

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 13 February 2013 at 3.00 pm,
at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Bennett, Mrs Blundell, Mrs Bould, Carter, Hurst-Knight, Kiernan, Mellings, Price, Thompson and West (Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance, Head of Operational Planning, Group Manager, Monitoring Officer, Corporate Services Manager and Executive Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin, Dr Jones, Minnery, Miss Reynolds and Roberts. The Treasurer, James Walton, had also given his apologies for the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair reminded Members that they must not participate in the discussion of, or voting on, any matter, in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and that they should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

No Disclosable Pecuniary Interests were declared.

3 Fire Authority Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 December 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Kiernan and, with Councillor Blundell abstaining, as she had not been present at the meeting, it was

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 December 2012, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Strategy and Resources Committee Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2013, and considered the recommendations at items 5, 7 and 9 of the minutes.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Bennett, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2013, be noted and that the recommendations at items 5, 7 and 9 of the minutes, as given below, be agreed:

Item 5

Financial Performance to December 2012

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2012/13.

Item 7

Adequacy of Provisions and Reserves and Robustness of Budget

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a)
 - i) Agree the reserves and provisions, as set out in the report; and
 - ii) Note the Treasurer's assurances covering the robustness of the 2013/14 budget and adequacy of the reserves and provisions.

Item 9

Capital Programmes 2013/14 to 2017/18 and Prudential Guidelines

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) This recommendation was agreed in closed session – please see item 7 of these minutes;
- b) Approve the Prudential Indicators and the Treasury Strategy for 2013/14; and
- c) Approve the Minimum Revenue Provision 2013/14.

6 Local Government Act 1972

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Bennett, and

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 1, 2 and 3.

7 Capital Programmes 2013/14 to 2017/18 and Prudential Guidelines (Paragraph 3)

Members received the paper on Capital Programmes 2013/14 to 2017/18 and Prudential Guidelines (the appendix to paper 5c).

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the paper on Capital Programmes 2013/14 to 2017/18 and Prudential Guidelines (the appendix to paper 5c on this agenda)

8 Fire Authority Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 December 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Price and, with Councillor Blundell abstaining, as she had not been present at the meeting, it was

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 December 2012, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

9 Strategy and Resources Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2013.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2013, be noted

At this point the meeting reverted to open session.

10 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Medium Term Financial Planning 2013/14

This report incorporated the recommendations, made by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 24 January 2013 for the Fire Authority's 2013/14 budget, updated on changes since the Committee met, and confirmed the use of assumptions for medium-term financial planning.

The Head of Finance (HoF) advised that reports 10 and 11 needed to be considered together and presented these to the meeting.

The HoF highlighted the developments in relation to the budget setting process that had occurred since the December 2012 Fire Authority meeting and the January 2013 meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee. These include a confirmed surplus of £51,000 on the Collection Fund. It had been anticipated that the Collection Fund would remain at zero for 2013/14.

Consultation on the proposed precept increase has been carried out via a page on the Fire Authority's website and through social media sites. The HoF reported that there had been 28 responses to the consultation and that of these, 24 had been positive. The level of response may be attributable to the size of the proposed increase.

Councillor Mellings referred to the budget figures, considered by the Fire Authority in December 2012 and those considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2013, and asked why there was difference of £340,000 between them. The HoF explained that this was because the Council Tax Freeze Grant had been counted as income in the December figures but this had changed and the difference stemmed from how the figures were displayed within the proposed budget package.

Councillor Adams referred to recommendation d) i) on page 2 of report 11, which set out the amount of Council Tax for each category of dwelling and asked if the table could be expanded to show the monetary increase per band per month and per year. He also asked if this information could then be released to the press. The HoF explained that this information will be available on the Service's website, after approval of the precept. The HoF also explained that the Authority is not required to produce a paper version of the Council Tax leaflet for 2013/14.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) reminded Members that, although the Authority is required to quote Band D increases, the majority of premises in both constituent areas are actually in Bands A, B and C. He also agreed that it was right for the Authority to present any increases in terms of pence per week, rather than percentages.

