



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 18 September, 2013 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, J Leather, B Livesley (from item 4) G Merry, H Mundry, S Nelson, R Polhill, B Rudd, T Sherlock, M Simon, A Tate, D Topping, C Thorley, J Weatherill, N Wright and S Wright.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

B CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair drew Members attention to the report which had been distributed to Members by Councillor Mundry (Member Champion for Young People) and provided an overview of the youth engagement work delivered by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service during the 2013 summer term. Councillor Mundry explained that he had asked Community Safety to pull together the report which highlighted the wide range of innovative programmes delivered by the Service. He also took the opportunity to thank Members for their support in raising money for the Fire Cadets Ghana trip.

Members noted the content of the report and commented that it was a useful document to promote the work the Service engaged in with young people.

C DECLARATION OF MEMBERS’ INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

D MINUTES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the annual meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 12 June 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

E MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 19 June 2013 be received, for information.

F MINUTES OF THE CLOSURE OF ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 19 June 2013 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 3 July 2013 be received, for information.

H MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 26 June 2013 be received, for information.

I MINUTES OF THE PAY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Pay and Performance Committee held on 7 May 2013 be received, for information.

J MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Tate provided an update for Members on the work programme for Performance and Overview Committee. She highlighted the following:

- Performance Review: Age UK Cheshire would be attending the Committee meeting on 25 September to present a performance report which Members hoped would help to improve the performance information available for Members of the Committee to scrutinise.
- HSA Targeting and Performance: The Committee had received a report which provided an overview of the Service's HSA targeting methodology and the methodology applied was commended.

2 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2012-13

Grant Thornton, the Authority's external auditors had produced their Audit Findings Report 2012-13 for Members' consideration. Representatives from

Grant Thornton, Robin Baker, the Auditor, and Caroline Stead, Audit Manager, were in attendance at the meeting to present the report.

Robin Baker provided an overview of the content and purpose of the report which was to highlight the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2013.

The findings of the report showed that the Authority had prepared the draft accounts to a good standard and the audit had not identified any material errors or uncertainties in the financial statement. The outstanding areas of work summarised in the report had been resolved and the Auditor would issue an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements. He added that an unqualified value for money conclusion would also be issued in respect of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2013.

Robin Baker commented that, due to the changes to the provision of external audit, there had been a slightly different approach to the audit and a new external audit team. He wished to place on record his thanks for the excellent co-operation received from the Head of Finance and his team during the process and in implementing the changes.

A Member queried whether the recommendation to document and implement a change control policy related to ICT systems. Caroline Stead confirmed that the recommendation related to having a detailed procedure in place for significant changes specifically for financial ICT systems but this was a valid point for all of the Service's ICT systems.

A Member queried the audit point relating to the Authority being assured that the payroll provider had appropriate controls in place. The Head of Finance explained that this related to the controls on the payroll providers own internal processes and that the Authority was seeking to ensure that it had better access to this information in future.

Fire Authority Members thanked officers and the external auditors for their hard work in ensuring the positive outcomes referred to in the report.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the Audit Findings Report 2012-13 be approved.

3 2012-13 FINAL ACCOUNTS

The Head of Finance presented the 2012-13 Final Accounts to Members for approval prior to publication before the end of September and explained that the overview of the accounts needed to be considered in conjunction with the Grant Thornton Audit Findings Report.

The final audited accounts showed an underspend on revenue of £274k against the revised budget of £44.278m. The mid-year review position reported to Members projected an underspend of £1,226k and it was recommended that this underspend be transferred to the IRMP Reserve, as should a further underspend of £944k at the end of the third quarter. The underspend achieved by the Authority should be seen in the context of the preparations to meet the substantial savings requirements included in the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan. In addition, the delivery of the outcomes of IRMP 10 relies upon the Authority's ability to smooth anticipated financial peaks and troughs, for which the reserves are essential. It was recommended that all the underspend, including the £274k, should be transferred to the IRMP reserve.

The report provided information on the Authority's balance sheet which showed a significant liability of £406m in respect of International Accounting Standard (IAS)19. This standard required every local authority to estimate all its future pension liabilities, in respect of existing pensioners and current staff. This did not represent an immediate call on resources; rather it was a liability which accrued over the lifetime of pensioners and staff.

The reserves position was also highlighted and Members were informed that the General Reserve had a balance of £6,741k which mitigated against the possibility of a significant financial consequence arising in the event of any of the Authority's corporate risks materialising.

The Authority was required to sign a letter of representation to the external auditors which explains the Authority's responsibilities in relation to the audit on an annual basis. A copy of the letter was attached to the report and it was recommended that the Authority approved the signing of the letter by the Chair.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the 2012-13 Final Accounts be approved for publication;**
- [2] the current balances of the Authority's reserves be noted;**
- [3] the transfer of the Authority's underspend (£2,444k) in 2012-13 to the IRMP reserve be approved; and**
- [4] the signing of the Letter of Representation to the Auditors be approved.**

4 PUBLICATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications presented the report to Members which sought approval for the publication of the Service's Annual Report for 2011-12. The draft report incorporated information on the annual Statement of Accounts, summary information about key areas of

performance during the last financial year, the outcomes of previous public consultation and opportunities to comment on future plans and key safety messages and advice.

