

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 22 May 2008 at 2.00 pm**

Present

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

1 Apologies for Absence

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

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 6 March 2008.

Councillor Holyoak asked how she should invite officers to attend the Shropshire County Council's Health Overview Scrutiny Panel to talk about fire safety in the home. The Chief Fire Officer advised that it would be best to arrange this through the Management Support Officer.

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 March 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

Following on from the report, which was agreed at the March 2008 meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation outlining progress on the Medium Term Financial Plan. A copy of the presentation slides was tabled to the meeting and is attached to the signed minutes.

A brief summary of the more significant points discussed is given below.

The Chair queried the difference in homes visited and the number of smoke alarms fitted. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this was because many of the homes visited already have smoke alarms fitted. Councillor Hartin asked how the issue of very difficult to reach households is addressed. The Chief Fire Officer explained that crews will keep trying to gain access and may also try through other agencies such as Social Services. 'Word of mouth' in local communities also helps. Records are kept of visits that are undertaken or failed so that households can be targeted. Councillor West advised that a meeting is to be held with Shropshire County Council to discuss cross partnership working.

Councillor West asked if there were still problems with staffing at Much Wenlock. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this was the case. Crew numbers had risen to 11 but had now fallen to 8. One of the contributing factors is the lack of affordable housing in the area. The Chair asked how the profile of these issues can be raised / publicised. Regular publicity is given to Retained issues and this raised profile has helped to improve retention. Regular reporting of appliance availability to the Audit and Performance Management Committee also helps to keep the issue focussed with members and officers. Councillor Hartin felt that the issue of affordable housing may only be improved through planning and this may be an improvement that is brought about through the transition to a unitary authority.

The Chair asked how the increased capital required over the next three years would be found. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this would be done through borrowing and also by utilising the capital reserve, which currently stands at approximately £0.5 million, some of this money is, however, already committed to certain schemes. The Chair then asked about realising capital receipts. The Treasurer confirmed that he is currently looking at this issue. Members raised concerns that the proposed sale of land in 2011/12 may be affected by the state of the property market and queried whether this issue should be captured on the Authority's Risk Register. The Head of Performance and Risk advised that issues such as this would be collected through the management of the St Michael's Street project. The Treasurer also pointed out that the receipt from the sale of the land would be received after the majority of work had been done on the project, which ties in with the settlement received. The Treasurer also advised that the capital reserve level drops away in 2010/11 and this deficit will be addressed over the next two years.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee that a seminar will be held immediately before the Fire Authority meeting on Wednesday 11 June 2008, 12pm at the Shirehall. This will allow Members the opportunity to discuss the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Final Accounts for 2007/08 before the Fire Authority meeting.

The Chair asked when the next Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) will be undertaken. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the last CPA result will be given in February 2009. After this the Fire Authority will become part of the Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA) and will be assessed with Shropshire County Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. The Fire Authority has one indicator included in Shropshire County Council's CAA and is the only Fire and Rescue Service in the region to have achieved this.

The Use of Resources assessments will continue but improving on the score already achieved may not be cost-effective. It is also possible that the Direction of Travel reputation may drop to a 3 if a level 3 is not achieved for the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). In relation to this, Councillor West praised the recent Equality and Diversity seminar provided by the Fire Authority, which had highlighted many issues relating to the ESLG.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the presentation

6 Annual Governance Statement

This report set out the draft Annual Governance Statement to be included in the Final Accounts for 2007/08.

The Vice-Chair referred to item 7 in Appendix B which related to staffing levels in Fire Control and asked how this issue was being addressed. The Head of Performance and Risk explained that planning is taking place at local and regional level to address this issue. Increased funding has been received from Government for temporary staff to be recruited so that existing control staff can be trained. The Vice-Chair asked if the temporary staff could be in place when needed. They can be we also need to ensure we are maintaining appropriate levels of experience in Fire Control.

Councillor West commented that some very significant issues had been raised in the report and asked how regularly these issues were monitored. A report is taken to the Audit and Performance Management Committee on a quarterly basis with an end of year report being submitted to both the Strategy and Resources Committee and the full Fire Authority.

Resolved that the Committee give their approval for the draft Annual Governance Statement 2007/08 and AGS Improvement Plan 2008/09 to be forwarded for signing at the meeting of the Fire Authority in June 2008.

7 A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England – Consultation Responses

This report informed Members of the outcomes of a consultation exercise undertaken by Government concerning the development of a Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the outcome of the Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation proposals for the development of a Centre of Excellence; and
- b) Agree to transfer the £6,879 previously budgeted for funding the development of a Centre of Excellence to Contingencies, pending further deliberations by CLG and their partners.

8 Fire and Rescue Authority Mutual Limited

This report informed Members of the recent court judgement made in relation to the Local Authority Mutual insurance company (LAML), its impact on the Fire Authority Mutual insurance company (FRAML), and the Fire Authority's position on this matter.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

9 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 Summary Report, received by this committee at its meeting in January 2008.

The Head of Performance and Risk drew members' attention to Graph 1 on page 8 of the report, which shows the work needed to reduce risks. Work is progressing on significant risk 70 but until it is possible to predict that we will achieve level 3 on the ESLG, this risk will continue to be reported as high.

Members were advised that Risk 66, which relates to the Regional Control Centre project, was previously made up of several different risks. The Executive Officers have now completed their assessment of this new combined risk and it has come out as 'very high risk'. Further information about how this risk is being controlled will be included in the next summary report.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

10 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, in accordance with section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of item 14 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 paragraphs 3 and 4

11 Corporate Risk Management Summary – Exempted Information (Paragraph 4)

The Committee had received an open session report, which summarised the Fire Authority’s current exposure to corporate risk. This report supplemented the open session report, as it contained information that was exempt from publication by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of this report, in conjunction with the Corporate Risk Management Summary discussed at item 9

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....