

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
Strategy and Resources Committee  
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury,  
on Thursday, 22 January 2009 at 2.00 pm**

**Present**

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

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor 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 13 November 2008.

Councillor Box commented that the second paragraph on page 3 of the minutes should include the word 'increases' so that it reads '... the Authority should not differentiate between firefighters and support staff in terms of pay *increases*'. The Management Support Officer undertook to rectify this before the minutes were signed by the Chair.

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 13 November 2008, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to the amendment detailed above

**4 Public Questions**

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

The Committee agreed that the order of the agenda be varied, at this point, to allow agenda item 6 to be considered before agenda item 5.

**6 Capital Update on Activity and Finance**

This report provided an overview of all the capital schemes within the Brigade and their current status.

The Chair referred to page 4 of the report and asked for clarification of the cost of hiring a consultant to progress the Telford Lecture Room scheme. The Head of Resources (HoR) explained that the cost is likely to be minor. Shropshire County Council used to provide this service at no cost but is unable to do so at the moment therefore an outside consultant will need to be used. Councillor Box asked the HoR to confirm that it was an architect that was required rather than a consultant. The HoR confirmed that this was correct.

The Chair then asked which budget the Road Traffic Collision Ford Ranger Equipment had been purchased from. The Principal Accountant explained that the Equipment Replacement Provision had been used to purchase this equipment.

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress on Capital Schemes (attached in the appendix); and
- b) Consider any virements or additional resources (detailed in Paper 5 – Financial Performance to November 2008) for recommendation to the Fire Authority in February 2009

## **5 Financial Performance to November 2008**

This report provided information on the financial performance of the service to date, and sought approval for action, where necessary.

The Principal Accountant referred to page 2 of the report and explained that £25,000 had since been identified and would be added to the Repairs and Maintenance figure therefore reducing the £30,000 required.

The Chair referred to the vacant posts detailed on page 2 of the report and asked if the intention was to fill these roles. The Principal Accountant explained that the Fire Crimes Officer role had been advertised and that the Outreach Officer post is being reviewed. Councillor Box asked if work had been undertaken with regard to employing a police officer into this role. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that West Mercia Police had been approached with regard to seconding one of their officers into the role but this had not proved possible. Interviews are due to be carried out for a part-time post, the applicants for which are all retired police officers.

The Chair asked if contributions only had to be made to the Pensions Fund in relation to ill-health retirements. The Principal Accountant explained that this was correct with payments being made into the Pensions Fund over a 3-year period to cover the commutations associated with ill-health retirements.

The Treasurer explained that £398,000 of contingencies have been set aside over the year. When setting the budget, the Treasurer anticipated that half of these contingencies would be available and therefore included a cautious estimate of £200,000.

The Chair asked what the value of this was in relation to Council Tax. The Treasurer estimated that this could reduce Council Tax by 3%. Councillor Box pointed out that, whilst this may be the case, this would not be available every year.

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- 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) Approve virement and changes to the capital programme;
- e) Note performance against prudential indicators; and
- f) Note the information provided on balance sheet items

## **7 Fire Authority Improvement Priorities 2009/10**

This report provided Members with the opportunity to comment on the Draft 2009/10 Improvement Priorities.

Councillor Box asked how much further detail would be available by drilling down. The Programme Manager explained that the detail would be reported to the Audit and Performance Management Committee but no further detail would be included on the Corporate Plan. Further detail would, however, be included in Directorate Plans.

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Provide comments as appropriate

## **8 Budget Strategy 2009/10 to 2012/13 Consultation Presentation and Feedback from Public Scrutiny Panels**

The Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on the Budget Strategy 2009/10 to 2012/13 Consultation, which incorporated feedback on the budget strategy from the Fire Authority's Public Scrutiny Panels that had been collated by Opinion Research Services. The presentation slides were tabled to the meeting and a copy attached to the signed minutes.

A full report on the budget consultation feedback will be taken to the Fire Authority meeting in February 2009.

Councillor West commented that he had been at both consultation sessions and that they had both gone very well, although with Ludlow being slightly more challenging than Shrewsbury.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the contents of the presentation

## 9 Adequacy of Provisions and Reserves and Robustness of Budget

This report:

- i Undertook the full analysis of Reserves and Provisions as agreed by the Fire Authority in December 2008;
- ii Examined reserves to see if funds could be transferred to the capital reserve;
- iii Provided an assurance on the adequacy of reserves and provisions; and
- iv Gave an assurance on the robustness of the budget.

Councillor West felt that it would be prudent to maintain the extreme weather reserve as it may be needed in the future. The Chair suggested that £100,000 could be transferred out for use in other areas. The Treasurer felt that this could be a future option.

**Resolved** that the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority:

- i The reserves and provisions as set out in the appendix;
- ii The Treasurer's assurances covering the robustness of the 2009/10 budget and adequacy of the reserves and provisions; and
- iii Note the material uncertainties from 2011.12 onwards

## 10 Shrewsbury Refurbishment

This report updated the Strategy and Resources Committee on progress with proposals to refurbish the St Michael's Street site at Shrewsbury and sought guidance on the Committee's preferred option for further development.

A document containing costings for each of the options outlined in the report was tabled to the meeting and a copy is attached to the signed minutes. The Head of Resources explained that option 1a, which involved adding an extra floor to the existing fire station building, was not a viable option due to the existing structure of the building and therefore costings had not been provided for it.

