



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 22 April 2015 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, 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, D Topping, J Weatherill N Wright and S Wright.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Robin Baker and Ged Small, representatives from Grant Thornton and Tony Cobain, representative from Mersey Internal Audit Agency.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chair informed the Authority that this would be the last Fire Authority meeting for a number of Members who were standing down at the end of their term of office in May 2015. Councillors Brickhill, Tate, Thorley and Topping would all be standing down at the May election and the Chair wished to take this opportunity to thank the Members concerned for their service to the Authority. He also wished to invite them to attend Headquarters on 17th June 2015 for a presentation in recognition of their service on the Authority. Councillor Johnson added thanks to all Members and Officers for their input into the Fire Authority during 2014/15.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A RECORDING OF MEETINGS

The Chair reminded Members that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Brickhill and J Houlbrook.

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 February.

The Chair also drew attention to the large fire at a former nightclub in Warrington last week and thanked the officers involved for their professionalism in dealing with the incident.

D DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

E MINUTES

Members were asked to confirm the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 11 February 2015 and receive, for information, minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee, Governance and Constitution Committee and Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee and notes from the Member Training and Development Group.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] **the Minutes of the meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 11 February 2015 be confirmed as a correct record; and**

- [2] **the Minutes of the following meetings be received:
Performance and Overview Committee – 18 March 2015
Governance and Constitution Committee – 1 April 2015
Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee – 19 March 2015; and
Notes of the Member Training and Development Group – 14 April 2015**

F MATTERS ARISING

PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2014

The Chair of the Performance and Overview Committee wished to draw Members attention to the success of the Cheshire-led campaign which resulted in the passing of legislation in respect of the fitting of smoke alarms in private rented accommodation and wished to congratulate the Officers involved in the campaign. It was noted that there was an item on the agenda to discuss the campaign success and the implications of the implementation of the regulations.

G URGENT BUSINESS TO BE DETERMINED BETWEEN FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS: SECTION 4.72 OF CONSTITUTION

Members were asked to note the decision taken concerning an agreement and lease to allow the installation and operation of electronic communications equipment at Holmes Chapel Fire Station.

2 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN AND UPDATE IN RESPECT OF THE AUTHORITY'S ACCOUNTS FOR 2014-15

The Head of Finance introduced this item and explained that Robin Baker and Ged Small, representatives from Grant Thornton, were in attendance at the meeting to present the External Audit Plan in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2014-15 for Members information.

The External Auditor provided an overview of the content and purpose of the report which was to provide the Authority with a detailed audit plan for the auditing of the Authority's accounts for 2014-15. An Audit Update report was also provided and this outlined progress to date on the 2014-15 audit. The update also covered emerging national issues and noted some challenges that the Authority would face in the coming years. He explained that the report also provided details of the audit fee for this work for 2014-15 which Members were asked to approve.

The External Auditors thanked the Members who attended an informal meeting with them to discuss the Authority's governance arrangements. The Chair commented that it had been useful for Members to have the opportunity to have more informal discussions with the External Auditors around governance.

The Head of Finance drew Members attention to the Government's proposals to bring the timescale for the closedown and audit of 2017-18 accounts forward to the end of July 2018. He explained that this would be a challenge for the Authority and the intention was to revise the closedown timetable from next year to reflect the tighter timescales. This would enable the Authority to identify any problem areas that needed to be addressed before the proposals were formally implemented.

A Member queried whether the changes to the accounting closedown timescales had been identified as a risk on the financial risk register. The Head of Finance responded that he would ensure that this was considered as part of the risk management process.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the External Audit Plan and Audit Update in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2014-15 be noted; and**
- [2] the audit fee of £39,813 for 2014-15 be approved.**

3 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2015-16

The Head of Finance introduced Tony Cobain, a representative from Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) who presented the Internal Audit Plan 2015-16 to Members for approval.

The Internal Auditor provided an overview of the report which contained the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2015-16. He informed Members that the plan had been developed following consideration of the Authority's plans and risk profile and after discussions with the Head of Finance. The Plan had also been considered by the officer's Policy Approval Group. Progress against the Plan would be monitored by the Performance and Overview Committee and any specific issues during the year could be escalated to the Policy Committee.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Internal Audit Plan for 2015-16 be approved.

4 AMENDMENTS TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Head of Finance presented this report which sought Member approval for changes and additions to the Financial Regulations. Governance and Constitution Committee had considered a report at its meeting on 1st April 2015 in which some changes/additions to the regulations were proposed and the Committee made a number of recommendations to the Fire Authority for approval. The Head of Finance provided an overview of the proposed changes and additions to the Financial Regulations which were outlined in the report. The changes were in respect of additions to the sections of the regulations on the Capital Programme, Debtors and Fraud and Irregularity and also the addition of a new section concerned with Reserves.

