

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 15 June 2011
at the Shropshire Education and Conference Centre, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

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

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations), Treasurer, Principal Accountant, Corporate Services Manager, Management Support Officer and Clerk to the Fire Authority.

1 Welcome to New Members

The Chair welcomed Councillors Carter, Murray and Thompson from Telford & Wrekin Council to their first Fire Authority meeting.

The Chair thanked Councillor Dixon, who lost his seat in the recent elections, and Councillors Eade and Mason, who are no longer sitting on the Fire Authority, for their work. It was agreed that thank-you letters would be sent to Councillors Dixon, Eade and Mason on behalf of the Fire Authority.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Adams, Dr Jones and Price. Councillor Mrs Barrow stated that she would have to leave early to attend a Shropshire Council meeting.

3 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 was an en bloc declaration of personal interest at this point from all members of Shropshire Council present at the meeting, i.e. Councillors Mrs Barrow, Bennett, Hartin, Hurst-Knight, Mellings, Minnery, Roberts and West. The declaration related to agenda items 9 and 11, as these items concerned the placement of contracts with Shropshire Council.

4 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 27 April 2011.

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

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 27 April 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

5 Public Questions

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

6 Strategy and Resources Committee Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 May 2011, and considered the recommendations at items 5, 6 and 7 of the minutes.

Councillor Hartin, as Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee, drew Members' attention to the various documents to be considered.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 May 2011, be noted and that the recommendations at the following items be agreed:

- 5 Amendments to Strategy and Resources Committee Terms of Reference;
- 6 Amendments to Role Descriptions for the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Committee; and
- 7 Integrated Strategic Planning Process 2012/13 and the Medium Term Corporate Plan

7 Committee Composition and Allocation of Seats to Political Groups

This report asked the Fire Authority to agree both the composition of its committees and the allocation of seats on its committees to political groups, following a change in the political balance, resulting from elections at Telford & Wrekin Council.

The Corporate Services Manager informed Members that there was an error in the appendix to the report. The heading in the fourth column on the table should read 'Lib Dem' not 'Lib Dem / Indep', as there are currently no Independent Members sitting on the Fire Authority.

It was noted that there was a mistake on the last page of the appendix, where Councillor Adams was listed as a member of the Strategy and Resources Committee instead of Councillor Mrs Barrow.

Councillor Hartin informed the meeting that he would be stepping down from the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel and the Human Resources Committee and that Councillor Mrs Blundell would be replacing him as the Liberal Democrat member on the Human Resources Committee.

Councillor Minnery advised that Councillor Hurst-Knight would be moving from the Strategy and Resources Committee to the Audit and Performance Management Committee and that the second Conservative vacancy on the Audit and Performance Management Committee would be filled by Councillor Carter.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Roberts, and with no Members voting against or abstaining, it was

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) That the political balance requirements should not apply to the Authority's Pensions Panel; and
- b) The committee composition and allocation of seats to political groups, as proposed in the appendix to the report.

8 Member Training and Development Programme 2011-12

Members received the revised Member Training and Development Programme for 2011-12.

The Corporate Services Manager informed Members that, as the October meeting of the Fire Authority has been cancelled and is to be rearranged in September, the session on 'Managing the Authority's Finances' will now be delivered after the September meeting.

Councillor Thompson asked if a site visit to the new headquarters building would be arranged for new Members. The Corporate Services Manager undertook to arrange this for all Members. Councillor Mrs Blundell asked for an overview of the website to be given in the Member training session immediately following the meeting, which officers agreed to do.

Councillor Picken asked if future Fire Authority meetings would be held in the new headquarters building. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that all Fire Authority meetings from September onwards would take place in the new headquarters.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the revised Member Training and Development Programme for 2011-12

9 Fire Authority Treasurer

This report recommended to Members of the Authority that they outsource the role of Authority Treasurer to Shropshire Council with a two-year Service Level Agreement with an option to extend for a further two years.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) began by acknowledging the work and commitment that the Treasurer had given to the Fire Authority over the years. Councillor Mellings, as Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, advised that the report had been brought before the Committee earlier in June for comment. The Committee felt that the option recommended in the report was the next logical step. Councillor Mellings commented that it would be helpful to have a named individual as Treasurer and the opportunity to access financial networks.

