



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 23 April 2014 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, D Brickhill, P Carey, D Flude, P Harris, L Jones, J Joyce, J Leather, 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 Caroline Stead, representatives from Grant Thornton and Tony Cobain, representative from Mersey Internal Audit Agency.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor E Johnson.

B CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

2014 Local Government Chronicle Awards

The Chair congratulated the Service on winning the Business Transformation category at the 2014 Local Government Chronicle Awards. He informed Members that it was a fitting tribute to Evan Morris as he retires from the Service.

Meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and North West Ambulance Service – 15 April 2014

The Chair and the Chief Fire Officer attended a meeting with the PCC and North West Ambulance Service to discuss blue light collaboration. The Chief informed Members that this was the second meeting that had been held and explained that discussions had included the implementation of the community safety programme (that the Service had a lead role in). A more comprehensive update on this work would be provided at a later date.

C DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

D MINUTES

Members were asked to confirm the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 12 February 2014 and receive, for information, minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee and Governance and Constitution Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Minutes of the meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 12 February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record; and**
- [2] the Minutes of the following meetings be received:
Performance and Overview Committee – 26 March 2014; and
Governance and Constitution Committee – 27 February 2014 and
2 April 2014.**

E MATTERS ARISING

GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Governance and Constitution Committee drew Members' attention to the discussions that had been held by the Committee in relation to the Unitary Performance Groups (UPGs). He informed Members that the proposals for UPGs had been discussed with a clear view that the flexibility with which the UPGs currently operated would not be undermined and the ability to act quickly to provide local solutions to local issues would not be lost. The Chief Fire Officer added that there would be an opportunity for Members to discuss the operation of the UPGs at the Members Planning Day in July.

2 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN IN RESPECT OF THE AUTHORITY'S ACCOUNTS FOR 2013-14

The Head of Finance introduced this item and explained that Robin Baker and Caroline Stead, representatives from Grant Thornton, were in attendance at the meeting to present the External Audit Plan in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2013-14 for Members information.

Robin Baker 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 2013-14. He explained that the report also provided details of the audit fee for this work for 2013-14 which Members were asked to approve.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the External Audit Plan in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2013-14 be noted; and**
- [2] the audit fee for 2013-14 be approved.**

3 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2014-15

The Head of Finance introduced Tony Cobain a representative from Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), who was in attendance at the meeting to present the Internal Audit Plan 2014-15 to Members for approval. He explained that MIAA were the new suppliers of internal audit services to the Authority.

Tony Cobain provided an overview of the report which contained the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2014-15 (including an Internal Audit Charter). He informed Members that the plan included proposals for 2015/16 and 2016/17 and explained that the plan was flexible to allow change should the Authority's risk profile alter. 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.

The fees for the Internal Audit service for the next 3 years were highlighted and a Member queried how many days audit work this equated to. Mr Cobain replied that the fee equated to a recurring number of visits and work would be measured on the basis of the quality of the outcomes.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Internal Audit Plan for 2014-15 be approved;

4 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Head of Finance presented this report which notified Members of the changes to the Authority's banking arrangements. He informed Members of the reasons for the changes and explained that Member approval was sought for the appointment of NatWest Bank as the Authority's bank. There was also a formal bank mandate that required the Chair's signature on behalf of the Authority.

RESOLVED That:

**[1] the change to the Authority's banking arrangements be noted;
and**

**[2] the appointment of NatWest Bank as the Authority's bank be
formally approved.**

5 SAFETY CENTRE BID FOR 2015/16 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY TRANSFORMATION AND FULFILLING LIVES: AGEING BETTER FUNDS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced this report which outlined to Members the work being undertaken on a bid for a grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Fire and Rescue Authority Transformation Fund 2015/16 which, if successful, would support the capital

costs of establishing the Safety Centre. The report also included information on work in Cheshire West and Chester, co-ordinated by Age UK Cheshire, on an application for 'FulfillingLives: Ageing Better' funds from the Big Lottery. It also provided an update on the Safety Centre project.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer outlined the bidding process for the transformation funds and detailed Cheshire's bid. Following an appraisal of the bid's prospects Officers believe that a match-funded application was more likely to succeed and this was the proposal put forward. He also informed Members that presentations regarding the Safety Centre and its aims had been provided at Sub-Regional Management Board and Sub-Regional Leaders Board meetings and also to the Police and Crime Commissioner in March and early April. The response was very positive resulting in all these organisations signing a letter supporting the bid and agreeing to enter into further discussions around potential revenue contributions and/or commissioning opportunities. It was noted that RoSPA had also indicated that it would formally support the bid.

Further information was also provided on Cheshire's 'FulfillingLives: Ageing Better' bid and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that officers from the Service and Age UK had identified real potential for the Safety Centre to add significant value to the proposed bid.

An update on the initiation of the project and engagement with partners was provided which included proposals for a Members Sounding Board for the Safety Centre project for Members to consider. It was noted that, initially, this would be an informal arrangement without decision-making powers. Any key decisions required, such as the creation of a separate legal entity, would be submitted to the Fire Authority for determination.

A Member of the Conservative Group clarified the group's position in relation to the Safety Centre. He stated that the group still had reservations about funding but that it would support the project.

