



MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 10 February, 2010 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, P Booher, J Crockatt, B Crowe, R I Fletcher, J Joyce, B Livesley, G Merry, H Mundry, A Needham, S Nelson, C Oliver, R K Polhill, L Redhead, T Sherlock, M Simon, G Smith, D Topping, J Weatherill and N Wright.

APOLOGIES: Councillors E Johnson, K Musgrave and C Thorley.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Incident Report

Members were provided with the latest incident report. The Chair made particular reference to the recent training exercise 'Withering Heights' and the Service's effective response to the extreme weather.

External Meetings

The Chair gave feedback on external meetings that he had attended which included the Sub-Regional Leaders Meeting and a meeting with Cheshire MP's.

Members queried whether there would be an opportunity for all Members to meet with the Local MPs and Lords. Previously meetings had been held at the Fire Service HQ between FA Members and Cheshire MP's and Members requested that Officers review whether these local meetings with the MP's could be renewed.

Migration Impact Funding

Members were informed that Year 2 funding for the project to improve the safety of migrant communities in Cheshire had been confirmed. There were 7 workers employed through the funding and Members discussed some of the positive initiatives that they had observed as a result of the funding

Community Safety Champion Awards

Members were asked to note that the Service was seeking nominations for the Community Safety Awards which would be held in April and Members were encouraged to nominate any deserving people or organisations.

Achievements

Members were informed that the Service had won another national award for its innovative approach to community safety. CFRS won the 'Innovation in Strategy at a Local Level' category at the E Government Excellence national awards. This was for the for the Service's SPRINGBOARD project that adopted a partnership approach to improving the safety and quality of life for older residents.

Events

Feedback from the two recent conferences held by the Service in respect of the 'Heritage Under Fire' Conference and the 'Working with You' Partnership Conference was provided for Members and the success of both of these events was noted.

The Chair also updated Members on forthcoming events, these included Cheshire Safety Day, Members Awaydays in July and Fire Service College Weekend dates for 2010.

B DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTEREST

There were no declarations of Members interests

C MINUTES

A Member requested that the minutes of all meetings held between CFA meetings be submitted to the next scheduled CFA meeting so that recommendations from the Committees can be picked up by the Authority at the earliest opportunity. It was recognised that in some cases the minutes from the meetings would be in draft format as they would not have been approved and signed off by the relevant Committee before the next CFA meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Minutes of the meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 9 December 2009 be confirmed as a correct record;
- [2] the Minutes of the following Committee meetings be received:
 - Policy Committee – 18 November 2009 and 20 January 2010
 - Standards Committee – 25 November 2009
 - Performance and Overview Committee – 2 December 2009
 - Staffing Sub-Committee – 9 December 2009
 - Notes of the Members Training and Development Group Meeting – 18 January 2010.

2 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP)/CORPORATE PLAN 2010/2011 - CONSULTATION

The Communications Manager presented the report to Members which provided details of the key elements of the consultation programme and the initial headline findings from the feedback received up until the end of January 2010. It was noted that the formal IRMP consultation period ended on 6 March 2010 and that a full consultation report containing all the feedback and comments received would be presented to the Policy Committee on 17 March 2010.

Key elements of the consultation programme had included:

- A survey with the Service's own Response consultation panel with over 860 members;
- A survey through the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality (CHAWREC) consultation panel;
- Dedicated consultation with the business community;
- Online consultation through the Service's website and Intranet;
- Direct communication with key internal and external stakeholders including representative bodies, local authorities and MPs;
- Eight stakeholder and residents meetings across the four unitary areas; and
- Two additional public meetings had taken place in the Birchwood area regarding the change of shift system at Birchwood Community Fire Station.

The Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update on the specific issues arising from the Birchwood consultation meeting so far. He explained that feedback from the stakeholders would be included in the final report to Policy Committee on 17 March, once all of the Consultation sessions had been complete.

The FBU Secretary was in attendance at the meeting and presented the FBU response to the IRMP 7 consultation. Copies of the FBU response were distributed to Members prior to the meeting.

There were a number of issues raised by Members following the FBU presentation which included further clarity on Cheshire Standards, the FBU national response to Co-responder and average response times for second vehicles. Members requested that the Chief Fire Officer provide a response to the issues raised in the FBU presentation to provide Members with a balanced view.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Policy Committee, at its meeting to be held on 17th March 2010, be granted delegated authority to sign off the final document for publication; and

- [2] the headline targets set out in the appendix to the report be included in the final version of IRMP 7.

3 REVIEW OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME

At the meeting held on 9 December 2009 Members had received the Review of Members Allowances report together with a presentation from the Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel on the Members Allowance Scheme 2009-10 recommendations. Members agreed to defer the report to this meeting to allow them more time to discuss the recommendations.

