

**Non-Exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 16 December 2009 at 2.00 pm
at Shrewsbury Education and Conference Centre, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Barrow (from 3.50 pm), Davies, Mrs Greenaway, Groom, Hartin, Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mason, Mellings, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Price (from 2.15 pm), Roberts and West (Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Head of Performance and Risk, Corporate Services Manager, Management Support Officer and Clerk

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Picken, Williams and Winchester and also from Mr Tebbutt, Independent Chair of the Standards Committee, who had wished to attend to present the Annual Report of the Committee but unfortunately was unable to do so, because of a prior commitment. Councillor Mrs Barrow had advised that she would be late, because of a clash with another meeting.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members 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 have a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting, held on 14 October 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 October 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 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 6, 7 and 8, on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12(A) to the Act, by virtue of Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4.

6 Voice/Data Communications, Command and Control Systems Refresh

This report endeavoured to set out, in a non-technical manner, the current and growing difficulties facing the Fire Authority and Service in respect of existing radio voice / data communications systems and the associated obsolescent Command and Control equipment.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer set the background to the current position and went through the various options open to the Fire Authority. He brought Members' attention to the planning assumptions in section 9 of the report, emphasising that officers continued to support the FireControl project.

Councillor Price joined the meeting at this point (2.15 pm).

After a wide-ranging discussion it was proposed by Councillor Groom and seconded by Councillor Price that recommendation b) be adopted, subject to the amendment that responsibility be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer, in consultation with the Fire Authority's Chair and Vice-Chair.

Subject to the above amendment, on a vote, it was

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority adopt recommendation b) in the report

All officers, with the exception of the Corporate Services Manager and Management Support Officer left the meeting room at this point (2.32 pm).

7 Brigade Managers' Employment Panel – Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel meeting, held on 23 November 2009.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Adams and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel, held on 23 November 2009, be noted and that the resolutions at item 10 be endorsed

All officers returned to the meeting room at this point (2.35 pm).

8 Audit and Performance Management Committee Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 November 2009.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 26 November 2009, be noted

The meeting reverted to open session at this point (2.37 pm).

9a Standards Committee

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 26 October 2009 and considered the recommendations at item 10 a) and 11 b) bullet point 3.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Davies and

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) In principle to the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee with Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council;
- b) That the Register of Members' Interests be placed on the Fire Authority's website, subject to individual discretion regarding publication of their contact details; and
- c) That details of gifts and hospitality declared by Members be placed on the Fire Authority website.

Councillor Davies, a member of the Standards Committee, advised that an approach had been made to Shropshire Council regarding establishing a Joint Standards Committee but they had indicated that they were not interested at this stage.

9b Annual Report of the Standards Committee

This report advised of the work carried out by the Fire Authority's Standards Committee during the municipal year 2008 / 2009.

In the absence of the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor Mellings, a member of the Committee, presented this report. He emphasised that the Fire Authority had strong standards and ethics and that it had not received any complaints under the new regime.

Nevertheless, it was important to give consideration to the key issues picked up in the Annual Report, which would enable the Authority to maintain its high standards. He welcomed ideas and suggestions from other Members as to how this might be achieved. Finally, he highlighted the need for Members to register any changes in their interests.

Resolved that the report be noted

10 Strategy and Resources Committee

Members received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 12 November 2009, and considered the recommendations at item 7.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Roberts and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve £106,000 virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note the position on the capital programme;
- d) Approve the latest position for prudential indicators for 2009/10;
- e) Note the performance against prudential indicators for 2008/09;
- f) Note performance in Treasury Management to date in 2009/10; and
- g) Note the information provided on balance sheet items

Members noted that the reports, considered by the Committee at item 5 (2010/11 and Later Years Revenue and Capital Budgets), were contained within the green booklet (attached as an appendix to Report 16 - 2010/11 and Later Years Budget Summary) and would form the basis of discussion at item 16 on the agenda for this meeting.

11 Brigade Managers' Employment Panel

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel meeting, held on 23 November 2009.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel meeting, held on 23 November 2009, be noted

12 Audit and Performance Management Committee

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 November 2009, and considered the recommendations at item 5, relating to Role Descriptions. Copies of the Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and for the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit were attached to the non-exempt minutes for Members' information.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Price and

Resolved that

- a) The non-exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 November 2009, be noted; and
- b) The Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and for the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit be agreed

13 Members' Roles and Remuneration

This report outlined the changes in roles of various Members of the Fire Authority, and specifically those of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group, in recent years. It advised of the outcome of the review of Members' allowances, conducted by the Independent Panel, and asked the Fire Authority to consider and decide upon the recommendations put forward by the Panel. The report also asked the Fire Authority to consider and decide whether a third person be invited to join the Independent Panel. Finally, the report asked the Fire Authority to agree the 2010/11 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances.

