

Budget and Performance Committee – 5 January 2016**Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – The 2016/17 GLA Group Budget (Fire)**

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Now we are into the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) session. Thank you, LFEPA, and welcome. We know who everyone is, yes: Gareth Bacon [AM], Chairman [London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority], Ron Dobson, Commissioner, and Sue Budden, who is the person with all the power, the Director of Financial and Contractual Services at LFEPA. Welcome. This will be a very easy little meeting, I am sure.

Can I start with you, Chairman Bacon? How challenging will it be to balance the budget in 2016/17?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): As with every year, it is always challenging to present a balanced budget, but we are very confident that we are going to. We started the process with a £13.2 million shortfall or savings that we needed to find. That was alleviated considerably when the Fire Brigades Union wrote to say that it would guarantee no further strike action until June 2017 at the earliest because we had a £1.7 million provision in the budget to pay for contingency crews in that time. Officers have identified £5.1 million worth of savings that have been agreed by the Authority, which leaves us with a shortfall of £6.4 million. We have two options that are out for consultation at the moment, both of which will close that gap completely. Depending which one ultimately gets approved, we will present a balanced budget.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Is that it?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is it.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): It has been a bit of a doddle, really?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): We are very good at what we do.

Jenny Jones AM: He just makes it look good, obviously.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Let us talk about the £5.1 million worth of savings then and we will ask Sue how secure they are and what impact they will have on services.

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): They are relatively low risk. They are made up of 46 different elements. There are lots of individual lines in here; some of the numbers are quite small. They do not have a frontline impact. They do require support service departments to manage further budget reductions, but the savings are made up of proposals that they have recommended themselves, so it is things that they are committed to do. One of the savings is for one year only. That is to release a provision that we have been holding against a potential rates bill, so we will need to find something to replace that for next year, but the others are spread across a whole range of things. We always look at our causes of underspends and see if we can make a permanent saving as a result. We have some reductions in contract costs; we have got reductions in energy prices as a result of the refit work we do to make the estate more energy efficient; we have done some clever procurement savings; there are savings we are anticipating from the new property service integrator with the MPS; there are

reductions in pension costs; we have some reductions in fire and rescue staff unit costs - as people leave, new people come in on a lower pay rate - and there is also some additional income. There is a whole range of things that fall in there. They are very specific and they are deliverable and relatively low risk.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Again, it is a doddle. We have two doddles out of three. Yes, you will have no problem; you could even go part-time and still deliver them?

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The £5.1 million.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Just a quick one: you mentioned a reduction in pension costs and I had been told that the Government had not clawed back pension contributions to the extent that you expected this year and so there was £2.8 million additional. Where is that figure? Have you used that to --

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is not in the £5.1 million. The £5.1 million includes a pension saving, which is what we are deeming under our local experience where people are either opting out or not joining the scheme.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: All right, but in terms of the Government not clawing back as you had expected --

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes, that is something we have just identified. When the settlement came out before Christmas, we did some work over Christmas. We had assumed where the composite employer's contribution rate now because there are three firefighter schemes --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Potentially, if it holds good, that £2.8 million could be put into the pot for reducing the savings target?

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes, it obviously gives flexibility, but it is for City Hall as well to look at our funding.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Yes.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The other thing that ought to be noted here is that that £2.8 million might be there for one year only.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: That is what I mean, yes.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You are right to identify that something could be done with that money, but it could be gone next year and so there is a fine line to decide whether or not --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: It may not be sustainable.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Exactly.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: My concern was that I thought the Government might think it had made a mistake and make a last-minute readjustment because it can --

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): It is only a provisional settlement.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Yes, it is a provisional settlement.

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): We have never had that before, but that could happen.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: How secure do you think that is? You do not know? OK, fair enough.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): You trust the Government, in other words?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Implicitly.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Implicitly?

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: All right, thank you. It is a useful amount of money though, is it not?

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): OK. Go on; make us miserable, Mr Dobson.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I will try not to do that, Chair, but it is not quite so much of a doddle. As Members will be aware, there are two options currently being consulted on. The public consultation started on 7 December 2015 and runs through until 1 February 2016.

I am sure that Members will not be surprised to know that I prefer option B because it is the one that I proposed. You will not be surprised that I prefer that one. The reason for that is that the reduction in the number of frontline pumping appliances, which that one includes. We are in a slightly unusual position in that we have evidence of two years that those pumping appliances are not needed in London. Previously whenever we have made any such change, it is on the basis of modelling, which I am pleased to say has proved to be very accurate. On this occasion, we know those fire engines have been out of service and not available to the frontline for the last two-and-a-half years and I am very confident in making the recommendation that those fire engines should not be placed back into service and that we should take the saving that accrues from that.

