

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 20 July 2011  
at Shropshire Education and Conference Centre, Shrewsbury**

## **Present**

### **Members**

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

### **Officers**

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations), Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources), Treasurer, Principal Accountant, Head of Operations and Risk, Head of District Performance, Corporate Services Manager, Management Support Officer and Clerk to the Fire Authority

## **1 Election of Chair**

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery and seconded by Councillor Mellings

That Councillor West be elected Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the election of Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

Councillor Thompson asked whether, since the Chair was to be elected from Shropshire Council, the Vice-Chair should be appointed from Telford & Wrekin Council, as the Fire Authority covers both constituent areas. The Clerk advised that this had been enshrined in Standing Orders but had been removed by agreement of the Fire Authority. The Clerk further advised that the only real way to address the issue would be for a Telford & Wrekin member to be nominated.

There being no other nominations, Councillor West was duly elected Chair.

Upon taking the Chair, Councillor West thanked Members and colleagues for their support and help. He also commented that he believes Members work well together and have an excellent working relationship with officers. Councillor West also thanked Councillor Minnery for his support in the role of Vice-Chair.

## **2 Appointment of Vice-Chair**

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow and seconded by Councillor Price

That Councillor Minnery be appointed Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the appointment of Vice-Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor Murray

That Councillor Picken be appointed Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the appointment of Vice-Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

On a vote, with 9 Members voting for Councillor Minnery and 4 Members voting for Councillor Picken, Councillor Minnery was appointed Vice-Chair.

Councillor Minnery thanked those who had supported him and commented that he would not let political or parochial issues affect his duty as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority.

## **3a Retirement of the Treasurer**

Councillor West, as Chair of the Fire Authority and Leader of the Conservative Group, and Councillors Jones and Mellings, as representatives of the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups respectively, paid tribute to the Treasurer, Mr Keith Dixon, for his hard work and dedication over the last 14 years.

It was noted that Mr Dixon had in his role as Treasurer been an approachable, patient and consummate professional, who had managed to make audit and finance enjoyable topics. All three Members thanked Mr Dixon for the support and guidance that he had given to the Authority and wished him well for his retirement.

Councillor West then presented Mr Dixon with a plaque and certificate on behalf of the Authority. Mr Dixon thanked the Authority and commented that he had always tried to give 100% to his role. His strong belief in local government and local representation had been strengthened by the dedication of the Members and officers, with whom he had worked.

## **3b Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Blundell. Councillor Hartin had advised that he would be late due to a clash with another meeting.

#### **4 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 at this point.

The Chair advised that there was a Member Awareness Session scheduled to take place immediately after the close of the meeting. Depending, however, on how many Members were able to stay at the end of the meeting, the session might be either curtailed or deferred to another date.

#### **5 Minutes**

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 15 June 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Roberts, and with Councillor Adams abstaining, as he had not been present at the meeting concerned, it was

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 15 June 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

#### **6 Public Questions**

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

#### **7 Minutes of Audit and Performance Management Committee**

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 June 2011.

Councillor Mellings drew Members' attention to the recommendations at items 5 and 6 of the minutes, which were to be picked up at items 8a and 8b on the agenda for this meeting.

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

#### **8 Constitutional Issues**

##### **8a Committee Membership and Constitution**

This report asked the Fire Authority to confirm appointments to committees, the Local Government Association Annual Assembly and Fire Services Forum and to review the constitution of its committees.

The Corporate Services Manager (CSM) advised that Councillor Murray was to be appointed to the remaining Labour place on the Human Resources Committee. The CSM further explained that, as the allocation of seats to political groups had been agreed at the Fire Authority meeting in June 2011, it had not been included in this report. The CSM also pointed out that the amendments, which Members were asked to agree at recommendation 8c are set out in paragraph 6 of the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery that the recommendations be agreed with Councillor West being appointed as the representative on the Local Government Association Annual Assembly and Fire Services Forum. This was seconded by Councillor Roberts and it was

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree the appointment of Members to serve on committees, as set out in Appendix A to the report;
- b) Appoint Councillor West as its representative on the Local Government Association Annual Assembly and Fire Services Forum; and
- c) Agree the proposed amendments to the constitution of its various committees, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

## **8b Review of Member Role Descriptions**

The purpose of this report was to review, and agree the Fire Authority's Member Role Descriptions.

