose (the Section 41 member).

5. Implications for the Council's Scorecard Priorities

The involvement of Council representatives in the decision making process of joint authorities will encourage better understanding of local and wider needs and viewpoints and can support the Council's Scorecard Priorities.

6. Background Details

It is customary for the Council to receive six monthly reports from those members appointed pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 to answer questions put to them at council meetings relating to the discharge of functions of joint authorities.

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West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

Report by Councillor John Edwards, Chair of the Authority

1. Finances:

In February 2017 West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) agreed a net Revenue Budget for 2017/18 of £94.8 million financed mainly through core funding from Government (£54.7 million) and Precepts on the West Midland 2 city and 5 Metropolitan Borough Council collected through Council Tax (£39.3 million).

Council Tax was increased by 1.99% over the preceding year. Even with this increase WMFRA still sets a lower Council Tax than any other Fire and Rescue Authority in the country.

By 2019/20, core funding provided by the Government to WMFRA will have been reduced by 50% (£38 million) since the cuts began in 2011.

A four year settlement offer has been secured from government by the provision of a service efficiency plan for 2016/17 – 2019/20. This will produce the following further core funding reductions:

- 2016/17 £3.278m
- 2017/18 £3.985m
- 2018/19 £1.691m
- 2019/20 £0.690m

This represents a reduction of core funding over the four year period 2016/17 – 2019/20 of £9.4 million or 15%. These figures are included in the total cuts mentioned above of £38 million or 50% during the period 2011/12 to 2019/20.

1a. Capital spending

Capital funding across the fire and rescue sector is dire. Total capital requirements by WMFRA in 2017/18 and 2018/19 are £20.84 million. This is being funded in the main from our own earmarked reserves. The main call on this investment will be fire station replacements; Coventry and Aston rebuilds are currently underway. There is also a need to fund the vehicle replacement programme.

In 2019/2020 available capital falls to £3.181. No specific announcements have been made by CLG in relation to capital funding. As a consequence there will be a capital funding shortfall of circa £3 million per year from 2020/21 onwards just to meet anticipated replacement of essential capital assets i.e. vehicles and equipment, not allowing for the funding impact of introducing any new schemes into the capital programme such as further station redevelopments and refurbishments.

Measures are being put in place through the LGA and the National Fire Chiefs Council to lobby government on its failure to enable access to capital funding for the fire and rescue sector in the next decade.

2. Future governance of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

The government's Policing and Crime Bill received assent on 31st January 2017. The Bill provides for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) to assume governance of fire and rescue services. The Bill extends the same provision to elected Mayors in devolved areas like the West Midlands.

WFRA has been discussing this potential change for over a year and in June 2016 established an independently Chaired Governance Working group to look at the issue in detail. Membership of the Group included representatives of the FRA, Home Office, West Midlands Ambulance Service, PCC, health services and the Chamber of Commerce. It was chaired by Richard Bacon from PWC.

Taking into account the findings of the Group, feedback from the Authority survey carried out in January and December and the views of the Authority, on 20th February WMFRA agreed unanimously to establish a route to future governance with the West Midlands Combined Authority and elected Mayor.

On 3rd March the West Midlands Combined Authority unanimously supported this approach and has since publically recognised the contribution that West Midland Fire Service can make to developing public service reform and health intervention and prevention.

Consultation will now be mapped with the WMCA and Mayor and with employees and the public to develop a local approach to future governance. The strategic document of the Authority, the 'Plan' will be amended to reflect this approach.

3. Employee provision and relations

Because of the ambition of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA) to be an outstanding employer even in difficult financial times, we became a Living Wage employer 2 years ago, adopting the Living Wage Foundation recommendation on minimum hourly rates. This shouldn't be confused with the government's so-called '*living wage*' which is in fact only a slightly revised minimum wage.

WMFRA is now set to approve the TUCs 'Dying to Work' campaign which recognises the rights of people in the workplace who have been diagnosed with terminal illness.

Relationships with our staff and their Trade Unions – UNISON and the Fire Brigades Union - remain harmonious. Indeed the cooperation and flexibility of our largest union, the FBU, is central to delivering new working arrangements which are ensuring that stations and fire appliances are kept on the run and available to meet our target response time of 5-minutes to reach life and property threatening incidents. Actual average response times currently are better than target at 4 minutes 40 seconds.

Staff flexibilities are also critical to the delivery of the excellent 'falls response' service which we continue to deliver to vulnerable people in Coventry and Wolverhampton. A third scheme has just started as a pilot with Dudley Council.

Working with our seven Councils through the Combined Authority/ Mayor will enable the development of more health related prevention and interventions with partners in the future.

4. Year to date performance

Appendix 1 outlines performance indicators to the end of February 2017.

Accidental fires in dwellings are below target but arson fires and casualties are above. Arson attacks in commercial properties and on vehicles are significantly over target.

During this 11-month period, almost 300 people were rescued or led to safety from fires by firefighters. Fire crews attended 2269 road traffic collisions and extricated 262 people from vehicles.

In incidents like these West Midlands Fire Service response times, which remain the best in the country, are critical to survivability.

John Edwards
Chair, West Midlands
Fire and Rescue Authority

April 2017

West Midlands Fire Service**Appendix 1**

Performance Indicator	Actual 2015/16	Target to end of Feb 2017	Actual to end Feb 2017
The number of accidental fires in dwellings	1702	1519	1449
The number of casualties from accidental fires in dwellings	63	55	60
The number of arson fires in dwellings	198	172	183
The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises	461	409	408
The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises	151	113	180
The number of arson vehicle fires	725	615	833
The number of arson rubbish fires	2133	1885	1770
The number of malicious false alarms calls received	886	N/A	804
The number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms	5735	5231	5214
Number led to safety from fires with brigade assistance	321	N/A	247
Number of rescues from fires	40	N/A	50
Number of RTCs attended	2341	N/A	2269
Number of extrications from RTCs	349	N/A	262