

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at the Shropshire Education and Conference Centre,
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 14 December 2005 at 2.00 pm**

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

Before the start of the meeting the Chair welcomed Mr Michael Tebbutt, one of the two Independent Members of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee, who had recently been appointed Chair of that Committee.

The Chair then presented a plaque and certificate of commendation on behalf of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to Shyam Vadukul for his courageous actions when a fire broke out in his neighbour's house.

1 Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared at this point in the meeting. Councillor Mrs Holyoak did, however, declare an interest when item 15 – Race Equality and Diversity Group – was discussed. Councillor Mrs Holyoak referred to her membership of the CVS (the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector), which was mentioned in the report.

3 Minutes

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 19 October 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 West Midlands Regional Management Board

Resolved: *that the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 28 October 2005, be noted and that the recommendations at items 46/05, 48/05, 49/05, 50/05 and 52/05 be agreed.*

6 Standards Committee

Members received and noted the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 12 October 2005

Resolved: *that the recommendation at item 7 of the minutes, to adopt the proposed procedure for local investigation of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by Members, be agreed.*

7 Human Resources Committee

Members received and noted the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 1 November 2005.

Resolved: *that the recommendations at items 7 and 8 be agreed.*

8 Strategy and Resources Committee

Resolved: *that the minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 17 November 2005, be noted.*

9 Retained Review

This report presented the findings of the Best Value Review of the Retained Service and sought feedback on the recommendations of the Retained Review Team. It also sought the approval of Members for substantial investment in the Retained Service in line with the recommendations of the Review.

Councillors Box and Hartin, as members of the Retained Review Team (RRT), thanked Retained firefighters and their partners for their contribution to the Review and also Phil Clarke, the officer who had led the Review and written the report, for all of his hard work. Both Councillors emphasised that much deliberation had taken place before making the recommendations contained in the report. Councillor Eade added that the Fire Authority must support the Retained Service and that he and the Conservative Group were fully behind the full package of investment proposed.

Resolved: *that Members*

- a) *Note the recommendations of the draft Best Value Review;*
- b) *Provide feedback to the RRT for inclusion in the final Best Value Review report; and*
- c) *Approve investment in the Retained Service, as detailed within the draft Best Value Review and summarised in the report.*

In view of all party support to provide the full level of investment requested in the report it was agreed that it would not be necessary to prioritise the investment as referred to in recommendation d). It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Eade, seconded by Councillor Box and

Resolved: *that recommendation d) in the report be dropped.*

10 Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation Results

This report advised Members of the outcome of an extensive three-month period of consultation on the Fire Authority's draft Integrated Risk Management Action Plan (IRMP) for 2006/07, and recommended changes to the document as a result of the consultation. The report also sought approval for the IRMP Members' Working Group to progress the third year IRMP process to the implementation phase. Members noted that there was an error on page one of the report: in the recommendations at 2 d) it should have read Section 11 not Section 10.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked Members and officers, who had participated in the Working Group. This year's consultation had been the best so far and staff appreciated the fact that Members were so involved in the process. Councillor Box, as Chair of the IRMP Members' Working Group, added that there had been no dissent within the Group on any of the recommendations.

The Head of Performance and Risk referred to the difficulties experienced when using the road traffic collision element of the Fire Service Emergency Cover software, which prioritised urban areas rather than high risk rural areas. These concerns had been raised with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (by whom the software had been provided) and, as a result, changes had been made. This was a relatively new area of work, so the standards would require some development in order to assist with road traffic collision reduction work.

Councillor Mellings said that this was a good example of a first class process, which had engaged with staff, other stakeholders and members of the public. He was, however, concerned about the implications, particularly health and safety, of implementing option three relating to aerial appliance cover, i.e. maintaining both aerial appliances but staffing only the one. The Head of Performance and Risk responded that staff would continue to be trained in the use of the aerial appliance, which was held on their station, and competence would be maintained on a daily basis. The health and safety of employees was a priority and the main purpose for having the aerial appliances was to provide a safe working platform for staff.

The Chief Fire Officer agreed that the consultation process had been of a high quality, and it had been conducted, debated and accepted in a professional manner. Finally, the Chair thanked the Head of Performance and Risk, Andy Johnson, for all of his hard work.

