

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 6 March 2008 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Eade (Chair), Hartin, Holyoak (Vice-Chair) and West

1 Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2008.

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2008, 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 Medium Term Financial Plan 2008/09 to 2011/12

This report proposed to Members of the Committee a structure for the latest development of the Fire Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Chief Fire Officer ran through the background to publication of the Fire Authority's first MTFP and brought Members' attention to section 4 of his report, which set out the key principles to be incorporated into the updated Plan. He then gave a brief outline of what each section of the Plan would contain.

A discussion took place regarding the 3.9% increase in the precept and the settlement received from the Government. The Committee agreed that the

settlement had been a good one, which had enabled the Fire Authority to bring growth items into its budget rather than cutting its services.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Agree the proposed structure for update of the Fire Authority's MTFP;
- b) Approve that the period covered by the Plan be extended from three to four years, to take full account of the impact of agreed capital expenditure at the St Michael's Street site in Shrewsbury; and
- c) Approve that the completed MTFP should be the subject of a full Equalities Impact Assessment

6 Fire Authority Corporate Plan 2008/09

This report sought Member approval of the proposed contents and layout of the Fire Authority's Corporate Plan 2008/09.

The Programme Manager brought Members' attention to the additional improvement priority at objective 9, namely 'to instigate measures to protect staff from hostile activity in the community', which had been included following comments at the February Fire Authority meeting.

He also referred to the second improvement priority at objective 18, which was 'to achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government'. He advised that a Steering Group, formed to progress this improvement priority, had drawn up a Plan of Action in relation to the Standard. The Plan of Action and Terms of Reference of the Steering Group were tabled (copies of which are attached to the signed minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the importance of achieving Level 3 of the Standard. Members noted that the outcome of each Steering Group meeting would be reported to the Chair and Vice-Chair at their fortnightly briefings, so ensuring the involvement of Members at the highest level. Furthermore, the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee would monitor progress against the Plan of Action.

The Programme Manager showed, on the overhead projector, a populated draft of the wall-mounted poster, which would be distributed to all stations and on which each station would set out their individual targets. The poster was predominantly for internal use. An Annual Report would be published in June, which would contain information for the public and stakeholders.

The Chair thanked officers for the considerable amount of work, which they had put into the Corporate Plan.

Having considered the contents and layout of the proposed Corporate Plan (as appended to the report), the Strategy and Resources Committee

Resolved that the contents and layout of the proposed Corporate Plan be approved

6a Target Setting 2008/09 to 2010/11

This report explained the process, which enabled Members to review and set challenging and realistic targets for 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The Programme Manager advised that he, the Head of Fire Prevention and the Information Officer had been involved in setting the targets proposed in the appendices to the report. At the request of the Chair, the Head of Fire Prevention went into further detail as to how the targets had been set.

A discussion took place regarding the influx of immigrants to the County and how this vulnerable group could be targeted. The Head of Fire Prevention advised that this was a high priority for the Service, which was working with a number of other agencies to identify the areas where immigrants had settled. The Service's Community Fire Safety Advocates would also be focussing on this issue. It was recognised that seasonal work meant that immigrants would not necessarily stay in one place but would move regularly to where they could find employment.

Members noted that Telford & Wrekin Council had developed a 'welcome pack' for immigrants, which provided, in different languages, advice on a number of important issues, including fire safety. At the request of the Vice-Chair, the Head of Fire Prevention undertook to find out whether Shropshire County Council had produced a similar information pack.

Members then moved on to consider section 5 of the report and noted that, under resilience, the comments in brackets relating to the final indicator in Appendix 2 (on page 10) were incorrect. The comments should have read 'if levels drop to 2, the Executive or Principal Officer would decide, on the basis of how busy Control was that day, whether an additional officer was required'.

Under equality and diversity, Members noted that officers were currently considering the National Equality Strategy. They also voiced their concern that the Fire Authority would have difficulty in meeting the targets set.

The Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to the three fire deaths, which had occurred in the County since Christmas. These had all involved elderly people, living on their own, in premises, which were adequately equipped with smoke detectors. The Committee agreed that this was clearly an 'at risk' group, which the Service needed to continue to target.

Members discussed at length the Fire Authority's involvement in Local Area Agreements (LAAs). It was noted that the Shropshire LAA was likely to include National Indicator 49 (the number of primary fires and related fatalities and casualties). The Chief Fire Officer commented that it would be helpful if Telford & Wrekin Council could include Indicator 49 in its LAA, particularly as this linked to other local authority indicators, such as the drive to increase the number of elderly people remaining in their own home rather than going into care.

A general debate took place about how fire deaths and injuries could be prevented and the role local authorities could play. It was agreed that officers would produce a report, detailing the fire deaths, which had occurred in the last five years. As soon as it was ready, the report would be sent to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and then taken to the April meeting of the Fire Authority. The Vice-Chair also undertook to invite officers to Shropshire County Council's Health Overview Scrutiny Panel to give a talk on fire safety in the home.

Finally, referring to the environment targets, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the British Standards Institute had just spent 6 days auditing the Service and indicated that the Fire Authority was likely to achieve ISO 14001:2004. If it did, it would be the first Service to do so for all of its environmental activities.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Approve the methodology for setting targets (see section 4 of report);
- b) Approve the amendments to targets for 2008/09, 2009/10 previously published in 2007/08 Performance Plan (set out in Appendix 1 of the report);
- c) Approve new targets for 2010/11 (set out in Appendix 1 of the report);
- d) Approve targets (where officers have been able to set targets) for additional new indicators to support overarching priorities for 2008/09 (see section 5, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report), subject to amendment of the error in the comments referred to above; and
- e) Agree that officers continue with further analysis in order to develop targets for additional indicators identified within section 5 of the report

7 Treasury Management Practices

This report sought Members' approval to the updated Main Principles of Treasury Management Practices (TMPs). It also reviewed the current arrangements for Treasury Management.

The Treasurer advised that the Treasury Management services provided by Shropshire County Council related to borrowing, lending, managing cash and banking arrangements on a daily basis. The contract provided value for money and the Fire Authority was unlikely to achieve better terms, if it were to administer the services itself. For these reasons his advice was to continue with the current arrangements.

He added that there were no areas for concern, particularly as the services were monitored by the Fire Authority's and the Council's internal auditors and the Treasurer himself. This was, however, a key area, because of the large sums involved, and it was, therefore, important that the Fire Authority have its own TMPs in place, which should be reviewed annually.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Approve the revised Main Principles of Treasury Management Practices (attached as an appendix to the report); and
- b) Note the current arrangements for Treasury Management

8 Annual Governance Statement

This report informed Members of the process that will be put in place to ensure the Authority's Annual Governance Statement is ready for inclusion in the Final Accounts for 2007/08.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the report

9 Efficiencies 2007/08 and Forward Years

This report monitored the level of efficiencies achieved to date and set out the current plans for further efficiency gains in 2008/09 to 2010/11.

The Treasurer emphasised that, to find the efficiencies required for 2009/10 and 2010/11, a significant redeployment of resources would need to take place, which could only be achieved through Integrated Risk Management Planning. Furthermore, the more efficient a service was already the more difficult it became to achieve the national average expected by the Government. This point would be made to the Audit Commission. Members agreed that it would be a challenge to meet future targets.

Resolved that the Committee note progress on delivering efficiencies in 2007/08 and the current position

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....