

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 14 December 2011 at 2.00 pm,
at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Bennett, Mrs Blundell, Carter, Hartin, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mellings, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Murray, Picken, Roberts and West (Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations), Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources), Treasurer, Head of Finance, Head of Area Command, Clerk to the Fire Authority, Corporate Services Manager and Management Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Thompson. Councillor Price had also given his apologies but a clerical error meant that these were not given at the meeting itself.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members that they should declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests at this point and that they should leave the meeting room before any item, in which they have a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Non-exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 26 September 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Roberts, seconded by Councillor Jones, and

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 26 September 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

At this point, the Chair introduced the Fire Authority's Treasurer, Rachel Musson, and welcomed her to her first Fire Authority meeting.

4 Public Questions

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

5 Meeting Schedule 2012

The Fire Authority received a schedule of proposed dates for 2012 meetings of the Fire Authority and its committees for approval.

Members were asked to note that the Fire Authority meetings in 2012 will commence at 3.00 pm instead of 2.00 pm. The reason for this change is to try to avoid any clashes with constituent authority meetings.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Hartin, and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the schedule of proposed dates for 2012 meetings of the Authority and its committees

6 Human Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 29 September 2011, and considered the resolution at item 9 of the minutes relating to the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Human Resources (ACFO HR) highlighted the changes that had been made to the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure as a result of the consolidation of the Appeals Committee into the Human Resources Committee. Councillor Dr Jones asked if there had been any changes to the timescales set out in the procedure. The ACFO (HR) confirmed that there had not.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 29 September 2011, be noted and that the resolution at item 9 of the minutes, relating to the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure, be agreed

7 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2011, and considered the recommendations at item 8 of the minutes.

It was highlighted that items 1 and 2 of the minutes erroneously referred to the Audit and Performance Management Committee instead of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2011, be noted and that the recommendations at item 8 of the minutes, as given below, be agreed

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget where requested;
- c) Note the position on the capital programme, and approve inflationary increases where requested;
- d) Approve the cancellation of capital schemes where indicated;
- e) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2011/12; and
- f) Note performance in Treasury Management to date in 2011/12

8 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 24 November 2011, and considered the Annual Audit Letter at item 5a of the minutes.

The Chair commented that the Annual Audit Letter was superb and thanked all those involved in the audit process.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Carter, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 24 November 2011, be noted and that the Annual Audit Letter, at item 5a of the minutes, be formally approved

9 Standards Committee

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 21 November 2011, and considered the recommendations at items 8 and 9 of the minutes.

The Clerk informed the meeting that the Committee is to meet in January 2012 to consider the implications of the Localism Act and how it will impact upon the Fire Authority. The Clerk also reported that he had begun discussions with the Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services at Shropshire Council in relation to the possible standardisation of the ethical framework across the Fire Authority and its two constituent authorities.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 21 November 2011, be noted and that the recommendations at items 8 and 9 of the minutes, as given below, be agreed

Item 8 – The Localism Bill and the Way Forward for Standards

The Fire Authority agreed that Mr Tebbutt and Mr Brereton be appointed Independent Members of the Standards Committee from the expiry of their second and first terms respectively for an indefinite period, pending developments relating to the provisions of the Localism Act.

Item 9 – Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality

The Fire Authority adopted the proposed Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality, including a requirement that Members declare gifts or hospitality refused.

10 2012/13 and Later Years Budget Summary

This report summarised the budgets that are proposed by the Strategy and Resources Committee. The results were put forward to the Fire Authority for approval as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision at the Fire Authority meeting on 13 February 2012.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) gave a presentation on 'Precept Planning 2012/13 onwards...setting the context' (a copy of the slides is attached to the signed minutes). A synopsis of the discussion generated by the presentation is given below.

Councillor Hartin referred to the 'cap' that the Government can place on precepts. He asked if there had been any indication that this would remain at the current level of 4%, as the Authority could potentially be in difficulty, if this was decreased. The CFO responded that there has been no definite indication regarding this, only an indicative cap of 4% for 2012/13.