Councillor Hartin pointed out that, when interviewed by the Independent Panel, he had advised that there was no longer a Main Opposition Group but two Opposition Groups of equal size. An interim arrangement had been agreed between the two Groups but the matter did need to be addressed.

It was proposed by Councillor Davies and seconded by Councillor Hartin that the recommendations in the report be agreed, subject to an amendment that the reference to a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Leader of the Main Opposition Group be deleted and replaced with a reference to an SRA for Leaders of those Opposition Groups with 3 or more Members.

On a vote, with 12 Members voting for and one abstention, it was

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the changes in the roles of Members of the Fire Authority and specifically those of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group;
- b) Adopt the recommendations put forward by the Independent Panel on Members' Allowances in its report (attached at Appendix A to report 13), subject to the amendment set out above;
- c) Invite Mr James Parker to join the Independent Panel; and
- d) Agree the 2010/11 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances (attached at Appendix B to report 13), subject to the amendment set out above

14 Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation Results

This report advised of the outcome of an extensive, three-month consultation on the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Proposed Actions document for 2010/11, and sought approval for changes to these proposals as recommended by the IRMP Members' Working Group, as a result of consultation feedback. In addition, the report sought approval for the Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group to progress the 2010/11 IRMP process to the implementation phase.

The Head of Performance and Risk reminded Members that the full consultation responses could be found on the Fire Authority website. He then went through the Summary of Consultation Feedback (at section 8 of the report). It was noted that, as a result of that feedback, the IRMP Members' Working Group was recommending changes to the IRMP 2010/11 Proposed Action document.

Councillor Price commented that, as a member of the Working Group, he had been extensively involved in the consultation process. He was pleased with the constructive attitude of staff, both operational and non-operational, and with the report produced by the local Fire Brigades Union.

A discussion then took place about the use and location of the Service's aerial ladder platforms (ALPs). It was noted that the ALPs could easily be moved, should it be found necessary.

It was proposed by Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Mrs Greenaway and

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the extent of the consultation exercise undertaken with staff, stakeholders and the public with regard to the IRMP 2010/11 Proposed Action document;
- b) Approve the changes to the proposals, as proposed by the Fire Authority's IRMP Members' Working Group, as a result of feedback obtained through the consultation process;
- c) Note the budgetary implications of the IRMP proposals; and
- d) Delegate responsibility for implementing the IRMP proposals to the newly constituted Strategic Risk and Planning Working Group

15 New Dimension Asset Transfer

This report summarised the Authority's current position over the transfer of New Dimension assets from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to local Fire and Rescue Services, including assets to this Authority, following the issue of Fire Service Circular 59/2009 (attached at Appendix A to the report).

The Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to the main outstanding issue, raised by the Fire Lawyers' Network, which was set out in bold at the bottom of page 3 of the report.

He advised that he had that day received a copy of the CLG's response to the letter of the Chief Fire Officers' Association but he had not yet had the opportunity to analyse it. He emphasised that, although supportive of using the New Dimension equipment, the Fire Authority should not be expected to bear any costs, which were over and above the benefit gained by Shropshire.

Members were concerned that, by signing the transfer agreement, they would be committing the Fire Authority to unknown liabilities. It was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor Mrs Greenaway and, on a vote,

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority delegate authority to the Strategy and Resources Committee to make the decision on behalf of the Fire Authority as to whether it enter into the Transfer of Assets Agreement

Following a question from Councillor Dr Jones, the Chief Fire Officer undertook to obtain further advice from the Fire Authority's legal advisor regarding the response from CLG and to find out whether other Services had signed up to the transfer agreement. He would then bring this information to the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee on 22 January to assist in the decision-making process.

16 2010/11 and Later Years Budget Summary

This report summarised the budgets proposed by the Strategy and Resources Committee and had been updated for subsequent events. The results were put forward to the Fire Authority for approval as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision at the Fire Authority meeting on 10 February 2010.

The Treasurer advised that the budget package recommended by the Strategy and Resources Committee, together with any changes made by the Fire Authority at this meeting, would form the basis of the Authority's budget consultation. Any issues raised during the consultation would then be picked up by the Committee at its meeting on 22 January.

The Treasurer brought Members' attention to the table on page 2 of his report and to the attached green booklet, which contained the reports considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee. He pointed out that any developments, which had taken place since the Committee met, were outlined in section 4 of his report. Although not mentioned in the report, he also asked the Fire Authority if it would commit, in advance of its February meeting, £195,000 in the capital budget for a replacement appliance. If this were agreed, the revenue consequences would also be committed now. It was noted that by placing an order for the appliance before 31 December, officers would be able to make a saving of £7,000 but no payments would be made until the 2010/11 financial year. Members, therefore, agreed that it made good financial sense to make this commitment now.

