

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 15 March 2012 at 2.00 pm**

Members

Councillors Mrs Barrow (Vice-Chair), Hartin, Minnery (Chair), Roberts, Thompson and West

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance, and Executive Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Picken.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 19 January 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Roberts, and with Councillor West abstaining, as he had not been present at the January meeting, it was

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 19 January 2012, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No public questions, statements or petitions had been received.

5 Strategy and Resources Committee Work Plan 2012/13

This report reviewed progress against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2011 / 2012 Work Plan and put forward a 2012 / 2013 Work Plan for consideration and approval by Members.

Councillor Minnery asked for further detail regarding the procurement strategies report, which had not been completed on the Work Plan for 2011 / 2012. As the officers present were unable to provide a response, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) undertook to investigate the issue further.

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

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note progress made against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2011 / 2012 Work Plan; and
- b) Approve the Work Plan for 2012 / 2013, attached as an appendix to the report.

6 Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee

This report presented the draft version of the Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee for consideration and approval by Members, prior to submission to the Fire Authority at its meeting in April.

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

Resolved that the Committee approve the draft version of the Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee, attached as an appendix to the report

7 Public Value Performance Targets 2012/13

This report presented recommendations for Public Value Performance Targets to support delivery of the Fire Authority's Service Plan 2012/13.

The CFO presented this report to the Committee and explained that the Government has set out in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework that it wishes to move away from centrally set targets for fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), which will enable FRAs to set measures and targets that are relevant to their local area. This move has been welcomed by many FRAs, although there are some that want national targets to be set. The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) has established a committee to consider this issue, of which the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) (ACFO CPO) is a member. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has indicated that national data collection may become the responsibility of individual FRAs but additional finance would need to be given to FRAs to enable this. FRAs have also expressed a wish that a proper benchmarking system be established within groups of similar FRAs, for example metropolitans, combined fire authorities etc.

The CFO explained that Appendix A to the report sets out the current and predicted performance for 2011/12, which shows that the Authority is predicted to achieve 4, and to fail 4, of its 8 targets. Appendix B sets out the proposed, and where appropriate amended, targets for 2012/13. The CFO reminded the Committee that the targets set need to stretch the organisation but at the same time need to be achievable with the resources available.

The CFO highlighted that measure 1a and 1b had been amended for 2012/13 to take account of concerns that measure 1b had been measuring two separate issues in 2011/12.

Councillor Hartin referred to Appendix A and asked what action was being taken with regard to measure 2a – accidental fires will be maintained to not more than 616 fires during 2011/12 – and 2b – fire crimes will be maintained to not more than 1114 fires during 2011/12 – both of which are predicted to fail. The CFO explained that with regard to accidental fires there had been higher than usual numbers of grass and bin fires in July to October 2011, which coincided with warm weather and the holiday period. There has also been a national upward trend of accidental fires being started in wheelie bins and the Service is working with both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to address this issue.

With regard to fire crimes, the CFO reported that there has been a rising trend in arson cases, particularly larger scale arson, for example farm / car fires. The Fire Crimes Officer has had an impact on arson cases and is working closely with the Police to achieve successful arrest and prosecution of arsonists. The Police take arson seriously and work is being done with local magistrates to highlight the seriousness of these offences.

Councillor Hartin referred to measure 3a – fire related deaths and serious injuries in the community will be reduced to less than 30 during 2012/13 - in Appendix B and asked if this figure was appropriate, given events to date in 2011/12. The CFO asked the Committee to consider setting the target for this indicator to not more than 35 rather than 30, given the statistics for the previous five years. He also explained that the measure had been set to include fire related deaths and serious injuries due to the low numbers of fire related deaths that normally occur in Shropshire. The recent trend has been an increase in deaths with a corresponding reduction in serious injuries and officers recommend that the two should still be measured together. The Committee agreed that the target should be set to not more than 35.

Councillor Minnery referred to measure 3b – injuries sustained to staff through firefighting will be maintained to not more than 25 injuries during 2011/12 – in Appendix A and asked for an explanation of why this indicator was likely to fail. The CFO explained that the initial figures used to set the target had been wrong, as they included injuries sustained on training rather than on the fireground. There has also been an increase in firefighting injuries sustained at domestic fires, which can be linked to a corresponding increase in serious house fires. Councillor Hartin asked if there was a particular type of injury that was sustained. The CFO explained that it is mainly burns to the hands and lower arms.

Councillor West asked if it was wise to reduce the target from 25 to 24 for 2012/13. The CFO explained that this was one measure, on which the Fire Authority needs to stretch itself. Councillor Mrs Barrow asked how this would be achieved. The CFO responded that it would be done through improved personal protective equipment (PPE) and training.

Councillor Hartin asked if the Service would be able to speed up the proposed replacement of gloves. The CFO confirmed that it would use efficiency savings to enable this. The CFO then demonstrated the new PPE, which will be issued under the Firekit Replacement Project, to the Committee. This includes gloves that enable greater dexterity for the wearer and which have longer arms. Firefighters will eventually be issued with two pairs of gloves rather than one and there will be a choice of gloves to ensure a proper fit for individuals.

