



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on 13 February 2008 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors A W Hooton (in the Chair), D T Bateman, Mrs P Booher, M Byram, Mrs N M Dolphin, Mrs E Moore Dutton, R I Fletcher, D W Freear, Grange, B Jones, J Joyce, E Lafferty, D Maguire H Mundry, S Nelson, C Oliver, R Polhill, Mrs M Simon, Mrs L Redhead and Mrs S Roberts.

APOLOGIES: Councillors D Andrews and H Grange

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman of the Fire Authority made the following announcements:

- An IDeA seminar on Local Area Agreements would take place on the rise of the Authority meeting,
- The Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Minister for Communities and Local Government would visit the Service on Friday 14 March,
- The next 'Whatever it Takes' programme at the Lache, Chester would take place between 6-11 April,
- A recruits pass-out ceremony would take place on Wednesday 19 March, starting at 6.30 p.m., and
- A Long Service Good Conduct Award ceremony for staff would be held at Cranage Hall on Friday 14 March.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 5 December 2007, be confirmed as a correct record;
- [2] the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 23 January 2008, be received;
- [3] the issue relating to recommendation 4 of minute 9 be approved by the Authority and the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 31 January 2008, be received; and
- [4] the Minutes of the meeting of the P&O Committee held on 6 February 2008, be received.

2 2008-09 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Treasurer presented the Draft Budget report and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2008 – 09. Members were required to approve the budget and set the Council Tax precept for the financial year commencing 1 April 2008. In determining a budget it considered reasonable, the Authority considered all relevant factors, including the likely impact of policy options on the achievement of the Service's objectives and on the level of Council Tax.

The report was the culmination of a series of budget reports, Member Away Days and Officer Meetings. The first report was received by the Authority on 5 December 2007 and built upon exploratory work undertaken at a Member Workshop on 31 October 2007. Since the Authority meeting on 5 December, a Members Away Day had been held in January, during which Members considered a range of related policy options. Members also took account of the views of staff representatives, who attended the Away Day. A further budget report was considered by Policy Committee on 30 January 2008.

The report was structured as set out below, and included a full summary of budget proposals. Members also received an overview of feedback from the budget consultation process, which showed overall support for the funding package, especially those related to training and resilience:

- Funding of the Authority and 2007-08 Budget
- 2008-09 financial settlement
- National context including indications of Government policy on Council Tax increases;
- Council Tax – discount on second homes;
- Efficiencies and savings;
- Revenue proposals;
- Capital programme;
- Medium Term Financial Plan covering the four year period to 2011-12;
- Responses to the budget consultation exercise;
- Robustness of estimates and adequacy/strategy for the use of reserves;
- Financial Health Targets;
- Prudential Code;
- Summary 2008-09 budget proposals.

The report proposed a total budget of £40.747m, representing an increase on the budget for 2007-08 of £1.863m. In Council Tax, this represented a Band D equivalent charge of £62.71, an increase of 2.8% (or £1.71) on the 2007-08 charge of £61.00.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be received and the information relevant to the setting of the budget and precept for 2008-09 be noted;
- [2] the 2008-09 revenue budget set (out in Table 2 of the report) be approved;
- [3] the 2008-09 Capital Programme and its method of financing set out in paragraph 35, be approved;
- [4] the Council Tax for 2008-09 for a Band D equivalent property be set at £62.71, representing an increase of £1.71 (2.8%);
- [5] precepts on Collections Funds be set as follows:-

	£
Chester	2,897,233
Congleton	2,213,928
Crewe and Nantwich	2,572,966
Ellesmere Port and Neston	1,730,545
Macclesfield	4,195,351
Vale Royal	2,941,224
Halton	2,368,055
Warrington	4,332,384
Total	23,251,686
- [6] the 2008-09 budget be financed as set out in Table 2;
- [7] the assessment of the adequacy of reserves and estimates be noted (paragraphs 42-57) and the strategy for managing reserves be approved;
- [8] the Authority revise their suite of Financial Health Indicators;
- [9] the Medium Term Financial Plan covering the period to 2011-12 be noted;
- [10] the Prudential Indicators for the years 2008-09 to 2010-11 be approved; and
- [11] the delegation of authority to the Treasurer to alter the mix of borrowing and other long term liabilities within the authorised limit and operational boundary be approved.

3 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP)/CORPORATE PLAN 2007/08-CONSULTATION

The Head of Communications presented a report outlining consultation feedback on the draft IRMP5 and Corporate Plan 2007 – 08. The Consultation Process began after the Authority agreed the draft document at its meeting on 5 December 2007.

The Consultation involved a wide-ranging programme and included both internal and external stakeholders, the public and partners.

Key elements of the consultation programme also included:

- a survey with the Service's own 'Response' consultation panel,
- 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, and
- direct communication with key internal and external stakeholders including representative bodies, local authorities and Members of Parliament.

