

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Wednesday, 13 February 2019, at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Carter (Chair), Dee, Hartin, Jones, Mellings, Murray, Pardy, Phillips, Price, Roberts (Vice-Chair) and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Dave Myers	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Jonathan Eatough	Clerk to the Fire Authority	Clerk
James Walton	Treasurer	
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Tracy Onslow	West Mercia Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner	DPCC
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1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Hosken, Milner, Minnery and Sahota. Councillor Pinter did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 December 2018, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

5 Standards and Human Resources Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards and Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 3 December 2018, be noted.

6 Audit and Performance Management Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 6 December 2018, be noted and the recommendations at items 7 and 10, as given below, be agreed.

Item 7 – Internal Audit Plan 2019/20

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the one year extension to the audit plan for 2019/20, as set out in the report.

Item 10 – Review of Whistleblowing Policy

Members asked that the Whistleblowing Policy be amended to include reference to individual being able to be accompanied when raising a concern. The ACFO undertook to make this amendment.

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the Whistleblowing Policy, as attached at the Appendix to the report, subject to the inclusion of the amendment agreed by Members

7 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 31 January 2019, be noted and the recommendations at items 6 and 7, as given below, be agreed.

Item 6 - Capital Programmes 2019/20 to 2023/24, Treasury Management Statement and Capital Strategy

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the Capital Strategy for 2019/20 – 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A to the report;
- b) *Recommendation considered in exempt session*; and
- c) Approve the Treasury Strategy Statement for 2019/20.

Item 7 - Adequacy of Reserves and Robustness of Budget

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) The reserves as set out in the appendix to the report; and
- b) The Treasurer's assurances covering the robustness of the 2019/20 budget and adequacy of its reserves.

8 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

9 Capital Programmes from 2019/20 (Paragraph 3)

The Fire Authority received the paper on Capital Programmes from 2019/20 (the appendix to paper 7a on this agenda).

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the recommendation of its Strategy and Resources Committee to:

- b) Confirm the 2019/20 onward programmes, set out in exempt Appendix B, and the associated revenue costs, set out in exempt Appendix C, as part of its final precept deliberations.

The meeting reverted to open session at this point (2.20 pm)

10 Revenue Budget 2019/20

This report incorporated the recommendations made by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 31 January 2019, in relation to the revenue budget for 2019/20. The report also confirmed the use of assumptions for medium-term financial planning.

The Head of Finance (HoF) presented this report and advised that it should be considered and agreed together with agenda item 11 – Revenue Budget: 2019/20 Precept. The HoF also advised that if this paper is approved without amendment, the following paper will stand. However if the precept is reduced, Paper 11 will have to be amended.

The HoF explained that the revenue budget was discussed at the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 31 January 2019 and that page 3 of the report shows the final budget position including the effect of capital programme from 2019/20 onwards. This includes the funding for the Telford Central Project which has been planned into the budget.

The Chair thanked the HoF for the detail that was included in the report and advised the Fire Authority that there is a need to display financial prudence with regard to the later year's budget as the future cannot be predicted with any certainty.

The DPCC asked if the Fire Authority had set any savings targets. The HoF explained that the savings which will be realised through the Integrated Risk Management Planning changes have been included in the budget with effect from 2020/21.

Members were mindful that funding for the Telford Central Project needed to be prioritised and asked how much of the 2019/20 surplus was earmarked for this development. The HoF advised that £750k had already been identified for the project, avoiding costs of £45k on the revenue budget. The total surplus will avoid borrowing costs of £65k each year into the future.

Members also referred to the assumption that the Collection Fund is zero in future years and asked if this was still a reasonable assumption or if there is any volatility in this factor. The HoF advised that the Council Tax Collection Fund income is quite steady but Business Rates Collection Fund returns do fluctuate and it is therefore assumed, in budget planning, that these are zero to try to avoid the Fire Authority being in deficit. The Treasurer also explained that there are two issues with regard to the Collection Fund. Firstly it is dependent on the local authorities so it is dangerous to make assumptions, and secondly, Shropshire Council do not account for a surplus in the Collection Fund so it is best for the Fire Authority to make a prudent estimate and plan for the worse outcome.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- a) approve a revenue budget for 2019/20, recognising the forward financial projections to 2021/22, as set out in section 6 of the report; and
- b) delegate any necessary amendments to the revenue budget to the Treasurer, in consultation with the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Authority.