Councillor Bennett commented that consideration needs to be given as to what 'excessive criteria' might be defined as in coming years. As income will follow for future year(s) there may be a situation where it is logical to increase the precept by more than the capping amount. The cost of referenda etc related to such a decision would, however, have to be carefully considered, before committing to anything. The CFO commented that this was a succinct summation of the situation and that the implications for taxpayers need to be considered before any decisions are made.

Councillor Carter commented that he would not wish to see a lesser service in the area. He also asked whether the Fire Authority would be put in a difficult position with central government and likely to be in the minority, if the grant were refused. He also commented that he thought that it was unlikely that the public would go against a request for additional monies through the precept but there might need to be closer co-operation with town councils etc. The CFO commented that he did not think that the Authority would be alone in refusing the grant, although other authorities in the region do seem to be considering accepting the grant.

The Chair reported that, at the recent Fire Commission meeting, most combined fire authorities indicated that they are not going to accept the grant.

Councillor Mellings commented that there was a real attraction, superficially, in accepting the grant but the long-term effects need to be considered, including the effect of 'cap' reduction. A balance between households and service needs to be achieved incrementally and there are clear examples of cost-saving achievements that have already been made. It would, however, be better to relate this to the average householder in terms of pence.

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that, in his experience, the biggest problem, when accepting 12 month funding offers, is sustaining them after the 12 month period finishes. He also agreed that any increases should be referred to in terms of pence rather than percentage for it to be more understandable to the public.

Councillor Hartin commented that he supported the approach suggested by the Authority but cautioned that, as Shropshire Council is accepting the grant, there may be some questions raised, although there is a difference in the way in which the Fire Authority and the Council are treated, i.e. back and front loading of cuts respectively.

Councillor Minnery commented that the job of the Fire Authority is to deliver a fire service and, therefore, the Authority is obliged to do whatever it takes to achieve this. Councillor Minnery also welcomed all Members of the Fire Authority to attend the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting in January 2012 as observers.

Councillor Minnery then proposed recommendations a) to c) and f) in the report en-bloc. This was seconded by Councillor Mellings and it was

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree to base its revenue budget planning and consultation on the totals set out in paragraph 6 of the report;
- b) Agree to base its capital programme on that set out in 7d in the appendix, (the Green Book), subject to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2012;
- c) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 7f in the Green Book, and confirm the General Reserve; and
- f) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package on 19 January 2012, for final decision by the Fire Authority on 13 February 2012.

Councillor Minnery then proposed that recommendation d) be amended to read that the Fire Authority '... was minded not to accept the grant'. This was seconded by Councillor Jones and it was

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- d) Having considered the views of its Strategy and Resources Committee around the offer of a one-off council tax freeze grant, was minded not to accept the grant.

Councillor Minnery then moved that recommendation e) be amended to read that the Fire Authority 'base its planning and consultation on an expectation of a precept increase'. This was seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and it was

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- e) Agree to base its planning and consultation on an expectation of a precept increase.

Officers agreed to take a range of proposals regarding the precept to public consultation.

11 Public Value

11a Update on Public Value and Cost Reductions

This report updated Members on the Public Value / Integrated Risk Management Staff Consultation Exercise 2011 and the current cost reduction plans for the Authority.

The Chair asked that officers convey the Fire Authority's thanks to all staff within the Service for their participation and for being instrumental in taking the Public Value process forward. These comments were echoed by Councillor Minnery, who commented, in particular, on the participation of Retained Duty System staff.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Congratulate all staff of the Authority for taking a part in securing the future of the Service through these necessary cost-cutting measures

11b Aerial Ladder Platform Crewing Project

This report informed Members of the outcome of the Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) Crewing Project and sought approval of the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations for the crewing of this appliance.

