



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

PRESENT: Councillors A W Hooton, (in the Chair), Mrs P Booher, H Grange, J Joyce, T Lafferty R K Polhill, and Mrs M Simon.

APOLOGIES: Councillors D Andrews and Mrs S Roberts

PART 1 – MATTERS DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 19 September 2007, be confirmed as a correct record.

2 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2008/09

The Treasurer presented the Draft Budget for 2008/09. It was noted that Cheshire Fire Authority (the Authority) was required to approve the budget and set the Council Tax precept for the financial year commencing 1 April 2008. In reaching a decision Members discussed the relevant factors, including the likely impact of various policy options on the operational Service and on the level of Council Tax.

The report was the third opportunity for Members to consider the budget proposals, initial proposals were considered by the Authority on 5 December 2007. Policy options and a number of financial scenarios were discussed in more detail at a Members Away Day held on 16 January. This built on the work undertaken at a previous Member Workshop held on 31 October 2007. The final Budget report would be presented to the Authority on 13 February.

The Treasurer provided Members with background information on the financial position of the Authority, including an overview of the provisional grant settlements and the national context. The report also referred to the Service's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), efficiencies and savings, the capital programme, reserves and the overall effects on Council Tax.

Members discussed a number of growth proposals with a particular emphasis on those promoting training and resilience. The report proposed a precept increase of 2.8%, which Members, indicated they wished Officers to develop at the January away day.

Members accepted the report and asked officers to work up final proposals based on the discussions for the meeting of the full Authority on 13 February 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2008-09 budget and precept be noted; and
- [2] Members confirmed their intention to develop a budget based on an increase in precept of 2.8% subject to final confirmation of taxbase and collection fund surplus deficit positions.

3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) - VERBAL REPORT

The Chief Fire Officer outlined a number of issues relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Members considered issues relating to operation of the Authority between 2008 and 2009. It was confirmed that the present Authority would continue to exercise its functions until 1 April 2009. Members noted that there might be some further changes to the Membership of the Authority in addition to changes caused by LGR, as a result of local elections in Warrington and Halton.

The main areas of debate focused on the political and constitutional issues for the Fire Authority and organisational implications relating to internal structures, such as Performance Delivery Group Areas. Members asked that further reports setting out all the areas for consideration be brought to the meeting of the Authority on 13 February.

RESOLVED: That

That separate reports relating to political considerations and organisational implications be brought to the meeting of the Authority on 13 February 2008.

4 FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008/11

The Head of Corporate Communications presented a report on the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy. The Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) had issued a draft 10 year Equality & Diversity Strategy for consultation.

Members noted that the objective of the Strategy was to provide a framework for action that would enable the Fire & Rescue Service to tackle current inequalities and, promote equality between different groups in line with legislative requirements. Importantly, it would establish a climate that enabled a supported, diverse workforce to provide a service that is closer to, and has a more effective relationship with the public.

The report included a draft response to the consultation for consideration by Members, which was approved.

The report also highlighted the Authority's achievement in December 2007 in becoming one of the first Fire Authorities to be externally assessed as operating at level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard. Members discussed the feasibility of achieving level 4 of the Standard

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft response contained in the Annex to the report be submitted to Government;
- [2] the Authority's success in being externally assessed as operating at Level 3 of the Local Government Equality standard be noted and relevant officers and Members be congratulated on this achievement; and
- [3] the IRMP5/Corporate Plan include the target of achieving Level 4 of the Local Government Equality Standard by July 2009 and Level 5 in 2010.

5 COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT (CAA) CONSULTATION

The Deputy Chief Officer, Community Risk Reduction presented a report outlining a proposed response to the consultation on the CAA consultation that will replace the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).

The Audit Commission had launched a joint consultation, with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Health Care Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation. The consultation related to arrangements for the new assessment framework, for councils and their partners in England called Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

The consultation set out how the framework would work in practice and how partner organisations, such as the Fire and Rescue Service, might fit into the process. The consultation posed a number of questions for

stakeholders. Relevant departments had contributed to a draft response to the consultation, which Members considered.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the implications of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process and approve the proposed response to the consultation.

6 FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK 2008-11

The Deputy Chief Officer, Emergency Response presented a report which set out the main issues highlighted in a consultation on a new Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for 2008-11. The report advised Members of the contents of the Framework and included a proposed response to the consultation.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provided the statutory authority for the National Framework and the Framework itself set out specific Government priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service as well as setting out requirements for local Fire Authorities.

Members discussed a number of issues contained in the Framework, including new duties for regional management boards and the resilience agenda, and approved the draft response to the consultation.

RESOLVED:

The draft consultation response be considered and approved.

7 A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The Chief Fire Officer presented a report on Government proposals for a National Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) had issued a consultation on the proposal to create a Centre of Excellence, which individual services would be expected to contribute to.

The report proposed supporting and endorsing the response of the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) to the consultation, to serve as the response of this Authority. CFOA supported the need for a national Centre of Excellence. However, they considered that it should take the form of a significantly reorganised central training facility, incorporating the current responsibilities of the college as well as the national development and leadership programmes based around the Fire Service College.

The report asked Members to approve the allocation of £17,500 towards the costs of the new Centre of Excellence a sum that had been negotiated

with CFOA to reflect the amended proposals, as outlined in the consultation response.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Authority endorse and support the response of CFOA to the Consultation (attached as an Annex as the response of the Fire Authority); and
- 2) £17,500 be included in the 2008/09 revenue budget, ring-fenced as the Authority's contribution to the transitional arrangements towards a Centre of Excellence.

8 URGENT BUSINESS AND EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

(1) Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business to be discussed.

(2) Exclusion of the 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 12 A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item	Paragraph
Review of Trade Union Protocol	(4) Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the Authority.

PART 2 – MATTER CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

9 REVIEW OF THE TRADE UNION PROTOCOL

The Head of Human Resources presented a report which asked Members to review a specific element of the Trade Union Protocol. At its meeting on 5 December 2007, the Authority requested that an extended analysis be undertaken into the reasons behind the recommendation to change the facilities afforded to the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU).

At the request of the Chairman the FBU presented the case in support of the current position in the provision of a full time FBU representative. The presentation concentrated on the positive input of the FBU over the past two years and emphasised the commitment of the FBU to working with Management on the implementation of IRMP 5.

Members considered a number of proposals.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] Members considered and noted the extended analysis contained in the Annex to the report;
- [2] Members noted the ACAS guidance that recommended a formula of 1.5 hours per member of a trade union – equal to a 0.4 full time equivalent of an FBU representative;
- [3] Members noted the contribution from the FBU at the meeting; and
- [4] the committee support option 1 as set out below and recommended that the final decision be referred to the meeting of the Fire Authority on 13 February 2008:

“Option 1 – No change is made to the existing time off arrangements for the facility of 1 full time equivalent (FTE) of an FBU representative. In addition, more scrutiny should be given to requests for facility time from other FBU officials, such as the Health and Safety representatives, to ensure better value for tax-payers money.”