Resolved: *that Members*

- a) *Note the extent of the consultation exercise undertaken with staff, stakeholders and the public with regard to the draft IRMP Action Plan 2006/07;*
- b) *Approve the increased involvement of the Service in road traffic collision prevention work, through appropriate changes to the Fire Authority's strategic aims and corporate objectives;*
- c) *Approve the changes to the Fire Authority's Draft IRMP Action Plan 2006/07, as proposed by the IRMP Members' Working Group; and*
- d) *Delegate responsibility to the Working Group to progress the IRMP process, as detailed in Section 11 of the report.*

11 Monitoring of Revenue Budget and Capital Programme, including Prudential Guidelines

This report formed part of the regular monitoring process undertaken throughout the year. It detailed the latest position on revenue and capital budgets, recommending action where necessary, and also monitored the Fire Authority's prudential indicators.

Resolved: *that Members*

- a) *Agree the virements set out at Appendix A to the report, and also within the report, noting those already agreed using powers delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer;*
- b) *Note the progress on the revenue budget and the capital programme, and approve the changes to specific schemes detailed; and*
- c) *Note the Fire Authority's position against its Prudential Indicators.*

12 Revenue Budgets 2006/07 and Projections for Later Years

This report set out the latest position on budget preparation, following the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee on 17 November 2005.

The Chair advised that he had received a letter that morning from Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government, which stated that the Government expected the average council tax increase in England in both 2006/07 and 2007/08 to be less than 5%. It went on to say that 'Local Government should be under no illusions that we will use our capping powers to deal with excessive increases, as we have done over the last two years. This applies to all authorities, including police and fire authorities.'

The Treasurer referred to the summary at section 9 of the report and advised that it was necessary to add £58,000 to next year's pension budget, as the Fire Authority was still expected to pick up the pension costs of retained firefighters, who had previously retired on ill-health grounds.

Councillor Box urged Members to ignore the threat of capping, as the Fire Authority could not risk the lives or safety of the people of Shropshire. He went on to say, however, that the Authority could achieve what it wanted to do within the grant provided and without risk of capping. Councillor Eade agreed with these sentiments.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority*

- a) *Approve a base plus committed changes budget of £17,062,000;*
- b) *Agree a pay and prices contingency of £400,000;*
- c) *Agree cashable efficiency savings of £77,000, subject to the outcome of consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan;*
- d) *Approve additional revenue costs arising from the capital programme of £64,000 in 2006/07, £230,000 in 2007/08 and later years, subject to acceptance of individual project appraisals and the impact on prudential guidelines; and*
- e) *Approve adding any net underspend in 2005/06 to the capital reserve, subject to review in the light of the final capital programme to be agreed.*

12a The Provisional Grant Settlement 2006/07

This report set out the implications of the provisional grant settlement for the Fire Authority in order to inform Members of the next phase of the budget process.

The Treasurer advised that this report had been written soon after details of the Revenue Support Grant had been announced. Since then the larger metropolitan authorities had complained that they had lost a large amount of grant, which had not been safeguarded by 'floor damping'. Their concerns had been acknowledged by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and were being put to Ministers. The outcome of these representations would not be known until after 11 January 2006, when the consultation on the settlement ended. This created uncertainty, as, until that time, it would not be known whether the outcome would affect other fire authorities or only the metropolitan authorities.

Councillor Box referred to the need for Members to decide the key policy options, which should form the basis of public consultation as a result of the provisional settlement. He said that the Fire Authority must be aware of people's ability to pay and the impact of its decisions upon the more vulnerable in Shropshire. With a council tax increase of 4.5% the Authority could achieve all of its ambitions, whilst raising council tax by only 6 pence per week. Work to be carried out under the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the Retained Review would ensure that the more vulnerable were taken care of and that the cost was spread throughout the County.

Councillor Box proposed, and it was seconded by Councillor Hartin, that a 4.5% increase in council tax should form the basis of the Fire Authority's budget planning. Councillor Eade emphasised the importance of carrying out the recommendations of the Retained Review and agreed that an increase of 4.5% was the right decision. This must, however, be viewed as a one off and he would be looking next year for an increase nearer the rate of inflation.