The Treasurer introduced the report and provided Members with a brief overview of the recommendations. The two main changes were to introduce a Member Champion allowance and allowances for the Group Spokespersons in their capacity as Business Continuity Leads.

Members were content with the majority of the recommendations contained within the report. However although there was an agreement in principle for a Group Spokepersons/Business Continuity allowance further details were sought on their roles and responsibilities before a final decision was made.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Members' Allowances as set out in the report, with the exception of the allowances for Business Continuity Leads, be accepted and implemented;
- [2] the allowance for Business Continuity Leads be approved, in principle, subject to the development of formal Terms of Reference for the role being submitted to April CFA for approval; and
- [3] it be noted that the approval covers the structure of the scheme for a three year period ending in the financial year 2012/13, subject to consideration of increasing allowances by the rate of inflation index RPI(X) year on year and the review of specific Special Responsibility Allowances as detailed in the report.

4 NANTWICH CO-RESPONDER SCHEME : 6 MONTH UPDATE

The Head of Policy, Planning and Resilience presented Members with an update on the Nantwich Co-responder Scheme which went live on 24 August 2009. The scheme provided highly trained and well equipped Fire-Fighters who responded to medical emergencies in their local community in support of the Ambulance Service.

The report provided details of how the scheme operated and the number and types of incidents attended. Dr Mark Forrest, the Service's Medical Director was in attendance at the meeting and provided details of his role and

examples of incidents attended where in his opinion lives had been saved as a result of the intervention of the co-responder.

Members discussed the benefits of the scheme and queried whether there were plans to roll the scheme out into other parts of the County. The Head of Policy Planning & Resilience explained that there would be an evaluation exercise on the pilot scheme in June 2010 which would assist in determining the success of the scheme and also any subsequent roll-out to other areas. However the introduction of the scheme in other parts of the County would be dependant on North West Ambulance Service agreement.

A discussion was held on response times and on whether comparative data with NWSAS response times could be provided for Members. It was noted that it was not within the jurisdiction of the Fire Authority to scrutinise the Ambulance Service.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the continuation of the Nantwich Co-responder pilot until June 2010 be approved; and
- [2] a further paper be submitted to the June 2010 meeting of the Authority to consider the long term future of the scheme.

5 URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR) REVIEW

The Interim Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented a report which had been referred from the Policy Committee and outlined a proposal to Members to consider discontinuing the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team together with the under-pinning partnership arrangements with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS).

MFRS had developed a flexible staffing model and had confirmed that they were now able to provide a 'stand-alone' USAR response and no longer required Cheshire to provide trained personnel to supplement the team.

The report also identified the implications of the proposal for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service in the ongoing maintenance of the International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team which would arise as a consequence of dissolving the USAR team.

Councillor Biggin, following agreement from the Chair, read out a statement he had prepared in opposition to the proposal to remove the USAR team from within CFRS. The Statement included issues over future funding arrangements, training implications, the public's view/perception of the proposals and the lack of information on the implications for the on-going provision of the ISAR team as an independent unit.

The Treasurer explained that, following Merseyside's decision to provide a 'stand-alone' USAR response, CFRS would no longer receive funding to meet the costs and paying USAR allowances to Cheshire staff.

In accordance with Standing Order No 3.53 Members voted on the recommendations contained in the report as follows:

| | | |
|------------------|---------|------------|
| Recommendation 1 | For: 16 | Against: 4 |
| Recommendation 2 | For: 20 | |
| Recommendation 3 | For: 16 | Abstain: 4 |

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the proposal to remove the provision of the Urban Search and Rescue Team from within the Service be approved:
- [2] the proposal to form an agreement with Avon Fire and Rescue Service for a canine partnership be approved; and
- [3] a further paper be submitted to Members to consider the future of the International Search and Rescue (ISAR) capability currently provided by the Service.

6 THIRD QUARTER REVIEW OF SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2009-10

The Director of Finance and Corporate Planning presented the third quarter review of Service and financial performance as at the end of the third quarter of 2009-2010. The paper reported progress against Service plans and financial performance together to provide a holistic view of overall performance.

The report provided an overview of financial performance as at the third quarter and it was noted that, as forecast at the mid-year review stage, Authority managed budgets were forecast to overspend by £162k. The overspend was a result of the low interest rates available for treasury management activities.

The forecast Service underspend had increased to £312k as compared with £195k at the mid-year review stage. This increase was primarily due to the number of vacant posts and Members would be aware that there was a recruitment exercise underway.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Planning informed the Authority that, as previously discussed with Members, there was a requirement for some remedial investment in the ICT infrastructure. It was proposed that Members be asked to approve that the provisional allocation of £130k of the forecast Service underspend be allocated to finance these costs. Subject to the final outturn position, the remainder of the underspend would be used to offset the overspend on the Authority Budgets.