Members discussed the proposals and a Member asked for assurance that the amendment to allow the Chief Fire Officer and Head of Finance to jointly increase the amount of capital programme by a maximum of £100,000 only be used occasionally, as she felt that items of a capital nature should be planned and therefore included in the programme approved by Members. The Head of Finance confirmed that this would be the case and explained that this discretion would not be used on a regular basis.

Members also requested that the wording in respect of the Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policies should be firmed up to make it clear that all senior Officers were required to be familiar with these policies.

RESOLVED That:

[1] the changes/additions to the Financial Regulations set out in the report be approved subject to a minor amendment to the wording in respect of the Anti-Fraud and Bribery policies to clarify the responsibility of senior officers.

5 DRAFT FIVE YEAR STRATEGY 2015-2020 CONSULTATION UPDATE

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications introduced the report which presented a summary of the feedback and comments received as a result of the 12 week consultation programme over the Fire Authority's draft five year strategy, *Planning for a Safer Cheshire 2015-20*. He explained that copies of the full consultation report had been made available for Members to view in group rooms prior to the meeting and that the report was also available on the Service's website.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that since the initial draft was published in December there had been a number of changes

and developments at local, sub-regional and national level which needed to be reflected in the final version of the Strategy. These included:

- The addition to the National Framework relating to firefighter fitness
- Headline issues highlighted in the Thomas Review of firefighter terms and conditions
- Confirmation that the Authority's campaign on legislation to require the fitting of smoke alarms in all private rented accommodation had led to the introduction of legislation which would take effect from 1st October 2015
- A successful bid, backed by the Fire Authority to deliver a £5 million Cheshire-wide programme to support residents with complex needs
- The formal approval of a new Cheshire day crewing agreement for Congleton, Northwich and Winsford stations.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications informed Members that the main focus of the consultation programme had been to inform and involve the Authority's key partners and stakeholders in establishing how the organisation would tackle the challenges and pressures it faced over the next five years. He also explained that, whilst responses from residents had been encouraged, key elements of the draft strategy had been included in the public perception survey which was carried out in September 2014 and the outcomes of the survey had been fed into the consultation process. He added that the trade unions had been consulted regarding the draft Strategy but no formal responses had been received by the consultation deadline date.

The key aspects of the consultation together with feedback received were highlighted in the report. These covered:

- Maintaining the Cheshire 'footprint' for the future delivery of frontline services
- Collaboration with Cheshire Police and other partners
- Co-responding and preventative health
- Future funding of the Service
- Potential options for the next emergency response review.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications concluded by informing Members that the Strategy would be updated accordingly and a final version would be produced for approval by Members at the Fire Authority meeting in June 2015.

Members discussed the content of the report and a number of issues were raised, specifically in relation to impact of the plans of neighbouring fire authorities on Cheshire. Members expressed concern over the proposed plans in neighbouring areas to close fire stations and further reduce emergency response cover.

A Member commented that the Authority should be cautious in its approach to plans to work with partners to assist in the delivery of services and needed to

ensure that partners provided funding for work that the Service carried out on their behalf.

The Chief Fire Officer provided a brief update on the current proposals that other fire authorities were consulting on and assured Members that any proposals by neighbouring fire authorities would be discussed with Members as part of the IRMP planning process. He added that both opportunities and risks associated with collaborative working would be included in the planning process and subsequent reports.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the outcomes of the consultation, as set out in the report, be noted; and**
- [2] the final draft of *Planning for a Safer Cheshire 2015-20* be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 17th June 2015 for approval.**

6 SMOKE ALARMS IN RENTED HOMES – CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented this report to Members which provided the details of the successful campaign delivered by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service with regard to legislation for the fitting of smoke alarms in private rented homes. He explained that the report provided an overview of the project and campaign journey. It also set out the next steps, including plans to ease the transition for landlords through the distribution of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and a major awareness-raising campaign.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer thanked the Fire Authority Members for their support and thanked the project team for the exceptional work they had carried out over the last two years in support of the campaign. The Chair added that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer's role in the project should also be recognised as he had done an outstanding job in leading the campaign and the success was a credit to Cheshire. Members congratulated Officers on this achievement and wished to place on record their thanks to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the project team for all their hard work.

