

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at The Business Development Centre, Telford,
on Wednesday, 14 February 2007 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Box, Major Coles, Davies, Eade, Hartin (Chair), Mrs Holyoak, Hurst-Knight, Hussey, Mellings, Minnery, Picken, Mrs Swift, Tandy and West

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Dr Drummond and Morgan. Members asked that a letter be sent to Councillor Morgan conveying their best wishes.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 20 December 2006.

Resolved *that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 20 December 2006, 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 non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2007. Reports 7, 8 and 9 from that meeting were attached as appendices to those minutes for Members' information.

Councillor Hussey queried the accuracy of the second paragraph on page 6 of the minutes. The Committee Clerk advised that she did not have her notes of that meeting with her and undertook to clarify the situation prior to the next



Strategy and Resources Committee meeting. Any inaccuracy in the minutes would then be resolved at that meeting.

Resolved that Members note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2007

6 West Midlands Regional Management Board

Members received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board Special Meeting, held on 1 December 2006, and considered the recommendations at item 58/06.

Resolved that Members note the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board Special Meeting, held on 1 December 2007, and agree the recommendations at item 58/06

7 Constitutional Issues

7a Allocation of Seats on Committees to Political Groups and Increase of Membership of Standards Committee

This report advised the Fire Authority of the need to reallocate seats on its committees to political groups, following by-elections at Shropshire County Council. The report also asked the Fire Authority to agree the proposed increase in membership of its Standards Committee from 5 to 6 Members.

Councillor Eade asked why, now that that the Fire Authority was a precepting authority in its own right, it was necessary for a Member from each constituent authority to be present at all of its committee meetings. The Corporate Services Manager responded that its purpose was to ensure representation for both constituent authorities at all committee meetings. Councillor Box added that it was also necessary to satisfy the perception of the public regarding openness and transparency. It was agreed that a report on this issue would be brought to a future meeting of the Fire Authority.

Resolved that Members

- a) *Agree the proposed allocation of seats on its committees to political groups (as set out at the Appendix to the 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; and*
- b) *Agree the increase in membership of its Standards Committee from 5 to 6 Members (as set out in section 6 of the report)*

The Chair then proposed, it was seconded by Councillor Box and further

Resolved that Councillor Hussey take the additional seat created on the Standards Committee



7b Consultation on Revised Model Code of Conduct

On 22 January the Department for Communities and Local Government published a consultation paper seeking views on a draft new Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members. This report summarised the more significant changes proposed and asked the Fire Authority to delegate authority to its Chair, the Chair of its Standards Committee and its Clerk and Monitoring Officer to respond to the consultation on its behalf.

Councillor Minnery referred to the proposed requirement in the draft Code that Members declare at meetings the acceptance of hospitality up to five years after the event, which he felt was ludicrous. Members agreed with him and asked the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to include the Fire Authority's objection to this requirement in its response to the consultation paper.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that it was necessary for authority to be delegated to an officer in consultation with Members and the wording of the recommendation should, therefore, be amended. It was, therefore,

Resolved *that the Fire Authority delegate authority to its Clerk and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair and the Chair of its Standards Committee, to respond to the consultation on its behalf, whilst taking into account, as far as possible, the views expressed to them by individual Members*

8 Member Champion Presentations

8a Asset Management and Procurement Champion

Councillor Lt Col Allen gave a presentation on his activities as Asset Management and Procurement Champion and circulated his presentation slides (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). He also presented the Asset Management and Procurement Strategy to the Fire Authority for adoption.

Councillor Lt Col Allen advised that he would bring reports regarding asset management and procurement to the Fire Authority and the appropriate committees as and when necessary.

Having noted the presentation of the Asset Management and Procurement Champion, Members

Resolved *that the Fire Authority adopt the Asset Management and Procurement Strategy*

8b Business Risk Management and Audit Champion

Councillor Tandy gave a short talk on his activities as Business Risk Management and Audit Champion. He asked Members to contact him or the Head of Performance and Risk, if they had any concerns relating to risk management or if they required further information.