Proofs of the newspaper style report had been distributed to Members with the agenda and each Member had received the edition for their particular unitary area. Copies of all four unitary area's reports had been sent to all Members electronically and hard copies were placed in Group Rooms prior to the meeting. The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that, if approved, the Annual Report would be published on the web-site by 30th September and the distribution of printed copies across Cheshire would commence on 7 October and was scheduled to be completed within 1 week. The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the costs had been kept low as most of the work on the publication had been completed in-house. The printing and delivery of the publication would be completed by external providers.

Members discussed the content of the report and a Member queried the wording in the centre pages relating to the proposals for IRMP 11. He specifically queried the wording used for Cheshire East in relation to proposal 5 – Crewe which read 'crew the second fire engine by on-call staff from 2016-17'. The Member suggested that the wording should be changed to 'review crewing of the second fire engine at Crewe' as there had been no decision made to change the second pump to on-call at Crewe.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the report was a draft copy for Members to approve. The information in the centre pages reflected the wording in the draft IRMP document which was the next item on the agenda for discussion. If there were any changes to the draft IRMP then the wording in the Annual report would be changed to reflect this.

RESOLVED: That

the draft Annual Report 2012-13 be approved for publication (noting that any changes agreed to the draft IRMP (agenda item 5) would need to be incorporated).

5 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN – INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2014-15 (IRMP11)

In December 2010 the Authority had approved a Four Year Strategy covering the period 2011-2015 and also agreed that detailed proposals for each year would be contained in a series of annual action plans (Integrated Risk Management Plans - IRMPs)

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications presented the report which sought Members approval for the IRMP for 2014-15. The report outlined proposals for the next financial year and also provided an update on the indicative timetable for implementation of all of the emergency

response review projects up to and including 2016-17. Copies of the draft IRMP11 had been distributed with the agenda.

It was explained that the Authority had completed a major consultation exercise during 2012-13 into proposals to fundamentally change how emergency response services would be provided across Cheshire in the future. These options included proposed new stations, changes to response standards and alterations to crewing arrangements at some stations.

A comprehensive report on the outcomes of that consultation was considered by the Authority in February 2013 before the approval of the IRMP for the current 2013-14 financial year. Members recognised that the plans would take a number of years to implement in full and there was a need for them to be scrutinised through the Service's annual risk planning process to ensure they continued to meet the Authority's objectives and future financial challenges. Members received updates on the risk analysis carried out for 2014-15 at their planning days in July and September and a summary of the approach is set out in the draft IRMP11.

The main focus of IRMP11 is clearly the emergency response plans, however, there are a number of other issues and proposals which were summarised in the plan under the following key headings:

Developing the Organisation

- **Management** – ensuring the Authority can influence national debates around the future management, governance and delivery of emergency services
- **Value for money (VFM)** – finalising the outcomes from the Service's three-year VFM programme and launching a business process review of key service-wide systems
- **Collaboration** – continuing to explore joint accommodation opportunities with partners and identifying collaboration options following the launch of N W Fire Control

Protecting Local Communities

- **Campaigns** – increase the Service's support and lobbying around two key campaigns – fitting sprinklers in all new buildings and making it a legal requirement for private landlords to fit long life, linked smoke alarms in all properties combined with the launch of a social housing landlords pledge
- **Data sharing** – develop new local data sharing agreements and take a lead on national negotiations over access to new data sets
- **False alarms** – review options to further reduce the number of false alarms from automatic fire systems which the Service attends
- **Home Safety Assessments** - set up a pilot project to provide a paid-for Home Safety Assessment programme for low risk households

- **Safety Centre** - carry out a feasibility study into the potential of establishing Cheshire's own dedicated Safety Centre for young people, possibly at Lymm

Responding to Emergencies

- **Emergency response programme** – implement the revised crewing of the second fire engine at Runcorn, the new shift system at Macclesfield and start on-call recruitment at Alsager, Penketh, Congleton, Knutsford, Northwich, Stockton Heath and Winsford and review the potential impact of the Service having a presence at the former Redsands Children Centre in Willaston, Nantwich
- **Shift systems** – consider options from staff working groups and implement new arrangements, including the formal start of riding with four firefighters on all fire engines
- **Fleet review** - carry out a detailed review into how the Service's fleet of fire engines should be bought, specified and maintained in the future.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the Service proposed to continue the approach which had been adopted in recent years of taking consultation out to the community and also using events to promote key safety messages and raise general awareness of the Service. It was noted that the formal 12-week consultation period would run from 23 September to 16 December 2013. Emerging issues from the consultation would be presented to Members at the Member Planning Day in November and the Fire Authority meeting on 11 December 2013. A formal report on the outcomes from the consultation programme would be submitted to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 12 February 2014.