The report also provided updates on Service performance from each of the Service Departments. In addition to the Department specific information there were some key Service-wide performance headlines of note that were outlined for Members:

- The Organisational Assessment, undertaken by the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, had rated Cheshire Fire Authority as 'performing well';
- Within Cheshire there had been only 1 preventable fire death to date. However, caution needed to be applied when dealing with such small numbers (relative to a population of 1m+), as one incident could have a very material impact and given the nature of such tragedies, it was perhaps not appropriate to extrapolate to the year end using such data.
- The Service was on target to achieve over 60,000 Home Safety Assessments in Cheshire during 2009/10. Over 60% of these were being delivered to people over the age of 65.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] progress against Service plans and the forecast financial outturn as at the end of the third-quarter be noted; and
- [2] the provisional allocation of £130k from the Service underspend to fund investment in the ICT infrastructure be approved, subject to Member approval of the business case.

7 2010-11 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Cheshire Fire Authority was required to approve its budget and set the Council Tax precept for the year commencing 1 April 2010. In determining a budget which it considered reasonable, the Authority must have regard to all the relevant factors, including the likely impact of policy options on the achievements of the Service's objectives and on the level of Council Tax.

The Treasurer explained that the report was a culmination of a series of budget reports, Member Awaydays and Officer meetings between October 2009 and January 2010. Throughout that period, Officers had undertaken a series of 'challenge and prioritisation' discussions, building on work begun in the Summer of 2009.

The report provided an overview of the following:

- Funding of the Authority and 2009-10 Budget
- 2010-11 grant settlement and national context
- 2010-11 Council Tax and discount on second homes;
- Efficiencies and savings;
- Revenue proposals;

- Capital programme;
- Medium Term Financial Plan - covering the period to 2013-14;
- Responses to the budget consultation exercise;
- Robustness of estimates and adequacy/strategy for the use of reserves;
- Financial Health Targets;
- Prudential Code;
- Summary 2010-11 budget proposals.

The Treasurer reported on the Medium Term Financial Plan and highlighted that the next few years would likely see very challenging financial circumstances.

A Member queried the staff responses to the budget proposals in respect of the perceived waste of money by some areas of the Service and asked if staff had access to the relevant information to enable them to make informed responses. It was noted that all budget proposals required a business case and were scrutinised by Officers to ensure that they provided value for money.

Members noted that the budget process had been very inclusive and comprehensive. As a result Members felt well able to approve the budget.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be received and the information relevant to the setting of the budget and precept for 2010-11 be noted;
- [2] the 2010-11 revenue budget set out in Table 2 be approved;
- [3] the 2010-11 capital programme set out in paragraph 29 be approved and approval be delegated by the Authority to the Treasurer for determining the most advantageous method of financing;
- [4] the Council Tax for 2010-11 for a Band D equivalent property be set at £66.43, representing an increase of £1.90 (2.94%);
- [5] precepts on Collections Funds be set as follows:-
- | | £ |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Cheshire West and Chester | 8,044,407 |
| Cheshire East | 9,643,713 |
| Halton | 2,537,626 |
| Warrington | 4,626,982 |
| Total | 24,852,728 |
- [6] the 2010-11 budget be financed as set out in Table 2;

- [7] the assessment of the adequacy of reserves and estimates be noted (paragraphs 40-56) and the strategy for managing reserves be approved (Appendix 5);
- [8] the Authority revise its suite of Financial Health Indicators as set out in paragraph 57.
- [9] the Medium Term Financial Plan covering the period to 2013-14 be noted (Appendix 1);
- [10] the Prudential Indicators for the years 2010-11 to 2012-13 as set out in Appendix 7 be approved;
- [11] approval be delegated by the Authority to the Treasurer for altering the mix of borrowing and other long term liabilities within the authorised limit and operational boundary.

8 MONITORING OFFICER

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the report which provided Members with an update on the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer roles within the Service.

Following the Senior Management restructure in 2009 and the departure of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, the role of Monitoring Officer had been split between an Officer employed by another Fire Authority and an 'in-house' Deputy Monitoring Officer who was also one of the Authority's Solicitors.

The 'in-house' Deputy (Head of Legal and Democratic Services) had been successful in securing a Monitoring Officer role in a neighbouring Fire Authority, which offered the opportunity to re-consider the existing structure. The Chief Fire Officer had considered the existing arrangements for discharging the role of Monitoring Officer, which was a statutory requirement under the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act. It was proposed that the current arrangement be revised and a full-time 'in-house' Monitoring Officer should be recruited to the post of Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

Members expressed some concerns on whether there would be a lack of independence with an in-house Monitoring Officer. Members were assured that the Staffing Sub-Committee would be reviewing the job profile as part of the recruitment process and could ensure that the profile reflected the independence of the role.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be received; and

- [2] Members affirm their support for a recruitment exercise for an 'in-house Monitoring Officer.

PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

NONE