



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 24 September, 2014 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, D Brickhill, P Carey, D Flude, P Harris, J Houlbrook, E Johnson, L Jones, J Joyce, B Livesley, G Merry, 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 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors H Mundry and D Topping.

B 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 Annual meeting in June. It also included dates for Members diaries for forthcoming events in October and November 2014.

Councillor Flude drew Members' attention to the update provided in relation to the North West Charter Level 1 Review and the positive feedback received. She thanked both Members and officers for their participation in the verification visit and the Democratic Services Team for their input.

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 18 June 2014 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 25 June 2014 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 25 June 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 2 July 2014 be received, for information.

H MINUTES OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 14 July 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 16 July 2014 be received, for information.

J NOTES OF THE MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the meeting of the Member Training and Development Group held on 26 June 2014 be received, for information.

K CHANGES TO APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Following the annual meeting in June 2014 the Conservative group made the following amendments to the appointments to committees:

Joint Consultative Committee

Cllr J Weatherill replaced Cllr E Johnson

Risk Management Board

Cllr E Johnson replaced Cllr J Weatherill

RESOLVED: That

the changes made by the Conservative Group following the Annual Meeting be noted.

L PETITION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Members that a petition had been received (by post) on 4th July 2014 at Fire Service HQ from a resident of Knutsford opposing changes to cover at Knutsford Fire Station.

The petition comprised of signatures from both an electronic and a hand written petition and the total number of signatures was 2069. It was noted that this included 79 signatures from outside Cheshire and there were an additional 24 signatures which did not include an address.

The petitioner was not available to present the petition to the Chair of the Authority.

RESOLVED: That:

[1] the receipt of the Petition in respect of Knutsford Fire Station be noted.

2 PROTOCOL ON REPORTING AT MEETINGS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced this report to Members which explained the effect that the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, which came into force on 5 August 2014, would have on the way that the Authority's meetings operated. The report sought Member approval for a protocol relating to reporting arrangements at meetings and the suggested approach to the audio-recording of meetings. He explained that a document had been issued by DCLG titled "*A guide for the press and public on attending and reporting meetings of local government*" and drew Members attention to paragraph 8 of the report which provided a summary of information contained in the guide.

Governance and Constitution Committee had discussed the new requirements at its meeting on 16 July 2014 and made a recommendation to the Fire Authority to adopt a protocol on reporting at meetings. The Committee also felt that, if a member of public intended to record one of the Authority's meetings, the Authority should ensure that it made its own audio recording. The existing microphone system already had this facility and could be used to audio record meetings at minimal additional cost.

Members discussed the new regulations and a number of Members expressed the view that all of the Authority's Member meetings that were held in public should be audio recorded as a matter of course. A Member queried whether the Authority would charge if a copy of the audio recording was requested. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services commented that he was not sure if charging was possible (due to Freedom of Information obligations) nor if it would be worthwhile as the cost of providing a copy should be minimal. However he confirmed that he would consider this point.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Protocol on Reporting at Meetings contained in the Appendix to the report be adopted and included in the Authority's Constitution;

- [2] all Member decision-making meetings that were held in public should be audio-recorded; and**
- [3] the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make such amendments to the Constitution as are necessary to give effect to these decisions**

3 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2013-14

The Head of Finance introduced this item and explained that Robin Baker, Engagement Lead and Caroline Stead, Audit Manager, representatives from Grant Thornton, were in attendance at the meeting to present the Audit Findings Report 2013-14 for Members' consideration.

Robin Baker (the Auditor) 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 2014. He explained that the External Auditor was required to report the audit findings under the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice.

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. He provided further detail on one of the risks identified in relation to the revaluation of the Authority's fire stations. He explained that the valuation had resulted in an £8m increase in the value of the Authority's property portfolio and there was a recommendation that an effective mechanism be put in place for keeping the value of assets up to date between formal valuations which management had accepted.

The Auditor confirmed that an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements would be issued together with an unqualified value for money (vfm) conclusion in respect of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2014. The Auditor informed Members that the work on the vfm conclusion had highlighted that the Authority had well established arrangements for the cycle of operational planning which clearly linked to its medium term financial plan and it was delivering on planned savings.

The Auditor thanked both his team at Grant Thornton and the Service's Finance Team for all their hard work and the co-operation received during the audit. The Chair of the Fire Authority thanked Grant Thornton for the report and the Head of Finance and his team for all their hard work in securing a positive outcome to the audit.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the content of the Audit Findings Report 2013-14 be approved.**

4 2013-14 FINAL ACCOUNTS

The Head of Finance presented the 2013-14 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 of £809k against the revised budget of £43,819k. The mid-year review and third quarter review positions had previously been reported to Members, and had identified underspends of £707k and £758k respectively. 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 the Emergency Response Programme relied upon the Authority's ability to smooth anticipated financial peaks and troughs, for which the reserves were essential. It was recommended that all the underspends, including the £809k in the final audited accounts, should be transferred to the IRMP reserve.

The Head of Finance explained that the report provided information on the Authority's balance sheet which showed a significant liability of £445,745k 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 and therefore did not represent an immediate call on resources. The external Auditor added that although this was a large net liability it was the same for all Fire & Rescue Services and the majority of Local Authorities. In the context of the Authority remaining a going concern, reassurance was provided by the Government's continuing commitment to make good pension fund deficits.

The reserves position was also highlighted and Members were informed that the General Reserve had a balance of £7,276k which mitigated against the possibility of a significant financial consequence arising in the event of any of the Authority's corporate risks materialising. The Head of Finance drew Members attention to the Community Risk Reduction reserve detailed in paragraph 12 and provided an updated figure for this reserve of £594k. The Emergency Response Programme reserve was £11,001k and he re-iterated that this reserve was a key part of the Service's strategy in delivering future IRMPs.