The Chief Fire Officer drew Members attention to paragraphs 7 and 10 of the report which reinforced the previous decisions that had been made by Members in February acknowledging the need to review and scrutinise the programme annually through the Authority's risk management processes to ensure proposals still met the organisation's requirements.

The Chief Fire Officer also highlighted a number of paragraphs in the draft IRMP document which reinforced the Authority's commitment to continue to scrutinise the proposals through the annual risk management process. He also commented that the Authority would review Cheshire East Council's draft proposal for emergency services to have a presence at the former Redsands Childrens Centre in Willaston, Nantwich which could affect its existing stations at Crewe and Nantwich.

Members discussed the proposals in the draft IRMP and a Member commented that the proposal for the safety centre should not necessarily be focussed on a specific location. She suggested that further discussions should be held with Members and that the Performance and Overview Committee should be involved in the scrutiny of the Safety Centre project. It was noted that there was an item further on the agenda in respect of acquisition of sites for new fire stations where further discussions on the location of the safety centre could take place.

A Member commented that the Service would need to ensure that the delivery of a paid-for Home Safety Assessment Service for low risk households did not have a detrimental affect upon the targeted Home Safety Assessments to the most vulnerable households.

A Member followed up his previous comments regarding the Annual Report and the wording for proposals affecting Crewe. He drew Members attention to the draft timetable included in the draft IRMP and requested that the wording on the draft timetable in respect of Item 9 (2015-16) be revised and should read 'consider recruiting for On-call staff at Crewe and Ellesmere Port'. He commented that the current wording pre-judged a decision as no decision had been made on crewing arrangements for the second fire appliance at Crewe. A number of Members opposed this view as they had previously agreed this wording and felt that there was a consistent message throughout the documents which made it clear that these proposals would be kept under review.

Members were asked to vote and Councillor Brickhill requested that his vote be recorded. Councillor Brickhill voted against the recommendation.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft Annual Action Plan for 2014-15 be approved for formal internal and external consultation.**

6 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Head of Finance presented this report which sought Members approval for the revised Financial Regulations. The Financial Regulations set the overarching framework within which all of the Authority's financial activity must operate and were a key element of the internal control structure of the Authority.

The regulations were approved by Members in 2006 and were last reviewed in 2009. It was therefore considered timely to review and update the Financial Regulations. It was noted that the Governance and Constitution Committee had considered the revisions to the regulations at its meeting on 27 March 2013. Minor drafting changes had been made prior to submission for approval by the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Financial Regulations be approved.**

7 ACQUISITION OF SITE AND DESIGN AND BUILD OF NEW FIRE STATIONS

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer introduced this report which provided an update for Members on progress made in respect of the programme for the

building of new fire stations. The report also sought the following authorisation from Members:

- (i) To proceed to secure a site in the Penketh area (subject to satisfactory terms being agreed);
- (ii) In principle, to include a safety centre within the planning application for the Lymm site; and,
- (iii) To build in some 'spare capacity' in the new fire stations, where appropriate.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided a summary of the information provided in the report which included updates on the progress made in respect of the M53/M56 site, Penketh and the Safety Centre proposals. An update on joint use proposals and the procurement of construction works was also provided.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Members that this report was supplemented by the report at Item 9 of the agenda and explained that the Press and the Public would be excluded from the meeting during discussions in relation to Item 9 as it contained information relating to the Authority's financial and business affairs. The Authority would move back in to public session to make the decisions set out in the recommendations in the report at Item 7 and the Press and Public would be invited back into the room.

Members had discussed the details about the preferred sites in private session and moved back into public session to consider the recommendations contained within the report.

It was noted that a number of Members commented that more work was required with Members prior to a decision being made regarding the location of the safety centre. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that the business case for the Safety Centre would be scrutinised by Members at the November Planning Day and no decisions had yet been made. The decision to incorporate the safety centre proposal into the design of the Lymm site was a 'desk top' exercise to assist in the identification of potential costs. Members agreed that they would authorise Officers to further develop the safety centre concept but that they wished to review the business case before any decisions on location were made.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the information in this report (and the further information contained in the report at Item 9) be noted;**
- [2] Officers be authorised to proceed to secure the site at Penketh – replacing the site previously approved in April (provided that satisfactory contractual terms can be agreed);**
- [3] Officers be authorised to further develop the safety centre concept; and**

- [4] Officers be authorised to build ‘spare capacity’ into the new fire stations, where appropriate, taking into account the level of interest/commitment from potential joint users and the costs associated with such additional requirements.**

8 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Order 2006, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item of business listed below on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act in the paragraph indicated:

Paragraph

(3) Information relating to the financial or the business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

9 ACQUISITION OF SITE AND DESIGN AND BUILD OF NEW FIRE STATIONS

The ACFO presented the report which provided supplementary information in respect to the report at Item 7 of the agenda.

Members discussed the details of the preferred sites provided in the report and provided feedback to officers on the information contained within it.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the information (and implications) about the sites at Penketh and Lymm be noted when considering the recommendations contained in the report at Item 7.**