

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at the Shirehall, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 8 February 2006 at 2.00 pm**

Present: Councillors Lt Col Allen, Benyon, Box, Davies, Dr Drummond, Eade, Hartin, Mrs Holyoak, Hussey, Lloyd, Mellings, Morgan, Picken, Mrs Swift, Tandy and West

1 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Minnery had tendered his apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 December 2005. It was noted that on page 5 at item 12a recommendation c) the date should have read 8 February and not 6 February 2006.

Subject to the foregoing, it was

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 December 2005, 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 Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Performance Management Committee, held on 9 January 2006.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Performance Management Committee, held on 9 January 2006, be noted.*

6 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 19 January 2006, together with the Fire Authority's Consultation Response relating to the Revenue Support Grant for 2006/07 and 2007/08. It was confirmed that the figure of £9,000, given in the first bullet point at item 6 in the minutes, included both

the contribution of £5,000 to the Race Equality and Diversity Group and the cost of retaining the Brigade Chaplain.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 January 2006, and the Fire Authority's Consultation Response relating to the Revenue Support Grant for 2006/07 and 2007/08 be noted.*

7 Standards Committee

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee, held on 24 January 2006.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 24 January 2006, be noted and the recommendation at item 5, regarding amendments to the Procedure for Local Investigation of Referred Complaints, be agreed.*

8 Constitutional Issues

The report of the Clerk proposed changes in the constitution of several committees to enable the business of the Fire Authority to be carried out more effectively and to take into account guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regarding audit committees. The report also asked the Fire Authority to nominate Members to participate in the Community Liaison Panel.

The Chair asked Members to inform officers as soon as they became aware that they would be unable to attend a meeting to avoid cancellation at the last minute. Alternative arrangements could then be made, if a meeting were likely to be inquorate.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority agree the following changes in the constitution of its committees:*

- a) *A decrease in the quorum of its Human Resources, Performance Management, and Strategy and Resources, Committees from 5 to 4; and*
- b) *Amendment to the terms of reference of its Performance Management Committee to include the Statement of Purpose and core audit functions set out at section 6 of the report.*

Following a discussion it was agreed that membership of the Community Liaison Panel be increased by one to enable the Fire Authority's Younger People's Champion to participate.

Resolved: *that representation on the Community Liaison Panel be as follows:*

<i>Borough of Telford & Wrekin</i>	<i>Cllrs Allen and Picken</i>
<i>Bridgnorth District Council</i>	<i>Cllr Hurst-Knight (co-optee)</i>
<i>North Shropshire District Council</i>	<i>Cllr Mellings</i>
<i>Oswestry Borough Council</i>	<i>Cllr Lloyd</i>
<i>Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council</i>	<i>Cllr Tandy (also the Fire Authority's Older People's Champion)</i>
<i>South Shropshire District Council</i>	<i>Cllr Hartin</i>
<i>Fire Authority's Younger People's Champion</i>	<i>Cllr Drummond</i>

9a Annual Audit Letter

Members received the Annual Audit Letter prepared by the Audit Commission following the 2004/05 audit of the Fire Authority. The Chair welcomed Mr Corcoran and Ms Hughes from the Audit Commission, who were attending the meeting to present the Annual Audit Letter.

Mr Corcoran summarised the key messages within the Letter, referring specifically to the commitment of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service staff and the excellent community fire safety work carried out. Ms Hughes added that the accounts were of a good standard and the working papers had improved since the previous year. She congratulated the finance staff on their work.

Members noted that Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2006 would take the form of:

- An annual service assessment with greater emphasis on service delivery, including operational performance;
- An annual assessment of improvement (or deterioration) through a scored direction of travel assessment; and
- An annual use of resources judgement to assess whether an authority was providing value for money.

Mr Corcoran advised that there would be a number of pilots for the new assessment regime and he urged Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority to participate in the pilot for use of resources. Although Members agreed that this would be a good opportunity, they required further information prior to making a decision. As the pilots would need to be completed between April and June 2006, it would not be possible for this information to be brought to the Fire Authority. It was, therefore,

Resolved: *that*

- a) Members formally accept the Annual Audit Letter;*
- b) Officers obtain from the Audit Commission further details of the pilots for the new 2006 assessments; and*
- c) Authority be delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee to agree whether or not the Fire Authority participate in the pilots.*

9b Auditor's Report on the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06

Members received the Auditor's Report on the Best Value Performance Plan audit 2004/05.

Ms Hughes commented that the Performance Plan was a good, readable document. There should, however, be a link between the objectives, actions and associated costs, which then followed right through to the budget and fed into the budget monitoring process. She was pleased that the Performance Management Committee would in future consider internal and external audit issues and remarked that the auditors wished to attend meetings of the appropriate committees from time to time. It was agreed that she would liaise with the Treasurer regarding such attendance.

