

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 16 June 2010
at AFC Telford United Learning Centre, Telford**

At 1.10 pm prior to commencement of the meeting the Assistant Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on Public Value, as requested by Members at the last meeting of the Authority. A question and answer session followed.

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Davies, Hartin, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mellings, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Picken, Roberts and West (Chair)

Officers

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

At the start of the meeting the Chair spoke about one of the Service's firefighters, Matthew Evans, who died on Friday, 4 June 2010 in a tragic motorcycle crash.

Members and officers then stood and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for, and in memory of, Matthew.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Dixon and Price. Councillors Groom, Kiernan and Mason had advised officers that they may be late for the meeting and subsequently did not arrive.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Hurst-Knight back to the Fire Authority as a replacement for Councillor Dr Winchester, whom he thanked for his work. The Chair also advised the Fire Authority that Councillor Greenaway had left the Fire Authority to take up a cabinet position at Telford & Wrekin Council. Councillor Greenaway will be replaced on the Authority by Councillor John Dixon, who has previously sat on the Fire Authority. The Chair has sent a letter of thanks to Councillor Greenaway.

The Chair also announced that Councillor Groom will be stepping down from the Fire Authority with effect from 30 June 2010 and his place will be taken by Councillor Karen Blundell, who has also previously sat on the Fire Authority.

The Chair introduced Christine Walker to the meeting. Christine, who previously worked at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, will be working as the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources) until October 2010 as cover for Louise McKenzie, who is currently on adoption leave. The Chair also welcomed Lynn Ince, Management Support Officer, to her first Fire Authority meeting following her return from maternity leave.

2 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.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 28 April 2010.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 28 April 2010, 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.

5 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee (A&PMC) meeting, held on 13 May 2010, and considered the recommendations at item 5 regarding amendments to the Audit and Performance Management Committee Terms of Reference and item 11, relating Treasury Management Practice.

Councillor Barrow referred to item 8 in the minutes, which related to the Internal Audit Annual Report and the eight recommendations in the report that were still outstanding. Councillor Barrow referred specifically to the charge card issue that had been identified and asked for an explanation of how this was being dealt with. The Principal Accountant explained that the amounts concerned were small in absolute terms. The charge cards have small limits and paperwork is required for each transaction. Any temporary increases to card limits are cleared with the bank in advance. A full review of the charge

card procedure is being undertaken, which will include the reissuing of indemnity forms and procedures.

The Chief Fire Officer assured the Fire Authority that the issues identified in the audit report were not significant. It has been agreed with the auditors that the Service will decide which of the issues identified need to be addressed. Councillor Dr Jones, Chair of the A&PMC, explained that she had met with the auditors to agree a collaborative approach to addressing the issues, with Internal Audit being viewed as a 'critical friend'.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 13 May 2010, be noted and the amended Terms of Reference for the Committee be adopted together with the Treasury Management arrangements

6 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 May 2010, and considered the recommendations at item 6 regarding amendments to the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee Meeting, held on 20 May 2010, be noted and the amended Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be approved

7 Human Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Human and Resources Committee meeting, held on 27 May 2010, and considered the recommendations at item 5 regarding the Committee Terms of Reference; item 6 regarding the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee; and item 7 regarding a request for funding from Telford Race, Equality and Diversity Partnership (TREDP).

Councillor Minnery noted that the recommendations at item 7 regarding the funding for TREDP referred to the preparation of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and sought assurance that the SLA would be brought back to the Human Resources Committee for approval, once it had been drawn up.

With this in mind, it was proposed by Councillor Minnery that the recommendations be approved with the provision that the SLA for TREDP be brought back to the Human Resources Committee for approval. This was seconded by Councillor Barrow and

Resolved that the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 27 May 2010, be noted and the recommendations at item 5 regarding the Committee Terms of Reference and item 6 regarding the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be approved.

The recommendation at item 7 regarding a request for funding from Telford Race and Equality Partnership was also approved with the provision that the Service Level Agreement, once drawn up, be returned to the Human Resources Committee for approval.

8 Statement of Accounts 2009/10

This report presented the Statement of Accounts 2009/10 for approval by the Fire Authority, and sought specific approval to a number of virements from the General Fund in 2010/11.

The Treasurer explained that the Statement of Accounts needs to be approved by 30 June 2010 and thanked the Principal Accountant for her work in preparing the accounts. The Chair endorsed this thanks on behalf of the Fire Authority.

The Principal Accountant then talked through the document, bringing a number of issues to the attention of the Fire Authority. A summary of the relevant points discussed is given below.

The Principal Accountant highlighted the figures set out on page 3 of the Statement and the amount that had been transferred to the Pensions and Other Staff Issues Reserve. Councillor Mellings referred to the Other Variations identified for 2009/10 and asked what impact these items had had on this year's budget. The Principal Accountant explained that the underspends reported had been taken into account in preparing the budget for 2010/11. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service is working to assess how external causes are driving internal costs, e.g. summer weather.

The Principal Accountant advised that the Accounting Policies set out on page 18 of the Statement were reviewed and rewritten during closedown.