Members discussed the membership of the proposed Sounding Board and agreed that it would consist of six Members and reflect the political composition of the Authority. Members also agreed that it would be useful to ensure that the membership included the Finance Member Champions and at least one representative from each of the unitary authorities. Members also commented that they would wish to nominate substitutes for the Sounding Board.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the proposal to pursue a grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government Fire and Rescue Transformation 2015/16 (covering fifty percent of the capital required - £1.95m) be endorsed;**

- [2] the proposal to support the ‘FulfillingLives: Ageing Better’ Bid led by Age UK Cheshire from the Big Lottery Fund be endorsed (the benefit of which will be contingent upon the Safety Centre including interventions aimed at older people and carers); and
- [3] the following Members be appointed to the Sounding Board for the Safety Centre project:

LABOUR (3)	CONSERVATIVE (2)	DEMOCRATIC (1)
Cllr S Nelson (Ch)	Cllr L Jones	Cllr M Biggin
Cllr P Carey	Cllr G Merry	
Cllr C Thorley		
SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS		
Cllr D Flude	Cllr D Topping	Cllr D Brickhill

6 REVISED CONSTITUTION AND OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014

The Chair of the Governance and Constitution Committee introduced this item and explained that it was a culmination of work carried out over the last 12 months between the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Governance and Constitution Committee. He informed Members that the Constitution had been developed to provide a clear and concise set of procedure rules for the Authority. He also commented that the revised Scheme of Delegation covered a number of the day to day decisions made by Officers, not just financial issues and it was important to ensure the document was not too restrictive for Officers.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the detail of the report which sought Members views on the outstanding issues in relation to the Constitution and also Members approval for the adoption of the entire revised Constitution.

The report covered the following areas which needed to be dealt with in order to complete the revision of the Constitution:

Outstanding Actions in Relation to Section 3: Members’ Decision-Making Bodies

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the list of plans, strategies and policies associated with the Fire Authority and the Policy Committee had now been developed and this list was attached as an appendix to the report. Members were asked to note that any future changes/additions to the list would be considered and approved under Procedural Matters at the commencement of the next available Fire Authority meeting.

At the December meeting Members had asked for the wording relating to Unitary Performance Groups (UPGs) to be reviewed. This matter was considered by the Governance and Constitution Committee and soundings were also taken from a number of other Members. A revised form of words, in relation to UPGs, was recommended for inclusion in the Constitution and it was also noted that this had been recognised as an area that required further discussions with Members. As previously mentioned there would be a session on the governance and practice of UPG's at the Members' Planning Day in July to progress these discussions.

Scheme of Delegation for Officers

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained to Members that the proposed scheme contained details of both delegations to and responsibilities of officers and drew Members' attention to a small number of items including the amount up to which the Head of Legal and Democratic Services could settle/defend actions against the Authority. He explained that this figure had been raised from the current figure of £10,000 to £25,000 following discussions with the Governance and Constitution Committee. A Member queried what the average amount for settling/defending an action would be and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that there were actually very few that were above £10,000.

Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

This part of the report dealt with regulations that would shortly be coming into force which had implications that were likely to lead to further changes to the Constitution. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that there were two main elements to be considered. One element related to how 'reporting', as defined in the draft regulations, could be accommodated and it was likely that some kind of protocol would be required. The Cheshire authorities were working together to adopt a consistent approach and were hoping to produce a Cheshire-wide protocol. The other element that would need to be introduced was a mechanism for the publication of certain officer decisions which highlighted the need to ensure that the scheme of delegation for officers was clear, robust and kept up-to-date.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the list of plans, strategies and policies associated with Members' Decision-Making Bodies, which is attached to the report as Appendix 3, be approved;**
- [2] the amended wording relating to Unitary Performance Groups, as set out in paragraph 14 of the report and as recommended by the Governance and Constitution Committee, be approved;**
- [3] the Scheme of Delegation for Officers, attached to the report as Appendix 4, be approved;**

- [4] the entire revised Constitution be adopted with immediate effect;**
- [5] the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make minor drafting changes to the adopted Constitution; and**
- [6] the likely implications for the Authority of the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 be noted.**

7 ACQUISITION OF A SITE FOR THE M53/M56 RESPONSE STATION

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented this report which updated Members on progress on the work to secure a suitable site for the M53/M56 Response Station and sought authority from Members to proceed to secure a site at the end of the M56, subject to satisfactory terms being agreed. The report was supplemented by information contained in the report at agenda item 9 which Members noted.

RESOLVED That:

- [1] the information in this report, and the further information contained in the report at Item 9, be noted; and**
- [2] Officers be authorised to proceed to secure the site at the end of the M56, provided that satisfactory contractual terms can be agreed.**

8 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That

The final item on the agenda was supplementary information in respect of Agenda Item 7 and as Members did not wish to specifically discuss the information contained in the supplementary report there was no requirement to exclude the press and public and the meeting was closed.

9 ACQUISITION OF A SITE FOR THE M53/M56 RESPONSE STATION

The report provided information which related to financial and business affairs which were considered exempt by virtue of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1072. It provided details about a site, the site owner and the anticipated purchase costs of the site.