The CSM explained that the minor amendments to be made to the Role Descriptions are as set out in the report.

Councillor Thompson queried the allowances for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority, particularly given the current situation with cuts to pay etc for local government workers. The CSM explained that the allowances are set by an Independent Remuneration Panel, which proposes the levels of allowance for agreement by Members. Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that the issue had been discussed previously and that he thought that the role descriptions were an excellent guideline for what Members should be doing on the Authority.

Councillor Jones asked if an officer could explain, for the benefit of new Members, how often the Independent Remuneration Panel met. The CSM explained that it is a legislative requirement for a Member Allowance Scheme to be set each year and the Authority normally undertakes this in December ready for the new financial year the following April. The Remuneration Panel meets every three years to review the levels of Member allowances. The Fire Authority has agreed that in other years the allowances will increase in line with the National Joint Council rate. In December 2010, the Authority decided, however, to freeze 2011/12 basic and special responsibility allowances at the 2010/11 rates and also to cut travel allowances.

At the request of Councillor Jones the CSM undertook to draw up a Role Description for Member of the Strategic Risk and Planning (STRaP) Working Group.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority agree the existing Role Descriptions, as detailed in the report, and that a Role Description for Member of Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group be drawn up

## **8c Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders**

This report reviewed the Fire Authority's Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders and asked Members to consider and decide upon the amendments proposed.

In accordance with the Fire Authority's Standing Orders any amendments proposed stand adjourned until the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

The CSM explained that it is good practice for the Fire Authority to review, at least annually, the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and its Standing Orders. Amendments proposed in the report are required to reflect changes in legislation or to provide greater clarity. The CSM pointed out that one further reference to Principal Officers, which should be changed to Section Heads, had been missed on page 2, section 1.4, of the Financial Regulations Standing Orders.

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

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority agree the amendments proposed to:

- The Scheme of Delegation to Officers;
- Standing Orders for the Regulations of Proceedings and Business;
- Standing Orders relating to Contracts; and
- Financial Regulations Standing Orders

## **9 Budget and Financial Monitoring**

This report dealt with issues arising from budget monitoring and with financial developments since the last meeting of the Authority. It requested approval to a number of virements to the 2011/12 budget as a consequence of these changes.

The Treasurer explained that a budget and financial monitoring report is brought to the Fire Authority on a quarterly basis. Following the close of accounts in June 2011, it is now confirmed that, as reported in section i of paragraph 4 of the report, £300,000 can be removed from the base budget for this year.

The Treasurer also reported that the Authority is on course to achieve the £1.146 million reductions identified through the Public Value process. These savings will, however, be offset by the need to appoint a Health and Safety Officer.

With regard to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, the Treasurer reported that it is possible that the employer's contribution will increase, however the Authority should be able to cope with this, should it occur. It is also likely that the Authority will have to pay a sanction charge in certain circumstances, as set out in the Pension Scheme's operating rules. It seems that this is not chargeable to the Pensions Account and will, therefore, fall on the revenue budget, which could have a significant impact on this Authority.

The audited accounts and the decisions made in relation to these in June 2011 remain unaltered as the Audit Commission does not appear to have made any changes to them. The Audit Commission have also written to confirm an 8% reduction in their audit fees for this year and a 12% rebate for the audit fees for 2012/13.

The Treasurer then referred to the issue of the Local Area Network (LAN), which is the next stage of expenditure to be taken from the ICT reserve, agreed at the June 2011 meeting of the Fire Authority. Under urgency procedures and after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority, the Treasurer and the Chief Fire Officer have agreed to proceed with a quotation process for the procurement of the LAN. This is an exemption from the tendering process that is set out in the Standing Orders relating to Contracts and is deemed necessary due to concerns about moving the current platform to the new building. It is hoped that a decision regarding the procurement will be made within the next few days and certainly in time to ensure resilience for the move. The Treasurer also reassured the Fire Authority that the cost of this is contained within the ICT Reserve.

The Treasurer informed the Authority that the capital scheme is currently within budget and advised that, if the Authority agree the changes to the budget as set out at paragraph 6 of the report, the balance of £285,000 will be used to fund expenditure on the St Michael's Street scheme, thereby reducing debt charges by £6,000 in 2011/12 and by £24,000 in future years.

