



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 10 December, 2014 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, D Brickhill, P Carey, D Flude, P Harris, E Johnson, L Jones, J Joyce, B Livesley, G Merry, H Mundry, S Nelson, R Polhill, B Rudd, T Sherlock, M Simon, A Tate, C Thorley, J Weatherill, N Wright and S Wright.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A RECORDING OF MEETINGS

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors J Houlbrook and D Topping.

C CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair asked Members to note the content of Chair's Announcements which included details of the Authority's achievements and events Members had attended since the last Fire Authority meeting in September.

The Chair drew attention to the recent performance by Cheshire schoolchildren of 'Heroes with Grimy Faces.' which was held in Chester Cathedral in November. He wished to thank all the schools and the officers involved and commented that this was an excellent and very moving performance.

It was noted that the Authority had won a number of awards over the last 12 months and Members wished to thank officers for the excellent work being done by the Service which was confirmed by the recognition received, often at a national level.

D DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

E MINUTES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 24 September 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

F MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 18 November 2014 be received, for information.

G MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 1 October 2014 be received, for information.

H MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 3 December 2014 be received, for information.

I MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 8 October 2014 be received, for information.

J MINUTES OF THE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 10 October 2014 be received, for information.

K MINUTES OF THE BRIGADE MANAGERS PAY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee held on 12 November 2014 be received, for information.

L NOTES OF THE MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the meeting of the Member Training and Development Group held on 25 September 2014 be received, for information.

2 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2013-14

The Head of Finance introduced this item and presented the Annual Audit Letter 2013-14 from the Authority's External Auditors, Grant Thornton for Members information. The Audit Letter provided an overall summary of the External Auditor's assessment of Cheshire Fire Authority and the Head of Finance drew Members attention to the key messages from the audit. He explained that an unqualified audit opinion had been issued together with an unqualified Value for Money opinion.

He informed Members that the Auditor had made two recommendations. Firstly that a review of the stock creditor should be carried out to confirm if it is a liability for the Authority. Secondly that arrangements should exist to revalue land and property assets to ensure the carrying value was kept up to date between formal valuations. He confirmed that these issues were being reviewed and would be addressed in the near future.

Members thanked the Head of Finance and his team for all their hard work which had contributed to the positive opinions issued.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Audit Letter 2013-14 be noted.

3 2015-16 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Head of Finance presented this report which advised Members that the Authority was required to approve a budget and set the Council tax precept for the year commencing 1 April 2015. He informed Members that, for the budget to be approved, the Authority must have regard to all relevant factors. These included the likely impact of policy options on the fire and rescue service, the prevailing economic climate and the impact of future grant reductions during the current Comprehensive Spending Review period (2011-12 to 2014-15 and extended to 2015-16) and beyond. He advised that this was the first of three budget reports, another to be considered at Policy Committee on 28 January and the final report by the Authority on 11 February 2015.

He advised that the report provided background on the financial position of the Authority, referred to the national context and identified some of the risks that the Authority should take into consideration. He brought Members attention to the following key areas within the report:

- Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR): The Government announced a mini CSR for 2015-16 in June 2013. The overall economic mood remained generally pessimistic and all indicators suggested the Authority's position of assuming cuts of 8% in settlement funding was reasonable.
- Medium Term Financial Plans (MTFP): These were detailed as two appendices within the report and showed how the Authority could produce a balanced budget for 2015-16, with the Council Tax Freeze Grant being

accepted and without accepting the Council Tax Freeze Grant and assuming a 1.99% increase in precept. He explained that a number of assumptions had been made within the plans but that, whichever option was decided upon by Members, there was a need for savings to be made of circa £8m or £9m over the next four years in order to produce balanced budgets, based on assumptions used. The Emergency Response Programme would generate savings of around £4m (of which around £1m had been achieved in 2014-15) so there were significant challenges ahead to meet the required savings.

- Council Tax: The Government had made the Council Tax Freeze Grant available for 2015-16 and had indicated that the equivalent of 1% of council tax at 2012-13 levels (approximately £250k) would be available in 2015-16. The Government has also indicated that the trigger for a local referendum would be a 2% increase in precept, although there was still some uncertainty around this level.
- Capital Programme: Members were aware that the Authority successfully bid for just under £2m to help fund the capital element of the Safety Centre. This augmented the capital grant of £4.5m to fund the building of new stations. Delays in the implementation of the programme meant that there was some slippage against the use of the grants. The latest Emergency Response Programme (ERP) indicated that all the grants for ERP would be used in 2015-16.
- Reserves: As at 31 March 2014 the Authority had a General Reserve of £7.2m. The MTFP, as presented, assumed transfers of funds into an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) reserve during the next 2 years which would help smooth some of the financial challenges facing the Authority. It would contribute to one off revenue and capital costs of the ERP and other IRMP related activity. The Head of Finance was currently in the process of risk assessing the level of General Reserve against risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register. The results of the assessment would be reported to Members in February 2014 but it was likely that the level of general reserve would be deemed sufficient to manage the existing risk profile.

