

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 15 December 2010
at Shropshire Education and Conference Centre, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow, Mrs Blundell, Hartin, Hurst-Knight, Kiernan, Mason, Mellings, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Picken, Price, Roberts and West (Chair)

Officers

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

Before the business of the meeting commenced, the Chair welcomed Louise McKenzie, who will be returning to the Service on 4 January 2011, following leave.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Dixon and Dr Jones. Councillor Eade did not attend the meeting.

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 at this point.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 4 November 2010.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 4 November 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 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 November 2010, and considered the recommendations at item 7.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 November 2010, be noted and that the recommendations at item 7, which are given below, be agreed:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget where requested;
- c) Note the position on the capital programme;
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2010/11;
- e) Note the mid year review of treasury activities for 2010/11; and
- f) Note the information provided on balance sheet items.

6 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 30 November 2010, and considered the Annual Audit Letter at item 6 of the minutes and the recommendations at item 12 of the minutes.

Councillor Mellings, as Vice-Chair of the Committee, spoke to the items highlighted for consideration and suggested that recommendation c) at item 12 be amended from 'Authorise officers to develop the underpinning 'Silver' and 'Bronze' measures' to 'Authorise a *working group of Officers and Members* to develop the underpinning 'Silver' and 'Bronze' measures'. This was seconded by Councillor Mason. The Clerk advised at this point that decision making powers should lie with Members or officers rather than a combination of the two. It would, therefore, be better for the recommendation to read 'Authorise Officers, *in consultation with Members*, to develop the underpinning 'Silver' and 'Bronze' measures'. The Authority agreed with this suggestion.

Councillor Minnery referred to item 11a of the minutes and asked if the request to receive details of statutory and non-statutory Equality and Diversity (E&D) activities, together with a full breakdown of their associated costs was onerous, given the current climate.

Councillor Mellings thanked Councillor Minnery for this comment and advised that the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) had since provided a briefing note to the Committee regarding this issue, which the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Committee had agreed was sufficient.

The CFO explained that he had responded rapidly to Members' concerns and had set out the continued importance of E&D and the reductions that had already been achieved in this budget. He confirmed that it would take 12 person days to carry out the analysis required to fulfil the request made in the meeting.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 30 November 2010, be noted; the Annual Audit Letter at item 6 be formally approved and the recommendations at item 12 of the minutes be agreed with recommendation c) to read as follows:

Authorise Officers, *in consultation with Members*, to develop the underpinning 'Silver' and 'Bronze' measures.

7 Annual Report of the Standards Committee

This report advised of the work carried out by the Fire Authority's Standards Committee from 1 April 2009 to date.

The Corporate Services Manager advised that legislation relating to the abolition of the Standards regime was expected to be enacted around September 2011. In the meantime all of the necessary processes and procedures were in place to deal with any Standards related issues under the current legislation. If, however, any allegations of breach of the Code of Conduct were to arise, the likelihood was that officers would attempt to resolve them informally in the first instance.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

8 2010/11 and Later Years Budget Summary

This report summarised the budgets that were proposed by the Strategy and Resources Committee. These had been updated for subsequent events. 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 on 9 February 2011.

The Treasurer apologised for the lateness of the paper and drew Members' attention to paragraph 4 of the report, which set out the main developments that had occurred since the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 24 November 2010. These included the proposal to fund future one-off developments from underspend and the proposal to fund the necessary improvements at Wellington station from revenue savings in 2010/11.

This would mean that this capital project would be removed from the 2011/12 programme, thereby reducing debt charges.

The Treasurer then reported that the Grant Settlement figures for 2011/12 and 2012/13 had been received, although the figures for 2013/14 and 2014/15 were still not known. The settlement received is worse than had been anticipated but the Authority is able to cope for at least the first two years. Budget planning had been based on assumptions of 5% reductions in both 2011/12 and 2012/13 but the actual reductions are 9.5% in 2011/12 and 3.1% in 2012/13. This is a disappointing settlement but it would have been worse without the flooring protection.

The Treasurer then referred to paragraph 6 of the report, which set out the revised potential budget position for 2011/12 and 2012/13. The table shows that there is likely to be a budget surplus in 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 with a fairly large budget deficit predicted for 2014/15 and 2015/16. There are three possible options for using the predicted surpluses, as set out in the report, but it is recommended that the surpluses be added to the un-earmarked capital reserve with the intention of using it to reduce the costs of funding the capital programme.

Councillor Hartin commented that it was a disappointing situation, especially after the meeting with the Fire Minister, which had been positive. Councillor Hartin also asked what line the CFO planned to take in any future discussions with the Minister. The CFO commented that it had been disappointing to be included with larger authorities, such as Tyne and Wear and Merseyside, with such large reductions in grant. The CFO also explained that the Minister had invited him to email him personally regarding the settlement. The CFO said that he would do so to reflect Members' concerns regarding the impacts of the settlement and to ask if the Treasurer and Principal Accountant can meet with civil servants to establish how the settlement has been apportioned. The reason for the large reduction could be something very simple, such as changes to the deprivation indices in Telford & Wrekin, which have affected the settlement amount, or simple errors in the formula calculation.