As Members I am sure will be aware, the provisional settlement that we received from the Government is for more than the one-year period and it shows that we are projecting to have to make some significant savings in years two and three of that period. We should now be not looking at just the one-off savings that we may be able to do next year; we need to be planning carefully for future years as well.

LFEPA will be asked next year to approve another London Safety Plan (LSP) - it is that time again - LSP6, and LSP6 will have to do a number of things. Firstly, it will need to make sure that we are assessing all the risks that London now faces and we know those risks have changed significantly in the last four or five years, the risks the London Fire Brigade wants to respond to.

We also need to take into account the projection in terms of our funding for the next few years, so therefore we need to be planning for those savings as best we can now. As Sue [Budden] has already identified, there is £2.8 million that - to use the wrong word - appears to have become available. There are some risks around that and what also we are aware of is that there is a review of the cost of the Firefighters Pension Scheme

again in April this year. I believe that if that money is taken next year, it will probably come as a result of the review of the costs of the scheme that is going to be carried out in April this year, so there are a number of risks around that money.

The other thing to say, I suppose, is just to reflect back on when I gave evidence to the Plenary meeting of the Assembly before Christmas. I was asked a question related to this in terms of, if there was money available, what I would spend it on. Given things like some of the funding we have is in potentially one-off lumps, there are areas where we could make a better provision and better influence the safety of Londoners by spending that money rather than putting back 13 fire engines that over the last two-and-a-half years, to be quite frank, we have not missed.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): OK, I did not get around to asking that question, but you answered. I will re-ask part of it, then, which was about options A and B. You said maybe a little casually that you preferred B because it was your own option, but obviously you will have critically appraised it against the other option and looked at the performance outcomes of the different options. You are presumably sharing those with the Fire Authority and the wider world and so you can point towards the sort of metrics that will come out of that. You have said a bit about that, but your level of confidence is backed up when you cite the evidence that the absence of these fire engines has not caused material harm, in your opinion, but there is another option on the table, which would presumably provide other benefits. How have you measured those up in terms of performance-managing the organisation?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): In terms of my option B, the option that I proposed, the evidence is there and is clear because we have had those fire engines out of service for two-and-a-half years. I have already made the Fire Authority aware through a report to the Resources Committee and the Fire Authority before Christmas my views on the two options and why I prefer option B. I will be doing that again at the next Fire Authority meeting, which will be after the result of the public consultation, and so the results of the consultation as well as my professional appraisal of the two options will be given to the Fire Authority then.

Just very briefly in terms of the first option, my worry with the first option is that - currently at least - it includes the recommendation to alternate crew some fire rescue units in London. Fire rescue units are very important to the London Fire Brigade in terms of our response to a range of risks other than fire, the terrorist threat being a very important one, in my opinion. We have not carried out alternate crew in our fire rescue units before and it is a step too far to alternate crew those appliances at this moment in time without a lot more work. I am also concerned that fire rescue unit stations are those stations that have the most significant training load in terms of the skills that they have and, in my opinion, we have not done sufficient work to identify whether or not those training requirements can still be met if those appliances are alternate crewed.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): I am aware that will be debated in far greater detail elsewhere. It happens that to my left I have as my exhibit the Deputy Chair of the Resources Committee of the Fire Authority, but he is the Deputy Chair of this Committee as well. He is going to ask questions ruthlessly and professionally as a member of the Budget and Performance Committee and he is going to look at the medium-term financial question, which you began to look at in your answer, Mr Dobson.

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): The Government clearly looks set to reduce its fire and rescue funding by about 25% between this coming year and 2018/19. How realistic is it to assume that the next Mayor would continue to protect LFEPA from these cuts by increasing the share of the business rates? Gareth, essentially, I guess, this is a political question for the next Mayor, but the assumption in the budget is that that will happen and that it looks realistic for it to happen now. Is that right?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You are right that to a large degree it is a political decision for the next Mayor. I am going to use the word 'he' because it is likely to be Conservative or Labour; that means no disrespect at all to our colleague, Caroline [Pidgeon AM]. He is going to have various options in front of him and a diminished pot to work with. He could use business rates to continue to protect the Fire Brigade and the frontline service, as this Mayor has, but the one thing that should be clarified on that is that the Mayor - this Mayor - said that that would be for the lifetime of London Safety Plan 5 (LSP5) and, as the Commissioner has just said, the process of putting LSP6 together will start this year, but it will be finished next year or the next financial year. It really is a political decision for the next Mayor, whomever that happens to be, as to how he wants to do things and whether he wants to protect the front line in that way.

