

**Non-Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 29 April 2009, at 2.00 pm
at AFC Telford United Learning Centre, Wellington**

Present

Councillors Box, Eade, Mrs Greenaway, Hartin, Mrs Holyoak (Vice-Chair), Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mason, Picken, West (Chair) and Williams

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised Members that this would be the last Fire Authority meeting to be attended by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Mrs Holyoak, as she was retiring. He thanked her for her work on the Authority and for the active role she had played in the work of its various committees. She had always been keen to support the many events organised by the Service and had at all times championed its employees, never missing the opportunity to thank them for their work. Her contribution to the Authority would be sadly missed, as would her sense of humour and outgoing personality. Her colleagues, both Members and officers, joined the Chair in thanking Councillor Mrs Holyoak for her work and in wishing her a happy and healthy retirement from her Fire Authority role. The Chair then presented Councillor Mrs Holyoak with a Fire Authority plaque and a bouquet of flowers.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Major Coles, Dr Drummond, Gibbon, Mellings and Minnery.

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 room before any item, in which they had a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

The Chair declared a personal interest in item 20 – FireControl and FireLink Update – in that he is a Director on the Board of the West Midlands Regional Control Centre.

Personal interests were also declared later in the meeting at items 11 and 17, details of which appear in the minutes under those items.

3 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 11 February 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mason and

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 11 February 2009, 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 Human Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009, and considered the recommendations at items 4 and 7.

The Assistant Chief Officer gave brief details to Members about the recommendations and the recommendation at item 4 was agreed without comment.

Councillor Hartin referred to the recommendations at item 7 relating to maternity pay and advised that the Committee had debated at length which of the options, put forward by officers, to recommend to the Fire Authority. The Committee had been split between two options, B and D, and it had been necessary for a vote to be taken. He asked the Assistant Chief Officer to explain the difference between those two options to enable all Members to understand fully what the recommendations entailed.

The Assistant Chief Officer gave the following information:

Option B, which was supported by the unions, would provide 39 weeks at full pay and 13 weeks at half pay. The projected additional cost between the existing scheme and this option was £14,454 for an employee on grade 7 and £19,723 for a firefighter.

Option D, which had been recommended by the Human Resources Committee, would provide 26 weeks at full pay, 6 weeks at half pay and 13 weeks at statutory maternity pay. The projected additional cost between the existing scheme and this option was £6,955 for an employee on grade 7 and £9,623 for a firefighter.

Councillor Dr Jones referred to the Fire Authority's attempts to recruit more women into the Service and asked whether the additional cost of adopting Option B could be contained within the budget. The Treasurer responded that the financing of Option D had been included in his report 14 – Outlook for 2008/09 Final Accounts and 2009/10 Budget. If Members decided upon a different option, it would change all of the figures within that report.

Any additional costs of the policy would be found in the first year from reserves. Officers would then review the figures in the second year in light of what had actually happened in the first. An assumption had been made that there would be only one maternity case each year but this was impossible to predict. Furthermore, if more females were attracted into the Service the predicted costs could rise.

Councillor Mrs Holyoak proposed the recommendations, as set out at items 4 and 7 in the minutes of the Human Resources Committee, they were seconded by Councillor Mason and, on a vote with 9 voting for, 2 against and 1 abstention,

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009, and agree the recommendations at items 4 and 7

6 Standards Committee

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 2 March 2009, and considered the recommendation at item 12b.

The Corporate Services Manager advised that since the meeting Mr Webb, another non-elected, Independent Member of the Standards Committee, had resigned on personal grounds. She, therefore, asked the Fire Authority to agree to commencement of the recruitment process for two non-elected Independent Members.

It was proposed by Councillor Holyoak, seconded by Councillor Mason and

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 2 March 2009, and agree to commencement of the recruitment process for two non-elected Independent Members to that Committee

7 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 5 March 2009.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 5 March 2009

8 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 12 March 2009, and considered the recommendations at items 6 and 9.

The Treasurer advised that the annual audit fee, which had increased by a small percentage from the previous year, was containable within existing budgets and was in line with projections.