Resolved: *that the report be noted.*

Mr Corcoran and Ms Hughes left the meeting at this point.

The Treasurer advised that reports 10a, b and c should be considered together, as a change in the recommendations of one would impact on the figures provided in the other two. A supplementary report '10c – 2006/07 Precept: Final Grant Settlement 2006/07' was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). This supplementary report informed Members of details released, since the agenda had been prepared, of the Final Grant Settlement and of reasons for the changes. The report also asked Members to amend report 10c as appropriate.

10a Revenue Budget and Capital Programme – Budget Recommendations

The report of the Treasurer brought together the recommendations of the Strategy and Resources Committee of 19 January 2006, which were incorporated into the report on the precept, later on this agenda. In addition, the outcome of the consultation process was reported and summarised.

Members agreed that the proposed budget was prudent, as it would result in a 4.5% increase in the precept, thereby avoiding capping. The increase would, however, still enable the Fire Authority to implement all of the recommendations of the Retained Review.

It was noted that a technicality regarding grant amending orders meant that the increase in the budget itself would be 5.5%. The Treasurer advised that he had sought confirmation from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that this would not result in capping. To date, however, he had not received a response.

Resolved unanimously: *that Members:*

- a) *Accept the recommendation of its Committee, as adjusted by later information, in order to set its budgets, projections and precept for 2006/07; and*
- b) *Approve the budgets for the reserves and provisions, set out at Appendix B to the report.*

10b Prudential Guidelines – Treasury Management Statement

The report of the Treasurer informed Members that, at its meeting on 19 January 2006, the Strategy and Resources Committee recommended that the Fire Authority approve the Prudential Guidelines, incorporating the Fire Authority's Annual Treasury Strategy; and the Capital Programme for 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Resolved unanimously: *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Accept the Prudential Guidelines for the revenue implications of the Capital Programme, set out in paragraphs 4 and 5;*
- b) *Accept the Capital Financing Requirements arising from the Capital Programme, set out in paragraph 6;*
- c) *Accept the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundaries for external debt, set out in paragraphs 7 and 8;*
- d) *Agree the Treasury Strategy for 2006/07 and the Investment Strategy, set out in paragraphs 9 and 10;*
- e) *Accept the Prudential Indicators for borrowing and lending, set out in paragraph 11; and*
- f) *Approve the Capital Programme as part of the budget package, as set out in the appendix to the report.*

10c Revenue Budget and Capital Programme: 2006/07 Precept

The report of the Treasurer sought approval to a budget for 2006/07; Council Tax levels for 2006/07; and precepts on billing authorities and related matters. It was noted that supplementary report '10c – 2006/07 Precept: Final Grant Settlement 2006/07' (previously tabled) increased the net budget requirement figure given in recommendation 2 a) in report 10c to £18,296,274 (from £18,296,245).

Resolved unanimously: that Members approve:

- a) That a net budget requirement be set at £18,296,274 (calculated in accordance with the provisions of Section 43(4) of the 1992 Act);
- b) A total precept of £11,249,431 to be levied on the billing authorities;
- c) 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 £72.62;
- d) 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	2006/07
	Council Tax
	£ p
A	48.41
B	56.48
C	64.55
D	72.62
E	88.76
F	104.90
G	121.03
H	145.24

- ii. The amount calculated (in accordance with Section 48 of the 1992 Act) as payable by billing authorities for 2006/07, as follows:

Council	Precept £
Bridgnorth District Council	1,470,666
North Shropshire District Council	1,543,907
Oswestry Borough Council	927,056
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council	2,504,664
South Shropshire District Council	1,198,535
Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council	3,604,603
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	11,249,431

- e) *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. *Be 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) *The revenue budget and pensions account illustrated in Appendix A to the report, for budgetary control in accordance with approved standing orders; and*
- g) *The Best Value Accounting – Code of Practice Provisional Revenue Account at Appendix B to the report.*

11 Annual Review of Charges – Special Services

The report of the Treasurer presented proposed increases in charges made for special services.

Members agreed that there were a number of anomalies within the proposed special service charges and that a full scale review of the charges should be undertaken. It would, however, be necessary for the Fire Authority to review the charges once the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had issued the guidance referred to in the Draft National Framework 2006/08.