Councillor Minnery referred to the Public Value Review outcomes and noted that there was no direct reference to this on the agenda. He felt that a separate report should have been prepared and included as an agenda item, as staff, who had taken part in the consultation sessions, had been told that the outcomes would be discussed and decisions made at this meeting. He felt that it was important to flag this up, so it did not occur next year.

The CFO explained that the Strategy and Resources Committee had considered the outcomes and had put them forward for consideration at report 5e in Appendix A to the report (the Green Book). The CFO referred to page 13 of Appendix B to report 8, which sets out the proposed cuts and opened them to the floor for discussion. The CFO explained that the table does contain items, which he would not normally recommend, but which he is required to put to Members for consideration, because of the current financial situation. The priority however is to safeguard the service.

Councillor Minnery said that his principal reason for raising this issue had been because of the proposal to end permanent crewing of the rescue tender (RT) which would have significant implications with regard to road traffic collisions. Councillor Minnery asked if this could be reviewed in years 3 and 4. The CFO commented that this was a useful discussion and that the item concerned had been deliberately put later in the scheme, however it should be remembered that the settlement for years 3 and 4 could be worse than that for years 1 and 2, which could make safeguarding the rescue tender crewing even more difficult.

Councillor West thanked Members for taking part in the Public Value consultation sessions and suggested that a general thank you for participation be put in The Pink.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Base its revenue budget planning and consultation on the totals set out in paragraph 6 of the report (2011/12 £20,837,000);
- b) Base its capital programme on that set out in report 5d of Appendix A (the Green Book), subject to adjustment of the Wellington scheme and to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2011;
- c) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 5f at Appendix A, and confirm the general reserve;
- d) Continue to base its planning and consultation on a nil increase in the precept in 2011/12, subject to obtaining the tax-freeze grant; and annual increases of zero in 2012/13 and 2.5% in later years; and
- e) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package on 20 January 2011, (including adding the projected surplus in 2011/12 and 2012/13 to the un-earmarked capital reserve to reduce future costs) for final decision by the Fire Authority on 9 February 2010.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the following two recommendations, set out in report 5e in the Green Book - Public Value Outcomes 2010:

- a) Note the contents of the report and agree to the recommendations of the STRaP (as detailed in section 5 of the report); and
- b) Endorse the recommendations of STRaP.

9 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2011/12

This report asked the Fire Authority to review and agree its list of Approved Duties and to agree its 2011/12 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances.

Councillor Hartin commented that he thought that it was customary for any changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme to go through the Independent Remuneration Panel and asked why this was not being done on this occasion. The Chair explained that the proposals in the report are to freeze Member allowances at current rates and to reduce mileage allowances. This will provide some parity and solidarity with the measures being undertaken by the Service to address grant cuts.

Councillor Hartin responded that he was objecting to the principle of the matter, not to the contents of the report, and would actually go further, for example abolishing the Regional Control Centre Director allowance, as it is not currently taken up. Councillor West advised that this allowance should be left until a decision is made regarding the Regional Control Centre. Councillor Hartin then asked if the money could not be deployed elsewhere. The CFO advised that every single budget needs to be looked at carefully and that the money would be utilised via underspend anyway. The CFO also advised that caution should be exercised when considering issues relating to the Regional Control Centre until formal announcements are made by the Government.

Councillor Mrs Barrow asked if the Fire Authority should also be looking at itself in terms of its size and the payment of a basic allowance to Members. The Corporate Services Manager explained that the Fire Authority can be up to 25 members in size, however there is an issue of practicality and maintaining committee functions. Councillor Minnery commented that this could not be considered in isolation and it may be wiser to start by looking at the operating structure.

Councillor West asked how often the Remuneration Panel met. The Corporate Services Manager explained that historically the Panel had been involved only when a full review of Members' allowances was to be conducted. In the past where minor changes to the Scheme of Allowances were concerned the Authority itself had agreed such changes. The CFO suggested that officers be tasked to look at the options available with regard to the size of the Fire Authority and to develop a paper for consideration by the Fire Authority. This was agreed.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Agree its Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2011/12 to take effect from 1 April 2011 (set out at the Appendix to the report); and
- b) Agree its list of Approved Duties (set out at Schedule 1 of the Appendix to the report).

10 FiReControl Project Update

The future of the national FiReControl Project, and in turn, the West Midlands' Regional Control Centre continues to be in doubt. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), on 8 November 2010, placed EADS (now known as Cassidian) in 'breach of contract'. This position was confirmed by the Minister for Fire – Bob Neill, who, when questioned over the matter in Parliament (15 November 2010), responded with the following statement:

“In June this year we activated a key milestone in our contract with the main contractor, EADS (now branded Cassidian), for delivery of the FiReControl project. This required EADS to complete the main system in three control centres by mid-2011. Because their record has not improved on delivery of the project, we informed EADS on 8 November that we consider them to be in material breach of their obligations under the contract and required them to remedy the position in 20 working days. I have made it clear to EADS that they must deliver on time, cost and quality. The Government are not going to bail out this contractor with additional public funding. We are going to stand up for the interests of the taxpayer and the fire and rescue service.”

Members will be advised of any developments (and likely consequences) as and when they arise.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update given by officers

Before the meeting closed the Chair thanked Christine Walker, Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Human Resources), for the work she had done for the Fire Authority.

He also wished all Members and officers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and thanked them for their work in 2010.

The meeting closed at 2.50 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....