The Corporate Services Manager referred to the proposed amendments to the Committee's Terms of Reference recommended at item 9. She pointed out that these had been put forward, following discussions with Internal Audit, to place more emphasis on the audit function and to set out specific responsibilities of the Committee in a logical order.

Councillor Dr Jones asked what progress had been made in respect of further audit training for Members (item 8 in the minutes). The Treasurer responded that the Member Skills Assessment had been sent to Committee members and 4 out of 7 responses received, from which it was difficult to determine priorities. He felt that the best approach might be to revisit the training needs assessment when new Members had been appointed to the Fire Authority, following the June elections, and he agreed to follow this up.

Members discussed the below average availability of appliances at some retained stations (item 14 in the minutes), which stemmed from the difficulty in recruiting retained staff in certain areas. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Chair and officers continued to work to improve the situation and the March figures showed that, for the first time ever, the Service had attained over 99% availability of all retained appliances.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 12 March 2009, and agree the recommendations at items 6 and 9

8c Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

Members received the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter from the Audit Commission.

It was noted that officers from the Audit Commission had been invited to present the Letter but unfortunately, because of prior commitments, no-one had been able to attend.

The Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to the key messages on page 3 of the Letter together with the 'Action needed by the Authority' on the same page. The latter stated that the Fire Authority is well positioned to ensure continued delivery of improved outcomes across all priority areas, as it has strengthened corporate and financial planning and improved financial capacity. It was noted that the person, who had signed off the Letter, was the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Lead, who would be providing the Fire Authority's CAA report in November 2009.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

9 West Midlands Regional Management Board

Members received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 30 January 2009, and considered the recommendations at items 4/09, 11/09 and 12/09.

It was proposed by Councillor Picken, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 30 January 2009, and agree the recommendations at items 4/09, 11/09 and 12/09

10 Fire Authority Work Plan 2009/10

This report sought to establish a Work Plan for the Fire Authority for the year May 2009 to April 2010.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mrs Holyoak and

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the 2009/10 Work Plan, attached as an appendix to the report, without amendment

11 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2009/10

This report asked the Fire Authority formally to agree its 2009/10 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances and to note that an Independent Remuneration Panel would carry out a full review of the Scheme in autumn 2009.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised all Members to declare a personal interest only in this matter as Members of the Fire Authority (but, under section 10 (2) (c) (ii) of the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, not a prejudicial interest). This declaration was accordingly made and recorded on behalf of all Members present.

Councillor Hartin felt that an autumn review would enable the Panel to consider the impact upon Fire Authority Members of their new roles within the unitary authority. Councillor Box asked that the Panel review the subsistence rates payable for visits to London. The Corporate Services Manager undertook to place these matters before the Panel for consideration. She also asked other Members to let her know if there were any issues, which they wished to raise with the Panel. Members would then be given the opportunity to make a written or verbal submission to the Panel.

It was proposed by Councillor Picken, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Maintain the current Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances, whereby basic, special responsibility, co-optee and travel allowances will increase automatically by the percentage agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services with effect from 1 April 2009; and
- b) Note that an Independent Remuneration Panel will carry out a full review of the Scheme in autumn 2009

12 Proposed Member Champion Reporting Dates

As requested by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 11 February 2009, officers had revised the timetable for Member Champion presentations to reflect the changes made to 2009 meeting dates.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the revised timetable for Member Champion presentations to the Authority

13 Integrated Risk Management Planning Members' Working Group Update

This report presented the proposed strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan, which clearly set out and identified the key priorities for Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) over the next three-year period. In addition, the report presented the findings and recommendations from the recent reviews carried out in respect of water safety and the provision of aerial appliances within Shropshire.

Members were requested to approve the recommendations made by the IRMP Members' Working Group at their meeting, held on 7 April 2009. In addition, Members were requested to note the proposed timetable for developing the draft 2010/11 IRMP Action Plan and the subsequent consultation strategy.