The Head of Area Command (HoAC) gave an overview of the ALP and its common uses. The ALP is crewed by two firefighters and there were originally two fully crewed ALPs on duty at all times. This was then reduced to one on duty but with both vehicles maintained to provide resilience, resulting in a total crewing level for the ALP of eight people over four watches.

The proposal for exploring different crewing options for the ALP as a means of achieving savings came through the Public Value process. The consultation consisted of two phases. Phase 1 of the consultation was to identify possible options for crewing with Phase 2 asking staff, which was their preferred option.

The HoAC referred to Table 1 on page 2 of the report and talked through the Switch Crewing options that are outlined at Options 1 and 2. Option 1, Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury only, does have the potential for the appliance to be involved in an incident, which could, therefore, cause delays in mobilising the ALP. Option 2, Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury and Telford Central, builds resilience regarding this but still does not guarantee ALP availability. The HoAC then referred to Table 2 on page 3 of the report, which sets out the Switch Crewing Resilience Options.

The consultation showed that both staff and the Representative Bodies are supportive of Option 2 on Table 1, i.e. switch crewing at Shrewsbury and Telford Central. With regard to Table 2, wholtime firefighters and the Fire Brigades Union prefer Option 1, which is composite crewing. Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters and the Retained Firefighters Union prefer Option 2, which is mixed crewing. The Officer in Charge of Shrewsbury prefers the use of RDS staff but this is a 'local' preference. It should also be noted that the consultation process has, as outlined in the report, been very constructive.

The HoAC explained that the issue had been considered by the Service Management Team (SMT) at its meeting on 30 November 2011. The SMT is minded to progress with Option 2, i.e. Switch Crewing at Shrewsbury and Telford Central, but there are various concerns, as set out at pages 5 and 6 of the report, which need to be addressed before this option can be taken forward with any confidence. The Chief Fire Officer has, therefore, recommended that a phased approach, as set out in paragraph 7 of the report, be taken. This approach will include a pilot of three resilience options, including no resilience. Following completion of the pilot scheme, the findings will be brought to the Fire Authority for final decision.

Councillor Hartin referred to the concerns raised by the SMT and asked if the cost of additional building works at Telford Central had had any impact on these. The CFO explained that this is not really a major concern; the main considerations are training and the impact of wear and tear on the ALPs themselves, which will have an effect on the replacement of the appliances. Councillor Hartin further commented that the consultation had given a clear steer that Option 2 was the preferred option, therefore, a clear explanation will need to be given as to why a pilot scheme is now being undertaken. The CFO agreed with this and explained that the best option for the ALP and for the rescue tender needs to be identified and there are some elements of the pilot, i.e. the no resilience option that need to be tested, whilst there are sufficient staff to do so.

Councillor Roberts asked for clarification of how the mixed crewing would actually work. The HoAC explained that the ALP requires specialist staff, who maintain their competence, to work on the appliance, and there are concerns about how this would be done with RDS staff. Therefore it is suggested that the ALP will be crewed by two firefighters from the wholtime pump. The other two firefighters from this appliance then remain on station until RDS staff arrive to make up the crew on the appliance that has remained behind.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the results from the staff consultation process undertaken to look at how the Service provides its ALP cover into the future; and
- b) Approve the Chief Fire Officer's recommendations, as detailed in section 7 of the report.

At this point the Chair proposed that the order of the agenda be varied in order to allow item 16 to be considered at this point in the agenda. This was because the issues outlined in item 16 might have implications for the recommendations that the Fire Authority was being asked to consider at item 12.

16 Draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2012 Onwards

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on the draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2012. A copy of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England consultation document, which was published on 13 December 2011, was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) (ACFO CPO) informed the meeting that the new National Framework is a 27-page document, which places 18 'must do' requirements on all English fire and rescue authorities (FRAs). The Framework sets out three priorities for FRAs, which are:

1. To identify and assess the full range of fire and rescue related risks that their areas face, make provision for prevention and protection activities and respond to incidents appropriately;
2. To work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service; and
3. To be accountable to their communities for the service they provide.

