

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at the Shirehall, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 17 October 2007 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Box, Major Coles, Dr Drummond, Eade (from 2.05 pm), Mrs Greenaway, Groom, Hartin, Mrs Holyoak, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mellings, Minnery, Picken and West

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Davies and Mason.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Allen declared a personal interest in item 7: the Fire Authority had appointed him to sit as its Director on the Regional Control Centre Board and one of the recommendations in report 7 concerned the arrangements relating to a Special Responsibility Allowance for the Director.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 18 July 2007.

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 18 July 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

Councillor Eade arrived at this point (2.05 pm).

4 Public Questions

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

5 Constitution of Committees

The purpose of this report was to review committee terms of reference and delegations.

Councillor Box commented that the Liberal Democrat Group should be represented on the Principal Officers' Employment Panel (the Panel), as it



was a significant group on the Fire Authority. Councillor Coles added that it seemed only equitable that the Liberal Democrat Group be represented, particularly as an Independent Member, of which there was only one on the Fire Authority, sat on the Panel.

Councillor Minnery felt that, as the Main Opposition Group had appointed a Leader at the Fire Authority's Annual Meeting in July 2007, this indicated that there was only one opposition group, not two. If it was the case that the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups had formed one opposition group and the Leader of that group already sat on the Panel, then the vacant position on the Panel should be filled by ballot rather than by a Liberal Democrat Member. Councillor Minnery strongly objected to changes being made in order to suit situations, in which the Fire Authority found itself.

Councillor Hartin commented that the Panel was very important and, as it had been agreed that since 2005 all parties would be represented on the Panel, he felt that it would be unwise to do anything different.

Councillor Minnery proposed that the vacancy on the Panel be filled by ballot. This was seconded by Councillor Eade and, on a vote with 8 members voting for and 7 voting against, it was

Resolved that the vacancy on the Principal Officers' Employment Panel be filled by ballot

Councillor Coles commented that, given the nature of the Panel's duties, he was uncomfortable with appointing a representative by ballot and would prefer that a Liberal Democrat Member be nominated. He also said that, even if a Liberal Democrat Member were elected by ballot, this would not necessarily be the representative, which the Liberal Democrat Group would have put forward.

Councillor Box nominated Councillor Hartin to the Panel. This was seconded by Councillor Minnery and unanimously agreed by the Fire Authority.

Having reviewed its Committee terms of reference and delegations, the Fire Authority

Resolved to agree the Committee terms of reference and delegations, as set out in the appendix to the report and to appoint Councillor Hartin to the Principal Officers' Employment Panel

6 Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders

The purpose of this report was to receive the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders, which were agreed at, and stood adjourned from, the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority, and to agree additional amendments, proposed as a result of the further review requested by Members at that meeting.



The Corporate Services Manager detailed a proposed further change to the wording at part 19.2 on page 5 of the report, which reflected comments from a Member, namely the following addition at the end of 19.2:

'It may be cast for or against the proposal or the Chair may decide not to use it. In the latter case the motion would not be carried.'

Councillor Coles pointed out that the paragraph at the top of page 5 of the report should read 'Delete 13.15 and 13.16' rather than 'Delete 13.15'. The Corporate Services Manager confirmed that his observation was correct.

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the Fire Authority

Resolved:

- a) To note the amendments to the Fire Authority's Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders (set out at paragraph 3 of the report), which were agreed at, and stood adjourned from, the last meeting of the Authority; and
- b) To agree the proposed amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business, set out at paragraph 4 of the report.

Committee Clerk's Note

As required by Standing Orders, the amendments referred to in recommendation b) will stand adjourned until the next meeting of the Fire Authority before they can be implemented.

7 Member Roles and Appointments

This report requested the Fire Authority to:

- Appoint a new Lead Member for Civil Resilience;
- Agree the amended Role Descriptions for two of the Fire Authority's Member Champions;
- Note the Role Description for the Regional FiReControl Director and the arrangements relating to a Special Responsibility Allowance;
- Appoint its representative on the Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Assembly and Fire Service Forum; and
- Endorse the appointment of Councillor Box to the LGA Fire Services Management Committee.

Councillor Coles asked whether any recommendation regarding the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Director of the Regional Control would be backdated to the date when the appointment had been made. The Corporate Services Manager replied that the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations might include backdating the SRA payment. In any event the recommendations would be brought before the Fire Authority when Members would be able to make a decision regarding backdating.



Councillor Box asked if children and young people would be included in the remit of the Vulnerable Persons Champion. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this would not happen, as the role of Young People's Champion would be retained.

