

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 23 September 2010 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

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

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Principal Accountant, Planning and Performance Manager and Management Support Officer

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Picken and seconded by Councillor Barrow

That Councillor Hartin be elected Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Hartin was duly elected Chair to hold office for the ensuing year.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor West and seconded by Councillor Picken

That Councillor Barrow be appointed Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Barrow was duly appointed Vice-Chair to hold office for the ensuing year.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Hurst-Knight and Minnery.

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 had a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 May 2010.

It was proposed by Councillor Roberts, seconded by Councillor West and, with Councillors Barrow and Picken abstaining as they had not been present at the meeting, it was

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 May 2010, 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 Strategy and Resources Committee Terms of Reference

The report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members. It also asked Members to consider whether there was any training or development, which should be undertaken by the Committee in order to fulfil its role.

Councillor West commented that no specific training appeared to be needed at present, however, should any particular issues that need to be brought to the attention of Members occur in future, then training or discussion sessions should be given as required.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the constitution of the Strategy and Resources Committee (attached to the report as an appendix); and
- b) Agree that there is currently no specific training or development, which should be undertaken by the Committee in order to fulfil its role.

8 Formula Grant Distribution Consultation Paper

This report sought the approval of the Committee to making responses to the Government's Consultation Paper on various options for grant distribution changes that could be introduced from the 2011/12 settlement onwards.

The Treasurer reported that he had recently received correspondence from the Fire Finance Network, which indicated that there should be no change at all.

Councillor Hartin commented that he was concerned about the options given in the report. He felt that the response to the Government's consultation should be strengthened but he was not sure whether this could be done through direct communication with the Fire Minister or through the Fire Finance Network.

Councillor West reported that he, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and the Treasurer were to meet with Owen Paterson MP on 24 September 2010 and the issue could be brought up then. Meetings had also been set up with Philip Dunne MP and Mark Pritchard MP. A date was yet to be confirmed for a meeting with Daniel Kawczynski MP. The CFO had produced a briefing note for the MPs, which will be circulated to Fire Authority Members.

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

Resolved that the Committee agree to:

- a) Respond as set out in paragraph 5 of the report, pressing for receiving the remaining grant lost in the previous settlement to the flooring mechanism (£366,000);
- b) Request that no changes to the formula should be made in 2011/12, given the other changes taking place in local government finances;
- c) Respond along the lines set out in paragraph 4, if the Government did consider the changes, as set out in the consultation paper; and
- d) Note the potential variations and uncertainty inherent in the grant for next year and the implications for service and budget planning

9 Capital Update on Activity and Finance

The purpose of this report was to provide an overview of all the capital schemes within the Brigade and their current status.

Councillor West referred to the Minsterley Station refurbishment and asked how many more stations were to be refurbished. The CFO confirmed that there were a further three retained stations which were Hodnet, Clun and Baschurch, as well as the whole time stations at Wellington and Telford Central. The Minsterley model will be used for the refurbishments but the costs should be slightly less, as Minsterley includes an extension to accommodate the relocated off-road vehicle.

Councillor West suggested that the refurbishment schemes need to be looked at rigorously. It is obvious that they do need to be done but it may turn out to be a false economy. The CFO advised that the Head of Resources had been asked to review the schemes and their timing.

Councillor Hartin said he was most concerned about Wellington, as it was in a poor state of repair and the refurbishment had been put off for many years.

The CFO shared this concern and reported that the Head of Resources is currently working with the station to identify what needs to be done to improve the station for the next eight to ten years. The Head of Resources is also working with West Mercia Police to identify possible areas in Telford & Wrekin for future developments with the intention of trying to secure funding from developers. This information will be brought back to the CFO at the end of next month and will then be taken to Members for consideration.

Councillor West reported that a recurrent theme in the Public Value sessions seems to be the question of whether firefighters could carry out work on the station themselves, for example grass cutting. Any cuts that occur will alter the Service dramatically and probably for good, which may help the long-term upkeep of stations. Councillor Barrow asked if there were any health and safety implications, which might prevent this. The CFO commented that there is a move to using local trades people to do jobs. Councillor Roberts queried if the firefighters would be employed by the Authority, whilst doing this work. The CFO explained that it would have to be done on a voluntary basis through 'friends of' organisations. The Committee requested that this be investigated.

Councillor Hartin asked for an update on the Fire Kit replacement scheme. The CFO replied that only PBI Gold kit is available through the Firebuy scheme. The CFO explained that he had tasked a team to investigate alternative kit, more suited to firefighting and rescue work, which is becoming a major part of the Service's work. The team has identified the PBO Gold kit, which is used extensively in France and Germany. The PBO Gold kit is lightweight, more suitable for use in rescue work and provides class leading protection from fire.