FRAs are asked to answer four consultation questions in relation to the Framework, set out on page 4 of the tabled document. The consultation period ends on 19 March 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the update given and task officers to prepare a draft response to the consultation document for consideration at the February 2012 meeting of the Authority

12 New Dimension Assets Transfer

This report summarised the Authority's current position over the transfer of New Dimension assets from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to local Fire and Rescue Services, including assets to this Authority.

The CFO referred to page 7, paragraph 1.3 of the document that had been tabled at agenda item 16. This paragraph states that 'each FRA must produce an integrated risk management plan that identifies and assesses all fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature'. The reference to a 'national nature' means that it may be necessary for the Service to retain the equipment and appliances that are provided under New Dimensions.

It has been indicated that New Burdens funding will continue but will be rolled into future grants. This Authority is, therefore, being placed in a 'catch-22' situation, where it may need to purchase equipment to replace that which has been refused. It has also been indicated that New Dimension funding will continue.

Councillor Dr Jones asked what the shelf life of the assets was and how many other fire authorities were considering handing the assets back. The CFO explained that an asset refresh of equipment is due in 2012, with the appliances having an anticipated 10 to 15 years of shelf life remaining. The Government has stated that it will replace the appliances at the end of this period. With regard to the decision of other fire authorities, the CFO referred to those authorities that are similar to Shropshire and reported that, to the best of his knowledge, only one Service has definitely said no.

Councillor Picken commented that the equipment should be kept, as it was important that New Dimensions issues were taken into account at all times and it could never be predicted as to when the equipment might be needed. The CFO agreed that this was a sound operational point. Councillors Minnery and Kiernan concurred.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority inform DCLG that it is willing to enter into the Transfer of Assets Agreement, as drafted

13 Information and Communications Technology Update

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on Information and Communications Technology (ICT), as detailed on the agenda for the meeting.

In addition, the ACFO (CPO) reported that the Local Area Network (LAN) and the Wireless Area Network (WAN) will be run out in parallel, and that the last station was due to be connected to the WAN that day.

Councillor Hartin asked if the issues with the IT system had now been rectified. The ACFO (CPO) responded that this appeared to be the case and that there had been no further outages.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update given

14 Fire Control Project Update

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on the Fire Control Project, as detailed on the agenda for the meeting.

The Chair asked that the word FiReControl no longer be used in relation to this issue, as this refers to the fire control company, which is now defunct.

The ACFO (CPO) reported that the Government's decision on the award of funding to support the development and implementation of a shared control room infrastructure with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority has been deferred until mid to late January 2012.

Councillor Hartin asked if it was correct that the Fire Authority was still paying for the regional control centre buildings. The ACFO (CPO) explained that the Authority is not paying anything towards the building but that it is paying for the FireLink Airwave network and that the cost of this is greater than the previous Airwave contract that the Authority had.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update given

Councillor Hurst-Knight left the meeting at this point (3.40 pm).

15 The Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances 2012/13

This report asked the Fire Authority to consider and agree its 2012/13 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances.

Councillor Hartin referred to overnight accommodation and asked if the amounts specified in the Scheme were sufficient. The Corporate Services Manager explained that most accommodation bookings are done centrally by the Executive Support Team, who are able to obtain good prices.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree its Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances 2012/13 to take effect from 1 April 2012 (as set out at the appendix to the report)

17 Fatal Fires Report

This report provided an overview of the circumstances of the fire fatalities that have occurred since April 2011 in the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin areas.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report

18 Local Government Act 1972

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by the Chair, 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, 3 and 4

Councillor Picken left the meeting at this point (3.45 pm).

19 Fatal Fires Report (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

The Fire Authority received the appendix to report 17, which was considered in closed session, as it contained personal information.

Councillor Picken returned to the meeting at this point (3.48 pm).

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the appendix

20 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 26 September 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Jones, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 26 September 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

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

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2011.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 November 2011, be noted

The Chair then wished all Members and officers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and he thanked them for their work and support in 2011.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....