The Chief Fire Officer added that Andy Johnson, the Head of Performance and Risk, had moved risk management forward a great deal within the organisation and that he was grateful to have Councillor Tandy working with him. He was now moving onto business continuity planning to ensure that the Service had plans in place to deal with any events, which might arise.

Resolved that Members note the presentation of the Business Risk Management and Audit Champion

8c Learning and Development Champion

Councillor Davies gave a presentation on his activities as Learning and Development Champion and circulated his presentation slides (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

Resolved that Members note the presentation of the Learning and Development Champion

The Chair thanked all those involved for the presentations.

9 Monitoring of Revenue Budget and Capital Programme, including Prudential Indicators

This report formed part of the regular monitoring process undertaken throughout the year. It detailed the latest position on revenue and capital budgets, recommended action where necessary, and also monitored the Fire Authority's Prudential Indicators.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the progress on the revenue budget and the capital programme;
- b) Approve the variations, set out in paragraph 4; and
- c) Note the Fire Authority's position against its Prudential Indicators

The Treasurer advised that reports 10, 11 and 12 were linked and should, therefore, be considered together. If Members approved the recommendations in report 10, they were in effect approving the recommendations in report 12, as the latter report merely set out the mathematics required in order to raise the precept.

10 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme – Budget Recommendations 2007/08

This report brought together the recommendations of the Strategy and Resources Committee of 25 January 2007, which had been incorporated into the report on the precept, to be considered later on the agenda for this meeting. In addition, the outcome of the consultation process was reported and summarised.

The Treasurer advised that, since writing his report, he had received information from other fire authorities about their precepting plans, which indicated that the straight average increase would be 4.5%.



The Chair summarised the differences between the recommendation originally made to the Strategy and Resources Committee - (a) below, and that which the Committee had made to the Fire Authority - (b) below, as follows:

- (a) an increase in precept of 3.9% for 2007/08 and of 5.2% for 2008/09
- (b) an increase in precept of 3.1% for 2007/08 and of 5.8% for 2008/09

Councillor Box said that he had unfortunately been unable to attend the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee. He was concerned about the removal of the Information Officer post from the budget, particularly as he had cited the verification of data as his most significant worry, when he, as Member Champion for Information, Communication and Technology, had given his presentation to the Fire Authority. The cost of that post to a Band D council tax payer was between 0.3 and 0.5 pence per week. The Audit Commission would be assessing the Fire Authority's data verification capability, as could be seen from report 19 on the agenda.

Councillor Box went on to say that to include all of the recommendations originally proposed would cost only an additional 57 pence per year. He was also concerned about the proposed increase in precept from 5.2% to 5.8% in 2008/09, a year in which it would be even more difficult to reduce the budget. Having been consulted, the public had responded that the precept increase should be kept at 4% and not reduced.

Councillor Box, therefore, proposed, and it was seconded by Councillor Tandy, that the recommendation put forward in report 10 be rejected and that the original recommendations brought to the Strategy and Resources Committee (in report 9 to that Committee, a copy of which Members had already received at item 5 on the agenda) be agreed, which would result in the following:

- An increase in the precept for 2007/08 of 3.9%;
- An increase in the capital reserve of £143,000 (as proposed in section 4 of that report);
- £13,000 from the collection fund surplus added to the capital reserve (as proposed in section 6 of that report); and
- Reinstatement of the Information Officer post.

It was noted that, if these proposals were agreed, it would be necessary to rework the calculations contained within report 12.

Councillor Eade responded that the Strategy and Resources Committee had made a decision and it had been the right one. Members had agreed at the last Fire Authority meeting that a 4.4% increase in the precept was too high. The Labour Group had wanted to keep to a 4% increase but the Conservatives had wanted 3%. He said that Members must not forget those who had to pay the bill, particularly those on a low income. The Fire Authority had received significant amounts of money it had not anticipated, namely the pension transfer in of an additional £81,000 and £32,000 over the predicted level for the collection fund surplus. The usage he was proposing for the collection fund surplus was virtually the same as that used in the current year.



He proposed taking the £47,000 contribution from reserves out of the 2007/08 budget, which would be offset by the £41,000 receivable via pump priming monies put into the Road Traffic Collision post.

