



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on  
17 September 2008 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 a.m.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors J Joyce, (in the Chair), Mrs P Booher, R K Polhill, Mrs L Redhead, Mrs M Simon, D Andrews and M Byram

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor A W Hooton, Mrs S Roberts

**PART 1 – MATTERS DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC**

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Station Manager Rowland, who was shadowing Cllr Mrs M Simon to develop political awareness and gain a greater understanding of the role of Members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 16 July 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

**2 PUBLICATION OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Head of Corporate Communications presented a draft of the Authorities Annual Report for 2007-08 to Members, reminding the committee of the Fire Authority's requirement to keeping its residents, businesses and key stakeholders informed about the development of services and policies and performance against its published plans.

Members were informed that the Annual Report would be made available electronically by 30 September and copies would be distributed to all households and businesses in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington during the first week in October.

Members approved the Annual Report for 2007-08 for publication and distribution, which incorporates statutory information on the annual Statement of Accounts together with summary information from the Authority's current Best Value Performance Plan.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Annual Report 2007 – 08 be approved for publication.

### **3 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE LETTER**

The Audit Commission, the external auditors to the Authority, presented Members with the Annual Governance Report for 2007-08.

The Treasurer reported on increased demands on the Audit Commission from the Government and other agencies. However, the continuing and positive relationship between the Authority and the commission would continue to deliver positive results throughout next financial year.

Members commented on difficulties with the quality of Management Information being provided by the current payroll provider, and were assured that the Authority was continuing to work with the company to improve information and data in this area.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Members receive the Report.

### **4 2007-08 FINAL ACCOUNTS**

The Treasurer presented a report to Members which provided an overview of the accounts, which was considered in conjunction with the Annual Governance letter, provided by the external auditors, and considered under the previous item.

The Authority's external auditors reminded Members that the 2007- 08 Mid-Year Review, which reported to the Authority in November 2007, identified a forecast underspend of £643k. Members agreed that this would be reallocated to fund PDG budgets for 2008-09 and to meet the costs of providing additional training and operational resilience, following the tragic events in Warwickshire. Those virements took place, leaving the Authority with a forecast balanced outturn position.

The draft final accounts were presented to the Closure of Accounts Committee on 25 June 2008. Following the virements referred to above, the accounts, which at that time had not been subject to external audit, showed an underspend on the revenue accounts of £269k.

The Authority's external auditor, the Audit Commission, had since undertaken a substantive audit and issued an unqualified opinion. Members noted that the Auditors were satisfied that the accounts reflected fairly the financial position of the Authority.

**RESOLVED:**

That Members receive the report.

**5 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08 AND OUTLOOK FOR 2008/09**

The Treasurer presented a report to Members which provided a review of treasury management activities during the year 2007-08, reports on progress to date during 2008- 09 and which offered an outlook for the remainder of this financial year.

Members were informed that the overall objective of the Authority's treasury management strategy was to minimise the cost of interest charged to the Authority's revenue account, over the medium to long term and maximise interest generated on cash balances. Members noted that this means achieving a good return on short-term lending, consistent with the appropriate levels of liquidity and security of principal, and selecting the most favourable time and loan instruments for taking up long-term borrowing.

**RESOLVED:** That

- [1] the report on treasury management activities for the year 2007-08 be received;
- [2] compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management for the year 2007-08 be noted;
- [3] Members note that the Authority remained within the three statutory borrowing limits at all times during the year 2007-08; and
- [4] the outlook for the year 2008-09 be noted.

**6 REPLACEMENT MOBILISING SYSTEM**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response presented a report to Members which provided further options for continuing with or replacing the Remsdaq mobilising system which, as Members had noted in previous meetings, was coming to the end of its serviceable life. The functionality and continued reliability of the system could no longer be guaranteed and which presented a significant risk to the Authority.

The report provided an overview and assessment of the current mobilising system and recommended that a replacement system to be procured.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response highlighted that a replacement system would ensure the Authority continues to meet its statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and would also provide a compatible system in readiness for the change-over to the Regional Control Centre at a future point in time.

Members were advised of an estimate cost of £500,000, although it was noted the final figure was expected to be less and that funding would be sought from New Burdens Funding from the Government or the Fire Authority's reserves. Where costs were expected to exceed £600,000, it would be a requirement that a further report be brought back to members for consideration and approval.

Members were informed that a new system would provide significant improvements in areas such as call handling as the proposed new system offers much greater functionality.

**RESOLVED:** That

- [1] the report be received;
- [2] approval be given to tender for a new mobilising system; and
- [3] the Chair write to the Minister, on behalf of the Authority, seeking New Burdens Funding for the replacement system.

## **7 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT REWARD SCHEME**

The Government Liaison Officer presented a report to Members which included a draft response to Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation document entitled Local Area Agreement (LAA) Reward Scheme. The consultation set out how a proposed new model for calculating the Performance Reward Grant (PRG) related to LAAs and which asked Local Authorities and partners to comment on the revised approach.

Members noted that the main changes resulting from the proposals would see a reduction in percentage of Capital Funding and increases to the percentage of Revenue Funding. The response to the consultation attached to the report was considered by Members and approved.

