

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held at the Shirehall, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 15 October 2008 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Major Coles, Dr Drummond, Eade, Gibbon, Mrs Holyoak, Hurst-Knight, Mason, Minnery, Picken, West and Williams

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Greenaway, Dr Jones and Mellings who were undertaking their visit to Falck, Denmark, as part of the Leonardo programme, this week. Apologies for absence had also been received from Councillors Box and Hartin.

2 Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded 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 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual meeting, held on 16 July 2008.

Councillor Major Coles referred to an outstanding item from those minutes relating to insurance. The Chair informed the meeting that all elected members were covered by insurance and that an insurance policy had been taken out to cover the non-elected independent members of the Standards Committee. Councillor Hurst-Knight then expressed his surprise that the issue had again been raised as following the meeting in July as Councillor Major Coles had received a briefing on the issue from a Senior Officer at Shropshire County Council.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual meeting, held on 16 July 2008, 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 Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders

Members received the amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders, which were agreed at, and stand adjourned from, the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the amendments to the Fire Authority's Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders (as set out at paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report), which were agreed at and stand adjourned from, the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority, held in July 2008.

6 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 11 September 2008.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 11 September 2008.

7 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 September 2008 and considered the recommendations at items 8, 13 and 14.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 18 September 2008 and agree the recommendations at items 8, 13 and 14.

8 West Midlands Regional Management Board

Members received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB) meeting, held on 24 July 2008 and considered the recommendations at items 15/08, 16/08 and 22/08.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the WMRMB meeting, held on 24 July 2008 and agreed the recommendations at items 15/08, 16/08 and 22/08.

9 Financial Planning Strategy 2009/10

This report informed the Authority of the issues raised by the Strategy and Resources Committee in considering their recommendations for a budget strategy for 2009/10.

Councillor Eade commented that the Strategy and Resources Committee had been keen on "what-if" planning at the time of the meeting but this was

becoming more important given that the economic situation is getting worse. Councillor Eade believes that the Chancellor has the power to intervene in the third year of the grant which could put the Fire Authority in a difficult situation.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree a budget strategy for 2009/10 that seeks to

- a) deliver the principles agreed in the 2008/09 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (set out in paragraph 3 i to v of the appendix);
- b) extend the planning horizon beyond 2010/11 into the three years of the next grant settlement;
- c) prepare to meet the implications of the various uncertainties currently known; and
- d) update the service implications of “what-if” analysis of optimistic and pessimistic grant scenarios from 2011/12.

10 Minimum Revenue Provision 2007/08 and 2008/09

This report informed the Fire Authority of changes to the regulations governing the amount of revenue provision in respect of capital financing, and presented members with a Minimum Revenue Provision policy for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

The Treasurer explained that the Minimum Revenue Provision is the money used to pay off the borrowing used to finance assets. The Asset Life of many Fire Authority items is less than 25 years and provision was made for these a couple of years ago.

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the Minimum Revenue Provision policy.

11 Small Fires Unit / Limited Access Appliance

This report summarised the review of the requirement for a Small Fires Unit (SFU) in the South Telford area, arising from the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) project. It also considered the difficult access issues in areas of Ironbridge and Broseley and the feasibility of combining the SFU with a Limited Access Appliance (LAA) and Landrover pump (L4P).

The Chief Fire Officer introduced Station Officer (StnO) Bishton and Sub Officer (SubO) Weaver to the meeting. StnO Bishton presented the report to the meeting with some accompanying slides. A brief summary of the discussion generated by this presentation is given below

The issue of accessibility to affected properties was discussed. It was explained that appliances can always get to within 100 metres of affected properties and that appliances carry sufficient lengths of both normal hose and hose reel to cover this distance.

Members were pleased that the issue of accessibility was being investigated especially as there are several areas which experience problems with parking. Members wondered if this provided an opportunity for partnership working for example with the Police. It was explained that crews talk to residents about parking and accessibility during Community Fire Safety work and that often local residents will raise concerns about accessibility with the crews.

Councillor Mason asked if the issue had also been assessed at night time. StnO Bishton explained that Red Watch Tweedale had monitored the areas concerned at 6 pm, 10 pm and in the early hours of the morning and had found that overall, local residents tend to park sensibly at these times.

Councillor Picken asked what procedures were in place for when the appliance was leaving i.e. if it needed to reverse out. StnO Bishton explained that guides would be used at the front and back of the vehicle if necessary. The Officer in Charge would also advise Fire Control of the situation so that this would be taken into account should the appliance need to be mobilised to another incident. Any vehicle, regardless of its size, can be compromised in relation to access.