Councillor Bennett made the point that, should the current economic situation prevail, income from Council Tax would shrink further, even if there is an increase in properties in the billing authority areas.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Bennett, and

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority approve:

- a) A revenue budget for 2013/14 and a forward financial projection to 2019/20, as set out in section 5 of the report;
- b) Incorporating these projections into its Medium Term Corporate Plan; and
- c) The draft Medium Term Corporate Plan 2013/14 to 2017/18, as set out on the website.

11 Revenue Budget: 2013/14 Precept

This report sought Fire Authority approval to a budget for 2013/14; Council Tax levels for 2013/14; and precepts on billing authorities and related matters.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Bennett, and

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority approve:

- a) That a net budget requirement is set at £21,206,152 (calculated in accordance with the provisions of Section 43(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992);
- b) A total precept of £12,633,726 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 £88.66;
- 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	2013/14 Council Tax £ p
A	59.11
B	68.96
C	78.81
D	88.66
E	108.36
F	128.06
G	147.77
H	177.32

- ii) The amount calculated (in accordance with Section 48 of the 1992 Act) as payable by billing authorities for 2013/14, as follows:

Council	Precept £
Shropshire Council	9,802,133
Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council	3,831,593
	<hr/>
	12,633,726

- 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;
- g) Approve the Service Reporting Code of Practice Provisional Revenue Account at Appendix B; and
- h) Approve the schedule of reserves and provisions at Appendix C.

12 Fire Authority Treasurer

This report informed Members of the Authority of a change in the Fire Authority's Treasurer.

Councillor Bennett asked that the Fire Authority's thanks and best wishes for the future be sent to Rachel Musson. The Chair undertook to do this.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

13 Findings and Recommendations Arising from Operational Performance Assessment 2012

This report informed Members of the outcome of the Operational Performance Assessment (OpA), conducted in 2012, and provided recommendations to address the identified collaborative areas for improvement. Members were asked to note that a reciprocal report would be simultaneously presented to Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor Bennett referred to page 2 of Appendix B to the report, which highlighted issues with the Service's Information and Communications Technology (ICT). He also referred to further issues concerning data management that were addressed in the report and commented that this is a strategic imperative, which needs to be addressed urgently. The CFO responded that it is clear that this is a weakness and it is a priority to address.

The Service suffered a major ICT crash in 2010, which fortunately did not affect mobilising capabilities. In response to this event, a five year ICT strategy was developed, the aims of which included improving the ICT infrastructure and developing a robust back-up system. The Service is currently halfway through implementation of the ICT Strategy and all Retained Duty Stations (RDS) now have broadband access via the Public Services Network. The Human Resources Management software is also being reviewed and money has been committed to implement other significant ICT improvements such as mobile working. The Strategy is being managed through the Service Transformation Programme (STP) as a key enabler and Audit Services will be undertaking an audit of ICT this year. The CFO confirmed that he is happy that the foundations are in place for an improved ICT system.

Councillor Bennett asked if there was anything more that Members could do to support the ICT improvements; what the reporting mechanisms were for the Service Transformation Programme Board; and how often the back-up system is checked to ensure that it is working correctly. The CFO explained that the back-up system, which is located on our premises in Telford, is robust, is tested regularly and has restoration abilities.

There is, however, work still to be done on backing up the mobilising system. The CFO also explained that there is currently no formal reporting mechanism from the STP Board to Members. Councillor Bennett commented that an update report would be useful for Members.

Councillor Price referred to page 3 of Appendix A to the report and, in particular, to the section on collaborative working. Following on from Sir Ken Knight's visit to Shropshire on 12 February, where particular interest had been shown in the work with Hereford and Worcester, Councillor Price asked how the notion of collaborative working should be presented to both staff and the public.

The Chair responded that he had been absolutely clear in any media interviews that this was a collaborative process and not a merger. The CFO confirmed that both he and the CFO of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service were committed to delivering the best service in Shropshire and across the wider West Mercia region. He also informed Members that the cost of merging would be prohibitive to this Authority.

