

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters,
on Wednesday, 15 December 2021, at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Aldcroft, Burchett, Carter (Chair), Evans, Hartin, Lavery (from 2.30 pm), Lea, Minnery, Offland, Pardy, Sahota, Thompson and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Services)	ACFO (CS)
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Richard Phillips	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Clerk
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Nicola Lowery	West Mercia Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner	APCC
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1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Hignett and Price
James Walton, Treasurer
Germaine Worker, Head of Human Resources and Administration

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Non-Exempt Minutes

Councillors Aldcroft, Minnery and Wynn abstained from voting on this item as they were not present at the meeting on 13 October 2021.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 13 October 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2021, be noted and that the recommendation at item 5, as given below, be agreed.

Item 5 – Financial Performance to September 2021, including Annual Treasury Review 2020/21 and Mid-Year Treasury Review 2021/22

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note activity on capital schemes;
- d) Note the update on corporate risk;
- e) Note the annual review of treasury activities for 2020/21;
- f) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2021/22; and
- g) Note the mid-year review of treasury activities for 2021/22.

6 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes

The Chair of the Committee presented these minutes to the meeting and highlighted the decisions that the Committee had made relating to ethical framework including amendments to the process for dealing with complaints against Members and the recording of 'Other Registerable Interests. The Clerk advised that a section for recording these interests will be added to the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests form to aid transparency across both Councils. The Clerk also clarified that there is no specific timeframe for completing the modified form as there are no sanctions if this is not done.

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 2 December 2021, be noted.

7 Meeting Schedule 2022

The Meeting Schedule for the 2022 meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees was brought to the Fire Authority for approval.

Members raised some issues with the dates for the Strategy and Resources Committee meetings. The ESO undertook to amend these as necessary and to inform Members of the amended dates.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the meeting schedule for 2022, subject to the amendments to the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting dates.

Councillor Lavery joined the meeting at this point (2.30 pm)

8 2022/23 and Later Years Budget Summary

This report summarised the budgets that are proposed by the Strategy and Resources Committee. The results are put forward to the Fire Authority for approval as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision at the Fire Authority meeting in February 2022.

The HoF presented this report and highlighted the following points to the Fire Authority:

- It is still not clear if a one year or three year settlement will be given
- The Service is still awaiting provisional settlement
- The Fair Funding review is still delayed
- The table on page 3 of the report shows the position of the revenue budget, using the assumptions recommended by the Strategy and Resources Committee, which give a deficit in each year up to and including 2025/26
- Lobbying for a precept increase of £5 or 2% whichever is higher, is continuing
- The Revenue Support Grant assumption has been updated to 2% for each year of the planning period
- The Rural Services Delivery Grant is still included in the planning assumptions
- Business Rates Grants will continue to be paid during the planning period
- Assumptions have been reviewed and updated based on the grant information over the last three single year settlements. The table at the top of page 4 of the report sets out the revised budget position including the updated assumptions
- The precept amount remains at 1.99% over the planning period - this was based on the potential growth and additional expenditure around reviews, and the reduction in reserves following the Telford Central Project.
- It is estimated that the Telford Central Project will reduce the Authority's reserve levels from £17m to £5m
- Confirmation of Collection Fund and Council Tax base is still awaited from the constituent authorities and further information on this will be brought to the January meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee

Members asked if some of the capital schemes and projects, for example ICT equipment upgrades, will last longer than the four years of the planning period. The HoF advised that the planning assumptions to the end of 2025/26 cover the items in the Capital Programme but there are some growth items that are based on pay and these will be factored into the assumptions.

Members also asked if the Capital Programme charges will be brought to the next Strategy and Resources Committee meeting. The HoF confirmed that they will be and explained that it may be necessary to indicate that there may be further costs going forward.

The Chair of the Authority commented that precept lobbying has been ongoing for a long time and that he hopes that the Treasury will give flexibility over inflation rates for the Revenue Support Grant. The HoF responded that if it is a three-year settlement, there may be an increase related to inflation.