The other thing of course is that it would not necessarily just have to be business rates that do that. How you fund the Fire Service or any functional body is a conglomeration of various different things and you could use business rates. What actually matters is the final figure at the end rather than how you get there. It is conceivable, but it is not the only card that the future Mayor will have to play.

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): I suppose, in a sense, given the business rates position and assuming that London's fire service funding is protected to some extent or other by use of business rates, it puts us in a rather better position than other fire and rescue services around the country that do not have that luxury, does it? Do we look to be in a rather better position financially than the rest of them?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I will have a stab at this first and then I might offload to --

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): I am interested to know what the Commissioner has to say as well and Sue Budden.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): OK. On that, potentially the answer is yes because the business rate take in London is higher than anywhere else in the country, for obvious reasons. What is very unclear at the moment though is how the business rate retention is going to be carved up, because if you look at the boroughs, the Chancellor made the announcement - I was in the room when he made the announcement - in Manchester and it was terribly exciting and everyone thought it was brilliant. Then everyone looked at the detail and thought, "There is not any. How is that going to work?" If you are a Westminster City councillor and you are going to retain all the business rates, you think, "Fabulous. That is hundreds of millions, if not billions". If you are in the London Borough of Bexley, it is a completely different story and if that is your main source of funding, and then you have some massive disparity across London. I would imagine that there is going to be some sort of redistributive mechanism, whether that is City Hall or somewhere else. How that works and what it looks like nobody yet knows and so how that will impact on the Fire Service again is something that is really very much up for debate at the moment. That is my take on it, but I do not know if colleagues have a different view.

Sue Budden (Director of Financial and Contractual Services, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes, definitely, we will need to consider what happens in London as to the rest of the country. The settlement is made on the basis that the reduction in spending power is met to some proportion by increases in the council tax take and business rate take countrywide, but I am not in a position to say how that would impact on individual authorities. Obviously the Metropolitan Authority is probably in a better position; a city like Manchester has probably a very good business rates take, but it is going to vary across the country. Other authorities as well might have more interest or appetite in council tax increases, so you just do not know.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): If I could just interrupt the conversation briefly, we need to park this point and look at it in terms of our response to the Mayor's consultation budget. If we are saying more widely that there is such uncertainty about the disposition of business rates, then the assumptions in the Mayor's budget about what is going to happen in the future must be even riskier. I know the Mayor's budget strategy does talk about that, but that is an area that we need to focus on to a greater degree.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Just very briefly, in terms of the fire rescue service, there is evidence to suggest that we have been treated slightly better by the settlement this time round - and previously - than other fire authorities. There are some other uncertainties around that as well that the Committee should at least bear in mind. There is a lot of discussion at the moment about whether or not the fire and rescue service will, would or should go back into the Home Office in terms of our overall policy department. We are about to get an announcement about that quite soon, actually, but there is an issue there if we do go back into the Home Office with the consultation, which is also running about Police and Crime Commissioners and fire authorities. How those come together in the future is an uncertain area at the moment, but it will certainly impact on fire and rescue service funding.

The final point I would like to make, if I may, is that in the previous debate, talking to the MPS, there is the issue about the NICC funding that the police get. We remember some time ago, as part of an earlier London Safety Plan, we tried to make exactly that case to the Government in terms of funding for London because for many of the events that the police speak about, the impact is obviously much greater on them than it is on the fire and rescue service, but we also are impacted greatly by many of those London effects. There is an argument there, in my view, for London to be recognised in the funding settlements that London gets from the Government in the future.

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): You have not so far had any success with the Government in making the case?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, unfortunately not.

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): That is a useful point, actually. Good. Can I return to LSP6, which you touched upon briefly? I wonder if you could, Ron, give us some flavour of the sort of things we can expect to see in LSP6 given the sort of financial pressures you have talked about. Even with the protected funding shown in the next few years, we are still looking at an £18 million budget gap in 2017/18 and so there clearly are financial pressures. Perhaps the reality is that both of the options for this year's budget are going to come up for next year or the year after as the sorts of things the Fire Brigade is going to have to look at, but would you give us a flavour of what you think is going to be in LSP6?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes, absolutely. The starting point for LSP6 has to be the risk in London and how that has changed, how we assessed that risk since the last time we carried out a London Safety Plan. That will be the starting point, and then after that will be a proposal on how we can fully address that risk as best we possibly we can with the budget available to us. I suspect that the budget available to us might not necessarily meet all our aspirations in terms of how we might meet the risk in future and therefore we have to have a range of options. I do think though, given that the types of risk that we respond to in London have changed so significantly, and the demand or the traditional and normal demand that is placed upon the fire and rescue service has reduced so significantly, the time has come to have a more fundamental look about what London expects from its fire and rescue service and how we can deliver that service for the future in a way that meets all the aspirations.