As far as the Information Officer post at a cost of £30,000 was concerned, the Conservatives had opposed it as soon as it had been raised. His group had supported investment of £850,000 in the Retained Service and championed investment in frontline services. It was not, however, prepared to spend on a post, which would not affect service provision and had been created merely to support Government policy.

The Chair stated that he had been present at the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee and had made it quite clear that he did not support its decision. The Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been asked for their advice and they had voiced their concerns, which were set out in the minutes.

Councillor Box said that he could accept the argument of Councillor Eade regarding the pension transfer monies and he agreed that the Conservatives had supported all decisions relating to the Retained Service. He pointed out, however, that people on low incomes would be paying less than 0.3 pence extra per week, if the Information Officer post were reinstated. He also emphasised the importance of back office support to the running of frontline services.

The Chair stated that at its last meeting the Fire Authority had tasked officers with reducing the precept increase from 4.4% to as near as 4% as possible. He was concerned about the warning received from the Audit Commission about data quality and felt that the Fire Authority would be leaving itself open to potential problems in future years, if it did not appoint an Information Officer. Furthermore, the budgetary position for 2008/09 would be worsened, if the measures put forward by the Strategy and Resources Committee were agreed. Even if Members went with the original recommendations the increase in precept for 2008/09 was likely to be 5.2%. Consultation on the budget had made it clear that the public was happy with a 4% increase this year and did not want the Fire Authority to go lower. He, therefore, supported Councillor Box's proposals, as seconded by Councillor Tandy.

The Chair asked that a vote on Councillor Box's proposals be taken by roll call. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer then called out the names of Members present and the following is a record of how they voted:

For

P Box
AH Coles
NJ Hartin
AJ Hussey
CJ Mellings
FR Picken
Mrs ES Swift
J Tandy

Against

DG Allen
R Davies
AJ Eade
Mrs Y Holyoak
J Hurst-Knight
D Minnery
S West



With 8 Members voting for and 7 Members against, it was

Resolved *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Reject the recommendation put forward in report 10;*
- b) *Agree the recommendation put forward in report 9 to the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee on 25 January 2007, which resulted in the following:*
 - *An increase in the precept for 2007/08 of 3.9%;*
 - *An increase in the capital reserve of £143,000 (as proposed in section 4 of that report);*
 - *£13,000 from the collection fund surplus added to the capital reserve (as proposed in section 6 of that report); and*
 - *Reinstatement of the Information Officer post.*

The Treasurer advised that he had previously prepared a second version of report 12, based on the original recommendations in report 9 considered by the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee. He would, however, need to photocopy that version so that each Member would have a copy to consider. The Chair, therefore, agreed to an adjournment for 10 minutes.

The meeting reconvened at 4.45 pm.

On the advice of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer a vote was taken on the recommendation in report 10.

With 7 Members voting for and 8 Members voting against the recommendation, it was

Resolved *that the Fire Authority not accept the recommendation of its Committee in order to set its budgets, projections and precept for 2007/08*

Councillors Mellings and Tandy left the meeting at this point (3.50 pm).

11 Capital Programme 2007/08 to 2009/10 and Prudential Guidelines

This report presented the capital programme, as recommended by the Strategy and Resources Committee, in the context of Prudential Guidelines.

On a unanimous vote it was

Resolved *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Accept the Prudential Guidelines for the revenue implications of the Capital Programme, set out in paragraphs 4a) and b);*
- b) *Accept the Capital Financing Requirements that will arise from the Capital Programme, set out in paragraph 4d);*
- c) *Accept the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundaries for external debt, set out in paragraphs 4e) and f);*



- d) *Agree the Treasury Strategy for 2007/08 and the Investment Strategy, set out in paragraphs 4g) and h);*
- e) *Accept the Prudential Indicators for borrowing and lending, set out in paragraph 4i); and*
- f) *Approve the Capital Programme as part of the budget package, funded as set out in paragraph 4c), and detailed in the appendix to this report.*

12 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme: 2007/08 Precept

This report sought Fire Authority approval to:

- A budget for 2007/08;
- Council Tax levels for 2007/08; and
- Precepts on billing authorities and related matters.

