

**Non-Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 11 December 2013, at 3.00 pm
at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Bennett, Mrs Bould, Carter (until 4.00 pm), Cherrington, Hartin, Hurst-Knight (from 3.40 pm onwards), Dr Jones, Mellings, Picken, Price, Miss Reynolds, Thompson and West (Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery), Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Services), Treasurer, Head of Finance, Clerk to the Fire Authority, Corporate Support Manager and Executive Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Kiernan and Minnery.

Councillor Hurst-Knight had advised that he might be late and subsequently arrived at 3.40 pm.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

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

Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin and Mellings declared a Disposable Pecuniary Interest in item 18, in that they were directors on the board of Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd. They had been granted a dispensation by the Standards Committee, which allowed them to take part in the discussion and vote on matters, relating to Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services, providing that legal opinion considered the participation to be appropriate. On this occasion, the report to be considered informed the Fire Authority of decisions that had been made by the board of directors and was for information purposes only. It was, therefore, deemed appropriate for Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin and Mellings to participate in the discussion of the item.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 25 September 2013.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 25 September 2013, 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.

5a Proposed Merger of Standards and Human Resources Committee

This report asked Members to consider the recommendation from its Standards and Human Resources Committees that the two Committees be merged into one. If the Authority agreed this recommendation, there were a number of other decisions it then needed to make.

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

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) The recommendation from its Human Resources and Standards Committees that the two Committees be merged into one;
- b) That the merged Committee be known as the Standards and Human Resources Committee and the appeals hearings sub-committee be renamed the Hearings Panel;
- c) That the merged Committee consist of 7 Members;
- d) That its constitution be as set out at Appendix A to the report;
- e) That Members of the Committee be Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Kiernan and Price (Conservative), Councillors Mrs Bould and Picken (Labour) and Councillor Mellings (Liberal Democrat);
- f) That the Committee elect a Chair and appoint a Vice-Chair at its first meeting;
- g) That the allocation of seats to political groups be as set out at Appendix B to the report, including that the political balance requirements should not apply to the Pensions Panel;
- h) That the Chair of the merged Committee sit on the Pensions Panel; and
- i) That the implementation date for these decisions be 1 April 2014.

5b Meeting Schedule 2014

The Fire Authority received a schedule of proposed dates for 2014 meetings of the Fire Authority and its committees for approval.

An amended version of the Meeting Schedule 2014 was tabled (copy to be attached to the signed minutes).

The amended schedule showed a revised date for the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel meeting and also that the date of the Fire Authority meeting in April was to be confirmed.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the schedule of proposed dates for 2014 meetings of the Authority and its committees as set out in the amended version

6 Human Resources Committee

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 17 October 2013

Councillor Dr Jones, Member Champion for Equality and Diversity, gave a presentation on the involvement of the Service in various equality and diversity events.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the presentation given

7 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 November 2013, and considered the recommendations at item 6.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 7 November 2013, be noted and that the recommendations at item 6, as given below, be agreed.

Item 6 Financial Performance to September 2013, including Mid-Year Treasury Review 2013/14

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Approve changes to capital schemes, where requested;
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2013/14; and
- e) Note the mid-year review of treasury activities for 2013/14.

8 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 14 November 2013.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting held on 14 November 2013

9 2014/15 and Later Years Budget Summary

This report summarised the budgets that were 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 in February 2014.

The Head of Finance (HoF) drew Members' attention to the budget position, summarised in the table on page 2, which showed that there was a predicted deficit of approximately £1.5 million by 2019/20. It was also likely that National Insurance contributions for employers would increase, following the proposed pension reforms in 2016. It was likely, however, that this additional cost could be covered by a realignment of the pay and prices reserve.

With regard to the council tax freeze grant, the HoF drew Members' attention to the table on page 3 of the report, which set out the options available to the Authority and the associated budget implications. She advised that accepting the freeze grant would mean that the expected deficit would be £500,000 larger by 2019/20.

The HoF also explained that the constituent authorities had indicated that there could be an increase in the council tax base in both areas, because of plans for new housing developments. The situation was being monitored and whilst it had not currently been factored into the budget position, it would be amended as necessary, when more information became available.

Councillor Price referred to the 2020 presentations and the fact that the public did appear to be prepared to pay an increased precept. He suggested that the Authority should decline the council tax freeze grant and continue to base its budget planning on a precept increase of 2%. Councillor Hartin commented that it was clear from the information provided that the Authority had no other option than to proceed as set out at recommendation e) ii).

