

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority**  
held at Shropshire Education and Conference Centre, Shrewsbury,  
on Wednesday, 13 June 2007 at 2.00 pm

**Present**

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Major Coles, Davies, Dr Drummond, Eade, Mrs Greenaway, Groom, Hartin (Chair), Mrs Holyoak, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mason, Mellings, Minnery and West (Vice Chair)

**Welcome and Thanks**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Mrs Jayne Greenaway, Councillor Bob Groom and Councillor Clive Mason to their first meeting of the Fire Authority. These are the new members of the Fire Authority following the recent elections at Telford & Wrekin Council.

The Chair thanked former Members - Mr Hussey, Mr Morgan and Mrs Swift for their contributions to the Fire Authority and offered them best wishes for the future. Councillor Coles added that he would like to offer his thanks and best wishes to Mr Morgan especially. Members agreed that letters of thanks from the Chair should be sent to Mr Hussey, Mr Morgan and Mrs Swift.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Box and Picken.

**2 Appointment of Vice-Chair**

It was proposed by Councillor Eade and seconded by Councillor Coles

That Councillor West be appointed Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until the Annual Meeting in 2007.

The Chair drew Members attention to Standing Order No 2, Part 2 in the Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business which states that - 'In the year when the Chair is a Member of Shropshire County Council the Vice Chair shall be a Member of Borough of Telford & Wrekin and vice versa.' The Chair notified Members that the proposal would be in breach of the Standing Order as both Councillor West and the current Chair of the Fire Authority are members of Shropshire County Council.

Councillor Eade requested that Standing Order No 2, Part 2 be reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in July. Councillor Eade then proposed that Standing Order No 2, Part 2 be suspended until the Annual meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2007. This was seconded by Councillor Holyoak and with all Members agreeing, it was



**Resolved** that Standing Order No 2 Part 2 be suspended until the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2007.

There being no other nominations, Councillor West was duly appointed Vice-Chair.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Minnery declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 15 – Response to OneCouncil Business Case Consultation due to his being a local Member. The following Members asked that their personal interest in this item also be declared: Councillors Major Coles, Davies, Dr Drummond, Hartin, Holyoak, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mellings, and West. Their personal interest was that the report relates to an interest, which is required to be registered under paragraph 14 of the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, namely their membership of Shropshire County Council and, in some instances, local borough or district councils. The declared interests were noted.

### **4 Minutes**

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 25 April 2007.

Councillor Coles referred to item 12 d) on the minutes and asked if Fire Authority Members would be invited to attend the Retained Duty Seminar. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that Councillors Box, Hartin and West had been invited to attend but that this invitation could be extended to all Members of the Fire Authority. A letter containing details of the event will be sent out to all Members.

**Resolved** that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 25 April 2007, 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 Standards Committee**

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 16 April 2007, and considered the recommendation at item 5.

**Resolved** that Members note the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 16 April 2007, and agree the recommendation at item 5.

### **7 Strategy and Resources Committee**

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007.



The Chair reported that at item 11, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Strategy and Resources minutes, the IRN number should have been 21 not 22. This has been corrected in the version which will go to the next meeting of the Committee for agreement and signature.

**Resolved** that Members note the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007.

## **8 Allocation of Seats on Committees to Political Groups and Membership of the Standards Committee**

This report advised the Fire Authority of the need to reallocate seats on its committees to political groups, following the local elections at Borough of Telford & Wrekin (sections 3, 4 and 5 and Appendix). The report also asked the Fire Authority to decide whether to continue with current arrangement regarding its representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board (section 6) and finally to agree the membership of, and nominate Members to, the Standards Committee (section 7).

In addition to the recommendations in the report, the Fire Authority was asked to agree membership of the Audit and Performance Management Committee and the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Members Working Group as meetings need to be arranged urgently.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) The proposed allocation of seats on its committees to political groups (as set out at the Appendix to this report), including a resolution that, under section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the political balance requirements of that Act do not apply to the Fire Authority's representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board;
- b) to continue with the current arrangement regarding its representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board (see section 6); and
- c) The membership of its Standards Committee (see section 7), which Councillors Groom and Mason were nominated to sit on.

Members also agreed that Councillors Dr Jones, Mellings and Picken be nominated to sit on the Audit and Performance Management Committee and that Councillors Box, Hartin and Dr Jones be nominated to sit on the IRMP Working Group.

### **Committee Clerk note**

Since the meeting of the Fire Authority, Councillor Greenaway has also been nominated to sit on the IRMP Working Group.



## 9 Review of the Code of Corporate Governance

This report asked Members to agree and adopt the proposed Code of Corporate Governance for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority following the annual review conducted by officers.

**Resolved** that Members agree and adopt the Fire Authority's proposed Code of Corporate Governance, attached as an appendix to the report.