The Fire Authority was required to issue a precept before 1 March 2007 and all items in the “Recommendations” contained in the report must be taken together. For ease of reference the key elements of the budget were set out in appendices to the report.

The Treasurer tabled an amended version of report 12, which was simply a mathematical reflection of the decision made by the Fire Authority at item 10. A copy of the amended report is attached to the signed minutes. He drew Members’ attention to Appendix A, which set out revenue votes in terms of the five strategic directorates, which made up the Service. It was noted that the Fire Authority’s Committees had wished to see the Revenue Budget set out in this way.

On a vote with 7 Members voting for, 2 against, 3 abstentions and 1 not voting, it was

Resolved *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Approve that a net budget requirement be set at £19,058,757 (calculated in accordance with the provisions of Section 43(4) of the 1992 Act);*
- b) *Approve a total precept of £11,782,298 to be levied on the billing authorities*
- c) *Approve a Council Tax, resulting in a basic amount of Council Tax at Band D calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (Section 44) of £75.45;*
- d) *Approve, under Section 40(2) of the 1992 Act:*
 - i. *The amount of Council Tax calculated for each category of dwelling in each billing authority’s area, as follows:*

Band	2007/08 Council Tax £ p
A	50.30
B	58.68
C	67.07



D	75.45
E	92.22
F	108.98
G	125.75
H	150.90

- ii. *The amount calculated (in accordance with Section 48 of the 1992 Act) as payable by billing authorities for 2007/08, as follows:*

Council	Precept £
<i>Bridgnorth District Council</i>	1,535,359
<i>North Shropshire District Council</i>	1,626,873
<i>Oswestry Borough Council</i>	981,085
<i>Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council</i>	2,614,622
<i>South Shropshire District Council</i>	1,259,042
<i>Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council</i>	3,765,317
	<hr/>
	11,782,298

- e) *Approve that the Treasurer:*
- i. *Issue the necessary precepts and information to the billing authorities in accordance with the provisions of Chapter IV of Part 1 of the 1992 Act and be authorised to make any amendment to the above to reflect the final approved budget, after consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority; and*
- ii. *Is authorised to make payments required from, and to, reserves and provisions within the approved budget strategy and within the Authority's Financial Rules, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chair.*
- f) *Approve the revenue budget and pensions account illustrated in Appendix A, for budgetary control in accordance with approved standing orders;*
- g) *Approve the Best Value Accounting – Code of Practice Provisional Revenue Account at Appendix B; and*
- h) *Approve the schedule of reserves and provisions at Appendix C.*

13 Annual Review of Charges – Special Services

This report presented proposed increases in charges made for special services.

Councillor Minnery was not comfortable with the proposed increase of only 2.7% and felt that the increase should be consistent with that agreed for the precept. Members were also concerned that the cost base appeared to rather low.



Councillor Minnery, therefore, proposed, it was seconded by Councillor Eade and

Resolved *unanimously that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Agree an increase in charges for special services of 4% to be applied from 1 April 2007; and*
- b) *Task officers to carry out a review of the cost base and bring a report to Members, detailing why, and how often, people required special services.*

14 Gold Command Cover within West Mercia Local Resilience Forum

This report informed Members about the proposed agreement with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority to provide shared Gold Command cover across the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum area.

Resolved *unanimously that Members agree the setting up of the agreement with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority to begin on 2 April 2007*

15 Retained Review Implementation

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

Councillor Box thanked Phil Clarke, the Retained Project Manager, for all his hard work. He also brought Members' attention to the Retained Employers' packs, which had been distributed to each Member prior to the meeting.

Resolved *that the Fire Authority note the progress of the Retained Review Implementation Project*

16 Regional Fire Controls and Convergence Management for Firecontrol and Firelink Projects

The papers relating to the setting up of the Local Authority Controlled Company were now with Companies House and discussions were underway with the Fire Control Board concerning insurance, legal and management issues of the new company. Discussions had also taken place concerning the funding for convergence, which had been received recently (£84,568 for 2006/07 and £129,163 for 2007/08) and how to take the project forward within a regional or sub-regional context with this grant funding.

