

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 5 March 2009 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

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

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Dr Worrall, Chief Fire Officer Mr Taylor, Corporate Services Manager Mrs Lloyd, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mr Raymond, Head of Fire Prevention Mr Ablitt, Information Officer Helen Jones, Principal Accountant Mrs Coadey and Treasurer Mr Dixon

In the absence of the Chair of the Committee (Councillor Eade) the Vice-Chair, Councillor Mrs Holyoak, chaired the meeting.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Picken, although Councillors Eade and Minnery did not attend.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members that they should declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests at this point and that they should leave the meeting before any item, in which they had a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 22 January 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor West and

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 22 January 2009, 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 Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007/08 – Overview and Outcomes

This report provided Members with a summary overview of the Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007/08 (introduced by the Audit Commission in 2006), together with the recently published performance results in respect of this, and other, English Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to Figure 1 on page three of the report, which showed the performance of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority in relation to other fire authorities. He also reiterated the positive comments made by the Audit Commission regarding the role of this Authority's Members as ambassadors for the Service in the community.

The Committee was pleased that the Audit commission had recognised the contribution made by Members and agreed how important that contribution was. Councillor West, Chair of the Fire Authority, added that the outcome of the assessment was very encouraging and he thanked Members for their input. It was noted that a more detailed report on the issue would be brought to the April meeting of the Fire Authority, when the Chair would take the opportunity to thank all Members.

In response to a question from Councillor Hartin the Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that data gathering for Comprehensive Area Assessment had already commenced and the Audit Commission aimed to publish the outcomes in November. This was, however, an ambitious target and its achievement would depend upon the capacity of the Commission. Members were likely to be involved in the process and would be contacted in due course.

Councillor Box felt that it might be helpful to invite Mr Cotterel, the Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead from the Audit Commission to one of the Authority's meetings and officers agreed to consider this.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the report

6 Medium Term Financial Plan 2009/10 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).

In presenting this report the Chief Fire Officer pointed out that the period covered by the proposed Plan was three years, whereas the budget planning process now extended to five years. He, therefore, asked that a third recommendation be added, namely that the period covered by the Plan be extended to 2013/14 to tie in with the budget planning process.

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor West and

Resolved that the Committee agree:

- a) The proposed structure for the 2009/10 update of the Fire Authority's MTFP;
- b) To the inclusion within the MTFP of the outcomes of an analysis of the Audit Commission's recently published national report into 'improving fire service efficiency.'; and
- c) That the period covered by the MTFP be extended to 2013/14 to tie in with the budget planning process

7 Fire Authority Corporate Plan 2009/10

This report sought Member approval of the proposed contents and layout of the Fire Authority's Corporate Plan 2009/10.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to page five of the report, which showed the proposed layout of the Corporate Plan. He also circulated a mock up of the Plan, which would be A2 size and would act as a 'book cover' to the five Department Plans. The format of the Plan was such that it would enable individual stations to include local priority targets set by council area committees and each section within the Service to set out their specific targets and priorities, which in turn linked to Department and Corporate Plans.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor West and

Resolved that the Committee agree the contents and proposed layout of the Corporate Plan, as set out in the report

8 Target Setting 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12

This report explained the process, which would enable Members to review and set challenging and realistic targets for 2009/10 and subsequent years, where appropriate.

The Head of Fire Prevention reported that officers had reviewed and updated prevention and protection targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11 and introduced new targets for 2011/12. In doing so they had to ensure that not only were the targets challenging but also achievable. Officers recommended that the Fire Authority retain the Best Value Performance Indicators as local performance indicators, as they remained valuable performance management tools, even though they were no longer a legal requirement.

He pointed out that the 'numeric' figure quoted in the tables at Appendix 2 referred to the actual number in Shropshire, as opposed to the Communities and Local Government target per 100,000 population. He then explained the rationale behind the proposed targets and pointed out where officers felt it was inappropriate to expend disproportionate resources in attempting to make very minor improvements.

