



MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 15 April, 2009 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 a.m.

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

Also in attendance H Norris (Monitoring Officer) and P Forrester (Audit Commission – Comprehensive Area Assessment Lead)

APOLOGIES:

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cheshire East Mayor

The Chair gave recognition to Councillor M Simon and congratulated her on behalf of the Fire Authority for being elected Mayor of Cheshire East.

Cadets: Ghana Trip

It was reported that the cadets were on track for raising the funds however, members were urged to make donations.

Death of Fire Service Personnel

It was noted that Fire Fighter Tony Kane had passed away after a long battle with a terminal illness. The funeral had been arranged to take place on Friday 17 April 2009 at Wharton Church, Winsford, with a service following at Walton Crematorium, Warrington.

North West Regional Control Centre

Members were informed of their invitation to this event which would take place on Monday 27 April 2009 at Lingley Mere Business Park, Warrington. The Regional Control Centre was due to be officially opened by Sadiq Khan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Fire Minister. On conclusion of the opening, there would be a briefing and presentation held within the control

centre for all invited guests that would provide an overview of the project and facility.

Recruits Passing Out

Members were also informed of their invitation to the Pass Out Evening arranged for the intake of trainee Fire Fighters in 2009. The event would take place at Park Royal Hotel, Stretton, Warrington on the evening of Tuesday 5 May 2009. The evening would commence at 7.00pm and would include an awards ceremony and evening meal.

Sandbach Fire Station Open Day

Members were advised that there would be an Open Day at Sandbach Fire Station on Saturday 18 April 2009 between 2pm and 4pm. The open day would include a Cadets Pass Out with certificates being awarded.

Officer Member Buddy Allocations 2009/10

The Buddy System provided an alignment of elected Members to members of the Senior Management Team, to provide information and support on a range of service, policy and organisational issues. Members had been provided with the details of their allocated buddies and were urged to make contact.

Monitoring Officer

Members were notified that Howard Norris had been nominated as the Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 3 April 2009 be received as a correct record subject to the following amendment:
 - (i) Councillor J Weatherill be replaced by Councillor K Musgrave on the Policy Committee;
- [2] Councillors C Oliver, J Joyce and D Topping be nominated to attend the LGA annual conference; and
- [3] the February 2009 Bulletin from the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board be received.

2 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2007-08

The Authority's External Auditors, the Audit Commission, presented an Annual Audit and Inspection Letter relating to the previous years audit. The overall outcome of the Letter was a positive endorsement of the Authority's performance and progress against the modernisation agenda, which confirmed the findings of the Audit Commission's national report 'Rising to the Challenge'.

In respect of the Authority's Financial Reporting the Audit Commission issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial accounts but did comment that an improvement could be made with the quality assurance process. It was recognised that the expectations of the Audit Commission were of the highest standard. The Audit Commission acknowledged that the Authority had improved its financial reporting year on year, to the extent that it was understood that the 2008 Use of Resources Key Line of Enquiry score fell just short of 3 – consistently above minimum requirements performing well.

With regards to Governance arrangements, the letter identified the need to maintain a strong focus on governance arrangements as the new local government framework emerged in Cheshire. Recognising the potential disruption of the Local Government Review a number of additional, exceptional measures would be put in place. In recognition of the impact of the Local Government Review on external relations, the Authority had also ensured that it had engaged with the new Authorities and understood the impact on the partnership environment.

The letter identified that the Authority had clear operational direction, and was well structured to meet its objectives. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Support outlined to Members targets set by the government with regards to frontline employees and female and ethnic minority recruitment. The target set by the government for female recruitment was 15% stretching to 18% where possible by 2013. Objectives for achieving this target were outlined in the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2009/10 (IRMP).

The letter made reference to key actions for Members through three recommendations:

R1: Monitor the progress achieved in strengthening the financial report arrangements;

R2: Monitor the progress made in further improving the diversity and equality within the workforce;

R3: Maintain the strong focus on governance arrangements as the new local government framework in Cheshire emerges.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the 2007-08 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be received.

3 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGIES 2009-10

The Area Manager, Finance and Governance presented Members with the strategy. It was reported that the strategy was a requirement under guidance issued by the Government in March 2004.

The paper gave an overview of the Treasury Management, Investment, and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategies. Additionally the report detailed the risk management procedures in place in respect of the Authority's Treasury Management activities.

There were seven Prudential Indicators applicable to the Authority detailed within the report. The Prudential Indicators demonstrated that the Authority's strategy in relation to capital expenditure and investment was prudent and robust. Additionally, five of the Prudential Indicators confirmed the prudence and sustainability of the Authority's strategy.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy for 2009-10 be approved; and
- [2] the 2009-10 Annual Investment Strategy be formally adopted and a total limit of £8m be approved for non-specified investments.

4 WATER RESCUE POLICY

The Authority's Integrated Risk Management Planning process identified that incidents involving water presented a significant risk to the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington, and to the operational crews who responded to such incidents.

The report reflected on the risks facing local communities, and presented both the business need and a proposal for the Authority to exercise its discretion and undertake water rescue as part of the service's emergency response role.

Members were advised that the paper covered details of the legal position, and financial and risk implications. Additionally the report identified detail on training requirements. There would be three levels of training, level one would be basic training, and this had been done in Chester, Warrington and Knutsford. Levels two and three were more in-depth and would only be available to specific members of staff.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] Members considered the information provided within the paper, in particular the summary of water risk within Cheshire; and
- [2] Members agreed to exercise the Authority's discretion under Section 11 of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 and that the introduction of an "in water" rescue policy for the service be approved.