The CFO explained that, if there was any concern over a conflict of interests, then the Fire Authority would approach Telford & Wrekin to use their Section 151 Officer. Councillor Carter asked if the recommendations needed to be amended to include reference to Telford & Wrekin Council regarding this issue. The Clerk advised that this would be covered in the service level agreement.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree that:

- a) Officers negotiate and enter into a Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council to employ the Services of a Section 151 Officer (Treasurer); and
- b) The costs of such a provision and necessary changes to the internal financial team have a nil effect on current costs

10 Statement of Accounts 2010/11

This report set out the key revenue issues that have arisen from work on the Statement of Accounts 2010/11, and sought specific approval to a number of virements from the General Fund in 2011/12.

The Treasurer informed the meeting that the Principal Accountant had worked hard to ensure that the accounts were ready for the end of June, in order that the Treasurer could sign them off as a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position.

The Treasurer advised that an additional £1 million of underspends had been identified at the close of the accounts, making a total of £2,213,000 for 2010/11. The report sets out possible uses for this money and these suggestions are reflected in the report's recommendations.

The Treasurer explained that utilising money from the capital un-earmarked reserve to fund major capital projects saves the Authority debt charges, with the aim being to fund the St Michael's Street project without borrowing. He added that money can be moved in response to events, for example the outcome of the retained firefighters' pension case.

Councillor Hartin referred to the capital earmarked reserve and asked if the £450,000 in this reserve was sufficient for those sites that did require work. The CFO explained that the Wellington site currently requires the most investment. It had been proposed that a new fire station be developed in partnership with Telford College of Arts & Technology. The project had, however, fallen through and so the Fire Authority had agreed £100,000 funding to improve the existing buildings. Project work is currently being undertaken to see if any more work is needed at the site. Any investment would, however, be kept to a minimum, as it is possible that the station may need to move to accommodate the growing population of the area.

Councillor Bennett acknowledged the growth in Telford & Wrekin and asked if any consideration had been given to the Community Infrastructure Levy. The CFO confirmed that this was being considered as part of discussions with Telford & Wrekin Council. Councillor Murray commented that Hortonwood may be the best site for future fire station developments due to its road network links. The CFO commented that, should the need arise to move the station, extensive work would be undertaken to identify the best sites.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve:

- a) The addition of £284,000 of expenditure slipped into 2011/12 to the current year's budgets;
- b) The budget of £64,000 for Risk Reduction Officers and £24,000 for Human Resources staff in 2011/12; and
- c) The transfer of the balance of the General Fund, £1,841,000 to the reserves, as set out in paragraph 5 of the report, subject to review during the preparation of the 2012/13 budget

Councillor Mrs Barrow left the meeting at this point (2.40 pm).

11 Information and Communications Technology: Outline Business Case

This report summarised the outline business case for shared services with Shropshire Council to secure improvements to the Service's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure. The proposed shared service arrangement for a Wide Area Network (WAN) infrastructure will make effective use of the previously agreed ICT reserve that underpins the Service's ICT Strategy for the next three to five-year period.