Members confirmed that the Council Tax base for Shropshire Council will be agreed on 13 January 2022 and asked if there had been any reduction in the Council Tax Base for both Councils. The HoF advised that a reduction in growth had been noticed. Indications from Shropshire Council have been positive in relation to the Council Tax base and the Service does not anticipate any reduction in this figure.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- a) Approve the change in planning assumptions as set out in section 5 of the report, and allow officers to continue to work on a range of planning scenarios for later years of the planning period;
- b) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 7 of the Appendix; and
- c) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package in January 2022, for final decision by the Fire Authority in February 2022.

9 Fire Strategic Alliance Update

This report updated Members on progress in preparing priority projects developed by the Strategic Fire Alliance between Shropshire (SFRS) and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services (HWFRS).

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and advised the following

- **Communications Strategy**
Work on this has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, it has now been completed by both Communications Teams
- **Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)**
HWFRS are due to consult on the revised Response Standard which SFRS have already adopted. There will also be alignment of Corporate Performance Indicators to allow comparisons of data and sharing of best practice
- **Procurement**
There will be a focus on larger scale procurement projects such as Aerial Ladder Platforms which should give tactical and strategic benefits to both Services
- **ICT**
The Wide Area Network (WAN) is in place in Shropshire with significant related savings of circa £600k over five years. HWFRS have awarded the tender for their WAN, which should give enhanced resilience Opportunities and Future Mobilising – both Services are sharing learning in relation to Station End Equipment and Alerters
- **Fire Control**
There is a pressing need to align technology across both Control Rooms, having the same system in both will give resilience and facilitate the implementation of the recommendations from the Grenfell Report

- **Environmental Management**

SFRS have good practices and HWFRS have good strategies so the aim is to combine the two strengths to work towards the Earthshot Prize goals

The Vice-Chair of the Authority commented that since he has sat on the Fire Alliance Board, he has found the collaboration and mutual understanding between the two Services to be refreshing and the interchangeability between two Services to also be very positive. Members echoed the Vice-Chairs comments and asked about opportunities for new projects within the Alliance, including incorporating outcomes from the HMICFRS Inspection.

The CFO responded that the Service does always consider if any new initiatives and project can be done in collaboration with HWFRS, so opportunities are always being identified and evaluated. New ideas and opportunities should come forward anyway through the Service's self-awareness, but these must not compromise the operational effectiveness of the Service. The aim of the Fire Alliance is to achieve resilience and increase capacity for both Services; not to focus on achieving efficiencies.

The Chair commented that the Fire Alliance is starting to show forward movement and the benefits of collaborative working are starting to be seen with more benefits arising as the Alliance goes forward.

Members queried how the sharing of resources across the Alliance, for example ALPs, works and if the wider staff group is consulted on possible changes. The CFO responded that it is a national fire and rescue service which is locally delivered so there are arrangements in place to draw in resources nationally if needed; but the Service always plans to ensure that any immediate response is within its capability. The CFO also confirmed that there is staff engagement with such changes in both Services. HWFRS do move quickly with implementing changes whilst this Service takes a more considered approach; whilst this on the whole balances each other, it does give occasional conflicts.

Members asked if there are plans to extend collaboration further beyond the Fire Alliance. The CFO confirmed that it is in the Strategy to undertake regional and/or national collaboration where appropriate.

The APCC commented that the Fire Alliance Strategy seems very sensible and asked if there are any key areas of resilience that the Service wanted to improve through it. The CFO responded that the ICT and Control Room Projects were key areas where improvements were sought and that there are four areas of the Services that have been identified to form the basis of the Alliance but not necessarily the outcomes of the Alliance. For example, the two ICT Departments had different philosophies, but these have now been blended to achieve resilience across the two teams rather than creating a single ICT Department. Initially the Fire Control workstream was designed to achieve efficiency but the focus of this project has now moved to establishing resilience and levels of utility.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report.

10 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting room for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12(A) to the Act, by virtue of Paragraphs 3 and 4.

11 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 4)

Councillors Aldcroft, Minnery and Wynn abstained from voting on this item as they were not present at the meeting on 13 October 2021.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 13 October 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Executive Officers left the meeting at this point (3.10 pm)

12 Brigade Managers' Employment Panel Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel meeting, held on 11 November 2021, be noted.

The Executive Officers returned to the meeting at this point (3.12 pm)

Chair's Announcements

The Chair closed the meeting by wishing Members a Merry Christmas and a happy, safe New Year.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....