The Treasurer then outlined the various elements of the Government's Pre-Budget Report, which would impact upon the Fire Authority. Unfortunately, although the grant distribution formula was due to change in 2011/12, the Report provided no information, so uncertainty still remained in this respect.

The Government had recently issued a letter regarding capping, but it had added little to the Local Government Minister's statement, excerpts of which were set out at the top of page 4 of the Treasurer's report. Members noted that, in the 16 years since the introduction of Council Tax, the lowest average increase for Band D was 2.1%. The fear of capping, therefore, remained a genuine issue, particularly as the cost of rebilling, following capping, had been £450,000 for a comparable Fire Authority several years before.

Councillor Adams voiced concern about the proposed 3.9% increase in precept, particularly as inflation was running at 0.1%. He appreciated that there might be mitigating factors but the Fire Authority had been driving down costs and saving money. He, therefore, asked what effect a 2% increase in precept would have.

The Chief Fire Officer brought Members' attention to page 4 of report 5 in the green booklet, which set out the consequences of a 2% precept increase. The Treasurer added that this would have the effect of taking out £260,000 of income from the budget year on year, thus exacerbating the Fire Authority's financial position in later years. The key was to obtain a balance between what was right for 2010/11 and then for future years.

The Chair, Vice-Chair and other Members thanked the Treasurer for providing an excellent, clear summary of the budget position.

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery, seconded by Councillor Hartin and, on a vote,

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Base its revenue budget planning and consultation on the totals, set out in Appendix B to the report (2010/11 £21,367,000);
- b) Base its capital programme on that set out in 5e Appendix A, (the Green Book), subject to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January;
- c) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 5f, and confirm the general reserve;
- d) Continue to base its planning and consultation on a 3.9% increase in the precept to £84.63 in 2010/11, an increase of £3.18, and annual increases of 3.9% in later years;
- e) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package on 21* January 2010, for final decision by the Fire Authority on 10 February 2010; and
- f) Commit £195,000 of its 2010/11 capital budget and the revenue budget consequences now for the purchase of a replacement appliance

* **Committee Clerk's Note**

The meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee has since been put back from 21 to 22 January 2020.

17 Financial Contingency ('What If') Planning for 2010/11

This report set before Members the results of the 2010/11 planning meetings, as they applied to 'what if' financial planning.

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note and agree the results of the planning workshops, specifically the 'what if' planning scenario

18 Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009 Results

This report informed Members of the recently issued results arising from the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime.

In presenting his report the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that only one Fire Authority, Lancashire, had achieved a higher score than this Authority and only ten Fire Authorities, including this Authority, had achieved a score of 3 across all five areas.

He pointed out that a 3 in CAA was the equivalent of a 4 in the former Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime and it was extremely difficult to achieve a 4.

Councillor Hartin said that this was a very pleasing result and thanked staff for their achievement. The Chair added that all staff and Members should be proud that they were consistently maintaining excellent results and outperforming larger authorities.

Councillor Mrs Barrow arrived at this point (3.50 pm).

When asked where there was room for improvement, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that the only area highlighted by the Audit Commission was the recruitment of female firefighters. The Service had taken steps to increase the numbers and would continue to do so. A discussion then took place about the resources committed by other Fire Authorities to CAA. Members agreed that the additional resources required by this Authority to achieve a score of 4 could not be justified.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report and appended CAA report

19 European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo da Vinci)

This report acted as a summary report regarding the Leonardo Staff Exchange Programme 2009, and sought Member endorsement of proposals for a further submission for European Commission (EC) funding to support a new programme for 2010.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that a celebration of the success of the 2009 Leonardo da Vinci Programme was to take place on 25 January, to which Members would be invited. Furthermore, he had found out that morning that the Fire Authority's leasing company was prepared to let it have three further vehicles free-of-charge to donate to fire services in Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania.

Various Members, who had been involved in the 2009 Programme, summarised their experiences and what they had gained from it. Members then went on to consider possible themes for applications for funding from the 2010 Programme. Councillor Hartin felt that it would be useful for Members to visit the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss the implications of the Working Time Directive and the effect, which it could have upon the fire cover provided by retained firefighters.

Councillor Minnery raised the issues of climate change, flooding and water rescue, which could be explored with European fire services to see how they dealt with them and what measures they were taking to make their communities aware of the impact of climate change.

The Chair asked all Members to think about possible themes and to discuss their thoughts with the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. Once themes had been crystallised, it would be possible to consider which Members would participate.

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

Resolved: that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the completion of the 2009 Exchange Programme;
- b) Endorse proposals for the programme to continue into 2010; and
- c) Provide an indication of the thematic subject areas to be explored during 2010 by Member/officer groups

20 Member Champion Presentation

Dr Jean Jones was to give a presentation on her work during the year as the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit but, as a number of Members had to leave at this point, it was agreed that the presentation would be postponed to a future meeting of Fire Authority.

The meeting closed at 4.05 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....