The issue was then raised about the groups identified as being vulnerable, particularly single parents and young males living alone. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the list given in the revised role description was a list of identified vulnerable groups and was by no means exhaustive. At the request of Councillor Groom it was agreed that the list would be amended to include 'those whose first language is not English'.

Councillor Hartin felt that the role would be greatly expanded and asked whether this was wise, given that the present Champion was the Chair of the Fire Authority. The Chair acknowledged Councillor Hartin's concerns but explained that, should the role become too onerous, the responsibilities would be reconsidered and the role possibly split.

Councillor Jones asked if an Equalities Champion had been considered. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that it had been considered but it would have an even larger remit. He also commented that the Older Persons' Champion role had been redefined to reflect feedback from the public.

Councillor Hartin commented that he still had concerns about the expanded Vulnerable Persons role and asked that the Chair report back to the Authority after a suitable period about the role and its demands. The Chair agreed to do so.

Councillor Holyoak proposed that the Chair be appointed as the Authority's representative on the Local Government Association Annual Assembly and Fire Service Forum. This was seconded by Councillor Box and unanimously agreed by the Authority.

Councillor Holyoak then proposed Councillor Minnery as the Lead Member for Civil Resilience. This was seconded by Councillor Allen and, with 14 members voting for and one abstention, it was agreed by the Authority.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Appoint Councillor Minnery as Lead Member for Civil Resilience;
- b) Agree the amended Role Descriptions for the Fire Authority's Older People's and Business Risk Management Champions (attached at Appendices B and C respectively);
- c) Note the Role Description for the Regional FiReControl Director (attached at Appendix D) and the arrangements relating to a Special Responsibility Allowance, set out at paragraph 5 of the report;
- d) Appoint the Chair of the Fire Authority as its representative on the Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Assembly and Fire Service Forum; and
- e) Endorse the appointment of Councillor Box to the LGA Fire Services Management Committee



8 Champion Presentations

Councillor Dr Jones gave her first presentation to the Fire Authority on her activities as Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit and circulated her presentation slides (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The Head of Performance and Risk referred to a leaflet, which the Service's Risk Management Group had produced in order to raise awareness of risk management issues amongst Members and officers. A copy of the leaflet was circulated to Members and is attached to the signed minutes.

Councillor Box gave his third presentation to the Fire Authority on his activities as Member Champion for Information and Communications Technology and circulated his presentation slides (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

Resolved that Members note the presentations of the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit and the Member Champion for Information and Communications Technology

9 Audit and Performance Management Committee

9a The Fire Authority received the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 July 2007.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting held on 26 July 2007.

9b The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 27 September 2007, and considered the recommendation at item 12. As the same recommendation was also to be considered at item 12 on the agenda for this meeting (minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee), it was agreed that a decision on the recommendation would be deferred until that point.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 27 September 2007

10 Standards Committee

10a The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 1 August 2007, and considered the recommendation at item 8.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 1 August 2007, and agree the recommendations at item 8

Councillor Coles asked if there was a second Independent Member of the Standards Committee. The Corporate Services Manager explained that there was but he had not attended the Standards Committee meeting on 1 August 2007 nor had he tendered his apologies for absence.



She confirmed that the issue of attendance by non-elected Independent Members of the Standards Committee had been considered in the amendments detailed in Report 6 – Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders.

In response to a question from Councillor Coles regarding the membership of the Standards Committee the Corporate Services Manager explained that the remit of the Committee was likely to expand as a result of legislation, which was anticipated in April 2008. She and the Chair of the Committee had discussed this issue and the need possibly to increase its size and independent membership to ensure that there were sufficient Members to deal with the new responsibilities. She would be presenting a report for consideration by the Committee, which would make its recommendations to the Fire Authority in due course.

In response to a question as to whether any further information had been found with regard to Councillor Groom's question on page 5 of the minutes the Clerk explained that this would be reported to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

- 10b** The Fire Authority received, for information, a copy of the revised Code of Conduct, which the Standards Committee (at its meeting on 1 August 2007) had agreed to adopt in accordance with the authority delegated to it by the Fire Authority on 18 July 2007.

11 Human Resources Committee

The Fire Authority received the non-exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 September 2007, and considered the recommendation at item 7.