The Clerk advised that recommendation 2 a) in the report should include reference to consultation with the Chair or, if he were not available, the Vice-Chair and a copy of the consultation response should be brought to the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority*

- a) *Note the implications of the provisional settlement and delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer, in consultation with the Chair, to respond to the consultation;*
- b) *Agree that an increase of 4.5% in the precept should form the basis of public consultation as a result of the provisional settlement;*
- c) *Request the Strategy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 19 January 2006, to propose a final Budget Package for consideration on 6 February 2006.*

13 Consultation on the Draft National Framework 2006 – 2008

This report informed Members of the recently circulated draft two-year Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2006-08, published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The ODPM sought the Fire Authority's observations on the draft Framework by no later than 10 February 2006.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer undertook to bring a report to the Fire Authority's Strategy and Resources Committee, which would summarise the key changes between the current Framework and the draft 2006-08 Framework. His report would also set out a draft response to the ODPM's proposals.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority*

- a) *Note the report; and*
- b) *Delegate responsibility to the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider and, as appropriate, approve a prepared response on behalf of the Fire Authority to the draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2006-08.*

The Chair and Councillor Box left the meeting at this point and the Vice-Chair took the chair.

14 Community Safety

This report informed and updated Members on a range of issues relating to community safety and also requested approval and support for the Safer Communities Core Strategy and the creation of a Community Liaison Panel.

The Chair and Councillor Box returned to the meeting at this point and the Chair resumed the chair.

Members discussed the approach, which the Fire Authority should take to the planning strategies of the borough and district councils within Shropshire, because sending individual responses to each of their consultation documents would be time-consuming. In view of this Members asked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to prepare a standard document, which would be sent to the councils in advance, setting out the key issues already highlighted in the response to Borough of Telford & Wrekin's consultation. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to do so but advised that he would still need to read each of the consultation documents and respond accordingly.

With reference to the Community Liaison Panel, Councillor Hartin noted that there was no Member on the Fire Authority to represent Bridgnorth District Council. To remedy this he suggested that a Member of that Council be invited to attend the first meeting of the Panel and participate as a co-optee.

Subject to the foregoing

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority*

- a) *Agree to, and support, the Safer Communities Core Strategy;*
- b) *Agree to the creation of a Community Liaison Panel;*
- c) *Note the key issues raised in the response to planning documents published by Borough of Telford & Wrekin;*
- d) *Note the progress on delivering community safety in rural areas; and*
- e) *Agree to the roll over of unspent funding into the financial year 2006/07.*

15 Race Equality and Diversity Group

This report requested that the Fire Authority give funding to the Race Equality and Diversity (RED) Group and provided a background to the request.

Councillor Mrs Holyoak declared a personal interest at this point, full details of which are provided at item 2 of these minutes.

Whilst wishing to give full support to the RED Group, Members were keen to receive regular progress reports on its achievements and benefits to the Fire Authority. It was agreed, therefore, that a report would be taken to each meeting of the Human Resources Committee.

Councillor Dr Drummond left the meeting at this point (4.00 pm).

It was noted that a similar request for funding was likely to be made by Shropshire County Council. Members were concerned about duplication of activity and asked that a full report be brought to the Fire Authority for consideration, if the County Council asked for funding.

On a vote with all in favour, it was

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority give funding of £5,000 per annum for a period of three years to the Race Equality and Diversity Group.*

16 Indemnities for Members and Officers

This report advised of the legal and insurance issues regarding Member and officer indemnities, following the introduction of the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Member and Officers) Order 2004. The report also advised of the steps, which were to be taken in order to protect Members and officers from becoming personally liable as a result of any activities, which were deemed to be 'ultra vires', i.e. outside the power of the Fire Authority.

Resolved: *that Members*

- a) *Note the report;*
- b) *Agree that the Fire Authority takes out its own Code of Conduct insurance for its Members and Independent Members of its Standards Committee; and*
- c) *Advise the Clerk and Monitoring Officer of any activities in which they were involved on behalf of the Fire Authority, other than as members of its committees, panels or working groups or of the West Midlands Regional Management Board.*

17 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.*

18 Human Resources Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 1 – Information relating to Particular Employees)

Resolved: *that the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee, held on 1 November 2005 be noted.*

**19 Principal Officers' Employment Panel
(Paragraphs 1 and 11 – Information relating to Particular Employees and to Employee Negotiations)**

A note of the meeting of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, which had taken place at 11.30 am that morning, was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The note outlined the recommendations of the Panel concerning the January 2005 pay settlement to Principal Officers and outlined the rationale behind those recommendations.

Resolved: *that the Fire Authority agree the recommendations of the Principal Officers' Employment Panel concerning the January 2005 pay settlement to Principal Officers.*

The meeting closed at 4.15 pm.

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....