

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at the Lord Hill Hotel, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 25 April 2007 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Box, Major Coles, Davies, Dr Drummond, Eade, Hartin (Chair), Hurst-Knight, Hussey, Dr Jones, Mellings, Morgan (Vice-Chair), Picken and West

Welcome and Thanks

The Chair welcomed Dr Jean Jones to her first meeting of the Fire Authority. Dr Jones has joined following the resignation of Councillor Tandy. The Chair thanked Councillor Tandy for his contribution to the Fire Authority – he was Vice-Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee and Member Champion for Business Risk Management and Audit. Members agreed that a letter of thanks from the Chair should be sent to Councillor Tandy.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Holyoak, Minnery and Mrs Swift.

2 Declarations of Interest

Prior to the meeting the Clerk and Monitoring Officer had prepared a note of advice for Members regarding their interests in item 16 – Response to Consultation on a Unitary Authority for Shropshire. As a result the following Members asked that their personal interest in this item be declared: Councillors Box, Major Coles, Davies, Dr Drummond, Hartin, 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. Councillor Morgan also declared a similar personal interest in that he is a member of the Shropshire Partnership Public Service Board.

3 Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 February 2007.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 February 2007, 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 West Midlands Regional Management Board

Members received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 25 January 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 3/07, 4/07, 5/07 and 7/07.

Resolved that Members note the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 25 January 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 3/07, 4/07, 5/07 and 7/07

6 Human Resources Committee

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 1 March 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 4, 5, 6 and 7. Members noted that further information had come to light regarding the final recommendation relating to item 7 (on page 4 of the minutes) and officers would take a further report on this issue to the next meeting of the Human Resources Committee.

Various points were raised by Members with regard to the Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

- Members asked that benefits to the community, resulting from the building improvement programme, be included in the annual report on the capital programme.
- Equality training will be integrated into the Members' Conference on 30 May 2007, when the Equality and Diversity Officer will deliver a training session.
- Member involvement in the Equality Audit Group has not yet been considered. Councillor Dr Jones said that she would like to sit on the Group, if Members were to be involved.
- The Scheme is a high-level document, which does not contain detail of how things will be done. The detail can be found in the station action plans, which will include issues, such as recruiting female firefighters.

Resolved that Members note the minutes of Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 1 March 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 4, 5, 6 and 7, with the exception of the final recommendation on page 4

7 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 8 March 2007, and considered the recommendation at item 5.



Resolved that Members note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 8 March 2007, and agree the recommendation at item 5

8 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the non-confidential minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 March 2007.

Members' attention was drawn to Key Performance Indicator F11 – the number of fires in non-domestic properties per 1,000 non-domestic properties. There is a discrepancy in this indicator, as fires on farms are included in the indicator but farms are not included as non-domestic properties. This issue has been raised with the Audit Commission and Communities and Local Government. The Chief Fire Officer was attending a meeting that day to address the issue. Clarification of this indicator should have a positive effect on Shropshire's performance.

Resolved that Members note the non-confidential minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 March 2007

9 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006

Mr Tony Corcoran, from the Audit Commission, had intended to attend the meeting to present the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006 to Members. Unfortunately, he was now unable to attend and had given his apologies for absence.

The Audit Commission had agreed to provide the final versions of the documents for the meeting but had been unable to do so. They had, however, confirmed that there were no amendments to the drafts, except at paragraph 18 on page 9 of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, which should read 'The increased council tax was pegged at 4 per cent this year' not 'The increased funding was pegged at 4 per cent this year as it is being introduced gradually'.

The Chair thanked the Audit Commission team – Mr Corcoran, Mrs Hughes, Mrs Mack and Mrs Wong for the time and effort that they had put into the audits. It was agreed that the Chair should send a letter of thanks to the Audit Commission. Members also felt that a letter should be sent from the Fire Authority to all staff, thanking them for their contributions to the Service's success. This could go out with the weekly staff newsletter.

With regard to the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006, Councillor Eade thanked the Treasurer and the Principal Accountant for their work. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer also thanked all support staff, especially the Finance team for their contributions. Councillor Morgan, who is a member of the Audit Commission Reference Group, confirmed that the success is due to all staff but that Members should also be thanked for their involvement.