11 Revenue Budget: 2019/20 Precept

This report sought Fire Authority approval to a budget for 2019/20; Council Tax levels for 2019/20; and precepts on billing authorities and related matters.

Members requested that when the precept increase is presented on the Service's website, information on increase in monetary terms be included to assist the general public's understanding of the changes. The HoF explained that the Fire Authority no longer produces a stand-alone leaflet for inclusion with Council Tax bills but the information is provided to the constituent authorities and put on the Service's website.

The DPCC requested an explanation of the Unearmarked Capital Reserve, as detailed in Appendix B to the report. The HoF explained that this Reserve contains the money for the Shrewsbury and Telford Central Projects and that the name should have been changed on this report, as it is now the Major Projects Reserve. The DPCC then asked if the Fire Authority would meet a Government recommendation similar to the Police, that unearmarked reserves should equate to approximately 10% of the revenue budget. The HoF explained that this is an indicative level for unearmarked reserves and the Authority will now meet this as it is only the General Reserve that is unearmarked.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority approve:

- a) That a net budget requirement be set at £22,288,080 (calculated in accordance with the provisions of Section 43(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992);
- b) A total precept of £16,228,512 to be levied on the billing authorities;
- c) A Council Tax resulting in a basic amount of Council Tax at Band D calculated in accordance with the provisions of the 1992 Act (Section 44) of £100.25;
- d) Under Section 40(2) of the 1992 Act:
 - i) The amount of Council Tax calculated for each category of dwelling in each billing authority's area, as follows:

Band	2019/20 Council Tax	
	£	p
A	66.83	
B	77.97	
C	89.11	
D	100.25	
E	122.53	
F	144.81	
G	167.08	
H	200.50	

- ii) The amount calculated (in accordance with Section 48 of the 1992 Act) as payable by billing authorities for 2019/20, as follows:

Council	Precept £
Shropshire Council	11,151,821
Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council	5,076,691
	<u>16,228,512</u>

- e) That the Treasurer:
 - i) Issue the necessary precepts and information to the billing authorities in accordance with the provisions of Chapter IV of Part 1 of the 1992 Act and be authorised to make any amendment to the above to reflect the final approved budget, after consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority; and
 - ii) Is authorised to make payments required from, and to, reserves and provisions within the approved budget strategy and within the Authority's Financial Rules, in conjunction with the Chair and the Vice-Chair;
- f) Approve the revenue budget and pensions account, illustrated in Appendix A, for budgetary control in accordance with approved standing orders; and

g) Approve the schedule of reserves and provisions at Appendix B.

12 Combined Fire Authority Review

This report set out the scope of the Combined Fire Authority review and asked the Fire Authority to decide upon which options they would like Legal Services to explore further.

The ACFO presented this report and talked Members through the various options that had been discussed by the Strategy and Planning Working Group.

The Chair commented on the importance of the Strategic Fire Alliance and the change of structure to the Authority's meeting schedule that this had brought about. The Chair also advised the Fire Authority that it did not have to rush with regard to this decision but it needs to make the right decision for the Fire Authority going forward.

Members commented that it was an interesting paper. The general opinion was that it would be wrong to remove the Committee structure altogether and Members were therefore minded to rule this option out with Members believing that Option 3 - Reduced Committees with delegated Authority decision-making was possibly the way forward.

Members also exercised caution that any decision needs to be set in a wider context with the geography and diversity of the county being considered in the decision making process. The different skills and strengths of Authority Members also needs to be taken into account and the numbers on Fire Authority should not be reduced too far.

Referring to the Hampshire case study, as set out in the report, Members asked for further information about the challenges this had involved. The ACFO explained that the removal of the Committee structure in Hampshire had resulted in cost efficiencies but there had been difficulty with decision-making and providing scrutiny due to the reduced numbers on the Fire Authority.