A discussion took place about the measurement of arson by the Police and the Fire Authority. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the Head of Fire Prevention had been in prolonged discussions with the Police about recording arson and, in particular, car theft fires. As a result, the Police had agreed that they would flag up such fires in future, which would provide improved data for the Fire Service.

Whilst they appreciated that all targets must be achievable, Members were concerned about the wording in the target relating to fire deaths. They felt that it must be made absolutely clear that the Fire Authority was always striving to achieve a target of nil for fire deaths. Members felt, therefore, that, in addition to the figure of 3 for the 'Upper Level of Tolerability', there should also be a target of 0 in the same column.

The Information Officer brought Members' attention to section 6 of the report, which dealt with people-related Corporate Health BVPI's. It was noted that these indicators and targets would be reviewed following the development of a more detailed and sophisticated reporting process. Any changes in the indicators and targets would be reported to the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee.

Councillor Box queried why officers had not proposed a more challenging target for BVPI 12 Sickness Absence. The Chief and Deputy Chief Fire Officers replied that these figures had been taken from the Audit Commission's document 'Rising to the Challenge' and this was an area where a disproportionate amount of resource might be expended in obtaining a minor reduction. Officers would, however, continue to look at ways in which these figures might be further reduced.

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Box and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Agree to retain Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) as local performance indicators;

- b) Agree to minor changes of some Service Delivery BVPIs, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report;
- c) Agree to 'Upper' and 'Lower Levels of Tolerability' being applied to selected Service Delivery BVPIs, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, **subject to the addition of a target of 0 for BVPI 143 (i)**;
- d) Note that the suggested targets for people-related Corporate Health BVPI's (contained in Appendix 1 of the report) may be subject to change, once the Resourcelink reporting process has been fully developed (as a consequence, any future changes to the indicators and targets will be reported to the Audit and Performance Management Committee);
- e) Approve the amendments to targets for 2009/10, 2010/11 and new targets for 2011/12 (contained within Appendix 1 of the report); and
- f) Approve targets for additional indicators to support overarching priorities for 2009/10 (contained in section 7, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report)

9 Treasury Management Practices

This report sought Members' confirmation of the Main Principles of Treasury Management Practices and reports on developments in investment strategy.

The Treasurer explained that it was necessary for Members to review annually the Fire Authority's Treasury Management Practices. He had carried out a review and currently saw no reason for them to be amended. Shropshire Council would, however, be reviewing theirs after the elections in June and it would then be necessary for him to undertake a further review to ensure that those of the Fire Authority aligned with the Council's.

Members debated at length the measures, which the Fire Authority might take in order to mitigate the very low returns now being received on its investments – the latest tranche of money placed with the Debt Management Office would receive a return of only 0.3% interest. A discussion took place about using the resources, held in the capital reserve and other reserves, to pay for the capital programme rather than borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board, to which the Fire Authority would pay interest of 4% to 5% interest. The Treasurer conceded that this was a possibility in the short term, particularly if capital payments were to slip.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Confirm the Main Principles of Treasury Management Practices (attached as an appendix to the report); and
- b) Note developments in the current investment strategy.

10 Financial Performance to January 2009

This report provided information on the financial performance of the Service to the end of January 2009, and sought approval for action, where necessary.

The Principal Accountant brought Members' attention to, and provided more detail on, the exceptional variances on page two of the report. Referring to the capital programme, she reported that stage two payments had been made on the new appliances, so the slippage now stood at £750,000.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor West and

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve the requested virements to the revenue budget;
- c) Note the position on the capital programme;
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators; and
- e) Note the information provided on balance sheet items

11 Strategy and Resources Committee Work Plan 2009–10

This report sought to establish a Work Plan for the Strategy and Resources Committee for the year April 2009 to March 2010.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Committee approve the Strategy and Resources Committee Work Plan, attached as an appendix to the report

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....