

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 13 March 2006 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Hartin (Chair), Hussey, Minnery, Morgan (Vice-Chair) and West

1 Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 19 January 2006, 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 Plan 2006-08

This report advised Members of the proposed structure and contents of the Fire Authority's Performance Plan 2006-08. The Chief Fire Officer tabled a Centrelink document entitled 'Strategic Directions', upon which the proposed structure of the Fire Authority's Performance Plan had been based. A 'Shared Priorities' document, developed by Policy Group at its strategic planning workshop in January, was also tabled. Copies of both documents are attached to the signed minutes.

It was agreed that the wording in the report on page 2 of Appendix C under Management Information System should be changed from 'performance monitoring' to 'performance management', as this indicated that information was used not only to monitor but also then to improve performance.

Having considered the proposed structure of the two-year Performance Plan 2006-08, set out within the report, and reviewed the proposed changes to the Fire Authority's Corporate Aims and Objectives, the Committee

Resolved: *that*

- a) *The proposed suite of draft shared priorities be approved; and*



- b) *Officers be instructed to present a completed draft Performance Plan 2006-08 for consideration and target setting at the Committee's next meeting (23 May 2006).*

6 Audit Commission Assessment - Use of Resources Pilot

At the Fire Authority meeting on the 8 February 2006 officers were requested to obtain information regarding involvement in the Audit Commission's Use of Resources Assessment pilot and authority was delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee to decide whether to participate in the pilot. This report provided further information regarding the pilot.

It was noted that the Audit Commission had recently advised that Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority would not be included in the pilot. A range and geographical mix of authorities were required and it seemed likely that West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority would participate. Officers were, however, keen to commence preparation for the actual assessment, which would take place in September. Members agreed that it would be helpful to approach Shropshire County Council, which had scored highly in the new assessment regime, and other such organisations, to assist in the preparatory work required.

Resolved: *that the contents of the report be noted.*

7 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2005/06

This report informed the Committee of the current position of the 2005/06 revenue budget and capital programme. The Fire Authority's council tax leaflet was tabled, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

Members applauded officers on having managed the budget so well, particularly because of its complexity. They were also complimentary about the council tax leaflet.

Having noted the position to date of the 2005/06 revenue budget and capital programme, the Committee

Resolved: *that it be recommended to the Fire Authority that:*

- a) *Further underspends identified be transferred to reserves and provisions, as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report; and*
- b) *It note the virements already approved by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, and approve the virements attached at the appendix to the report.*

8 Annual Efficiency Statement

This report updated Members on progress so far against the Fire Authority's policy on seeking efficiencies, and recommended a forward looking statement for 2006/07, as required by the Government.

In response to a question from Councillor Minnery the Treasurer stated that no non-cashable efficiencies were included in the statement, because he had not as yet been informed of any by officers, but this issue was being addressed. Councillor Minnery offered to assist officers in identifying the types of efficiencies, which could be included under this heading.



Having noted the position on efficiency planning, the Committee

Resolved: *that the Annual Efficiency Statement attached at the appendix to the report be agreed, subject to the inclusion of any non-cashable efficiencies, which might be identified.*

9 Medium Term Financial Plan

This report updated the Fire Authority's medium term financial plan, as part of the process of embedding financial plans, budgets and capital programme within the delivery of service priorities.

The Treasurer referred to the proposed content of the Plan and specifically the Foreword, containing a political statement of objectives for services and finance, and section viii, setting out key targets and three year revenue and capital plans. He advised that the Fire Authority, as a single service authority, would need to consider how it would address these issues. Councillor Morgan felt that it was also important to reflect in the Plan the link with regional projects.

Resolved: *that Members note the potential work needed to produce a Medium Term Financial Plan and commission a first draft to be brought to the next meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee (25 May 2006).*

10 Special Exemption from Standing Orders Relating to Contracts

This report advised Members of special exemptions from Standing Orders Relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

Members noted the special exemptions from Standing Orders relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

Having considered the detail of the report, the Committee

Resolved: *that the exemption procedure had been applied appropriately.*

11 Retained Firefighters and the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations – House of Lords Decision

The Committee received BBC and Fire Brigades Union press releases relating to the outcome of the appeal to the House of Lords together with Fire Brigades National Employers Circular EMP/2/05 of 20 January 2005, which provided sketchy information regarding the appeal. Fire Brigades National Employers Circular EMP/2/06 of 8 March 2006 was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

The Assistant Chief Officer outlined the history of the appeal. It was noted that the two press releases had been published before officers had been able to access the actual judgement of the House of Lords and they were somewhat misleading. The correct position was summarised in the tabled Circular EMP/2/06.



The Treasurer advised that this issue had always been recognised as a risk and had accordingly been included in the Risk Register. There had, however, been a low probability attached to it, because of previous decisions made in the case. It was not at this stage possible to calculate what the cost to the Fire Authority would be, as there were still too many unknowns, not least of which was whether the Government would provide any assistance. The Assistant Chief Officer stated that the decision of the Employment Tribunal was likely to be known by the end of 2006. In the meantime the Treasurer's advice was that service plans and proposals remain unchanged.

Councillor Morgan noted the situation with concern but felt that the Treasurer's advice should be accepted. The Fire Authority should continue with its plans, particularly for the Retained Service, until it had more information regarding the implications.

When asked about the Fire Authority's share of the legal costs, the Treasurer replied that these were likely to be in the region of £20,000. He had no definite figures and would, therefore, bring reports to Members, when he received further information.

Resolved: *that*

- a) *Officers bring further reports to Members, when the decision of the Employment Tribunal and the financial implications of that decision were known; and*
- b) *In the meantime the Fire Authority be recommended to continue with its current service plans.*

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....