Councillor Barrow asked what the cost of the kit was. The CFO confirmed that it is exactly the same as the cost of the PBI Gold kit. The Service is currently working with Shropshire Purchasing to issue an European notice for tendering for the project. Members will be given an opportunity to look at the kit and try it on.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress so far on current schemes

10 Financial Performance to July 2010, including the Annual Treasury Report 2009/10

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

The Principal Accountant talked through each of the recommendations contained in the report and explained them to the Committee.

In relation to recommendation f), Councillor Hartin asked if any penalty would be incurred in relation to the Authority not having borrowed its full requirement. The Treasurer explained that there would be no penalty as the Authority is able to borrow what it likes within its agreed prudential borrowing limits. The amount of borrowing can, therefore, be adjusted in response to variations in interest rates.

Councillor West referred to the appliance order which had increased and queried whether the original price had been set. The Principal Accountant explained that the scheme value should have been increased originally, although the price agreed has remained constant. The Committee considered the possibility of rebadging new appliances to Shropshire *and Wrekin* Fire and Rescue Service. However this was judged to be too problematic, as the Fire Authority would need to agree the change of name and all badged articles would have to be changed.

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

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve budget allocation into new directorates for budget control purposes;
- b) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- c) Approve virements to the revenue budget where requested;
- d) Note the position on the capital programme, and approve a supplementary vote of £15,000 for appliance replacement, and other variations;
- e) Note performance against prudential indicators for 2009/10;
- f) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2010/11, approving any proposed amendments;
- g) Note the annual review of treasury activities for 2009/10;
- h) Note performance in Treasury Management to date in 2010/11; and
- i) Note the information provided on balance sheet items.

11 Progress Report – Service and Budget Planning 2011/12

This report updated the Committee on progress on service and budget planning carried out to date, as agreed by the Fire Authority as part of its strategy for meeting the expected pressure of the next four years.

The Treasurer outlined the issues of assumptions and variables that are referred to in the report as well as some of the issues that are still unknown for the Authority, such as the Retained Firefighter Pension issue and the Regional Control Centre charges.

With regard to the Authority's Reserves and Provisions, the Treasurer advised that any savings should be held in the Reserves. The savings are those arising in 2010/11 and they should be held in reserves, if possible, due to the current high level of budget uncertainty. Councillor Hartin asked for how long. The Treasurer advised that this would be until the Retained Firefighter Pension issue had been resolved. The Reserves could also be used, if the pace of change was too fast.

The Authority should have a clearer idea of these issues in December when it will begin to develop its precept and reserve policy. The outline of the public consultation would normally be taken to the December Fire Authority meeting for consideration.

The outcomes of the Public Value consultation should also be available in December. Councillor Hartin commented that there are some clear ideas coming out of the sessions. The CFO responded that the Authority is in a good position to start developing its budget for Year One. The process can be started and the figures changed as necessary.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Endorse the progress made to date; and
- b) Agree that any further actions are not necessary at this point in time

12 Use of Capital 2010

This report advised of capital investment made over the last three years and the benefits, which have been obtained from this investment.

The CFO explained that in relation to the appliance replacement project, the appliance life has been extended from 12 to 15 years for all appliances. The 'use life' of the appliance, i.e. the volume of incidents attended, will also be taken into consideration, when considering replacement.

Councillor West referred to the drill tower at Bridgnorth, with which there appears to have been some problems. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the tower had been put up back to front. This has been corrected by the contractors at no cost to the Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the benefits achieved and agree to consider these, when deciding upon future capital funding requests

13 Asset Stewardship Report

This report advised of the current condition of assets owned by the Authority and changes, which have occurred in the financial year 2009/10. This was a summary of information previously provided in the form of budget working papers, capital appraisals and capital budget reports, together with additional information.

Councillor Hartin asked if there were any more opportunities to expand joint use of stations. The CFO replied that the West Midlands Ambulance Service has changed its policy on siting of vehicles and is now using locations, such as petrol stations. There are ongoing talks with West Mercia Police about possible opportunities and also with Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

Resolved that the Committee note the current asset position

14 Corporate Risk Management Summary Report

This was the latest of the regular Risk Summary Reports to the Strategy and Resources Committee.

As previously, the reports are intended to enable Members to meet the requirements of the Committee's Terms of Reference, as they relate to the Fire Authority's management of corporate risk. The progress reported related to that achieved since the last Summary Report, received by the Committee at its meeting on 20 May 2010.

The CFO drew Members' attention to Risk ID 78, which relates to the IT system. There are significant issues with the IT network, which are currently being addressed by bringing together the companies involved in order to address the fundamentals of the system.

Councillor Barrow raised concerns about the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service website, which currently seems to have a lot of blank pages. Members also commented that the new website does not appear to be as logical or intuitive to use as the old site was. The Planning and Performance Manager requested that Members feedback any comments regarding the website to him and he will raise the issues with the Web Officer.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of this report

15 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, under the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item on the grounds that it 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 3 and 4

16 Corporate Risk Management Summary – Exempt Information

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

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report, in conjunction with the Corporate Risk Management Summary discussed in open session

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....