It was noted that the Authority was required to sign a letter of representation to the external auditors which explained 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 and the Chief Fire Officer.

Members discussed the content of the report and the Finance Member Champions stated that they had been involved in the accounts process and were satisfied with the report.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the 2013-14 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 in 2013-14 to the IRMP reserve be approved; and**
- [4] the signing of the Letter of Representation to the Auditors be approved.**

5 FIRE AND RESCUE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

The Head of Performance, Planning and Communications introduced this report which presented Members with the draft Annual Statement of Assurance for approval to fulfil one of the requirements under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (2012) to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance.

The Head of Performance, Planning and Communications explained that the Authority fulfilled the financial and governance assurance requirements through the process to produce and validate the Annual Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement. The Annual Report also summarised some of these issues as well as providing an account of delivery against each published Integrated Risk Management Plan. The draft statement was presented to Governance and Constitution Committee in July for review prior to its submission to the Fire Authority.

The Statement of Assurance for 2013-14 and all compliance and assurance documentation together with other relevant links and signposts would be published and accessible directly from the Service's website.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Annual Statement of Assurance 2013-14 be approved for publication.**

6 PUBLICATION OF ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

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 2013-14. The draft report incorporated statutory 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. It was noted that, despite recent changes to national guidance, there remained both a statutory duty and an expectation for Fire

Authorities to publish and widely distribute information about its performance and finances.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications added that, from an environmental perspective, the paper used satisfied the requirements of the Forestry Stewardship Council and, from a financial perspective the costs would be met from within existing budgets and equated to 4.4p per head of population. Once approved, an electronic copy of the publication would be published on the Service's website by 30th September and delivery of printed copies to residents would commence on 13th October and was scheduled to be completed within a week.

Members asked if the costs could be included in the publication and also an explanation of the statutory requirements to publish the report to clarify these issues for Members of the public who may query the costs and rationale for the production of this document.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft Annual Report 2013-14 be approved for publication; and**
- [2] information about the costs and justification for publication of the Annual Report be added to it.**

7 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN – DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2015-16 (IRMP12)

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications presented the report which sought Members approval for the IRMP for 2015-16 (IRMP12). The report outlined proposals for the next financial year and also provided an updated timetable for implementation of all of the remainder of the Emergency Response Programme projects. Copies of the draft IRMP12 had been distributed with the agenda.

Members had received updates on the risk analysis carried out for 2015-16 at recent planning days in July and September and a summary of the approach was set out in the draft IRMP12. The main focus of IRMP12 was clearly the emergency response plans, however, there were a number of other issues and proposals which were summarised in the plan under the following key headings:

- Developing the organisation;
- Protecting local communities; and
- Responding to emergencies.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications explained that the draft IRMP contained the latest version of the timetable for delivering the emergency response proposals for 2015-16 through to 2016-17. He informed Members that the recent progress on planning permissions and land purchase had made it possible to firm up some aspects, in particular, the new timetable

clarified both when new stations are due to open and when those with an on-call staffing would be fully operational. This also meant that the expected dates for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port to move to on-call moved back to 2017-18. He drew Members attention to point 2 on the timetable and explained that the arrangements for Heswall were being finalised so the reference to a new fire station at Neston could be removed.

The Authority would continue with its approach 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 29th September to 31st December 2014. Emerging issues from the consultation would be presented to Members at the Member Planning Day in October and the Fire Authority meeting on 10th December 2013. A formal report on the outcomes from the consultation programme would be submitted to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 11th February 2014.

The Chief Fire Officer referred Members back to the External Audit report which had highlighted that the Authority had well established arrangements for the cycle of operational planning which clearly linked to its medium term financial plan and thanked Members for their support and input in this process.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft Annual Action Plan for 2015-16 be approved for formal internal and external consultation.

8 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2014-16

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which sought Members approval for the Member Development Strategy for 2014 to 2016. The Member Training and Development Group (MTDG) had discussed the content and format of the Strategy and the final draft was presented to them in July 2014. The MTDG recommended that the Strategy be submitted to the Fire Authority for approval.

The Strategy for 2014-16 would continue to focus on continuous development and improvement and acknowledged the need to review the provision in light of the impact of changes to the Service and Authority membership. The Authority gained accreditation to level 1 of the North West Charter for Elected Member Development in 2011. North West Employers recommend that an authority should review the Level 1 accreditation every 3 years. Therefore the Strategy included objectives to assist the Authority in maintaining Level 1 through the review process and also objectives carried forward from the 2012-14 Strategy in respect of the attainment of Level 2 of the Charter.

The Chair of the Member Training and Development Group thanked Members for their input and engagement with the Authority's Member Development

activities. The Chair of the Authority added his thanks to Members for their participation and commented that North West Employers had been very impressed with Members and the Member Development programme when they carried out their recent verification visit in relation to the Level 1 review.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft Member Development Strategy 2014-16 be approved .

9 ADDITION TO THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014-15: PURCHASE OF CADET VANS

The Head of Finance introduced the report which sought Member approval for an addition to the Capital Programme to enable the replacement of six cadet vans. He explained that the Service's Budget Management Board had considered a request to purchase the replacement cadet vans as they were reaching an age where it was more cost-effective to replace them. Budget had been identified from which to fund the purchase so it had been agreed to bring this expenditure forward to start in 2014-15.

BMB approved the proposal to spend £72k with a £4k contingency in total over the current and next two financial years, funded by contributions from revenue or reserves. As the expenditure was capital in nature Members approval was also required to increase the capital programme.

RESOLVED: That

[1] an addition of £72k and a £4k contingency to the capital programme be approved to fund the purchase of six cadet vans.