Councillor West asked if there was a greater risk if firefighters used PPE that had been issued to specific people. The CFO confirmed that this was an issue and that there would be a briefing for all firefighters to clarify the rules on the wearing and cleaning of both firekit and PPE. Councillor Roberts asked if cleaning was the responsibility of the individual. The CFO explained that the cleaning of kit is done centrally.

Councillor West commented that he felt that with the changes that are to be made to the firekit and PPE, reducing the target to 24 for measure 3b seems to be realistic. It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor West, and

Resolved unanimously that the Committee agree the proposed Public Value performance targets for 2012/13, as set out in Appendix B to the report, with the exception of measure 3a, which will be amended to read – Fire related deaths and serious injuries in the community will be reduced to less than 35 during 2012/13.

8 Financial Performance to February 2012

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

The Head of Finance (HoF) highlighted the table on page 2 of the report, which sets out the position of the revenue budget and explained that the overspend on Fleet Management was due to the extension of appliance life from 12 to 15 years, which has led to increased vehicle servicing.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked when the vacancies referred to in the table would be deleted. The CFO explained that the vacancies in Fire Control were due to maternity leave and long-term sickness, which has meant that agency staff have been kept on to ensure cover. The CFO also explained that Fire Control has always operated on low numbers and, as a measure to ensure short-term cover, five Retained Fire Control Operators have been recruited and trained.

The CFO referred to the reduced spending on management development and health and safety training and explained that this is combined training for new managers. As there has been no recruitment and little promotion, there has been a reduction in spending on training.

Councillor Hartin referred to the prevention underspend and asked if there had been a reduction in the level of prevention work, as was indicated by the wording in the table.

The CFO explained that the posts referred to are to be deleted and that there has been a slightly reduced level of spending on prevention. Prevention work is now being delivered more and more by watches and stations and away from the central department. The effect of this is being monitored. The Service is trying to reinvest in prevention, where possible. Councillor Mrs Barrow asked about road traffic collisions (RTCs) and spending on associated prevention work. The CFO explained that the prevention of RTCs is a responsibility of the police and local authorities and, as such, the Service has reduced its spending on RTC prevention. Trends in this area are being monitored, however, and money will be found to enable work, if needed.

Councillor West referred to the fleet management overspend and commented that this was to be expected, given the extended appliance life. He asked if there was a plan in place to address the issue, if needed. The CFO confirmed that the issue was being monitored and alternative methods, such as the foam delivery system, are being investigated to try and reduce wear and tear on the appliances. The Head of Resources has also been tasked to look at the balance of usage with regard to appliances, i.e. replacement being based on the condition, rather than the age of the vehicle, with appliances being moved around the County as appropriate.

The HoF confirmed that, as part of the review of the Authority's reserves and balances, Members had been advised that the Equipment Replacement Provision may be increased. This could then be used to cover unusually large maintenance costs on appliances and smooth expenditure in the revenue budget.

The HoF referred to paragraph 6 of the report, which sets out the Fire Authority's current investments and explained that the investment strategy has been reviewed and it has been decided to maintain it as is for the time being. Once the use of resources has been considered and agreed, then a review of lending will be carried out.

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

Resolved that the Committee recommend 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 2011/12; and
- d) Note performance in Treasury Management to date in 2011/12.

9 Review of the Finance Department

This report presented a review of the Authority's restructured Finance Department, following the retirement of the Treasurer in August 2011.

The HoF explained that the new department structure is still to be fully implemented due to maternity leave but the transition has been very smooth with all involved taking to their roles well and the officer seconded to cover maternity leave doing a good job. The new structure means that there will be two officers available to look at audit and preparation work for the audit, which is underway.

The HoF suggested, and it was agreed by the Committee, that a further review should be carried out and reported to the Committee in six months' time to assess the impact after a full year of operating under the new structure.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked how the outsourcing of the Treasurer role was working. The HoF responded that there had been no issues with this. The Treasurer is supportive and interested in the Fire Authority, although there is a different relationship, as the Treasurer is not in direct contact with officers daily, as was previously the case. The CFO concurred that this was difficult when officers were used to having the Treasurer on hand, although this should become easier as time goes on.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked what the impact of the new structure had been on officers. The HoF said that officers appear to have settled into their new roles but a review of the roles of individual team members will need to be undertaken after a full year to see how these roles have evolved.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

10 Localising Council Tax Support in England

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on Localising Council Tax Support in England, as detailed on the agenda for the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked if there had been any feedback on the Council Tax leaflets. The CFO confirmed that there had been two calls relating to the council tax leaflet.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the update given

11 Local Government Resource Review Update on Business Rates Retention

The Fire Authority received a verbal update on the Local Government Resource Review Update on Business Rates Retention, as detailed on the agenda for the meeting.

The CFO explained that Business Rates Retention could mean a significant reduction in the funding baseline. Cuts may be more than 10%, which will mean that the Fire Authority will need to make up this difference itself. The National Non-Domestic Rates portion of grant could also be reduced due to the effect of central government retention.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the update given

12 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting 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 Paragraph 3.

13 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Members received the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 19 January 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Barrow, seconded by Councillor Minnery, and with Councillor West abstaining, as he had not been present at the January meeting, it was

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 19 January 2012, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....