Resolved that the Fire Authority formally accept the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006

10 Quorum for Committee Meetings

This report set out the current arrangements regarding the quorum for Fire Authority committees and asked Members to consider whether they wished to make any changes to these arrangements.

Councillor Morgan felt that, as there could be changes to the Fire Authority following the elections on 3 May 2007, it was not the right time to make this decision. Any changes should be debated by the new membership. Councillors Picken and Eade agreed with these sentiments. The Corporate Services Manager added that the Fire Authority reviewed the constitution of its committees at its Annual Meeting in July each year and the issue could, therefore, be considered then.

Having considered the report, Members

Resolved that no changes should be made to the current arrangements regarding the quorum for its committees and that the issue should be brought to the Fire Authority's Annual Meeting in July

11 Member Champions

11a Risk Management and Audit Champion

Following the resignation from the Fire Authority of Councillor Tandy the Fire Authority was asked to appoint a new Risk Management and Audit Champion.

It had been suggested that Members may wish to delay this decision until after the elections, when the new membership of the Fire Authority would be known. Members, however, agreed that, because of its importance, the position should be filled without delay. It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Lt Col Allen, seconded by Councillor West and

Resolved that Councillor Dr Jones be appointed as the new Risk Management and Audit Champion

11b Information, Communication and Technology Champion

Councillor Box gave a presentation on his activities as Information, Communication and Technology Champion and circulated his presentation slides (a copy of which are attached to the signed minutes).

Members thanked Councillor Box for his presentation. Councillor Major Coles asked who initially answers 999 calls. 999 calls are answered by a British Telecom operator, who routes the call to Fire Control in Shrewsbury. The time taken to respond to calls is measured from when Fire Control answers the call. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that British Telecom provides updates on time taken and will also be providing a timed account so that this can be monitored.



Councillor Eade asked how often the backup systems are checked and what the testing involved. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the backup systems are tested weekly. Radios are tested automatically on a 'fail-safe' basis.

Resolved that Members note the presentation of the Information, Communication and Technology Champion

The Chair advised that item 13 on the agenda would be taken next, as it tied in with the issues discussed in the Member Champion presentation.

13 Regional Control Centre Update

A paragraph had been included on the agenda regarding developments with the Regional Control Centre and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update.

The Chair reported that he had visited the Centre site earlier in the week, with Councillor Eade, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the Head of Fire Control Convergence. The visit had been interesting but there were questions over the size of the building, as it seems to be larger than necessary.

It was agreed that a Members' visit should be arranged to the Regional Control Centre towards the end of the year. Councillor Coles also asked if it would be possible for Members to meet the Regional Control Centre Director during this visit.

Councillor Picken asked if any backup had been put into the building. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the building has been designed for resilience and can survive for one week on its fall-back systems. The building also has stringent security systems.

Councillor Eade expressed concerns about the full business case only becoming available, once work had started on the building.

Resolved that Members note the agenda paragraph on the Regional Control Centre and the verbal update given by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer

12 Retained Review Implementation

This report informed Members of the progress of the Retained Review Implementation Project.

The Retained Project Manager talked through the progress matrix at the appendix to the report and drew Members' attention to the following recommendations:

No. 4

The employers' support system will enable employers to track staff and the incidents to which they have responded. Work on this system is progressing.



No. 16

The communications procedure is currently in production with Human Resources.

No. 10

Each of the Retained Support Officers has been given a project to work on, one of which concerns the targeting of female applicants.

No. 25

The issue of training by wholetime watches is to be taken to Policy Group for discussion.

There has been a huge increase in the number of retained application packs being sent out by Human Resources. There has also been an increase in the number of fitness tests being carried out, currently one session a month. The May recruit course has also been filled and retention of retained staff has improved.

The Retained Review Implementation Project is due to close at the end of April 2007 and Members were asked to consider whether the Retained Implementation Group should be disbanded after its scheduled meeting in May.

Councillor Morgan thanked the Retained Project Manager and the Retained Support Officers for their work. He suggested that the Implementation Group should remain for a short while to ensure that all the tasks it is overseeing are completed. The Retained Support Officer confirmed that the outstanding tasks should be completed by the May meeting.