She explained that the Income and Expenditure Account on page 26 of the Statement is split into the areas that money is spent on and highlighted that some of the items do not reflect income from Council Tax.

The Principal Accountant highlighted that the Debtors figure on page 29 of the Statement had increased due to the operation of the Pensions Account. Communities and Local Government (CLG) owe money to the Fire Authority, which should be received in July or August 2010.

The Principal Accountant explained that under revised accounting rules the Fire Authority is deemed to have entered into an agency agreement regarding Council Tax collection, which will require it to show all creditors / debtors in future.

Councillor Adams referred to the pensions situation and asked if this issue was likely to require more cash injection in the future. The Chief Fire Officer explained that there are a number of aspects relating to this issue.

The £700,000 has been transferred into the Pension and Other Staff Issues Reserve to cover the pension payments for those Retained Duty System staff, who wish to join the pension scheme. However it is difficult to predict what uptake there will be for this. £250,000 - £300,000 will also be needed to pay the compensation awarded to retained firefighters for their having received different treatment to that of their wholetime colleagues. The employers' contributions will also need to be paid and there is a possibility that these could increase from 21.3% to 24%.

The Treasurer reassured the Fire Authority that the £700,000 should cover the extra costs that have been identified however it is still an unknown quantity. It is possible that money may need to be found to match any contributions made between 2001 and 2006. The Treasurer explained that the possible increase in contributions had been addressed in budget planning.

Councillor West informed the meeting that pensions are an item on the agenda for the Fire Forum meeting on 18 June 2010.

Councillor Mellings referred to page 37 of the Statement and in particular to the section relating to Members' Allowances. He asked whether a breakdown of the expenses paid should be included for transparency purposes. The Principal Accountant undertook to include this in future and the Corporate Services Manager reported that the advert regarding Members' Allowances, which was a legislative requirement, would be published within the next month.

The Treasurer made the following amendments to the figures in Appendix B to the Statement. Item 4 – Financing Costs should read 162,000 not 112,000 and Item 8 – Net balance should read 115,000 not 166,000 and the Total 511,000 instead of 512,000.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the Statement of Accounts 2009/10, attached a Appendix A, including the transfer of £700,000 to the Pensions Reserve, as set out in paragraph 4, subject to incorporating the Annual Governance Statement and to audit;
- b) Authorise the Treasurer to make any final adjustments, including for the result of outstanding property valuations and collection fund balances, subject to reporting these to the next meeting of the Authority;
- c) Approve the virements set out in the table in paragraph 4, totalling £378,000; and

- d) Approve the Backward and Forward Looking Efficiency Statements, set out in paragraph 5, totalling £252,000 and £427,000 respectively.

9 Annual Governance Statement 2009/10 and Improvement Plan 2010/11

This report asked the Fire Authority formally to approve the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2009/10, which must be included as part of the Statement of Accounts 2009/10. It also asked Members formally to approve the AGS Improvement Plan 2010/11.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Accept and sign-off the Annual Governance Statement 2009/10; and
b) Approve the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2010/11

10 Medium Term Financial Plan

This report informed Members of changes to the process of producing the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Councillor Minnery reported that he had attended a Fire and Rescue Congress on 15 June 2010. He would be preparing a report on it for circulation to the Fire Authority but he particularly wanted to draw attention to an address, given by Charlie Hendry, regarding the following four individual threats, which look set to arrive at the same time:

- Reduction in Revenue Settlement Grant, ranging between 15% - 25% over 3 -5 years
- The possible 3 year Council Tax freeze
- The loss of ring-fenced grants, such as New Dimensions
- The potential introduction of area-based funding

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree the new approach to the development of the MTFP; and
b) Note the contents of the draft MTFP.

11 Annual Report 2009/10

This report sought Member approval of the proposed contents and format of the Fire Authority Annual Report 2009/10,

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) recommended that the production of the wallets should be discontinued.

The ACFO explained that this would mean that the Annual Report would only be available on the website. Monitoring showed that the current Annual Report had been accessed 495 times via the website with an average viewing time of 1 minute 31 seconds. One thousand of the wallets had been produced last year at a cost of £724 but it had not been possible to monitor the level of response to them. The ACFO explained that paper copies of the report could be provided if requested as could translated copies of the report.

The ACFO also drew members' attention to the fact that the Annual Report refers to Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and is therefore backward looking. Several members commented that although they had originally thought that the leaflet version of the Annual Report should be retained their opinion had changed due to the backward looking nature of the report and there being no evidence of its impact.

Councillor Minnery proposed that the recommendations in the report be moved with recommendation b) reading that the practice should be discontinued. This was seconded by Councillor Hartin who suggested that an email containing a link to the website be sent to all key stakeholders once the Annual Report has been published.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the draft contents and format of the proposed Annual Report;
- b) Decide to discontinue the practice of promoting the Annual Report using a wallet, thus realising a saving as outlined in section 6 of the report; and
- c) Delegate final approval of the Annual Report to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

12 New Dimension Asset Transfer

This report summarised the Authority's current position over the transfer of New Dimension assets from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to local Fire and Rescue Services, including assets to this Authority. This followed communication with CLG seeking changes to contract and assurances of funding.