## 10 Member Champion Presentation

Councillor Picken, Lead Member for Civil Resilience has been due to give his Member Champion presentation at the meeting but unfortunately he was unable to attend. It was therefore proposed by Councillor Hartin and seconded by Councillor Eade that the presentation be suspended and rescheduled to the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

**Resolved** that Councillor Picken's presentation be postponed to the Annual Meeting in July 2007.

## 11 Statement of Accounts 2006/07

This report informed Members of the 2006/07 closure of accounts, and asked the Fire Authority to approve formally the Statement of Accounts 2006/07, which they had considered in detail at the recent Members Conference held on 30 May 2007 and which was attached as an appendix to the report. This approval would be subject to the approval of the Statement on Internal Control, next on the agenda, and also to audit, and any minor adjustments required to the comparative figures in the statement.

A document was tabled which contained some minor amendments to the Statement of Accounts 2006/07 (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The Principal Accountant explained that the amendments were technical adjustments necessary, for the reporting of pensions liabilities under Financial Reporting Standard 17.

The Principal Accountant reported that the statements showed a balance of £352,000 in the General Fund. A report showing the possible uses for this balance will be brought to the Fire Authority meeting in July.

Councillor Jones referred to page 5 of the Statement of Accounts and in particular the issue of Retained Firefighters and the Part-Time Workers Regulations. Councillor Jones asked how much of the General Reserve was set aside for the issue and why the Fire Authority held a General Reserve and a number of other reserves. The Principal Accountant explained that the General Reserve is set aside for unearmarked costs based on risks facing the Authority, whilst the other reserves are earmarked for specific costs or issues. There are currently no actual figures available relating to the backdating until a decision is made at the tribunal which is scheduled for November 2007. The issue has been identified as a major risk as the figure could be more than the Fire Authority could afford.



Councillor Hartin asked what current proportion of the General Reserve was being set aside. The Treasurer confirmed that a proportion of £1.2 million is currently being set aside, based on a low probability of the cost occurring. A low probability has been applied to the cost occurring due to the size of the figures involved. It is expected that the Government will provide help or may allow fire authorities to borrow in order to meet the costs.

Councillor Jones asked about the issue of either having a dedicated Member Champion for Health and Safety or incorporating it into one of the existing Member Champion roles. The Head of Performance and Risk confirmed that this would be discussed and addressed at the Annual Meeting in July.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority approve the Statement of Accounts 2006/07, attached as an appendix to the report, subject to the incorporation of the Statement on Internal Control, and audit.

## **12 Statement on Internal Control**

This report asked the Fire Authority to approve formally the Statement on Internal Control (SIC) 2006/07, which must be included as part of the Statement of Accounts 2006/07. It also asked Members to approve formally the SIC Improvement Plan 2007/08.

The Head of Performance and Risk reported that Internal Audit have provided written assurance that there are no issues evident within the Fire Authority's operating systems. The SIC will be amended to reflect this.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority

- a) Accept and sign-off the Statement on Internal Control 2006/07; and
- b) Approve the SIC Improvement Plan 2007/08

## **13 Performance Plan 2007/08**

This report advised Members of the statutory obligation set out in Local Authority Government Act 1999 that requires fire and rescue authorities to prepare and publish an annual Performance Plan by no later than the end of June each year.

The Chair praised the new format of the Performance Plan and commented that it is much easier to read, particularly those pages relating to the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs).

Councillor Coles pointed out that the Punjabi translation on page 44 of the Plan was not correct. He also asked how many copies of the Plan have been requested in other languages, how these requests are facilitated and what the financial impact of providing translated documents is. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that the issue with the Punjabi translation on page 44 had been noted and would be rectified when the Plan went to print as stated in the note at the top of page 44. He also explained that it is a statutory requirement to include this page in public documents. So far, there have



been no requests for translated documents so the only cost incurred is for the inclusion of the page. A retainer is paid to Telford & Wrekin Council for translation services. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer was unable to confirm at the meeting the exact amount of the retainer but added that this information would be made available to Members.

Councillor Jones asked if the 'Our culture' section on page 12 of the Plan could be amended to say 'Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is made up of a diverse body of people'. She also pointed out some minor amendments to be made to page 23 of the Plan

Councillor Hartin drew Members' attention to page 38 of the Plan and in particular to BVPI 143(i) as the issue of the target for the number of fire deaths needs to be addressed. The target currently set is 0.22 per 100,000 population, equivalent to one death per year. The Chief Fire Officer explained that there is scientific reasoning behind this and that even with one death per year the Fire Authority would still be in the highest performing fire authorities. Councillor West asked how the Fire Authority's standing would be affected if the target for BVPI 143(i) was set at zero (0) and a death then occurred. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Fire Authority would still be one of the top performing fire authorities. He pointed out, however, that one dwelling fire with multiple deaths could have a very severe and longstanding effect upon the performance grading of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Allen commented that the figure should be viewed as an assessment of what is likely to happen rather than a target to be reached. Councillor Drummond felt that, morally, it was only acceptable to have a target of zero.

Councillor Mason asked if a target had to be set. The Chief Fire Officer explained that it is a legal requirement to set targets and the Fire Authority will be penalised if there are any that are not set.

Councillor Coles suggested that the target be set as zero with a note explaining why the target has been set as this.