As the 2020 Process would be considered by the Authority again in February 2014, Councillor Hartin wondered if this was an opportune time to bring forward the issue of a referendum on precept increase, as the impact of this had never been fully considered. He asked that figures be produced to give a clear indication of the cost of holding a referendum. Councillor West commented that the possibility of holding a referendum during a general election was being investigated.

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin and seconded by Councillor Price, that at recommendation d) the council tax freeze grant be declined.

Councillor Bennett commented that one of the main risks with a referendum was that there could be a very low turnout. This could, however, be avoided, if the referendum was combined with something else or if alternatives were used, such as events or mailings, which carried a low or nil cost. The Chair advised that referenda would not be accepted by the Minister, if they were carried out by means other than a traditional paper vote. he did, however, agree that the cost and feasibility of carrying out a referendum be investigated.

Councillor Dr Jones commented that she supported recommendation e) ii) but that there were variables that needed to be considered and further information was needed. It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones and seconded by Councillor Cherrington that recommendation e) ii) be agreed.

Councillor Bennett then proposed recommendations a), b), c) and f). These were seconded by Councillor Carter and it was

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree to base its revenue budget planning and consultation on the totals set out in section 7 of the report;
- b) Agree to base its capital programme on that set out in 5c in the Appendix to the report (the Green Booklet), subject to further additions, and to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by the Strategy and Resources Committee in February 2014;
- c) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 5d, and confirm the general reserve;
- d) Decline the offer of a two-year council tax freeze grant;
- e) Continue to base its planning and consultation on a precept increase of 2% in 2014/15, and the years following; and
- f) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package in February 2014, for final decision by the Fire Authority in February 2014. In addition, it was agreed that officers would calculate the cost of holding a referendum regarding an increase in precept in excess of 2% and the impact this would have on the budget and bring a report to the February meeting.

10 Meeting with Fire Minister

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

Councillor Thompson thanked the officers and Members for attending the meeting and suggested that David Wright MP would also be supportive of the issue. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the meeting had been with Conservative MPs only and that the decision about this had been made by Philip Dunne MP.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the update given

11 2020 Strategic Planning Process

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on the 2020 Strategic Planning Process as detailed on the agenda for the meeting.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) (ACFO - SD) advised that the final session of the planned meetings would take place at Oswestry that night. He thanked the members of the Strategic Risk and Planning (StRaP) Working Group for their attendance at the meetings. The results of the formal consultation would be taken to the October, rather than the July, 2014 meeting of the Fire Authority to allow thorough analysis of the consultation results.

Councillor Hartin, as Chair of the StRaP Working Group, said that attendance of the StRaP members at the meetings had been much appreciated and that public response to the proposals had been picked up. Councillor Mrs Barrow, on behalf of the StRaP members, thanked officers for their work. This was echoed by the Chair, who also commented on the benefits of the process, which was not carried out in other services.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the update given

12 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2014/15

This report asked the Fire Authority to consider and agree it's 2014/15 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances.

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

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) Its Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2014/15 to take effect from 1 April 2014 (a draft of which was set out at the appendix to the report); and
- b) That no increases be applied to basic, special responsibility, travel and subsistence allowances from 1 April 2014

Councillor Carter left the meeting at this point (4.00 pm).

13 Local Government Act 1972

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, 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.

14 Human Resources Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 17 October 2013

15 Audit and Performance Management Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 14 November 2013.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 14 November 2013

16 Special Exemption from Standing Orders relating to Contracts (Paragraph 3)

This report advised Members of special exemptions from Standing Orders relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree that future reports of this type be taken to the Audit and Performance Management Committee;
- b) Note the special exemptions from Standing Orders relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority; and
- c) Agree that the exemption procedure had been applied properly. No advice on future implementation of this policy was offered.

17 Recruitment of Deputy Chief Fire Officer (paragraph 3)

This report set out the Chief Fire Officer's intentions regarding the structure of Brigade Management and asked the Fire Authority to direct the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel to plan the process for the recruitment of a Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

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

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the Chief Fire Officer's intentions regarding the Brigade Manager structure; and
- b) Direct the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel to plan the process for recruitment of a Deputy Chief Fire Officer, reporting back to the February meeting of the Fire Authority with recommendations and a plan of action

18 Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services (paragraphs 1, 2, and 3)

This report advised of developments relating to Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the recommendations in the report

Before closing the meeting, the Chair wished all Members and officers a Happy Christmas and New Year and thanked them for their support during 2013.

The meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....