In LSP6 - and it is not a definite answer - certainly I would like to see more of a focus on some of the specialist things that we do, recognising those more than perhaps we have done in the past and funding them appropriately. We need to look at the way in which we provide our fire cover. We know at the moment we are trying to achieve the best standards of attendance times in the country and it is the right thing to do. I would not want to change those attendance standards because they are the right ones for London, but the way in which we go about achieving those needs to be considered in terms of are our fire stations in the right places. I would like to think --

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): In a sense, these are all the sort of things that were talked about in LSP5 about whether we have the right fire stations in the right places and the right number of fire engines. In a sense, what is it that is going to be fundamentally different about LSP6 or is it just going to be a bit like LSP5 but with a much tighter financial envelope?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): As I say, the starting bit is the risk that we face in London that what the fire and rescue services are trying to respond to is different to what it was when we looked at LSP5 and certainly LSP4 because we are responding to very different things now than we were then. That calls as to the question of whether or not our distribution is the right distribution, whether we have the right equipment and the right skills or whether there are new skills that we want to introduce for our firefighters for the future. There probably are some. We will inevitably need to look at things like whether it is right to provide equal service all the time across London in the way we do at the moment or whether we need to have some stations that have different operating hours to others. I am not talking about closing stations, but I am saying maybe some might operate at different times of the day depending on where the risk is within London. That is certainly something we would need to look at for the future.

Slightly off at a tangent, I suppose, I would like us to think about what we could do to more proactively target those whom we know are at risk in London. We know the people who are at risk from fire and we know exactly who they are, but unfortunately we do not have the ability to target them as well as we would like to with things like proactive community safety measures. If we could install in people's homes, where we know of a risk, things like portable sprinkler systems, fire-safe electric blankets and other things we could do, if we had the money to invest in those --

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): These sound like extra costs.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I do not think they need to be an extra cost. We should think about it in terms of reducing the overall cost of fire in London generally and include that as part of our core budget. Other things might have to be sacrificed in order to do that, but I do not necessarily think that is an extra cost; it is something that we should be providing because it is the most effective way we can reduce the risk of fire death more than we have done in the past.

Stephen Knight AM (Deputy Chair): Finally, to what extent is deferring consideration of LSP6 until after the mayoral election delaying the implementation of needed savings plans? I suppose it is inevitable that decisions around LSP6 are going to be taken by the next Mayor, but presumably work on it can start now.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Work on it is already starting. We have carried out quite an extensive internal staff engagement process over the last six months. The consultation we are carrying out at the moment about the budget options for this year is part of that process and we are already starting to think about the elements that need to be in the safety plan and

hopefully finding some more innovative ways of reducing the risks that we deal with. I do not think we are actually putting off any savings plans because those savings plans are going to be with us anyway. The options that we have - both the options, in fact, because they achieve the budget target set by the Mayor - give us a way of going into the future and laying some reasonable groundwork.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Returning to your question about business rates, the risk is particularly focused on LFEPA because the way in which the current Mayor has projected your budget depends on that business rate growth coming to you. Mr Gallie [Assistant Director, Group Finance, Greater London Authority] is frowning and so that means I am probably wrong but, anyway, we need to think about this in writing our report because he is sometimes right.

Jenny Jones AM: Last month at our Plenary, I did ask you about the community safety aspects that you could help with on flooding, for example. Have you made any progress on that? I cannot imagine it would be a very big budget line, but it is part of the whole thing about helping people to help themselves.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes. In terms of the response, we have a very good response in London in terms of flooding, but what we need to be doing is more proactively, as part of our home fire safety visits and their interactions into people's homes, give them more advice about how they can protect themselves from the effects of flooding. We are currently rewriting our home fire safety strategy process. When firefighters go out into the community to do home fire safety visits, the intention is that they do a lot more than just home fire risks; they will be looking at a range of things and one of those is certainly going to be flooding.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Can you see a plausible future Mayor of whatever description not having to close fire stations as a result of projected budgets?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Yes, not having to? You can keep them all open?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): There are different ways you can staff fire stations which provide different options that do not mean closing fire stations.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): They may be sort of open --

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Part-time.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): -- part-time, retained or whatever?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Lots of different ways, yes.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): Yes. The business model would change, but you would keep the same number.