Members discussed the next steps in the implementation of the regulations and the difficulties in enforcing them. The transitional arrangements were also discussed and the methodology used for the allocation of smoke alarms was queried. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the methodology in relation to the smoke alarm allocation had been based on the 2011 census as the timelines to utilise the funding were very restrictive. He added that the proposed communications campaign would raise awareness and provide guidance to landlords and tenants and the enforcing authority to assist with the implementation and enforcement of the regulations.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the successful outcome of the campaign be noted; and**

- [2] the campaign to raise awareness among landlords and tenants and the plans to distribute smoke alarms given to the sector by DCLG be supported.**

7 PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE HOME SAFETY ASSESSMENT OFFER

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) introduced this report which detailed a proposal to change the current 'universal' offer of Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) to one entirely focused on completing HSAs in homes deemed to be at heightened risk.

The report provided information on the current HSA provision and details of four options which were considered by Members at a Planning Day in September 2014. At the Planning Day Members felt that two options merited further discussion: retaining the 'universal offer', accepting that less vulnerable people would continue to receive the service free of charge; or the option to provide free advice to all, but only complete HSAs in those homes deemed to be at heightened risk. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer recommended that the latter option be approved for the future delivery of HSAs and provided further clarification on the rationale for restricting free HSAs to those most at risk.

A Member asked to be reminded about how the Service determined homes that were deemed to be at heightened risk. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service had evolved its risk analysis and the methodology included a number of factors/weightings. He added that the methodology used in Cheshire was being rolled out to other fire services and the Business Intelligence Manager had been appointed to lead nationally on analytics in recognition of the work carried out in Cheshire to refine the risk analysis. He suggested that a session on this work could be included at a future Members Planning Day to give Members a more detailed insight of the HSA risk analysis work carried out.

RESOLVED That:

- [1] the report be noted; and**
[2] the Service continue to provide free advice for all, but only complete HSAs in those homes deemed to be at heightened risk.

8 'ON THE STREETS' PROJECT FUNDING – ADDITIONAL STAFF

The Head of Prevention and Protection presented the report which sought Member approval for four additional 'On the Streets' sessional youth workers. Members had discussed the positive benefits and impact of the 'On the Streets' programme at the Members' Planning Day in January 2015 and it was requested that a paper be submitted to the Fire Authority to expand the programme to other areas.

The report provided details of the current programme including the staffing resources and the areas where the team had been working over the last twelve

months. Following a review of the current position it was now recommended that four additional staff be appointed to optimise delivery and support the plan to have a team in each unitary areas.

The costs of four additional staff, including on-costs, was £30,000 per annum and it was recommended that for 2015-16 this be funded by a specific reserve created out of the Authority's 2014-15 underspend. Going forward the Authority would need to consider whether it wished to consider a growth item in the base budget for 2016-17, or whether it wished to consider an alternative method of funding such as using Unitary Performance Group funds or other Prevention and Protection reserves.

Members welcomed the proposals and a number of suggestions regarding future funding were discussed including providing some stability to the programme by funding it for a lengthier period. Members proposed that the Authority committed to the additional funding for 5 years but that the source of funding from 2016-17 onwards remained flexible. Members requested that this item be included on the agenda for the next round of Unitary Performance Group meetings. The Chair thanked Councillor Biggin for championing the project and suggested that each UPG should nominate a Member to take this forward within their area.

RESOLVED That:

- [1] the employment of four additional 'On the Streets' staff to expand the project to each unitary area be approved;**
- [2] the additional staffing arrangement be the subject of a five year commitment;**
- [2] the additional costs of £30,000 per annum be funded initially from the 2014-15 budget underspend with further consideration being given to the funding source as part of the 2016/17 budget discussions; and**
- [3] Unitary Performance Groups should discuss the expansion of the 'On the Streets' project and the next steps.**

9 REDESIGNATION OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER POST

The Head of People and Development introduced the report which contained a proposal to change the title of the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to better describe the role carried out by the post holder.

The report provided details of the rationale for this proposal. Members were informed that the roles and responsibilities of the CFO had changed during recent times and, in particular, since the introduction of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012 (the Framework).

Members of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee discussed this issue after the CFO's recent appraisal and supported the submission of a report to seek Fire Authority approval to change the CFO's title to Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. It was felt that that this would

reflect the developing role and responsibilities and align with the requirements of the Framework. It was also noted that a number of Fire Authorities had already approved a similar redesignation of title for their CFO.

A Member queried whether this would mean that the CFO's job description would need to be revised. The Head of People and Development confirmed that the job description would be updated.

RESOLVED That:

- [1] the title of the post of Chief Fire Officer be redesignated to Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive.**