Councillor Hartin commented that option 2 in the recommendations, which was being proposed by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO), seemed to be logical and sensible. He asked what would happen if CLG returned the amended contract. The Clerk advised that discussing this issue further at this point may take away any future negotiating position.

Councillor Adams asked what would be the operational effect of the High Volume Pumping Unit (HVPU) being withdrawn. The CFO explained that withdrawing the HVPU would have a huge impact on the Service, as the operational response is based on this equipment being available therefore it would have to be replaced by the Service. The Incident Response Unit (IRU)

being withdrawn would require some replacement equipment to be purchased by the Service but this would not have such a great impact on operations.

Councillor Adams asked about the viability of purchasing the equipment from CLG and the Service undertaking maintenance on its own. The CFO explained that, as the Fire and Rescue Services had not seen the original contract, there was no indication of the medium and long-term maintenance costs.

Councillor Adams also asked what would happen about the replacement of equipment under the proposed 18-year contract. The CFO explained that the CLG has indicated that there will be a 'major refresh' of equipment throughout the duration of the contract and that there is a termination clause, which means that CLG will purchase the equipment and then charge the Service for it.

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow that option 2 in the recommendations be adopted. This was seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Fire Authority accept the New Dimension assets and sign the contract, as presented by CLG, subject to amendments, which place an obligation on CLG to accept transfer of ownership of the assets back in the event that central government funding for maintenance and management of the assets is either withdrawn or significantly reduced in the view of the Fire Authority and in the event that the Fire Authority requests a transfer back to take place at that time.

13 Member Champions

This report asked Members to agree that officers carry out a fundamental review of Member Champion roles and bring back a report to the Fire Authority in due course, setting out their findings and proposals.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree that officers carry out a fundamental review of Member Champion roles and report back to the Fire Authority in due course, setting out their findings and proposals for the way forward

14 Abolishment of Comprehensive Area Assessment

This report informed Members of recent national developments that indicate the termination of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime

The ACFO commented that he had attended a Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) meeting on 15 June 2010, at which this issue had been discussed. It had emerged that there was still a statutory duty to ensure that combined fire authorities are performing. This is a Government responsibility and, as such, other options for assessing the performance of Fire and Rescue Services are now being looked at.

Councillor Minnery also commented that this issue had been addressed at the Fire Congress, which he had attended. An Audit Commission representative had announced that there may be some voluntary assessments available, which would be packaged for public consumption and for which a fee would be charged.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of this report

15 Update on the Regional Control Centre and Mobilising System

Members were advised that within the recent Government publication – *The Coalition: our programme for government* a shared conviction is made to ‘...stop plans to force the regionalisation of the fire service’ (Section 4, page 12). Clarification is currently awaited regarding this position statement to determine the impact and consequence upon the FiReControl Project.

The ACFO explained that a Government statement on the future of the Regional Control Centre project is expected in the next 10 days. The Chair advised the Fire Authority that the item was on the agenda of the Fire Forum meeting on Friday 18 June 2010.

Councillor Barrow requested that an email be sent to Fire Authority members once this information has been received. This was agreed.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note this verbal update

16 Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (England) Order 2006 – Delegations and Policies

The Chair advised the meeting that he intended to consider this item as a matter of urgency under the Fire Authority’s Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business – Standing Order 6(b). The reason for the urgency is that it may be necessary in the near future to deal expeditiously with a number of pensions issues and in order to do so certain procedures and delegations need to be in place.

Although not included in the original agenda, Members had been advised prior to the meeting that this item would be considered under the urgency procedures and a copy of the report had been sent to them.

This report identified the decisions to be made by, and the discretionary decision making powers of the Fire Authority under the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (England) Order 2006 (referred to subsequently in the report as the Order). The report included recommendations relating to the delegation of decision –making powers and also puts forward some general policies to facilitate the effective implementation of those decisions and powers.

The Treasurer advised the meeting that any decisions taken need to be considered in light of where the money will come from. The delegation to take decisions on spending money, also meant delegating powers to find monies from existing budgets, a power hitherto not devolved by the Fire Authority to existing Committees or Groups.

Delegation should acknowledge that reports to the proposed Members Panel would include proposals on where the money would come from.

The Clerk advised the Fire Authority that under the Code of Conduct, Members are required to have regard to any relevant advice provided by the Treasurer, when reaching decisions on any matter.

The Corporate Services Manager advised that the delegations in relation to the Firemen's Pension Scheme Order would need to be revisited and she would, therefore, be bringing a report on this to the July meeting of the Fire Authority.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve:

- a) The proposals for delegation of powers under the Order (set out at Appendix A to the report);
- b) That any decisions to be made or discretionary powers exercisable under the Order, which are not included in the list at Appendix A, be delegated to the proposed Pensions Panel;
- c) That the delegations to the Chief Fire Officer (contained in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers) be amended accordingly;
- d) The proposed policies (set out at Appendix B); and
- e) That a Member Panel be established, as set out in section 5 of the report.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....