5 VALUE FOR MONEY STRATEGY

The strategy detailed a number of documents that outlined governance arrangements for the delivery of a local fire and rescue service. Through these key documents, the authority would ensure statutory duties and locally identified objectives were met, in accordance with the local communities.

As a publically funded body, there was a clear expectation that the Authority should deliver value for money (VFM), through the service. The strategy set out how the Authority could ensure it delivered value for money in all its activities. There were a range of qualitative and quantitative measures used by the Authority to measure VFM detailed in the report. Members were advised the purpose of the strategy was to formalise the existing approach.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the strategy be adopted

6 WORKFORCE PLANNING STRATEGY

The strategy was one of a suite of strategies and policies, specifically designed to implement the principles and aspirations of the Services Human Resource Strategy, previously agreed by the Fire Authority in February 2007.

The report sought approval for a comprehensive Workforce Planning Strategy, to be overseen by the Service's Resources Forum and Organisational Development Group. The workforce planning cycle within the strategy would be intrinsically linked to the annual integrated service and budget planning process. The stages within the cycle would be enabled by the introduction of the new Human Resources Information System (H.R.I.S).

RESOLVED: That

[1] the strategy be approved; and

[2] the workforce planning cycle aligns with the integrated service and budget planning process 2010/11 which will begin in early Summer 2009.

7 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

The Area Manager, Corporate Communications presented Members with a new draft Community Empowerment Strategy 2008-11. The existing strategy was fundamental to community engagement and achieving the objective – "Use inclusive consultation and communication to involve local communities in developing services which meet their needs." Members were informed that the updated version reflected some fundamental developments which impacted on the Service's future consultation and engagement work.

Members expressed concerns in respect of communication links with key partners through Local Area Partnerships and Local Area Forums and felt that these had not been detailed as in-depth as required. The need for

differentiation between Area Forums and Community Forums needed to be clearly identified, and Members felt that the strategy should be aligned with the Community Forums. The four areas, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington had in place separate structures for community engagement and the structures developed by the Fire Authority needed to be aligned with the four constituent authority structures.

Members acknowledged that the strategy was viable in principle. However, there needed to be more Member involvement and further scrutiny and development before it was adopted.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] approval of the strategy be deferred; and
- [2] an away day be arranged for Members and Officers to review the draft strategy; and
- [3] the draft strategy be presented to the June Fire Authority Meeting for approval.

8 CO-RESPONDER PILOT PROPOSAL

The report provided Members with a detailed background into the co-responding scheme as well as a number of associated implications and issues.

Members noted that Co-responding was a collaborative scheme between Fire and Rescue Services and Ambulance Services, which aimed to provide the earliest possible first response to life-threatening medical emergencies.

Although Cheshire had consistently mentioned co-responding in a number of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP), and been supportive in principle, the IRMP published on the 1 April 2009 was the first to identify a firm proposal to pilot a scheme in Nantwich. This was intended to be a partnership with the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS).

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the introduction of a pilot co-responder scheme in conjunction with NWAS within the Nantwich area be endorsed;
- [2] a six month review be undertaken and a further paper brought to the Authority; and
- [3] monthly monitoring of the pilot scheme be undertaken

9 FIRE AND RESILIENCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The paper presented Members with an overview of the National Fire and Resilience Programme and the current level of delivery within Cheshire. The programme consisted of three main elements;

- New Dimensions; an enhanced capability to deal with major incidents;
- Firelink; a national secure digital radio network; and
- FiReControl; the instigation of nine interlinked control centres to receive emergency calls and mobilise resources across England.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be noted.

10 CONSULTATION IN RESPECT OF THE TRANSFER OF NEW DIMENSION ASSETS

The paper presented to Members informed them of the publication of Fire & Rescue Service Circular 16/2009 which requested comments on the draft agreement for the transfer of New Dimension assets to the ownership of Fire & Rescue Authorities.

RESOLVED: That

[1] Members respond to the Circular as indicated in paragraph 15 of the report; and

[2] Members approve, in principle, entering into the Transfer of Assets Agreement if CLG is not prepared to amend the Draft Agreement as suggested.

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 12 A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item	Paragraph
No 12 Regional Control Centre – Staffing	(4) Information relating to 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 of the Authority
No 13 Combined Aerial Rescue Pumps	(3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information)

PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

12 REGIONAL CONTROL STAFFING ISSUES

The report presented to Members provided an overview of staffing issues and Human Resource implications in view of the move to a new regional control centre in 2011. In particular, it requested that Members supported a staff transition plan in order that work could proceed and appropriate terms and conditions could be decided for the new facility.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be noted; and
- [2] the staff transition plan be approved.

13 COMBINED AERIAL RESCUE PUMPS

The paper detailed the Authority's intention to introduce two new Combined Aerial Rescue Pumps in addition to the current high reach appliances already in use within Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. The project to develop and introduce the two Combined Aerial Rescue pumps, had encountered a number of manufacturing and financial issues which had arisen primarily due to the current economic climate. These issues had a significant impact on the project being delivered on schedule and within the previously identified budget. The paper, therefore proposed to defer the CARP project.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] Members considered the information in the report; and
- [2] the Combined Aerial Rescue Pump project be deferred in order to re-assess the situation when the financial market settles, and then determine if a more suitable option is available to consider.