In the meantime, therefore, Members

Resolved: *that the proposed charges for special services be applied from 1 April 2006.*

12 Retained Review

The report of the Chief Fire Officer sought Members' approval for the continuation of the Retained Review Team and for the Team's terms of reference to be changed from one of Review to Implementation of Recommendations.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Sanction the continuation of the Retained Review Team;*
- b) *Agree a change in the terms of reference for the Retained Review Team from Review to Implementation of Recommendations; and*
- c) *Agree that the Retained Review Team have the power to co-opt personnel onto the Team as and when required.*

13 Update on Regional Fire Controls and Convergence Management for Firecontrol and Firelink Projects

The report of the Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the progress of both national projects and recommended methods of supporting these critical infrastructure initiatives.

Resolved: *that Members:*

- a) *Note the update on Regional Fire Control and National FireLink Projects;*
- b) *Task Officers to enter into discussions with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 'net additional costs';*
- c) *Agree to create a temporary (two year) post of 'Project Manager Fire Control Convergence'; and*
- d) *Agree to use reserves of £4,500 to fund this post prior to Government funding becoming available in April 2006.*

14 Performance Plan 2006/08

The report of the Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the 2006-08 Performance Plan requirements for single purpose fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority agree:*

- a) *The proposed content of a two-year Performance Plan 2006-08;*
- b) *The adoption of a four-stage Strategic Planning process;*
- c) *To delegate authority to approve appropriate stages to the Strategy and Resources Committee and Performance Management Committee; and*
- d) *To delegate authority to approve the final Performance Plan to the Chair and Vice-Chair in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer.*

15 Comprehensive Performance Assessment National Report January 2006

The report of the Chief Fire Officer summarised the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Fire and Rescue National Report which was published in January 2006.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority:*

- a) *Note the contents of the report; and*
- b) *Approve the attendance of the Chair of the Fire Authority at the Audit Commission Reference Group meetings.*

16 Working Partnership with Telford & Wrekin Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership

The report of the Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the community safety work being carried out with Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

Councillor Lloyd asked that the wording on page one of the Appendix to the report be amended to include the word 'legitimate' before 'wealth creating' in the reference to 'A Prosperous Telford'.

Responding to a question from one of the Members, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Fire Authority was not recognised in Shropshire County Council's Local Area Agreement but officers were attempting to redress this situation. The Chair urged Members of the County Council to promote the involvement of the Fire Authority in such partnerships.

Resolved: *that Members agree the contents of the 'Service Level Agreement' attached as an appendix to the report.*

17 Consultation on Reorganisation of Local Services

The report of the Chief Fire Officer requested guidance and direction from Members as to the position the Fire Authority should take in replying to a number of consultation documents concerning service reorganisation and reconfiguration in the region.

Members recognised that they needed to consider various consultation documents from the Fire Authority's perspective. It was likely, however, that they would receive most of these documents for comment through their constituent authorities. To avoid duplication, therefore, it was agreed that reports would not include the consultation documents themselves but would give the website address, at which they could be found.

Subject to the foregoing,

Resolved: *that consultations on issues wider than operational matters be brought either to the full Fire Authority or to the Strategy and Resources Committee.*

18 Shropshire Partnership Equalities Forum

The report of the Chief Fire Officer requested the Fire Authority to agree to funding for the Equalities forum. It also gave background information around the request for funding.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority agree to provide £5,000 funding to the Equalities Forum for 2006/07, to be funded from the general reserve, in line with the request that this be used specifically towards the work of the Forum.*

19 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances

The report of the Clerk outlined the current position regarding Members' allowances, and asked the Fire Authority to agree its 2006/07 allowances, to consider making further provision for its non-elected, Independent Members, and to instruct an independent remuneration panel to carry out a review in autumn 2006.

The Committee and Administration Manager advised that she had contacted the two gentlemen, who had conducted the first independent review of the Fire Authority's Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances. They had both indicated that they were prepared to carry out a further review of the Scheme in the autumn at no cost to the Authority other than their travel costs.

Resolved: *that Members agree:*

- a) *To maintain the current Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances with an increase of 2.95% (the percentage agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services) to take effect from 1 April 2006;*
- b) *To make provision for an additional allowance of £50 for up to 4 hours and £100 for over 4 hours to be paid to the non-elected, Independent Members of its Standards Committee, should they be required to determine locally any allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct (if they incurred a financial loss or represented a small organisation, which would otherwise have to bear the cost); and*
- c) *To instruct an independent remuneration panel to conduct a review of the Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances in autumn 2006.*

20 Dates for Future Meetings

Resolved: *that Members agree and note the dates of meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees for 2006/2007, as set out at Appendix B to the report.*

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 the following items 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 the paragraphs specified against them.*

22 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 1 – Information relating to Particular Employees)

Resolved: *that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 December 2005, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.*

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm.

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....