



MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on Wednesday 30 January 2013 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors J Joyce (Chair), L Jones, J Kerr-Brown, J Leather, G Merry, B Rudd and D Topping.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors D Brickhill, S Nelson and C Thorley.

B DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members interests.

The Monitoring Officer provided guidance for Members in respect of Items 2 and 3 on the agenda. He explained that, whilst he believed that Members would (if they owned a property within the area covered by the Fire Authority) have a disclosable pecuniary interest in the Budget item when they determined the precept at the Fire Authority, he did not believe that there was a need to disclose such an interest at the Policy Committee meeting as they were not being asked to make any recommendations to the Fire Authority.

He also explained that he had written to all Members regarding the position concerning Members' Interests and intended to seek specific dispensations from Governance and Constitution Committee prior to the Fire Authority meeting.

C MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That

the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 14 November 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

E NOTES OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD

RESOLVED: That

the notes of the Risk Management Board meeting held on 11 December 2012 be received, for information.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

2 2013-14 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Head of Finance presented this report and explained that Members of the Fire Authority were required to approve a budget and set the Council Tax precept for the year commencing 1st April 2013. He advised that the Authority must have regard to all relevant factors, which 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 beyond.

He explained that this was the second of three budget reports with the final report being received by the Authority on 13th February 2013. He advised that the report provided an update on the position that was reported to the Fire Authority on 12 December 2012.

The Head of Finance explained that DCLG confirmed the details of the Local Government settlement on 19th December 2012 which roughly confirmed the position set out at the December meeting. There were significant changes in the way that Local Government was to be funded and it was difficult to be definitive about the percentage reductions to the budget. However it would appear that Central Government funding for the Service on a like for like basis had been reduced by 8.9% from 2012-13 to 2013-14 and 6.2% from 2013-14 to 2014-15. He summarised other assumptions that had been made within the Medium Term Financial Plan which included; grant settlement reductions of 8% and 5% for the following years (2015-16 and 2016-17); annual pay inflation of 1.5%; annual non-pay inflation of 2% and delivery of savings of £6-7m being achieved.

The Head of Finance summarised the new arrangements for the Localisation of Council Tax Support and the potential risk and impact to the Authority from the Collection Fund deficits of Council Tax and Business rates. He also explained the Government's plans regarding the Council Tax Freeze grant and the limitations of any increases in Council Tax precept whereby any increases above 2% would require a referendum. The Medium Term Financial Plan, attached as an appendix to the report, had two separate sections. The first section modelled the impact over four years of not taking the freeze grant available but assuming an increase in the Council Tax precept by 1.99%. The second section modelled the impact with the freeze grant. In both cases it was assumed that no further freeze grant would be available from 2015-16 and that, in its absence, the Authority would choose to increase its precept by 1.99%.

The Head of Finance confirmed to Members that the Capital Grant Bid submitted by the Authority to the Government had been successful. The Authority would receive a total Capital Grant of £3.3m per year for 2013-14 and 2014-15. This included the capital grant allocated based on the formula used previously.

He concluded that the budget setting process was being undertaken at a time of serious financial challenges and in an environment of significant changes in the way in which Local Authorities were funded. The Medium Term Financial Plan highlighted the impact of the current situation with the base budget predicted to fall by between £2.5m and £3m and the requirement to make savings of between £6 and £7m. The plan was under constant review in the current economic climate and any changes would be reported to Members in meetings and other forums.

Members discussed the points raised and the uncertainty with regard to the Council Tax Freeze Grant and how long this would be available in future budgets as the alternative option to increase council tax would be built in to the base budget from 2013-14 and beyond.

Members also congratulated the Service on the successful Capital Grant Bid. A Member queried what weight, if any, had been given by Central Government with regard to how the capital would be utilised and the potential for revenue savings. The Head of Finance confirmed that weight had been applied and in his view this had an impact on the success of the bid and the Authority would be accountable to deliver savings.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2013-14 budget and precept be noted.

3 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2013-14 (IRMP10)

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications introduced this report which provided Members with an outline of the key themes which had resulted from the consultation into the Authority's future plans. He advised Members that these themes would be discussed in further detail at the Members Planning Day on 1st February 2013. He confirmed that the consultation programme into the Authority's draft annual action plan for 2013-14 (IRMP10) had been completed as scheduled and that it remained on course to satisfy the Constitution Institute's compliance criteria. He informed Members that the final consultation report would be presented at the Fire Authority meeting on 13th February 2013.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications summarised the headline results on the key issues from the general section. He highlighted the increased number of responses received from the public, staff and stakeholders compared to last year. These figures meant that the Authority could be confident the responses were an accurate reflection of public opinion on both the Service-wide and local issues raised in the Survey. He advised that there had been a good representation which was reflective of the community the Authority covers.

He advised that there was public support for a number of proposals which included the 10 minute response standard and a council tax increase. The responses indicated that a high percentage of the public had no contact with

the Service and therefore had a certain perception about the work of the Service. It was suggested that the Service included information in a council tax leaflet to provide some assurance on how the budget was spent and to raise awareness of the wide range of services provided.

It was noted that the degree of staff support was less than the public response and some reservations had been expressed by staff responding to the consultation.

Key issues for each of the unitary areas were also highlighted and the results of the responses received on a number of options detailed within the survey.

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications concluded by informing Members that a formal response had been received from the FBU for Members consideration and FBU representatives would be attending the Members Planning Day on 1st February 2013 to present their response.

Members expressed their thanks to the team who had delivered the consultation programme and were pleased with the level of responses received and the level of exposure achieved.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the key themes emerging from the consultation on the draft 2013-14 Annual Action Plan (IRMP10) be noted.

ITEM FOR DECISION

4 ICT USAGE AND SECURITY POLICIES

The Head of ICT introduced this report which sought Members' approval for a suite of new and refreshed ICT policies. He explained that the policies provided governance and guidance for staff on the use of the Service's ICT equipment and facilities following the investment that the Fire Authority had made through the ICT programme of change.

He advised Members that the suite of policies fell into two distinct areas: usage and security. They were required for internal governance and to comply with external requirements. He added that a generic Information Security Policy would also be brought to Members at a later date.

The Head of ICT explained that the new policies reflected a change in attitude to the use of ICT systems and the Internet, as technology had continued to evolve and access to the systems increased. He felt confident that the new ICT infrastructure could support the increased usage and it was proposed that the policies would be reviewed after six months by the Head of ICT and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

He summarised the key points of each of the policies, the first four were related to usage of the systems and the subsequent four related to the security of the physical ICT assets and data held on them.

Members commented that the reports were comprehensive and protected the Service, Officers, staff and Members. They felt they were clear and understandable and provided a practical set of guidance on individual's responsibilities.

Members asked if the usage of the systems, particularly the Internet, would be monitored and the Head of ICT confirmed that usage would be monitored and the impact of any increased usage would be considered when the policies were reviewed.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the following ICT Usage and Security policies be approved:
ICT Acceptable Use Policy
Internet Policy
Email Policy
Mobile Phone Policy
Removable Media and Mobile Device Policy
FireLink Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) Information Security Policy
Physical Security Policy
System and Remote Access Policy**
- [2] the Assistant Chief Fire Officer be authorised to arrange implementation of the policies;**
- [3] the effectiveness of the introduction of the policies be reviewed by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer to determine whether they should be confirmed or amended; and**
- [4] the Assistant Chief Fire Officer be authorised to make such minor changes to the policies as necessary as a result of the review referred to above, or generally.**

PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

NONE