Councillor West felt that the Retained Review had been an absolute success. He was very proud to have been involved and was especially pleased with the difference that it had made to the morale of retained firefighters. Councillor West suggested that the Group be retained as a 'ghost group', which could be called upon when needed, for example when seminars were being held.

Councillor Box echoed Councillor West's suggestion and also asked that responsibility be delegated to the Group, so that they could decide when they would stop meeting. The Chair felt that this was not appropriate.

Councillor Allen raised concerns about the effect that disbanding the Group would have on the morale of the retained firefighters. He suggested some sort of annual review of the retained system be undertaken. Councillor Hussey could not see the need to keep the Group once the Review had finished. As the retained firefighters now feel more integrated into the Service, there should be no need to have a working group dedicated to them.

Councillor Morgan felt that the Audit and Performance Management Committee should monitor the performance of the retained duty system.

Councillor Eade felt that the implementation needs to be reviewed, as it progresses. He also commented on the expertise and working knowledge that the Group has gained and that this needs to be retained. The Deputy



Chief Fire Officer felt that this fits with the future role and the Group could be called on for extra work, for example with national seminars.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Eade and, on a vote, with all members voting for, except one, who voted against, it was agreed that the Group should hold its final meeting in May and then be 'mothballed' until such time as it might be required again.

The Retained Support Officer explained that the financial implications of the proposed seminar would be minimal as Communities and Local Government had offered to provide some funding. There is also the possibility of sponsorship and delegates could be charged. The Fire Authority agreed that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service should host the Retained Duty System Seminar, with further details being brought back to the Authority as necessary.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the progress of the Retained Review Implementation Project;
- b) Agree that the Retained Implementation Group should hold its final meeting in May and then be 'mothballed' until such time as it might be required again;
- c) Task the Audit and Performance Management Committee with the continued monitoring of retained performance, particularly with regard to appliance availability, recruitment, retention and community fire safety work; and
- d) Agree that a Retained Duty System Seminar be hosted by Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

14 Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 Overview and Outcomes

This report provided Members with a summary overview of the Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 (introduced by the Audit Commission in 2006), together with the recently published performance results in respect of this Fire Authority and other English Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Councillor Box asked if the Deputy Chief Fire Officer could identify the top things that had helped the Fire Authority to achieve the result that it had. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that it was due, in no particular order, to Member involvement and Members' support for officers; committed staff, both firefighters and support staff; and the local communities, who were heeding the fire safety advice that the Service was delivering to them. Councillor Box also felt that the support of the unions was a vital element in the success.

Members agreed that a letter of thanks, from the Chair, should be sent to all staff and could possibly be sent out with the Service's weekly newsletter.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report



15 **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.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer urged Members to ensure that fire targets are included in the Local Area Agreements of their constituent authorities. He added that, if Members were in agreement with the report's recommendation, officers would bring the draft response for approval to the June meeting of the Fire Authority.

Resolved that the Fire Authority authorise officers, in dialogue with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to prepare a draft response on behalf of the Fire Authority to the Audit Commission's consultation proposals to be brought back to the June meeting of the Authority

16 **Response to Consultation on a Unitary Authority for Shropshire**

This report outlined the possible impact upon the Fire Authority of the proposals for the move to unitary status of local government within Shropshire and recommended a response to the current consultation process.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked how Telford & Wrekin Council currently holds the Fire Authority to account. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that it is done through the Fire Authority, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement. These latter two, however, included all of the partners, not just the County Council.

He added that further clarification of the phrase 'challenge and lead all services', which is used in the business plan for the unitary authority, is being sought.

Having discussed the contents of the report, Members

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree that the comment section should form the basis for the response to the consultation; and
- b) Task Officers with exploring any unclear areas with bidding authorities as necessary



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 18, 19 and 20 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 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 14 February 2007.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 February 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

At this stage all officers with the exception of the Clerk, Solicitor and Committee Clerk left the meeting room.

19 Principal Officers' Employment Panel (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt notes of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, held on 8 March 2007, and considered the recommendations at item 11.

Resolved that Members note the exempt notes of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, held on 8 March 2007, and agree the recommendations at item 11

At this stage officers returned to the meeting room.

20 Audit and Performance Management Committee (Confidential)

Members received the confidential minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 March 2007.

Resolved that Members note the confidential minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 March 2007

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