The Head of Finance concluded that the detailed budget was unlikely to change from the current projections and highlighted the need for continued savings which would result in some difficult decisions being required in future years.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2015/16 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.**

4 CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY DRAFT FIVE YEAR STRATEGY 2015-2020

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications introduced the report which presented the Fire Authority's draft Five Year Strategy, *Planning for a Safer Cheshire 2015-2020*, for approval for consultation. It also provided

details of the proposed programme and timetable for consultation and publication. He explained that this document was the Authority's overarching strategy which would cover the next five years and, as previously, would be supported by annual action plans (IRMPs).

The report highlighted the key themes and issues which were set out in the draft strategy. The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the document was structured to provide a retrospective look at what had been achieved over the last four years which highlighted the substantial changes that had taken place. It also gave context to the scale of challenges ahead and set out the proposed responses to these challenges in a number of key areas.

The key issues and proposals were outlined:

- The strategy was based on the current Medium Term Financial Plan which included a number of assumptions and expectations. It states that if the financial and other pressures increase more than expected the Authority would have to consider asking residents to vote for an additional Council Tax increase.
- The Authority's existing core vision, mission and objectives together with the core values would be retained as it was felt they remained fit for purpose.
- Confirmation of the Authority's commitment to deliver all of its services which work directly with local communities using its current footprint and boundaries. However options would be pursued for broader collaboration in those areas that did not have an impact on the delivery of frontline services.
- A number of proposals for developing the organisation which include a further value for money review programme to streamline key business processes and exploring the local and regional opportunities for collaboration in non-operational areas with a specific focus on opportunities with Cheshire Constabulary.
- The development of the new integrated safety centre which would be central to the organisation's future work to protect local communities and vulnerable people in particular.
- A further review to consider a range of issues to ensure emergency response arrangements remained fit for purpose in the future which included changes to risk levels; incident trends and volumes; impact on existing response standards; the sustainability of low activity stations; matching resources to address the variations in demand between day and night-time; the type and number of fire engines needed for different types of incidents; and exploring different firefighting technologies and tactics.

The Head of Performance, Planning and Communications drew Members attention to the consultation programme that was detailed in the report. It was noted that there would be a 12 week consultation period running from 5th January 2015 until 27th March 2015 which would include direct mail outs to key stakeholders and briefings with partnership groups. It was proposed that,

at the end of the consultation period, a feedback report would be presented to the Authority meeting on 22nd April 2015. Following this the revised strategy would be considered at the Authority's annual meeting on 17th June 2015, for formal approval.

Members queried whether the population forecast had factored in the large amount of new developments that were being proposed within Cheshire and also queried the wording around over 65 population growth as Cheshire East had one of the highest figures in the North West. The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the figures were based on existing predictions and new developments were captured in the analysis of external drivers and risk planning calculations. He confirmed that the wording on the growth in the over 65 population would be reviewed and updated along with any changes to performance or financial information which occurred between before the start of formal consultation.

A Member commented that the Authority was developing a close working relationship with Cheshire Constabulary in respect of the collaboration agenda and highlighted the need to engage with North West Ambulance Service, although it was recognised that it was a very different organisation so opportunities for collaborative working were more limited.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft Five Year Strategy 2015-2020, subject to a review of the comments made, be approved for formal consultation; and**
- [2] the timetable for consultation and publication, as set out in the report, be approved.**

5 INITIAL FEEDBACK – DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015-16 (IRMP 12)

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications presented the report to Members which provided initial feedback in respect of the consultation programme which was being carried out on 'Making Cheshire Safer', the Authority's draft annual action plan for 2015-16 (IRMP12). He advised that the consultation programme ran until 31st December and the information contained in this report was based on views and comments received up to 21st November 2014.