Suggestions about the West Midlands Region moving forward in the 'roll out' order had been refuted by the National Project Team, although the Region would be employing its regional Control Centre Director along with the first wave regions. There were no firmer facts to report at present. Officers would keep Members updated as new information was made available. The Chief



Fire Officer reported that the Government had cancelled the Members' seminar on Regional FireControl, which had been planned for 1 March.

Resolved that Members note the agenda paragraph on the FireControl and Firelink projects and the verbal update given by the Chief Fire Officer

17 Auditor's Report on the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06

The Audit Commission had produced the Auditor's Report on the Best Value Performance Plan audit 2005/06.

It was noted that Tony Corcoran, from the Audit Commission, had been invited to present this Report. He proposed, however, to present the 2006/06 Audit Letter and feedback on the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessments to Members after the scores had been formally released in March, at which time he would also refer to the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06 report.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the Auditor's report

18 Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08

This report set out the Fire Authority's statutory responsibilities to prepare and publish an annual best value performance plan. The report also identified other related performance issues to be considered in the preparation of the performance plan. Most notably, this included the necessity to identify by no later than 31 March 2007 improvement priorities resulting from the recent Performance Framework assessments.

Having considered the report, the Fire Authority

Resolved

- a) *To approve the proposed planning arrangements (as summarised in the appendix to the report); and*
- b) *To delegate authority to its Audit and Performance Management Committee to scrutinise and approve the Improvement Priorities prepared by officers*

19 Audit Commission Consultation Exercise: Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 and Proposals for Re-categorisation

This report summarised key areas of the Audit Commission's proposals for the review of fire and rescue authorities during 2007/08, together with proposals for Comprehensive Performance Assessment re-categorisation.

It was noted that it had been necessary for the Fire Authority's responses to the consultation to be agreed by the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair, in order to comply with the 8 February deadline.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of this report



20 Falck – Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Staff Exchange Programme 2006

This report, together with the appended Executive Summary Report, provided a précis of the Falck - Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Staff Exchange Programme 2006.

The Fire Authority's solicitor confirmed that the Fire Authority had the power, under the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 and the general consent provided by the Secretary of State, to donate redundant fire appliances to countries overseas. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the redundant fire appliance in question would fetch in the region of only £1,000 at auction and it was intended that all costs for transport and accommodation would be met from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

Resolved *that the Fire Authority*

- a) *Note the contents of this report; and*
- b) *Authorise officers, in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to review and evaluate further opportunities for staff development through the Leonardo da Vinci programme for 2007*

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Box and further

Resolved *that the Fire Authority formally agree to donate its redundant fire appliance to another country, which qualified for funding under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme*

21 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 7.*

22 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 20 December 2006.

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that the National Joint Council had met on 6 February 2007 and confirmed that Continuing Professional Development would be implemented with effect from 1 July 2007. The Council had also introduced transitional arrangements for those employees, who would have been in receipt of the Long Service Increment for the period October 2006 to July 2007, had it not been phased out. It was not yet possible to make any payments, however, as advice was awaited from the Pensions Regulator as to whether such payments were pensionable.

Resolved *that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 20 December 2006, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record*



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

At this point all officers, with the exception of the Fire Authority's Clerk and Solicitor (who remained to provide any legal advice required) and the Committee Clerk (who remained to minute the discussion) left the meeting.

Members received the notes of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel meeting, held on 15 January 2007 and considered the two sets of recommendations at item 13: recommendations a) to c) and a) to e).

Councillor Hussey, as Chair of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, advised that the Panel's decision regarding the recommendations had been unanimous. It was noted that the pay award for the Treasurer was still outstanding. He had not wished to make any submission until the pay awards of the other Principal Officers had been agreed in order to avoid any perception of a conflict of interests. A date would now be fixed for the Panel to meet and consider his submission.

Resolved that Members note the notes of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, held on 15 January 2007 and agree the two sets of recommendations at item 13: recommendations a) to c) and a) to e).

24 Strategy and Resources Committee (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2007.

Resolved that Members note the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 25 January 2007

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

