

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
held at 2.00 pm on Monday, 26 September 2011  
at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

**Present**

**Members**

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Bennett, Mrs Blundell, Carter, Hartin, Hurst-Knight (from 2.35 pm), Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mellings, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Murray, Picken, Price, Roberts and West (Chair)

**Officers**

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations), Head of Finance, 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 Hurst-Knight had advised that he would be late due to a clash with another meeting.

**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.

Councillor Price declared a prejudicial interest in items 13 and 18 on the agenda, as they related to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, of which he is a member.

**3 Minutes**

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual Meeting, held on 20 July 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Carter, and, with Councillors Mrs Blundell and Hartin abstaining, as they had not been present at that meeting, it was

**Resolved** that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual Meeting, held on 20 July 2011, 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 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 8 September 2011.

Councillor Dr Jones, as Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, drew Members' attention to the unadjusted misstatements, detailed on page 4 of the Committee minutes.

The Head of Finance (HoF) then asked the Fire Authority to confirm that the Letter of Representation, agreed by the Committee at the meeting on 8 September 2011, was still valid as at that day and that there had been no subsequent events or matters that should be brought to the attention of the Audit Commission.

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

**Resolved** that the Letter of Representation was still valid as at that day and that there had been no subsequent events or matters that should be brought to the attention of the Audit Commission

Councillor Minnery referred to the issue of capacity within the Finance Department, as detailed on page 4 of the Committee minutes, and asked for further explanation on this issue. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) replied that the size of the Finance Department is relative to the size of the organisation. Any items above and beyond the day-to-day issues dealt with by the team, such as audits, therefore place additional pressure on the Department.

The Lean Systems Review identified how additional capacity can be obtained within the Department. The recommendations arising from the review have been implemented but it is unlikely that capacity will increase greatly beyond the day-to-day activities. Officers are, therefore, in discussion with the auditors regarding adopting a different approach to audits. The HoF agreed that this had been a difficult audit and commented that, despite the issues faced by the Department, the Statement of Accounts places the Department in a good position to go forward. Councillor Minnery requested that an update on the situation within the Department be given to the Strategy and Resources Committee in six months' time. Officers undertook to provide this update.

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 June 2011, be noted

## **6 Constitutional Issues and Protocols**

### **6a Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders**

This report asked the Fire Authority to receive and note the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders, which were agreed at, and stand adjourned from, the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority receive and note the amendments to the Fire Authority's Scheme of Delegation to Officers and to its Standing Orders (set out at paragraphs 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the report), which stand adjourned from the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority, held on 20 July 2011

### **6b Role Description**

At its Annual Meeting in July 2011 the Fire Authority asked that a Role Description be drawn up for Member of the Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group. Accordingly, a draft Role Description was brought to the meeting for Members' consideration. Prior to this the draft Role Description had been circulated to members of the Working Group for comment.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority agree the Role Description for Member of the Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group

### **6c Review of Protocol on Member / Office Relations**

This report asked the Fire Authority to review its Protocol on Member / Officer Relations, which gives guidance for Members and Officers on their respective roles and expectations, and on their relationship with each other.

Councillor Hartin referred to paragraph 5.1 of the Protocol, which makes reference to the Standards Committee, and asked what will happen when the standards regime changes. The Corporate Services Manager explained that the Protocol will be updated to reflect changes and will be brought back to the Authority for agreement.

Referring to paragraph 3.1 of the Protocol regarding officers providing a timely response to enquiries and complaints, Councillor Mrs Blundell asked what timeframes there were for these responses. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that an initial acknowledgement of complaints is provided within 5 working days with a response to the complaint being provided within 28 working days.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority agree the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations, set out in the appendix to the report

## **6d Review of Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality**

This report asked the Fire Authority to review its Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and to decide on any changes to be made.

Councillor Bennett commented that he was uncomfortable with the Fire Authority reviewing the Protocol and, therefore, suggested that the Standards Committee should carry out the review and make recommendations to the Fire Authority. Councillor Minnery agreed with this comment and further stated that he believed that the Protocol was onerous and required simplification. The Clerk commented that the Protocol is part of the Code of Conduct and agreed that it could be simplified.