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor Box and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the Draft Strategic IRMP 2009 – 2012 and the proposed communication strategy;
- b) Acknowledge the recommendations, made by the aerial review team, and agree to explore further the implications from the option to co-locate aerial appliances within the County;

- c) Agree to approve a one-off virement of £51,000 required to implement the recommendations from the review of water rescue provision (if approved the funding would be available from reserves, see next report); and
- d) Note the proposed timetable to develop the Authority's 2010/11 Draft Action Plan and the subsequent consultation strategy

14 Outlook for 2008/09 Final Accounts and 2009/10 Budget

This report updated the Authority on prospects for closing the 2008/09 Accounts and on other events that were likely to impact on the 2009/10 Budget. It also sought approval to virements recommended by its Committees.

The Treasurer advised that this report provided Members with an opportunity to consider the issues emanating from the closure of accounts and to raise any concerns. He pointed out that the Chancellor's recent budget indicated that the 2010/11 grant settlement would remain the same, so the Fire Authority's 2010/11 budget could be revisited in the knowledge that any external impact would be minimal.

Councillor Eade voiced concern about the pressures, which could be placed upon the Fire Authority's funding in the future by the Government, which in turn would result in the need to find further efficiencies. It would, therefore, be useful to look again at 'what if scenarios'.

The Treasurer agreed that it would be sensible to revisit the Fire Authority's projected budgets, in particular, the assumptions made about future grant settlements, and to start planning early for the 2010/11 budget. He shared Members' concern regarding preservation of service delivery.

It was proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Picken and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the virements recommended by the Strategy and Resources Committee, as set out in Appendix A(i) to the report, and note changes that had been identified since;
- b) Approve £18,000 to implement fully the Asset Management System (paragraph 4);
- c) Approve the changes to Maternity Pay recommended by the Human Resources Committee, earmarking part of the Pensions and Other Staff Matters Reserve to meet costs in 2009/10, and to review the changes when considering the budget for 2010/11 (paragraph 5);
- d) Note the current position of "Backward" and "Forward" Looking Annual Efficiency Statements and agree to spend up to £100,000 on implementing efficiencies through the St Michael's Street project (paragraph 6);
- e) Note the likely balance sheet positions at 31 March 2009, as set out in paragraph 7; and
- f) Note the prospects for the 2009/10 revenue and capital budgets (paragraph 8)

15 Investment and Treasury Management Policy

This report updated the Authority on Treasury Management issues as at 31 March 2009, and in the light of responses to the Icelandic banks crisis.

In response to a question from Councillor Box the Treasurer confirmed that the Authority would not take out any loans from Public Works Loan Board at this time but would instead draw down on cash to fund capital projects, so mitigating the loss of return on investments.

Councillor Dr Jones asked whether the Audit and Performance Management Committee and other Members would receive training in treasury management. The Treasurer undertook to bring a proposal regarding such training to that Committee, once Shropshire Council had reviewed its treasury management policies and the Fire Authority had aligned its policies with theirs.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the investment situation at 31 March 2009;
- b) Confirm the current approach to lending; and
- c) Task its Audit and Performance Management Committee to review Treasury Management Practices (paragraphs 5 and 6ii)

16 Analysis of Audit Commission National Report – Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency

This report acted as a supplement to the previous paper brought before Members on 11 February 2009 in respect of the Audit Commission publication entitled 'Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency'. The previous report sought Member approval for officers to undertake further analysis of the Commission's report and the results of the analysis were set out in this report.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred to the two appendices attached to the report, which set out a number of areas for further improvement and recommended actions for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. Having seen the two documents, officers of the Audit Commission had commented that they provided the most in-depth analyses of the National Report they had seen. Members agreed that this was an excellent piece of work. The Chair thought it would be useful if officers were to prepare an Improvement Action Plan, based upon the two appendices, which could then be monitored by the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Picken and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report;
- b) Task officers to prepare an Improvement Action Plan, based upon the contents of the two appendices to the report; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Audit and Performance Management Committee to monitor implementation of the Plan

Councillor Eade left the room at this point (3.20 pm).

17 Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009 - Overview

This report informed Members of the recently launched Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process introduced by the Audit Commission. The new assessment process for fire and rescue authorities replaces the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime.

Cllr Box declared a personal interest at this point in that, as a peer assessor, he might benefit from additional work elsewhere during 2009/10, if this Authority's operational assessment peer review were delayed until 2010/11.