Richard Tracey AM: This is about the future of the Authority and the Government's proposal to abolish the Authority and to move the responsibilities to the Mayor. These are probably questions for the Chairman, really. What is the current situation with the legislation?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The legislation is due to go through Parliament in this calendar year. At the moment, we do not have any projected dates or indeed know what the preferred option from the Government is going to be and so it is a bit difficult to pin the tail on the donkey, really, in terms of what we are going to end up with or when. The Fire Authority unanimously supported the idea of a Deputy Mayor for Fire as a replacement for the Fire Authority itself. That was also echoed by the GLA submission and indeed the Mayor's. I would be surprised if the Government completely ignored all of that and went with something different, but it is not impossible. It is very difficult to talk about where we are going to end up.

In terms of timescales, as I say, it is due to go through this calendar year and so I would expect any new arrangements probably to start from the municipal year beginning in May 2017 or 1 April 2017. At the moment we do not have concrete details from the Government in terms of either a timeline or its preferred governance model and so it is very theoretical at the moment.

Richard Tracey AM: As you say, the Select Committee also approved the idea of abolishing the Fire Authority and replacing it and so it seems as though all along the process of consultation has been in favour of that model. One thing on timing: how will the timing of governance changes fit in with the development of LSP6?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Assuming that I am right about when I expect the new governance structure to take place, at the beginning of the municipal year in 2017, LSP6 is due to start very soon and the decisions around LSP6 will be taken within the next 12 months and so the final year of LFEPA will be taken up largely with LSP6. I would expect LFEPA to vote on LSP6 probably around about March of next year just before we change the governance structure and so I would expect LFEPA to be making a decision on that.

Richard Tracey AM: Do you see as a possible development of the governance it following pretty much the same pattern as MOPAC?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is not what we recommended in terms of the Authority or the GLA or the Mayor. We were looking for a Deputy Mayor for Fire almost as a standalone rather than the big structure that has surrounded MOPAC.

Richard Tracey AM: Quite big, yes.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is partly because we think that would be overkill really for fire, but also we think the transparency around the Deputy Mayor reporting directly to the Mayor would be better and that is the whole point in doing a lot of this. It is around clearer decision-making in a more timely way.

Richard Tracey AM: Yes. How would you see transparency being ensured in the new model? There have been criticisms from some of the transparency of the MOPAC model.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Assuming I am right and it ends up being a Deputy Mayor for Fire, I will contain my answer to that because that is what we are all pointing towards --

Richard Tracey AM: Yes, quite.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): -- if that is what we end up with. It is difficult to answer in definite terms because we do not know what the Government is going to propose, but LFEPA at the moment is like an old-fashioned local authority. When local government was changed by the previous Government to a cabinet or mayoral structure, decisions were taken in a different way: there was one person responsible for signing off particular decisions, but normally that would be done, there would be a forward plan and so decisions would be announced in advance or the programme would be announced in advance. Decisions would not be taken necessarily in public meetings unless they are collective cabinet decisions, but decision papers and the decisions themselves would be publishable and all that would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI).

My interpretation of where we might end up with a deputy mayoral model is something along those lines and of course scrutiny would be carried out here. There would be a separate Fire and Emergency Planning Committee with responsibility to scrutinise the Deputy Mayor, the Commissioner and the Mayor. That is what all three of the bodies who responded to the consultation have recommended and, if that is where we end up, that is more or less how I would see it happening.

Richard Tracey AM: No shortage of information and a shortage of papers?

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I do not see why.

Richard Tracey AM: No, quite.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): It will probably change. The reports that go to the Fire Authority now are compendious, to say the least; they are very lengthy. They probably would not be quite as long, but that is not a question of hiding information. Normally the reports that go to the Authority now, because there are only five real decision-making points which are the five meetings per year, tend to also give you all the back history of how we have got to where we have got to now. Some of that can probably be compressed, really, for public consumption, but I do not think that there is going to be any sort of hiding away of information or anything like that. Certainly if I were the Deputy Mayor, I would not be interested in anything that was becoming suddenly very secretive.

Richard Tracey AM: No, of course.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I do not see any need for that.

Richard Tracey AM: Quite right.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Thanks. Do you have any, Mayor Biggs?

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): That is interesting as well. I have had to push very hard to be more transparent than my officers would like to be in my new role.

Gareth Bacon AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I am not surprised.

Mayor John Biggs AM (Chairman): The organisations tend to circle the wagons and not reveal information any more than they have to if they are left to their own devices.

OK, thank you very much. It has been a joy having you here.

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