The Treasurer informed the Authority that due to concerns arising from the sovereign debt crisis in Greece, lending has been restricted to other local authorities and the Debt Management Office for the time being. There is also currently no clear view of the effects on the banking situation, should issues spread from Greece to other countries.

Councillor Mellings noted that there was a £300,000 saving on pay and prices, which should feed through to 2014/15. He then referred to the issue of the rescue tender in the last two years of the Public Value proposals and asked at what stage there would be an opportunity to review this issue. The Treasurer explained that there is a meeting of the Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group on 4 August 2011 and the issue could be considered then.

Councillor Minnery commented that the rescue tender issue is foremost for the Group.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) commented that officers share the concerns about the rescue tender, which will be considered in relation to 2013/14. The Public Value process will be repeated across all areas of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in the summer of 2012 and it is probably best to address the rescue tender issue at that time.

Councillor Adams asked if the issue of the sanction charges in relation to pensions was a one-off or a recurring issue. The Treasurer explained that this is a series of one-off payments, which is dependent on the officer retiring and relates to complex tax rules.

Councillor Murray referred to the underspend, which had been identified in the 2010/11 budget, and asked if the Government would try to recover that money from the Fire Authority. The Treasurer confirmed that it was not possible for the Government to do this.

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

**Resolved unanimously** that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the virements set out in paragraphs 6 and 7, totalling £285,000, which will result in net savings of £6,000 in the current year; and
- b) Note the current restrictions on lending to protect security of capital

## 10 Partnership Working and the Outcomes

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an overview of the outcomes of partnership working within the Fire Authority and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that the Service is currently involved in 25 partnerships across the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin areas. An internal Scrutiny Group has been set up to monitor the work of these partnerships.

Councillor Bennett referred to the last sentence of paragraph 4 of the report, which states that the Community Safety Partnership Management Group has been set up to monitor the outcomes and actions of the Local Joint Committees (LJCs) and asked for clarification of what this meant. The DCFO explained that this Group had been formed as a consequence of the recent Area Command restructure. The intention is for the Group to oversee the work undertaken in conjunction with LJCs, not to monitor their actions.

The Chair asked if there were good links with Telford & Wrekin's equivalent of LJCs. The DCFO confirmed that this was the case.

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

## 11 FiReControl Project – National Audit Office Review

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on the finding of the National Audit Office Review into the failure of the FiReControl project.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) advised that this was a summary report and that more detailed reports would follow from the National Audit Office. He drew Members' attention to the following areas, which are not addressed in the report:

- 1) The cost to fire authorities, which is estimated to run into millions of pounds;
- 2) The FireLink project, which was an integral part of the FiReControl project and which is still costing money; and
- 3) The impact on staff, including Fire Control Operators, whose careers have effectively been put on hold, and temporary staff.

The Chair agreed that the report only scratches the surface and commented that these issues, particularly regarding the costs of the failed FiReControl and of FireLink, should be flagged up with Communities and Local Government. The Authority agreed that this representation should be made by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations).

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

## 12 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This was the fifth Annual Corporate Risk Management Summary Report to Members. These reports aim to inform Members about the corporate level risk management work that has been undertaken during the previous twelve months, as well as summarising the risk environment in which the Service is currently operating.

The Head of Operations and Risk drew Members' attention to the last paragraph of section 6 of the report, which states that the annual review of all risks had been completed on 1 May 2011. Following on from this review the total number of risks has reduced by eight. There are currently 14 live threats and the average risk level has increased slightly. 10 risks are assessed as being above tolerance level and further details regarding these are set out in section 10 of the report.

Councillor Roberts referred to the appendix to the report and queried why there was reference to the Brigade, the Service and the Authority rather than a consistent reference to one of these. The Head of Operations and Risk explained that the information in the appendix is derived from a database that has been in existence for a number of years and that, where possible, references are being changed to achieve consistency.

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



**13 Local Government Act 1972**

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Mellings 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

**14 Corporate Risk Management Summary – Exempt Information (Paragraphs 3 and 4)**

The Authority had received an open session report, which summarised its current exposure to corporate risk. This report supplemented that one, as it contained information that is exempt from publication by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the contents of this report, in conjunction with the Corporate Risk Management Summary discussed in open session

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

This report acquainted Members with outline details of the Service’s Business Continuity Strategy.

**Resolved** that Members note the contents of this report

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....