Members noted the positive feedback, from the public, in particular on those policy options relating to operational training and resilience. It was noted that overall, the public and stakeholders were supportive of the Authority's plans for the coming year.

RESOLVED:

That subject to Members' views on the detailed IRMP consultation, the final approval of the IRMP / Corporate Plan 2008 / 09 be delegated to the Policy Committee at its meeting on 12 March, where the full analysis of consultation responses would be presented.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) - POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The report outlined a number of issues relating to the operation of the Fire Authority throughout the 2008-09 transitional year of local government re-organisation in Cheshire.

Members had noted in advance of the meeting, the number and complexity of the implications of LGR and it was therefore agreed that the paper be considered as an information item.

Members received the report and agreed to reconsider the issues for decision at the meeting of the Authority on 16 April 2008.

RESOLVED:

That resolution of the issues relating to the political implications of Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) be postponed until the Authority meeting on 16 April 2008.

5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) – ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response, presented a report on the operational implications of LGR. The process provided an opportunity for the Authority to review its Performance Delivery Group (PDG) arrangements. The report recommended a move from the current 8 areas to 4. These would be co-terminous with the local authority boundaries of Halton and Warrington and the new unitaries of Cheshire East and Cheshire West (in place from 1 April 2009). Members noted that the changes would have a positive impact on partnership working, specifically in relation to Local Area Agreements (LAAs), by aligning the geographical boundaries of local service delivery.

Members also agreed to make changes to the current arrangements that gave PDG Managers responsibility for a particular PDG area as well as a functional specialism. The current situation often produced conflicting priorities and impacted upon local accountability.

The proposals gave Members a further opportunity to build upon the excellent work already delivered in embedding performance management and ensuring effective local co-ordination by moving to 4 dedicated PDG managers.

A number of key drivers for change were considered and a range of options for the implementation of the proposals were identified. Members agreed to delegate the authority to implement the proposals, as soon as the process would allow, to the Chief Fire Officer and the Senior Managers.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] PDG boundaries be restructured so that they are co-terminus with the boundaries of the new unitary authorities of East Cheshire, The City of Chester & West Cheshire and the existing unitary authorities of Halton and Warrington with effect from 1 April 2008;
- [2] further consideration of the managerial and Human Resources implications of implementing this change be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and reported to the Authority at its meeting on the 16 April; and
- [3] the new duties placed on the Authority by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, be noted.

6 MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT- PROCEDURE FOR FILTERING COMPLAINTS

The report presented by the Corporate Support Manager provided information for Members on the arrangements for implementing the local Member Code of Conduct and the proposals for filtering and hearing complaints against Members at the local level.

By 1 April 2008 the Authority will need to have in place a localised process for the investigation and hearing of complaints. This requirement was set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which gained Royal Assent in October 2007.

Members agreed a process for dealing with complaints which was previously discussed at the meeting of the Standards Committee on 23 January 2008. The report proposed using the Monitoring Officer from a neighbouring fire authority to provide a review of the both the filtering and hearing stage of complaints in cases of appeal.

The Government was consulting the detail of the Code and the report proposed a response to the questions posed, based on the views aired at the Standards Committee. In particular, Members focused on the suggestion that the Committee should establish a third subcommittee for the review of the filtering of complaints. Members felt that this was too bureaucratic and agreed that this view be reflected in the response to CLG.

The report also set out other requirements of the Code on Members, such as the need to have an independent Member chair the Standards Committee and to recruit additional independent committee Member to increase capacity. Members were keen to recruit a wider pool of Independent Members to fulfill future work demands. Members assumed that a further report on the arrangements for the Chairmanship of the Committee be considered at the meeting of the Policy Committee in 12 months.

RESOLVED:

- [1] the suggested process for the filtering of complaints be noted and agreed;
- [2] the decision to appoint an interim independent Member to chair the Standards Committee until the June Annual General Meeting be delegated to the Policy Committee on 12 March;
- [3] the requirement and process for recruiting new independent Members to the Standards Committee be noted and agreed; and
- [3] the views of Members to the questions raised in the Government consultation be added to the proposals in the report, and be submitted.

7 INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS ACCREDITATION

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Community Risk Reduction presented a report on the organisation's recognised accreditation with the Institute of Fire Engineers. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service had collaborated with the Institution of Fire Engineers in registering its Fire Protection Officers with the Engineering Council (EC), as qualified Engineering Technicians.

Members noted that the purpose of accreditation was to enable the Inspecting Officers to gain a recognised engineering qualification, in an industry where professional standards were important in ensuring a consistent approach to fire safety in buildings that contained complex engineered solutions.

It was highlighted that Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service were the first Fire Service in the country to achieve the qualification with the Engineering Council.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

8 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.