Councillor Picken left the meeting at this point (3.25 pm).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer went through the background to CAA and outlined how CAA and CPA differ. He then gave a short presentation on how the Audit Commission would present CAA results. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to the signed minutes.

Councillor Eade returned to the meeting at this point (3.30 pm).

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and, on a vote with all voting in favour except Councillor Box, who abstained (and asked for his abstention to be recorded),

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Approve the undertaking of a formal operational assessment peer review during 2010/11

18 Equality and Diversity Update

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that, following the achievement of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in August 2008, the Service had commenced work on a self-assessment against Level 4. An external consultant had supported the self-assessment process and on 12 March 2009 confirmed that the Service satisfied the requirements of Level 4.

The Steering Group had since tasked the Equality and Diversity Officer with collating the evidence used within the self-assessment into a single document, which would be endorsed by the consultant and presented to Policy Group. Officers were extremely pleased to have made such rapid progress and to have achieved Level 4 just six months after completing Level 3.

Councillor Dr Jones, the Fire Authority's Equality and Diversity Champion, said how pleased she was with this result. She congratulated officers on achieving Level 4 and thanked them for their work. In turn the Chair thanked Councillor Dr Jones for her contribution as Champion.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update given

19 Member Champion Presentation

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

The Chair thanked Councillor Box for his presentation.

Resolved that Members note the presentation of the Information, Communication and Technology Champion

20 FiReControl and FireLink Update

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the FiReControl project was moving forward and Communities and Local Government (CLG) would complete the next financial analysis of the business case within a few months. The West Midlands Regional Control Centre was due to begin fit out of information and communications technology equipment in May. The Fire Authority's officers were fully engaged with discussions around the recruitment of current staff into the Regional Control Centre along with all relevant human resource management issues. The Local Authority Controlled Company Board had been presented with a new, enlarged, staffing model, which would increase the costs set out in the CLG business case significantly. The proposals would come to the Fire Authority before any agreement was made to increase costs.

The FireLink project locally was not running to schedule, with further delays in switching over from the existing digital radio system to the new Government provided one. The Fire Authority did, however maintain the full functionality of its current excellent system.

Members noted that the Chair, as a Director on the Board, would be closely monitoring any requests for additional funds.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the verbal update given

21 Telford and Wellington Fire Stations

This report enabled the Authority to consider proposals for the redevelopment of Telford and Wellington Fire Stations, and to consider future funding requirements.

Due to the current financial position and possible restrictions on future finances, it should be recognised that these works represented aspirations and that agreeing the recommendations of this paper did not represent a commitment to the schemes.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Agree, for the purposes of capital budget planning, the allocation of £500,000 in the year 2012/13 for works at Telford and £1,000,000 in the year 2013/14 for works at Wellington, both schemes to be subject to full costings and capital appraisals being carried out prior to approval

22 Summary of Outcomes from Brigade Managers' Employment Panel

This report summarised the outcomes of the recent meeting of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel (the Panel).

The Assistant Chief Officer brought Members' attention to the Extraordinary Meeting of the Fire Authority, which would take place at 2.00 pm on 22 May to receive the recommendations of the Panel regarding the appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

The Chair advised Members at this point that this would be the last Fire Authority meeting, which the present Chief Fire Officer would attend. The Chair thanked Mr Taylor for his work as Chief Fire Officer and said that the Authority would be losing a valuable asset. Mr Taylor responded that he had enjoyed being Chief Fire Officer for four years and working with the Fire Authority. He thanked Members for everything they had done for him.

All officers, except the Clerk to the Authority, Assistant Chief Officer and Corporate Services Manager left the meeting at this point before the exempt items on the agenda were considered.

23 Local Government Act 1972

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones and

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 paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4

24 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 11 February 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 11 February 2009, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

25 Human Resources Committee (Paragraphs 1 and 2)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Mrs Holyoak and

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the exempt minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 26 February 2009

26 Treasurer’s Pay Award 2008 (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4)

This report detailed the recommendation of the Brigade Managers’ Employment Panel made at its meeting on 20 March 2009 with regard to the pay award for the Treasurer with effect from 1 January 2008.

It was proposed by Councillor Box, seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the recommendation, as set out in the report

The meeting closed at 4.05 pm

Chair.....

Date.....