He informed Members that the consultation programme consisted of face to face briefings and presentations with key stakeholders, directly contacting a comprehensive database of partner organisations and carrying out 12 community consultation roadshows. Promotion and publicity for the consultation included use of the Authority's annual report, press releases to local media and extensive use of the Service's website and social media channels. The programme had been scaled back compared to last year to reflect the more limited scope of the proposals. However, it was clear that the

level of responses would be sufficient to provide a high degree of confidence in results – at least plus or minus 5%.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications drew Members attention to the low number of staff responses and informed Members that to date just over 60 responses had been received. A number of staff roadshows had been held and there had been extensive internal promotion and publicity. The on-going industrial dispute had affected the number of responses as had the more limited scope and impact of the new proposals in IRMP12. He added that there had been no formal response from the Trade Unions to date although union representatives had been invited to the Members Planning Day in January where they would have an opportunity to present their views to Members.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications highlighted some of the emerging themes from the initial feedback received so far and explained that the final consultation report containing full details of all responses would be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 11th February 2015.

Members noted the low number of responses from staff and queried if these were as a result of low morale. The Chief Fire Officer responded that he had attended a number of staff IRMP roadshows recently and had noted that morale had been affected by the on-going industrial action. He had collected a number of comments from staff during these events and informed Members that he was clear on the key priorities going forward. The first priority would be to get the dispute resolved and then to make a concerted effort to work on improving working relationships and morale. The Chair added that a substantial amount of work was being done by the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Local Government Association to assist the Fire Brigades Union and DCLG in resolving the dispute.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the interim feedback on the consultation programme for the draft 2015-16 Annual Action Plan (IRMP12) be noted.

6 APPROVAL PROCESS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A FRAMEWORK CONTRACTOR TO CONSTRUCT THREE FIRE STATIONS AND THE SAFETY CENTRE

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report to Members which provided an update on the procurement process for the appointment of the framework contractor to construct three fire stations and the safety centre (referred to in the report as ‘the new-build programme’). The report sought agreement from Members on their involvement in the process for the appointment of the framework contractor to deliver the new-build programme.

He explained that although the Fire Authority’s constitution did not require Member involvement in contract awards it has always been envisaged that, as this was a significant contract, it would be considered by Members before the

formal award took place. It was proposed that the Fire Authority authorise Policy Committee to engage in the appointment process for the award of the framework contract. The Committee would meet towards the end of January 2015 to do this. In addition it was proposed that Councillor Sherlock, in his role as Member Champion for procurement, would be invited to attend this meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the information in the report be noted; and**
- [2] the Policy Committee be authorised to engage in the approval process for the award of the framework contract to deliver the new-build programme.**

7 ESTABLISHING A CHARITY

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced this report which explained the rationale for establishing a charity, set out some of the key issues concerning the proposed charity and sought Member approval to proceed to develop the charity.

He stated that the information contained within the report was for Members to note at this stage as there was still some work to be done but officers felt that a formal decision was required before any further work was carried out.

Members' attention was drawn to the Members Sounding Board's views that the charitable company should have a purpose that did not restrict its activities to the functioning of the safety centre. This would allow greater flexibility for the charity to become involved in the broader safety agenda.

A Member queried the powers of the Trustees as they were not usually involved in the day to day running of the charity. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that, in this instance, the proposed role of the charitable trustees might be expected to be more hands on, given the likely resources of the safety centre. Members were satisfied with this response but stressed the need for clarity of the roles of the charitable trustees.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the information in the report be noted; and**
- [2] the further development of a charitable company limited by guarantee, as outlined in the report, be approved.**

8 PETITIONS PROTOCOL

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which sought Members approval for the adoption of a protocol relating to the handling of petitions. He explained that the Governance and Constitution Committee had provided guidance on the preparation of a petitions protocol at its meeting held on 8th October 2014.

A Member queried if a requirement for signatories to provide the postcode (to ensure the person signing the petition was from the area) could be added to the protocol. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that Governance and Constitution Committee had discussed this issue and decided that they did not want to include this kind of restriction as people may work in the area who could be affected by a matter that was the subject of the petition. He added that the Service would always carry out a verification of petitions and would be able to provide figures to Members for the number of signatures from residents of Cheshire.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Petitions Protocol (attached as Appendix 2 to the report) be approved; and**
- [2] minor changes to the constitution, as shown in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.**

9 PROGRAMME OF MEMBER MEETINGS 2015/16

The report provided Members with details of the proposed programme of meetings for the Fire Authority for 2015/16 for approval, together with a copy of the remaining meeting dates for 2014/15, for information.

Meetings were scheduled to tie in with relevant dates for budgetary and policy requirements and in accordance with the Fire Authority constitution. The 2015-16 timetable also included dates for a number of additional Member meetings and planning days to assist with diary planning for the coming year. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services added that Performance and Overview Committee meetings had been scheduled outside the usual cycle of meetings for 2015/16 to enable the delivery of more timely performance reporting.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the programme of Member meetings for 2015-16 be approved.**