

13. Future of West Midlands Regional Management Board

Purpose of report

1. The recent announcement by the Fire Minister Bob Neill that Fire and Rescue Services no longer have to work through Regional Management Boards has given the opportunity for the West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB) to review its position. This report proposes that as recommended by WMRMB, the Authority consider the dissolution of the Board.
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Recommendations

The Clerk recommends that:

- (i) ***the Authority agrees to dissolve the West Midlands Regional Management Board; and***
- (ii) ***delegated authority be granted to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority to take all necessary steps to achieve the dissolution of the West Midlands Regional Management Board at the earliest practical date.***

Background

2. The West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB) was established in 2004 in response to the Fire White Paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service 2003" and in compliance with the requirements of the first Fire and Rescue Service National Framework (FRSNF) which required each FRA to participate in the setting up of Boards without decision-making powers but charged with responsibility for the effective regional co-ordination and delivery of 6 specified strategic functions:
 - CBRN resilience
 - Specialist support services, e.g. fire investigation
 - Regional Control Rooms
 - Regional Procurement
 - Regional Training
 - Regional Human Resources Management
3. In some instances the FRSNF imposes mandatory requirements such as the requirement to set up a company to manage the Regional Control Rooms and in others the requirements were advisory only.

4. The WMRMB, which comprises the 5 Fire and Rescue Authorities in the West Midlands, was constituted under Section 102(1)(b) Local Government Act 1972 without full delegated powers under a written framework agreement to act on behalf of the FRAs and to bind them on decisions involving the discharge of the 6 strategic functions subject to the restriction that the Board cannot make decisions involving the closure or relocation of individual FRA properties, facilities or services without ratification by FRAs whose activities would be affected by such decisions. An individual FRA may terminate its participation in the Board by giving one year's notice to expire on 31 March of the next following year after the expiry of 12 months.
5. The Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority representatives on the WMRMB are Group Leaders, Brig Peter Jones CBE, Cllr Tom Bean and Cllr David Taylor. Brig. Peter Jones is currently the WMRMB Chair.

Current Situation

6. At its annual meeting on 25 August 2010, the West Midlands Regional Management Board received the recent announcement from the Fire Minister ending regionalisation of fire services. (Draft minutes attached at Appendix 2).
7. WMRMB Members were keen to encourage informal joint working between Fire Authorities, both within the West Midlands geographic boundaries and beyond, and resolved unanimously:

'To recommend to the region's Fire and Rescue Authorities that they agree to dissolve the West Midlands Regional Management Board and that they give delegated powers to their Chief Fire Officers, in consultation with the Chairs of the Authorities, to take all necessary steps to achieve the dissolution of the West Midlands Regional Management Board at the earliest practical date, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.'
8. This action was subject to the approval of the Secretary of State which was received by the Clerk to the WMRMB on 14 September (The Fire Minister's letter is attached as Appendix 3)
9. The Board has no employees or assets so in a mutual consent situation the process of winding up ought to be straightforward subject to the authorisation of the Secretary of State.

Conclusion/Summary

10. The recent announcement by the Fire Minister that Fire and Rescue Services no longer have to work through Regional Management Boards has given the opportunity to review the need for a formal Regional Management Board in the West Midlands. The Authority was recommended by WMRMB to dissolve the Board and give delegated powers to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair, to take all necessary steps to achieve the dissolution of the WMRMB at the earliest practical date, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State. The Fire Minister approved of the proposal on 14 September and it is envisaged that the WMRMB will be dissolved by 31 December 2010.

Corporate Considerations

11. A Business Impact Analysis form is attached at Appendix 1 to measure and address the proposals contained in this report. The form contains information on the potential resource implications, legal issues, strategic policy links, equality/ethical issues and risk management implications.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Business Impact Assessment Form

Appendix 2 – Draft minutes of Annual General Meeting of West Midlands Regional Management Board (25 August 2010)

Appendix 3 – Letter dated 14 September 2010 from Fire Minister, Mr. Bob Neill, M.P.

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