The Clerk advised that Members need to be aware of the risks associated with the procurement route, outlined by him at the April meeting of the Fire Authority, but that those risks are relatively low.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) informed the meeting that he had arranged to meet with Shropshire Council the following afternoon, pending the Authority's agreement to the report's recommendations. That meeting would move the process to stage 4 of the Public / Public Partnership Pathway, as set out in Figure 1 in the report.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- i) Approve proposals to enter into a shared services agreement for the provision of a Wide Area Network infrastructure with Shropshire Council and / or its contractors;
- ii) Delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer to enter into any other agreements, which may be necessary or appropriate to give effect to this arrangement;
- iii) Approve funding set-up costs of £149,000 from the ICT reserve, and covering annual running costs from current budgets from 2012/13 onwards. An additional £33,000 revenue costs will need to be met from the revenue budget in 2011/12; and
- iv) Receive, at a later date, a report setting out the business case to enhance the legacy Local Area Network

12 FiReControl Project - Update

This report set out proposals to consolidate, through the use of a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), partnership arrangements with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (HWFRA) and recommendations to fund additional expenditure to secure resilient control room arrangements.

The ACFO tabled a copy of a letter from Bob Neill MP (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The letter relates to the business case and can be read one of two ways but any level of funding will help the Authority.

The Chair informed the meeting that the wording of recommendation c) in the report should be amended to read 'Authorise the Chief Fire Officer, acting on behalf of the Fire Authority, to sign the MoU'.

Councillor Hartin referred to the FiReControl article in the press over the weekend, which had mentioned legacy funding and the possibility of private finance initiative funding being paid. He asked if there would be any impact on fire and rescue authorities. The CFO replied that Cassidian did not deliver the contract on time or to quality, hence the cancellation of the contract.

The Government had spent £500 million on the contract but, as Cassidian had not delivered, it was likely that the Government had exercised liquidated damage sections of the contract. Communities and Local Government have indicated that some of this money will be available to fire and rescue services. The currently empty Regional Control Centre buildings, for which rent is being paid, may, however, lead to shrinkage in the amount of money available.

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

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report;
- b) Agree the proposed MoU between the Fire Authority and HWFRA;
- c) Authorise the Chief Fire Officer, acting on behalf of the Fire Authority, to sign the MoU;
- d) Note the financial impact on the Shrewsbury Headquarters Programme as a result of the cancellation of the national FiReControl project;
- e) Agree to fund approximately £95,000 in additional costs from reserves, if grant is not forthcoming; and
- f) Receive, at a future meeting of the Fire Authority, a more detailed report concerning developments and financial implications arising from the cancellation of the FiReControl project

13 Annual Report 2010/11

This report sought Member approval of the proposed contents and format of the Fire Authority Annual Report 2010/11.

The ACFO advised that the Final Accounts will be added to the report once they are approved in September.

The Chair informed the meeting that recommendation b) in the report needs to be amended to read 'Delegate final approval of the Annual Report to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair'.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Approve the draft contents and format of the proposed Annual Report; and
- b) Delegate final approval of the Annual Report to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair.

14 Future of Local Public Audit

This report sought approval to a formal response to the Government's Consultation paper "The Future of Local Public Audit".

Councillor Mellings commented that, as Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, he feels that Appendix B covers all issues that need to be raised in the response to Communities and Local Government. Further assessment will be required, when the detail of the changes is released by the Government.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve a response, as set out in Appendix B to the report

15 Fire Futures – Government Response

This report summarised the response to the Fire Futures Reports produced by working parties from the fire community.

The CFO commented that centrally removed bureaucracy, although welcomed, will lead to further responsibilities and costs for fire and rescue authorities. The new National Framework, which is due to be published in time for 2012, will probably set out minimum standards for fire and rescue authorities.

Councillor Hartin asked about the future of the Fire Service College. The CFO replied that the College may be privatised, although there are other options that could be explored. The College did sell land to raise capital funds for investment but the Treasury will not allow the College to spend the money raised. This issue is being looked at by chief fire officers at national level. The College is facing stiff competition from larger fire and rescue services, who offer similar training courses. The CFO informed Members that it was important to continue to support the College as the Centre of Excellence for operational training in the UK.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

16 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded 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 12A to the Act, by virtue of paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

17 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2 and 5)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 27 April 2011.

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

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 27 April 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

18 Strategy and Resources Committee Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 May 2011.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 May 2011, be noted

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....