

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held in the
Long Mynd Room, Telford Central Fire Station
on Wednesday, 23 July 2025, at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Blundell, Clayton, Coleman, Evans, Fejfer, Handley, Hannington, Husemann, Kerr, Mehta, Minnery, Overton, Radford, Waite and Walmsley

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Sam Burton	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Karen Gowreesunker	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Anthea Lowe	Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Clerk
Richard Phillips	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Deputy Clerk
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Supervisor	ESS
Aleksandra Zydek	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Attendees

Andy Groom	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services
Katherine Richardson	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Fejfer and Husemann

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Governance Arrangements for the Fire Authority

The Fire Authority considered the matters set out within the report and made decisions regarding the future shape, format and governance arrangements of the Fire Authority.

The Clerk presented this report and advised that the recommendations in it have been formed from the discussions that took place at the Governance Workshops that the Fire Authority attended earlier in the year.

The size of the Fire Authority

Proposed increase to 17 Members better reflects the electorate split between the two constituent authorities. Out of a total combined electorate of 383,599, Shropshire Council has 65.65% of the electorate and Telford & Wrekin (T&W) Council has 34.35%. The proposed increase to 17 Members with 11 from Shropshire Council and 6 from T&W Council gives a more accurate representation on the Fire Authority that better reflects the population split between the constituent authorities. Based upon projected population figures for 2030, a more accurate representation would be achieved by an increase to 19 Members on the Authority, but this would mean a much larger increase in membership.

The proposed increase will have an effect on the political balance of the Fire Authority due to the political affiliations of the additional member that will be appointed by each constituent authority. This may, then, require a review and restructure of appointments to Committees but this will also add resilience to the Authority and its Committee structure.

Scrutiny Committee

Performance monitoring will be moved from the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee to the new Performance and Scrutiny Committee to avoid any overlap in the remit of committees. Recruitment of two independent co-optees to sit on the Performance and Scrutiny Committee will be undertaken. A small allowance of £500 per annum will be paid to these co-optees, with this allowance also being extended to the independent members who support the delivery of the standards regime.

The Chair of the Performance and Scrutiny Committee will be paid an allowance of £2,259 per annum. This is the same as the allowance paid to the Chairs of both the Strategy and Resources and Audit and Standards Committees and is based on the Independent Remuneration Panel recommendations from their 2020 review of member's allowances.

Member Role Profiles

Existing Member Role profiles have been updated in accordance with the changes and additions identified during the Governance Review. A new Role Profile has been created for the Chair of the Performance and Scrutiny Committee.

Unions and Representative Bodies

It was clearly identified during the Governance Review that Members wish to improve and build upon the existing positive and collaborative relationship that the Fire Authority has with its unions and representative bodies. The first step towards this is to re-state and re-invite unions and representative bodies to attend Authority and Committee meetings in an observatory capacity.

Currently union and representative bodies are only allowed to speak at Authority meetings during public questions; with this right being limited to matters of general interest rather than specific operational or strategic questions which relate to employment matters.

Given that the Fire Authority view building constructive relationships with the unions and representative bodies as a critical element of future Fire Authority governance; Officers plan to review all of the working arrangements between the Fire Authority and the unions and representative bodies with the aim of bringing a future paper to the Fire Authority for approval of improved ways of working together.

The Chair explained that the decision to reduce the size of the Fire Authority in 2019 was driven as a response to the Police and Crime Commissioner's Business Case for the Fire Authority to become part of their remit. The Chair also said that he had concluded that performance monitoring should not be combined with the audit function of the Authority and that the appointment of two more members would assist with achieving this. The Chair advised the Authority that he would be asking Shropshire Council for their appointment to be a representative of an electoral district which has an On Call fire station in it and which is not currently covered by an Authority Member.

Councillor Overton acknowledged that a scrutiny function is needed and reminded the Authority that political balance does need to be sought for that Committee. Councillor Overton also supported the issue of strengthening the Authority's relationship with the unions and representative bodies, as he knows that the Fire Brigade Union is keen to attend Authority meetings. Councillor Overton concluded by saying that he supports the proposed increase in numbers which will benefit the equity and workloads of Members; and that he is in favour of the report and the recommendations in it.

Councillor Coleman commented that whilst she understood the approach of having Members with On Call stations in their electoral divisions, she would like to see more females on the Fire Authority to allow greater representation. The CFO commented that whilst there is low female representation across the Service, there is high female representation in the Service's Senior Management Team.