Councillor Mellings commented that the OpA process had been helpful but it had not told the Fire Authority anything new. He added that the Audit and Performance Management (A&PM) Committee had specifically requested that information regarding the functions of the STP be presented to its meeting on 7 March 2013. Members agreed that regular STP updates should be taken to the A&PM Committee. These would then come before the Fire Authority as part of A&PM Committee minutes.

Councillor Price commented that the independence of the review had been important. The CFO agreed with this and explained that the OpA Peer Review Team had comprised the CFO of Hereford and Worcester, a North Yorkshire Fire Authority Member, a senior Police Officer, a Senior Manager from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and a prominent businessman. The CFO had welcomed the Review Team's close inspection of the Service and had wanted them to highlight the improvements needed, which they had done.

The Chair reported that the collaborative approach to the OpA was being held up at national level as good practice and that he had given a presentation to the Local Government Association on the benefits that had been gained from what is viewed to be an unusual practice.

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the findings of the Operational Performance Assessment;
- b) Agree to incorporate the findings within the Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance; and
- c) Approve proposals that the Fire Authority enter into detailed discussions with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority to form a strategic alliance aimed at delivering service improvements.

14 Preparation of Annual Service Plan and Statement of Assurance

This report informed Members of proposed arrangements to develop and publish the Fire Authority's annual Service Plan and the newly required Statement of Assurance in a format that satisfies Government expectations.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Bennett, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report, particularly in respect of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework;
- b) Approve proposals for the preparation of a:
 - i 'Forward looking' Service Plan 2013/14; and
 - ii 'Backward looking' Annual Report 2012/13 (subtitled as the Annual Statement of Assurance); and
- c) Delegate responsibility to the relevant committees, working with officers, to oversee preparation of the above documents prior to final approval by the Fire Authority.

15 2020 Strategic Planning Process

This report informed Members of the Strategic Planning Process, which is proposed in order to develop the Fire Authority's Strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The Head of Operational Planning referred to Section 8 of the report and explained that it was hoped that Members of the Strategic Risk and Planning (StRaP) Working Group would be able to participate in this phase of the process, although it was understood that this coincided with the elections at Shropshire Council. The more important phase for Member participation is phase 7, i.e. post July 2013, when staff consultation on preferred options will be undertaken.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Price, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the 2020 Project Plan

16 Proposed Amendments to the Pay Policy Statement

This report provided the proposed amendments to the current Pay Policy Statement for the consideration of 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 Clerk referred to page 4 of the appendix to the report and explained that a further change, which was not set out in the report, needed to be made to the Monitoring Officer's job title. This should now read as follows:

'This post is filled by the Assistant Director: Law, Democracy and Public Protection at Telford & Wrekin Borough Council'.

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Adams, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the proposed amendments to the current Pay Policy Statement, including that put forward by the Clerk

17 Annual Review of Charges – Special Services

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

It was proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the proposed charges for special services and that they be applied from 1 April 2013

18 Combined Control Room Project

This report updated Members on preparations to create a 'virtual' combined fire control room, operated from two locations – Shrewsbury and Worcester. The project is a formal collaboration between Shropshire and Wrekin and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authorities, managed via the previously reported and approved Memorandum of Understanding.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note progress made to date in terms of measures taken to implement a 'virtual' combined fire control room

19 Annual Report of the Human Resources Committee

This report advised of the work carried out by the Fire Authority's Human Resources Committee during 2012.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

20 Community Fire Safety Initiatives and Partnerships

The Group Manager Prevention, Station Manager Risk Reduction and Community Risk Reduction Officer gave a presentation on current fire safety initiatives and partnership working. A copy of the presentation slides are attached to the signed minutes of the meeting.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the presentation

Before formally closing the meeting, the Chair informed Members that Sir Ken Knight's visit on 12 February 2013 had been successful and that Sir Ken Knight had been particularly impressed with the relationship between Members and officers. The Chair thanked Members for the work and support that they gave to the Fire Authority.

The meeting closed at 4.20 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....