Councillor Major Coles asked for details of the specialist vehicle that was used for incidents on the Long Mynd. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this was the Pinzgauer which is based at Church Stretton.

Councillor Picken commented that the report was welcome news and wondered if it was likely to be rolled out across the county. The Chief Fire Officer explained that a number of requests are received regarding this issue and that any problem areas identified are risk assessed in order to find an appropriate solution.

Councillor Minnery, as Chair of the IRMP Members' Working Group, explained that as part of this year's IRMP process, crews are being asked to assess roads etc in their area in order to identify any difficulties. This is a process which is ongoing and the information gathered is being passed to Fire Control.

Both the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer commented that they were pleased that this issue had been identified and assessed, and a solution drawn up, by firefighters.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) agree not to proceed with the purchase of a Limited Access Appliance;
- b) agree not to proceed with the purchase of a dedicated Small Fires Unit;
- c) agree to review the capability of the Landrover pump based at Tweedale Fire Station to ensure its continued suitability as a Small Fires Unit; and
- d) agree to bring the second Landrover pump up to the same specification as the current Tweedale unit.

12 Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Update

This report updated members on compliance with the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and outlined some of the activities that have been undertaken to reach the current position.

The onset and publication of Joint Inspectorate Proposals on Comprehensive Area Assessment add further to the importance of monitoring our compliance. In particular, the assessment proposals state that:

‘The report on the organisational assessment for fire and rescue services / authorities will encompass how effective the organisation is in:

Resilience and large scale civil protection arrangements which are tested for effectiveness’

Councillor Minnery commented that he had attended one of the training exercises at Ennstone Products and felt that the Fire Authority’s appreciation for the use of the site and the facilities provided there should be recorded.

Councillor Major Coles commented that there had been little mention of terrorist attacks in the report. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Local Resilience Forum had been formed for this and that many of the issues raised in the report were linked to this topic.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) note the contents of the report;
- b) agree to continue to monitor compliance at regular intervals; and
- c) note that Members are invited to take an active part in future resilience activity, details of which will be distributed as appropriate.

13 Equality Standard for Local Government

Members were aware that Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority were assessed against Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government during August 2008. It has been confirmed that the Authority has successfully achieved Level 3 and initial feedback indicates that the Authority is operating comfortably at that level. The final feedback report has not yet been received, although it is due imminently. The report will be brought to Members’ attention upon receipt and Members were asked to determine whether they wished the report to be placed before the Human Resources Committee or for it to come directly to the Fire Authority meeting in December 2008.

The Chief Fire Officer read out the following paragraphs from the conclusion to the draft report

‘Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is to be congratulated on reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard. The Service has shown a commitment to improving its approach and outcomes to equality, and has directed resources

to support these aims. The three elements of the assessment: the self assessment document, the supporting evidence and the interviews provided a consistent view of the Service's achievements and the areas where it needs to make improvements. In particular it should be noted that during interviews staff were enthusiastic about improving the way in which they deliver services to communities and those most vulnerable and at risk. In addition the Service has shown leadership in the community and amongst its peer group and has demonstrated this through the number of initiatives that are supporting safety, and community cohesion principles, particularly for young people, older people and those that are often isolated and in rural settings. The Service has taken account of the need to support newer communities and migrant workers in the region. Staff are acutely aware of the Service's aspirations and aim to meet these.

The assessors recommend that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service should receive the Equality Mark Certificate for level 3 achievement.'

The Fire Authority thanked Councillor Dr Jones, as Equality and Diversity Champion for her involvement in the assessment.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update and determined that the report should be placed before the Human Resources Committee.

14 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 15 and 16 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, 2, 3 and 4 and on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of confidential information.

The Chair proposed and the meeting agreed that the order of items 15 and 16 on the agenda should be varied so that item 16 was dealt with first.

16 Audit Commission Performance Assessments 2007/08 (Confidential)

During September 2008 the Fire Authority was audited by representatives of the Audit Commission as part of the Fire and Rescue Service Performance Assessment 2007/08 process. The outcomes of the assessment will not be formally released until later this year, and as a consequence, any interim / informal feedback is subject to embargo restrictions at this time. The Chief Fire Officer provided Members with a verbal summary of the audit process and, in his opinion, the key issues arising.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal summary of the audit process and the key issues arising.

15 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual meeting, held on 16 July 2008.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority Annual meeting, held on 16 July 2008, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....