Councillor Waite asked when the two Independent Members for Scrutiny would commence their posts. The Clerk replied that it would be from the same date as the Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Coleman asked if the decision had already been made as to who these people would be. The Clerk explained that the report refers to two sets of Independent Members. The Independent Members for Standards are already in post. Their appointments will be extended, or further recruitment undertaken if they do not wish to sit for another four-year period.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Having considered the size of the Fire Authority, agree to revert to the former total of 17 Members, as set out within the report, with this change taking effect from 1 October 2025;
- b) Give final approval to the re-organisation of the Fire Authority Structure as set out within the report with effect from 1 October 2025, including the creation of a dedicated scrutiny committee and delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, to agree any final arrangements in preparation for its first meeting;
- c) Approve the Terms of Reference for each of the Committees that the Fire Authority would like to progress, as set out at Appendix A to the report;
- d) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to commence recruitment of two independent persons to sit on the Performance & Scrutiny Committee;
- e) Approve the payment of a small co-optee allowance in the sum of £500 per annum to each of the Independent Persons appointed to the Performance & Scrutiny Committee and those who support in the delivery of the standards regime;
- f) Approve the Member Role Profiles for various positions across the Authority, as set out at Appendix B to the report;
- g) Note that Officers will review all of the working arrangements between the Fire Authority and the Unions and Representative Bodies prior to bringing a future paper to the Fire Authority with recommendations for approval; and
- h) Delegate authority to make any changes needed to the Fire Authority's Standing Orders to reflect the decisions made by the Fire Authority at this meeting.

4 Updated Protocol on Member / Officer Relations

This report set out amendments to the Fire Authority's Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and sought approval from the Authority for the adoption of the amended Protocol.

The Deputy Clerk presented this report and informed Members that the amendments made to the Protocol reflect the amendments identified at the Governance Workshops.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Agree that the amended Protocol on Member / Officer Relations, as attached at the Appendix to the report, be adopted.

5 Draft Social Media Protocol for Officers and Members

This report presented a draft Social Media Protocol for Officers and Members and asked the Fire Authority to provide comment to provide comment on it before it is adopted as a Service policy.

The ACFO presented this report and explained that the need for a Social Media Protocol for Members has been identified through the Governance Workshops. The draft Protocol, which is attached at the Appendix to the report sets out the importance, and benefits, of social media and provides guidance on appropriate usage. Advice is also provided on the General Data Protection Regulations in relation to the use of social media.

Councillor Kerr raised the issue of consent for photographs and that this should be given in written form. The ACFO responded that this is part of another Service policy which will be cross-referenced with the Social Media Protocol.

Councillor Coleman raised that the Protocol refers to social media but includes WhatsApp so there is a need to clarify the social media / social networks that the Protocol covers. In addition, Members also suggested that the use of teams should be more robustly covered in the Protocol; that the need to change passwords when somebody leaves the organisation and the destruction of any data sets that person may hold should be reinforced; and the message that comms devices should be switched on whenever officers are 'on call' should also be reinforced.

The ACFO responded that there is a Starters / Movers / Leavers process within the Service, and this needs to be linked into this Protocol. The CFO also explained that there is a robust command rota in place together with a notification process for reaching officers out of hours.

Councillor Clayton expressed concern about the Authority over-reaching with personal social media and suggested that people need to be transparent about personal statements if made on social media.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the report;
- b) Provide the following comment on areas of the Social Media Protocol that it considers require amending:
 - Clarification needed around social media and social networks
 - Use of Teams to be more robust within policy
 - Reinforce need to change passwords when somebody leaves the organisation and the destruction of any data sets that person may hold
 - Reinforce message that comms devices should be switched on whenever officers are 'on call'
- c) Note that the Social Media Policy will now go through the Brigade Order system to enable it to become Service policy.

6 Committee and Fire Authority Appointments

This report asked the Fire Authority to confirm appointments to its Committees; to appoint its representative on the Local Government Association Fire Services Commission; and to appoint its Member Champions.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Agree that Political Group Leaders will review appointments to Committees and notify the Executive Support Supervisor of any changes to those appointments;
- b) Note that any changes to Committee appointments will be approved by the Monitoring Officer under the delegation to them that was confirmed by the Fire Authority on 25 June 2025;
- c) Appoint Councillor Minnery as its representative on the Local Government Association's Fire Services Committee;
- d) Appoint Councillors Mehta and Radford as its Equality and Diversity Member Champions;
- e) Appoint Councillor Kerr as its Audit and Risk Member Champion; and
- f) Appoint Councillor Minnery as its Improvement Member Champion.

Chair's Notices

The Chair thanked everybody who had been involved in the Governance Review.

The meeting closed at 2.50 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....