It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Bennett, seconded by Councillor Minnery, and

**Resolved** unanimously that the Fire Authority agree that the Protocol be referred to the Standards Committee for review prior to its being approved by the full Fire Authority

## **7 Statement of Accounts 2010/11**

This report presented the completed Statement of Accounts to the Fire Authority for consideration and approval.

A summary document of the Statement of Accounts, containing the Explanatory Foreword and Statements, was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

Councillor Adams left the meeting at this point (2.26 pm).

The HoF then talked through the contents of the document, providing a brief explanation of the detail contained in it.

Councillor Minnery commented that the changes that had had to be made to the Statement of Accounts were ludicrous and asked if representation could be made to anybody regarding this. The CFO explained that the changes were an issue related to international financial monitoring systems and as such would not be easy for the Authority to challenge alone. The HoF agreed that the document was complicated for the ordinary reader but the reporting standards are very prescriptive. Councillor Price asked if it would be possible to provide a simplified format for lay people. The HoF undertook to provide this.

Councillor Hurst-Knight arrived at this point (2.35 pm).

Councillor Minnery thanked the Head of Finance and the Finance Team for their work on preparing the Statement of Accounts and throughout the year.

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

**Resolved unanimously** that the Fire Authority approve the Statement of Accounts for 2010/11, subject to incorporating the Annual Governance Statement

## **8 Annual Governance Statement 2010/11 and Improvement Plan 2011/12**

This report asked the Fire Authority formally to approve the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2010/11, which must be included as part of the Statement of Accounts 2010/11. It also asked Members formally to approve the AGS Improvement Plan 2011/12.

Councillor Minnery commented that he felt it was strange to be asked to approve the AGS Improvement Plan, when there were items included in it that were already completed. He asked if it would be better for these to be separated out in future. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) acknowledged these comments and explained that this was a timing issue, which had been brought about by the changes to the process of approving the Statement of Accounts.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority:

- a) Accept and sign-off the Annual Governance Statement 2010/11 (attached at Appendix A to the report); and
- b) Approve the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2011/12 (attached at Appendix B to the report)

## **9 Code of Corporate Governance 2011/12**

This report put forward a draft Code of Corporate Governance 2011/12 for consideration and formal adoption by the Fire Authority.

Councillor Minnery referred to section 2.1.2 of the Code, which relates to Member Role Descriptions and asked why the Member Champion roles were struck through. He recollected that a report on these roles was to have been brought to the Fire Authority for discussion but this had not happened. The Corporate Services Manager confirmed that Councillor Minnery's recollections were correct. The role of Members was, however, likely to evolve in the future and, indeed, a workshop relating to this issue was planned.

The CFO added that, under the Localism Bill (which has since been enacted), it is likely that the role of Members will change over the next 12 to 18 months. He felt, therefore, that it may be better to consider the Member Champion roles as part of any future review of Member roles overall.

Councillor Adams returned to the meeting at this point (2.43 pm).

Under the circumstances Members agreed that only the reference to 'Director of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Ltd' should be deleted at 2.1.2, as this role was now defunct.

**Subject to the foregoing**, it was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority formally adopt the Code of Corporate Governance 2011/12, with the exception of the deletions in section 2.1.2, which would be deferred for future consideration

## **10 Financial Performance to August 2011 including the Annual Treasury Report 2010/11**

This report provided information on the financial performance of the Service, and sought approval for action, where necessary.

The HoF talked through the virements that the Fire Authority was being asked to approve, as set out on pages 2 and 3 of the report, and explained that movements within the Information and Communications Technology Reserve would be finalised and reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee at its meeting in November 2011.