The Chair advised the Authority that Officers are aware of the Telford & Wrekin Council elections in May which may affect political groups. The Chair also emphasised that the Authority needs to consider the savings that could be made and ensure that it makes the decision for the right reasons. That is to secure the Fire Authority into the future and to enable cross party working. The changes to the Fire Authority must ensure that it is balanced and structured and the Authority must be able to justify any changes that it makes.

The CFO commented that it was important to remember that form follows function with regard to this decision and that the changes are being sought to improve, rather than mend, the Fire Authority's effectiveness and efficiency. The Fire Authority's democratic representation, leadership and scrutiny needs to be ensured through these changes.

The CFO then outlined the two options that he believed were available to the Fire Authority. Firstly, a move to a single Fire Authority with reduced numbers of 8 or 9 members, or secondly a change to a reduced Committee structure with Committee sizes of 7 to 9 Members. There is no specific requirement for the Fire Authority to provide scrutiny of its decisions but its Code of Corporate Governance states that it is considered good governance to have one Committee that makes decisions and one that checks and monitors those decisions.

The CFO then concluded that the Fire Authority should exclude one option and task Legal Services to investigate the preferred option which will hopefully help to ensure the Fire Authority's sustainability, resilience and robustness.

The CFO also advised that initially it had been hoped that the changes could be instigated to tie in with the governance year so it would be helpful if the Fire Authority could advise with regard to the pace of change. It was then proposed that Option 3 should be further investigated by Legal Services and a report brought to the next meeting of the Fire Authority for agreement.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- a) Would like Legal Services to explore Option 3 – Reduced Committees with delegated Authority decision-making further with a view to this change running from the Fire Authority's Annual Meeting; and
- b) No definite decision was made about how information only items should be received if they were no longer presented at Fire Authority and Committee meetings.

13 Annual Service Plan 2019/20

This report set out proposals for the Service's Annual Plan 2019/20.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree the proposed format of the Annual Plan 2019/20;
- b) Delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority, to agree the final wording and layout of the Plan; and
- c) Delegate the setting of the Service Targets to its Strategy and Resources Committee in March.

14 Annual Review of Charges for Special Services 2019/20

This report presented proposed increases in charges made for special services.

The HoF presented this report and advised that the 2% increase in charges was based on the interim pay increase awarded to firefighters in 2018/19. Any changes to this increase, following the final pay award to firefighters will be brought back to Fire Authority for agreement.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the proposed charges for special services to be applied from 1 April 2019.

15 Proposed Amendments to the Pay Policy Statement 2019/20

This report set out proposed amendments to the Pay Policy Statement for consideration by the full Authority, as required under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the process agreed by the Fire Authority in February 2012.

The HHRA presented this report and advised that the Car Allowance column in the Appendix would be removed before publication on the website

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the proposed amendments to the Pay Policy Statement.

16 Flexible-Rostering Duty System Trial within Fire Control

This report provided a summary of the Flexible-Rostering Duty System trial, which has been undertaken in Fire Control since January 2018 and also made a recommendation about the future shift system to be used in Shropshire's Fire Control.

The DCFO presented this report and clarified that this project is not about reducing staff numbers in Fire Control but it is about the need to improve resilience within the Control Room function.

The DCFO thanked the Fire Control staff and the Representative Bodies for their approach to trials. Local agreement has been reached in relation to the use of the Flexible-Rostering Duty System going forward but this does require agreement from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Executive Council. Should agreement not be forthcoming from the FBU Executive Council, the use of forced implementation will not be explored at this stage but will be kept on the table for the future.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report and commented that it was particularly pleasing to see the reduction in sickness levels within Fire Control because of the Flexible-Rostering System. The Chair also praised the acceptance of the employees concerned and the work that had been undertaken with the Representative Bodies.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the summary report and the analysis of datasets provided as part of the trial; and
- b) Approve the recommendation for the Flexible-Rostering Duty System to be progressed to a Collective Agreement with the Fire Brigades Union Executive Council, to enable implementation.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....