Councillor Box asked for clarification of how headquarters would fit into the extension proposed for Shrewsbury Fire Station in option 1b. He also asked what would not now go ahead at Telford Central. The Head of Resources (HoR) explained that it was proposed to build an extension of one-third to one-half of the size of the existing building. This would enable the fire station to be accommodated on the ground floor of the building with the headquarters function utilising the first and second floors of the building. The HoR stated that the space would be properly planned to ensure that people were not 'squeezed' into the building. With regard to Telford, the HoR confirmed that this work would be done from a separate budget and would look at providing training / meeting space as well as improving fire station accommodation.

The HoR explained that potentially there were efficiencies to be achieved by combining the Shrewsbury and Telford schemes, e.g. through appointing a single contractor, but the Telford Scheme does need to be considered on its own merits.

Councillor Box asked if work on proposals for Telford had been undertaken previously. The HoR confirmed that it had been considered as part of the Tweedale scheme but it was clear that the work does need to be considered separately rather than as an addition to another project.

Councillor Hartin commented that the figures appear similar for both option 1b combined with the Telford work and option 3, which involves relocating Headquarters to Telford. Councillor Hartin could see that option 3 provided possibilities but felt that there could be major issues with the relocation of headquarters staff and an increase in staff travel claims, therefore option 1b seems to be a more practical solution. Councillor Box agreed with this opinion for the reason that, as there was different work to be done at Telford, with this option there may be more cost savings.

The Chair asked if the fact that Telford is predicted to be a major growth point for the West Midlands had been considered in these plans. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the potential increase in both housing and businesses had been addressed in last year's Integrated Risk Management Planning. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that development plans are continually monitored to ensure that response standards are maintained. The Chief Fire Officer further clarified that it is distance, which has the major effect on responding.

Councillor Hartin proposed that option 1b be recommended to the Fire Authority as the preferred option together with approval for officers to prepare a full business case for works at Telford. This was seconded by Councillor Minnery.

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the provisions of the report; and
- b) Agree option 1b as the preferred option for further development and approve officers to prepare a full business case for works at Telford

## **11 Capital Programmes 2009/10 to 2013/14 and Prudential Guidelines**

This report presented the capital programmes for 2009/10 to 2013/14, for consideration by the Committee in the context of Prudential Guidelines.

The Principal Accountant informed the meeting that the decision, made at agenda item 10 with regard to the Shrewsbury Project, had no effect on the Prudential Guidelines.

The Principal Accountant also informed the meeting that it was possible that, rather than borrowing money, internal funds may be used to finance capital projects.

**Resolved** that the Committee agree to forward the 2009/10 onward programmes, as set out in the appendix, for consideration by the Fire Authority as part of its final precept deliberations

## 12 Revisions to the Budget and Final Budget Plan

The report developed a final revenue budget package for consideration by the Fire Authority, taking into account latest information.

The Treasurer informed the Committee that the Collection Fund figure had changed to £63,000 from £50,000, which, if confirmed, means a further £13,000 will be added to the Capital Reserve, if no other changes are made.

The Treasurer informed the Committee that the option chosen for the Shrewsbury project can be managed with £1.5 million of borrowing, which means that this causes no variation to the budget proposed in the report.

The Treasurer also informed the meeting that the estimated £281,000 of surplus income over expenditure, which was reported in December 2008, has reduced to £192,000, which will go into the Capital Reserve. There are also increases in the predicted deficits for 2010/11 to 2013/14. This issue was raised at the December 2008 Fire Authority meeting, where the consensus seemed to be that the Authority was equipped to cope with this.

The Chair asked if there was any leeway with regard to pay awards. The Treasurer explained that the provision for 2009/10 and 2010/11 was at the pessimistic level but the General Reserve had been reduced. After this an average of the optimistic and pessimistic scenarios had been used.

**Resolved** that the Committee agree to propose to the Fire Authority a revenue budget of £20,751,000 for 2009/10, which together with a net transfer to reserves gives a budget requirement of £20,832,000

## 13 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This was the latest of the regular Risk Summary reports to the Strategy and Resources Committee. As previously, these reports are intended to enable Members to meet the requirements of this Committee's Terms of Reference as they relate to the Fire Authority's management of corporate risk. The progress reported relates to that achieved since the last Annual Summary Report, received by the Fire Authority at its meeting in November 2008.

The Programme Manager informed the meeting that new Risk 74, concerning the economic uncertainties, is currently being assessed and further details will be brought back to the Strategy and Resources Committee in due course.

Councillor Box asked if there were likely to be any risks highlighted from the report into the Warwickshire fire. The Chief Fire Officer answered that it was very difficult to predict what would come out of this report but it is likely that some of the work undertaken in the Integrated Risk Management Planning process will pre-empt some of the report recommendations.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the contents of the report

**14 Local Government Act 1972**

**Resolved** that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for item 15 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, by virtue of Paragraph 4

**15 Corporate Risk Management Summary – Exempted Information**

The Committee had received an open session report, at Agenda Item 13, which summarised its current exposure to corporate risk. This report supplemented that one as it contained information that is exempt from publication by virtue of the Local Government Act

**Resolved** that Members note the contents of this report, in conjunction with the Corporate Risk Management Summary report discussed in open session

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....