The HoF also reported that the Fire Authority is currently operating within its Prudential Indicators and that it has undertaken no further borrowing to date. With regard to lending, the Fire Authority has continued its policy of only lending to the Debt Management Office and to other local authorities.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Noted the position on the capital programme;
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators for 2010/11;
- e) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2011/12, approving any proposed amendments;
- f) Note the annual review of treasury activities for 2010/11; and
- g) Note performance in Treasury Management to date in 2011/12

## **11 Budget Projections based on Revised Assumptions**

This report updated Members with the projections currently being used by officers to plan future Service strategy. Members of the Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group had reviewed these figures and agreed that they should form the basis of future Service planning. The report is also updated for latest information on future expenditure and income.

The CFO explained that the Fire Authority is considered to be in a 'safe' position until 2013/14 and that any decisions taken this year will have an effect on the Service in 2015/16 and 2016/17. The Service is addressing the issue and is taking a two-pronged approach of lobbying the Government together with identifying any additional cuts that can be made. The aim is to make use of surpluses to reduce future borrowing but there are uncertainties that will need to be dealt with.

Councillor Hurst-Knight suggested that, as well as lobbying the Government and talking to local MPs, the Service should also be talking to the leaders of the local constituent authorities. Councillor Hartin asked what progress was being made with regard to approaching the Government. The CFO explained that he and the Chair were due to meet with the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, on 6 October 2011. The CFO also confirmed that Bob Neill will officially open the new headquarters building in January 2012.

### **Committee Clerk's note**

The meeting that was due to be held with the Fire Minister on 6 October 2011 was subsequently cancelled.

Councillor Price commented that there had been a successful process of consultation to identify the savings made so far through Public Value. There are still savings to be made and some savings still to be reviewed. Councillor West commented that he had recently undertaken peer reviews at other fire authorities, who are taking on board this Authority's unique process for identifying savings. Councillor Hartin commented that the process may also be applicable to other local authorities, such as councils.

The CFO explained that the 2.5% increase in precept, which is referred to in the report, is equivalent to a 4p increase per week per family. Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that the figure of 4p per week should be used, rather than 2.5%, when discussing the precept increase.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report

## **12 Open Public Services White Paper**

This report summarised the key issues raised in the White Paper 'Open Public Services', identified areas where Members may wish to discuss changes ahead of any legislation and suggested comments Members may wish to make to the White Paper.

The CFO explained that there are areas for improvement with regard to the role of Members. There is a suggestion that Members become 'community' or 'citizen' champions and it is proposed that a workshop looking at this issue be held on the morning of 14 December 2011, i.e. the morning of the Fire Authority meeting.

Councillor Bennett referred to the final paragraph on page 3 of the report, which states that 'the proposals suggest that commissioned services will be paid by results...' and asked how this was likely to be done.

The CFO explained that he did not know at this stage but the current grant formula is complex. This formula will be scrapped in 2013/14 and replaced by a new calculation method. The Government has already scrapped performance measures but these may be brought back in as a means of measuring results. It is hoped that this is not the case but there is no clear indication either way in the White Paper.

Councillor Dr Jones asked if it was likely that there would be a return to the Comprehensive Area Agreement system. The CFO responded that there was a lot of discussion taking place about these issues and that under the modernisation agenda there was reference to a 'picture of place'. He also commented that there is concern over the possible levels of bureaucracy that might arise from any new national method of measuring performance.

Councillor Carter commented that it may be worth making the point about keeping bureaucracy to a minimum at the meeting with the Fire Minister on 6 October 2011. The Chair agreed to take this issue forward.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the issues raised in the White Paper

### **13 Response to Consultation on Proposed Changes to Firefighters' Pension Schemes**

This report provided the draft response from the Fire Authority to the consultation exercise on the proposed changes to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (1992) and New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (2006).

Councillor Price left the meeting room at this point (3.14 pm), having previously (see item 2) declared a prejudicial interest in this item.

The CFO explained that this report had been brought directly to the Fire Authority, rather than taken first to the Human Resources Committee, to ensure that all Fire Authority Members were aware of the issues arising from this consultation. In addition to the proposed changes outlined in the report, the Government is also proposing to increase employee contribution rates to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

The CFO explained that the Clerk had reminded him that there were officers present in the room, including himself, who were impacted by the issues raised in the paper. The Chair asked Members if they were happy for the officers concerned to remain in the room, whilst the issue was discussed, to which Members responded that they were.