A vote was taken on the suggestion that the target for BVPI 143(i) be set as 1, as presented within the draft Performance Plan. With 9 Members voting for, 2 voting against and 4 abstaining, it agreed that the target for BVPI 143(i) should remain as 0.22 per 100,000 population, equating to one death per annum.

**Resolved** that the target for BVPI 143(i) be set as '1' (0.22 per 100,000 population).

Councillor Minnery then moved the recommendations on the report. These were seconded by Councillor Hartin and with the unanimous agreement of the meeting it was

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority have considered and approve

a) The proposed draft plan for 2007/08;





- b) The proposed targets, as set out in Appendix C of the document; and
- c) That officers have the authority to make any minor changes to ensure that the Plan is correct and up-to-date.

## 14 Medium Term Financial Plan 2007/08 to 2009/10

This report sought the Fire Authority's approval to the contents and publication of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2007/08 to 2009/10.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the MTFP had been discussed in detail at the Member Conference in May. He then drew Members' attention to page 73 of the MTFP which addresses the issue of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR07). It is anticipated that the Budget Working Group will meet in September to start working up possible scenarios for November when the results of the CSR07 will be published.

The Chief Fire Officer also explained that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment requires publication of a MTFP which ties in with the Performance Plan. Consequently the MTFP will be published alongside the Performance Plan.

Councillor Minnery commented that the document was worthwhile and complimented the authors on its production. Councillor Minnery then drew Members' attention to page 26 of the MTFP and asked what steps were being taken to raise the issue of sparsity with the Government. The Chief Fire Officer responded that it would be prudent to wait until the 'What If' scenarios in Section 7 of the MTFP have been worked up before raising the issue with Government. The Treasurer then said that it would also be better to clarify the changes being proposed to the funding formula, so that the potential effect on the Fire Authority can be assessed.

The Chair asked if there were any other channels through which the issues could be raised. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the MTFP formed a major part of the assessment by the Audit Commission through their Use of Resources work.

The Chair also informed the Fire Authority that the meeting with the Conservative MPs which had been arranged for 13 July 2007 had been cancelled and would be rearranged for later in the year. Councillor Eade felt that the Fire Authority needed to be proactive in making representations to the Government and needed to adopt a concerted and planned approach. He suggested that individual meetings should be arranged with the MPs and a working group could possibly be set up to address the issue.

Councillor Minnery felt that the issue should be taken directly to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Communities and Local Government Secretary of State - Angela Smith MP. He formally moved this proposal which was seconded by Councillor West. The meeting then unanimously

**Resolved** that a meeting be arranged between the Authority and Angela Smith MP.



The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the 'What If' planning would need to be taken forward before the case could be put to the Parliamentary Under- Secretary.

Councillor Minnery then moved the recommendations in the report. These were seconded by Councillor Jones and agreed by the Fire Authority, who

**Resolved to**

- a) Approve the MTFP attached as an appendix to this report; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to make minor amendments and to incorporate appropriate links with the Performance Plan, if necessary.

Councillor Minnery left the meeting at this point (3.05 pm) as he had declared a prejudicial interest in item 15 due to his being a local Member.

## **15 Response to OneCouncil Business Case Consultation**

This report presented the response to the OneCouncil consultation by Communities and Local Government (attached at Appendix A). It reflects the discussions at the last Fire Authority meeting and includes changes agreed by the Chair, Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer following their discussions with the Chief Executive of Shropshire County Council.

Councillor Coles asked if the Fire Authority could reply to the letter from the Leader of Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, enclosing a copy of the response that had been sent to Communities and Local Government. Councillor Jones supported this suggestion. Councillor Hurst-Knight was strongly opposed to the idea.

The Chair advised that it would, at this stage in the consultation process, be prudent to refrain from engaging further in the issue especially as he; the Chief Fire Officer and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had met with the Chief Executive of Shropshire County Council and clarified the Authority's position on the matter.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the form of the response to Communities and Local Government, as set out at Appendix A to the report.

Councillor Minnery returned to the meeting at this point (3.08 pm)

## **16 Audit Commission Consultation Exercise Transition to Comprehensive Area Assessment**

In 2009 the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) arrangements for auditing of local public sectors services will be superseded by Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). CAA will develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues and will also





create a more joined-up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

This report advised Members of the Audit Commission's consultation proposals regarding the transition from CPA to CAA and of a proposed response prepared on behalf of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Minnery acknowledged that the indicators for which data is currently collected would disappear but he wondered if the data would still be collected as it was becoming useful, particularly for Integrated Risk Management Planning. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer agreed with the view expressed by Councillor Minnery and felt that it should be recommended that not all the indicators are removed as they allow the Authority to manage and benchmark effectively.

**Resolved:** that the Fire Authority respond to the consultation exercises by commenting that the general principals of CAA are supported but further information, particularly in respect of fire-related performance indicators, together with the full impact upon fire and rescue authorities is sought.

## 17 Local Government Act 1972

**Resolved** that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 22, 23 and 24 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 of confidential information.

## 18 Strategy and Resources Committee (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 24 May 2007.

**Resolved** that Members note the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 24 May 2007.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