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that, since the meeting of the Human Resources Committee, officers had recognised that the resolution at item 7 of the minutes could be seen as discriminatory against former operational employees. To overcome this difficulty it was proposed that the wording of the recommendation be amended to read as follows:

'Having considered the contents of the report, the Human Resources Committee

Resolved *that the Fire Authority be recommended to adopt a policy of no re-employment of operational employees following retirement, except where such former employees participate in the Service's usual recruitment process.'*

On a vote, with 14 Members voting for and 1 abstention, it was

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 September 2007, and agree the recommendation at item 7 as amended above



12 Strategy and Resources Committee

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 2 October 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 7 and 8.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 2 October 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 7 and 8

13 West Midlands Regional Management Board

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 26 July 2007 and considered the recommendations at items 17/07, 18/07, 20/07, 21/07, 23/07, 25/07, 30/07 and 32/07.

Members considered the wording at item 14/07 of the minutes and registered their confusion at what this meant. The Clerk was also not clear about its meaning.

Councillor Hartin referred to item 15/07 and asked for it to be recorded that Councillor Austin had been the inaugural Chair of the Board, so thanks were due to him also for the part he had played in making the Board one of the most successful nationally.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 26 July 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 17/07, 18/07, 20/07, 21/07, 23/07, 25/07, 30/07 and 32/07

14 Budget Monitoring 2007/08

This report showed variances, which had been identified, whilst monitoring the revenue budget for 2007/08, and also provided summary financial information for the Fire Authority as a whole.

Councillor Eade asked what reduction in the Council Tax increase the £526,000 underspend represented and what percentage this underspend was of the overall budget. The Principal Accountant responded that this would have taken 5% off the Council Tax increase and it was approximately 2% of the overall budget. The figure included, however, a number of one-off savings, which would not go forward year on year.

Committee Clerk's Note

The 2% figure given by the Principal Accountant was based on the net effect on the General Fund of £321,000. If based on the underspend figure of £526,000 the percentage would be approximately 2.8%.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget as a whole;



- b) Approve the virements detailed in paragraph 4;
- c) Note the virements, which had been approved by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, under delegated powers; and
- d) Approve the transfer of the Fire Authority's pension budgets to the Corporate business area

14a Digitisation of Fire Safety Property Files

This report informed the Fire Authority of an option for digitisation of the Service's fire safety property files, which would significantly enhance the working efficiency of the Fire Safety Department and bring a number of cost and efficiency benefits.

Councillor Eade felt that this was the way forward and the Fire Authority did not have any choice but to support the proposals made in the report. He, therefore, proposed, it was seconded by Councillor Minnery and

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority agree to invest £52,500 to facilitate the conversion of the Service's 15,500 fire safety property files into digitised documents

15 Prudential Indicators 2007/08

This report informed the Fire Authority of progress against its agreed prudential indicators for 2007/08. It also reported the actual prudential indicator figures for 2006/07.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note that the guidelines had been complied with during 2006/07; and
- b) Note the position for 2007/08

16 Financial Benchmarking

This report advised Members of the findings of an analysis of comparative financial information for Fire and Rescue Authorities for 2006/07, recently reported by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

Members were disappointed that once again the information provided by CIPFA was inaccurate. Under the circumstances they felt that there was no point in requesting officers to carry out any further, more detailed analysis. They did, however, ask that the Chief Fire Officer write to CIPFA and the Audit Commission once more to say that the statistics were inaccurate and could not, therefore, be relied upon, or used, to assist in improving efficiency.

Members noted that it was, unfortunately, necessary for the Chief Fire Officer to continue to carry out some analysis each year, even though the information provided was inaccurate, in order to make this point to the Audit Commission.

Resolved: that the Fire Authority



- a) Note the findings of the analysis;
- b) Note that anomalies with the statistics, previously identified to both CIPFA and the Audit Commission, do not appear to have been corrected for the 2006/07 data; and
- c) Having taken into account the limitations of the statistics, do not wish officers to carry out any further more detailed analysis

17 FiReControl / FireLink Update

This report provided information regarding progress and issues relating to the FiReControl and FireLink Projects.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report

18 Continuous Professional Development Update

A paragraph had been included on the agenda regarding developments with the Continual Professional Development Scheme.

Resolved that Members note the agenda paragraph on the Continual Professional Development Scheme

19 Integrated Clothing Project Update

A paragraph had been included on the agenda regarding developments with the Integrated Clothing Project.

Councillor Hartin asked how the latest developments would impact on replacement of personal protective equipment, which had been provided for in the capital programme. The Chief Fire Officer replied that it would not have any effect. The Fire Authority still maintained its contract with its current suppliers and would continue to do so as long as was necessary.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the agenda paragraph on the Integrated Clothing Project

20 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 21 and 22 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 and 2.

21 Audit and Performance Management Committee (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

The Fire Authority received the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 July 2007.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 July 2007



22 Human Resources Committee (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

The Fire Authority received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 September 2007.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 September 2007

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