The CFO then talked through each of the changes detailed in the paper, explaining the Authority's proposed response to them, and answering any questions from Members. A synopsis of the issues raised by Members is given below.



Councillor Bennett referred to paragraph 12 of the report, which refers to the issue of abatement, and asked the CFO to explain what abatement meant. The CFO explained that it is a process used when a member of the pension scheme retires and subsequently returns to work in the public sector. The member's pension will be reduced to ensure that they do not earn more from their combined pension and salary than they did before their retirement. Abatement would not be applied, if the individual was re-employed in the private sector.

The Authority agreed with the proposal set out in the consultation document but believes that the onus should be on the individual concerned to declare, if they are in receipt of a pension. Councillor Bennett asked if abatement applied only to firefighters or was applicable to all public service pensions. The CFO confirmed that the change outlined relates to firefighter pensions but it is being applied to all other public sector pension schemes.

Councillor Adams referred to paragraph 7 of the report, which concerned flexible duty system allowances, and asked if this would happen. The CFO explained that this needs to be looked at to see if it is worthwhile. This issue would only apply to future members of the scheme and not to current members.

Councillor Adams then referred to paragraph 5 of the report, which concerned the issue of the use of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rather than the Retail Price Index (RPI), in relation to pensions, and commented that he believed that this had already been implemented. The CFO confirmed that this was the case but that it had been done without consultation and is, therefore, being legally challenged by the national representative bodies. Councillor Hartin commented that, even though the change to RPI has been made, the Authority's concerns over the impact should still be included in the response to the consultation.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree the responses set out by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Human Resources (ACFO HR); and
- b) Task the ACFO HR to respond on behalf of the Authority.

Councillor Price returned to the meeting room at this point (3.37 pm).

## **14 Accommodation Update**

The Fire Authority received the following update on progress with the new Headquarters from the Chief Fire Officer and Head of Resources.

The main building is almost complete and has been occupied for approximately 4 weeks by headquarters staff; 3 weeks by station personnel; and 2 weeks by Control. Snagging and minor works, such as the handrails to the main entrance, are ongoing.

Demolition of the old Headquarters is now taking place with asbestos currently being stripped out and the gable walls closest to the other buildings being taken down. Mechanical demolition and removal from site will start next week and it is anticipated that this will take 2 weeks and involve up to 200 vehicle movements. After demolition is completed, alterations will be made to the temporary fire station to enable the return of workshops and Technical Services from Sundorne.

Councillor Price congratulated the Head of Resources and his staff for their work on the project and commented that all staff, to whom he had spoken, are very impressed with the building.

Councillor Hartin asked what would happen to the land, once the old headquarters building had been demolished. The Head of Resources explained that the land will be divided up for various uses, including carparking, training and workshops, and clarified that there are now no proposals to sell the land, as had been suggested in the early stages of the project.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the verbal update

## **15 Information and Communications Technology Strategy – Update**

This report provided Members with a summary update regarding implementation of the Service's Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Strategy.

Councillor Hartin commented that he was aware that there were some current issues and asked if these had been resolved. The ACFO explained that there were still difficulties with some parts of the network but the Service is confident that these will be addressed and rectified by the end of November 2011.

The CFO commented that the ICT Department and others had worked extremely hard to introduce the mobilising system in nine months, whilst still completing their normal day-to-day work, and that this had been a huge achievement by all involved.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report

## **16 Local Government Act 1972**

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, 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 3 and 4

**17 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 3 and 4)**

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual Meeting, held on 20 July 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Mrs Barrow, and, with Councillors Mrs Blundell and Hartin abstaining, as they had not been present at that meeting, it was

**Resolved** that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual Meeting, held on 20 July 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

**18 Business Continuity Strategy (Paragraphs 3 and 4)**

This report acted as a supplement to the previous exempt paper to Members and offered further details concerning the Service's business continuity strategy to protect the communities of Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin.

Councillor Price left the meeting room at this point (3.53 pm) as he had declared a prejudicial interest in this item.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report

The meeting closed at 4.10 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....