**RESOLVED:**

That the formal response to the LAA Reward Scheme consultation document be approved and submitted.

## **8 FIRE SAFETY ORDER – RESPONSIBLE PERSON**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services presented a report which detailed the Governance issues surrounding the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and Fire Authority premises.

Members noted that the Fire Safety Order came into force in 2006 introducing a number of specific responsibilities on Fire Authorities. This paper detailed the specific responsibilities on the Fire Authority to carry out the Fire Risk Assessment and inspections.

Members heard that the Authority in conjunction with the North West Chief Fire Officers Association Prevention and Protection Group had developed a policy which could be applied to all Fire Authority owned and occupied buildings. The policy is to enable the nominated persons to apply the appropriate standard of fire safety within Fire Authority premises. The policy included instruction on the completion of a fire safety risk assessment and a template for the fire risk assessment.

The report set out and clearly separated the role of risk assessor and the advisor and provided a transparent mechanism through which the Authority can ensure full compliance with the order.

**RESOLVED:** That

[1] the Fire Authority devolves responsibility for the carrying out of the risk assessment to the nominated individuals; and

[2] the Scheme of Delegation be amended as detailed in paragraph 11 of the report

## **9 CHESHIRE WEST & CHESTER – LOCAL AREA WORKING CONSULTATION**

The Government Liaison Officer presented a report to Members on a published Consultation by the new unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester and which considered possible boundaries for future area and neighbourhood working; through the creation of Area Programme Boards.

The document illustrated two proposed models for delivering area and neighbourhood working and has been widely consulted on over the past three months.

Members considered both proposals and raised a number of issues in relation to local area boundaries and engagement with the Service at station and unitary performance level. The draft response was considered and approved for submission to West Cheshire and Chester Council.

**RESOLVED:**

That the formal response to the consultation proposal be approved by Members.

**10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING : PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY – CLG CONSULTATION**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services reported to Members on a consultation issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the proposed changes to the membership of the Fire Authority necessitated by the re-organisation of local government in Cheshire.

The report updated Members on responses to that consultation and proposes a formal response from the Authority.

Members noted that much of the content of the consultation had been agreed by the Authority in previous meetings and incorporated dialogue between senior officers and the Government.

Members noted that CLG was required to consult relevant stakeholders on the implications of making amendments to the combination order of the Combined Fire Authority (CFA).

The report advocated early inclusion of the Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Members; giving them observer status at meetings of the Authority and requiring the CFA to seek their views 'when making decisions on precepts and budget requirements for 2009/10'. This aligned totally with the resolution of the Authority at its meeting on 11 June 2008.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services advised Members that the political allocations had been agreed by both unitaries and that names would be provided in October.

**RESOLVED:**

That Members response to the CLG consultation as detailed in be approved for submission.

**11 URGENT BUSINESS AND EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Standing Order 3.31 provides that no matter shall be considered at a meeting of the Fire Authority if it is not specified in the Agenda for the meeting unless the Chairman rules that in his opinion the item should be considered as a matter of urgency and specifies the reasons why it is

urgent. The ruling, including the reasons for urgency, must be recorded in the Minutes of the meeting.

Any matters brought forward under this item which involve the disclosure of exempt information will be considered in Part 2 of the meeting at the end of the business to be transacted.

[1] Urgent Business

There were no issues to be considered under urgent business.

[2] 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 items of business listed below on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item	Paragraph
Update on Insurances	(3) Information relating to Business and Financial affairs of a Third Party
Fireguard Project	(3&4) Information relating to Business and Financial affairs of a Third Party and relating to Industrial Relations
Industrial Relations Update	(4) Information relating to Industrial Relations

## **PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE**

### **11 UPDATE ON INSURANCES**

The Treasurer presented a report to the Members which provided an update on the current insurance arrangements following the recent ruling against the London Authorities Mutual and in light of the Authority's participation in the Fire and Rescue Authorities Mutual (FRAML).

The Treasurer advised Members of the need to look at the commercial markets with regard to the above.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the recommendations as set out in the report be approved.

### **12 FIREGUARD PROJECT**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response presented a report to Members which informed them of progress with regard to the National Fireguard Project. At the time the Authority has only participated in the scoping phase of the project. Members noted that there has been no commitment from the Authority or Officers to take part in the proposed implementation stage of the project.

Members noted Government changes in regard to costs of providing contract cover under contingency circumstances where previously the Armed Forces had been used.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the report be considered and the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

### **13 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS UPDATE**

The Chief Fire Officer presented an update to Members on a number of industrial relations issues arising from the implementation of the IRMP/Corporate Plan or associated issues.

In accordance with the National Industrial Relations Protocol and local arrangements, the Authority had sought to implement its IRMP/Corporate Plan through dialogue with recognised Trade Unions, leading to consensus wherever possible. The **Annex** to this report updated Members on the 'state of play' in implementing the Plan, with specific regard to the consultation and negotiation process.

The report also highlighted a number of current national industrial relations issues.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be received and the highlighted issues be considered.