



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on
Wednesday 10 December, 2008 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT: Councillors A W Hooton, D T Bateman, Mrs P M Booher, M Byram, Mrs N M Dolphin, R I Fletcher, B Jones, J Joyce, H Mundry, C Oliver, R Polhill, S Nelson, P Byrne, Mrs M Simon, Mrs L Redhead and Mrs S Roberts

APOLOGIES: Councillor D Andrews

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Chair's Announcements

Members Christmas Lunch

Members were reminded that the annual Christmas Lunch, provided by the staff of the restaurant at Headquarters, would take place on the rise of the meeting. The event for both existing and shadow Members would include a festive three course lunch and a short fun quiz.

MPs Briefing Session at Westminster

The Chair informed Members of the recent successful MPs day in London on 26 November where he and the Chief Fire Officer met with MPs and Members of the House of Lords from Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. The event provided a valuable opportunity to brief local parliamentarians on the plans and activities of the Authority, as well as offering an opportunity to discuss future proposals and local, regional and national challenges.

In light of the success of this trip the Chair suggested that in future years it would be more beneficial to take a greater number of Authority Members, from across the political parties, to the event, to give more opportunity to get key messages across and to give local Members an insight into the work of the Chair and Principal Officers in building relationships with national decision makers.

Carol Concert

Members were informed of the success of the Annual Fire and Police Carol Concert which had taken place at Chester Cathedral on Tuesday 2 December. The evening had been well represented by both Members and Officers and it was felt that it had helped to kick off the festive season with a number of excellent performances and rousing carols.

IRMP 6 Stakeholder Events

As part of this year's consultation program for IRMP 6, Members were informed of the Authority's planned series of local stakeholder/resident events within the Unitary Performance Areas led by the Unitary Performance Managers. Members were encouraged to attend as the key representatives of the Service.

Invitations and more information about the events would be sent through to shortly.

All Local Councilors would be invited to these events, along with other key stakeholder organisations and authorities. Members were also informed of a specific consultation event planned to be held in Wilmslow to pick up the proposals to change the duty system at that location. Dates and details were to be advised in the near future.

Authority Prosecution - Control Recycling

Members were asked to note that the Authority had brought its first prosecution against a company for not complying with fire safety regulations. Control Recycling has been fined £20,000 after pleading guilty to five offences. This prosecution would hopefully act as a reminder to other companies of the seriousness of failing to comply with this legislation.

Member Away Day – January 2009

Members were informed that the next Member Away Day, to consider the Authority's budget for 2009-10, had been provisionally booked for the Cottons Hotel, near Knutsford, on the 14 January 2009. Once again Shadow Fire Authority Members from Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester would be invited to the event.

Members were also informed that Trade Union representatives would be invited to attend this event. Members were asked to contact Corporate & Democratic Support if they were unable to attend.

Fire Authority - Farewell Dinner

Members were informed that Cranage Hall had been provisionally booked for the evening of 6 March 2009 for a farewell dinner for the current Fire Authority and their partners. The dinner was being held to formally thank outgoing Members for their service and would be hosted by the Chief, Senior Officers and the Chair. Full details would be sent out to Members early in the New Year.

MINUTES

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services informed Members that an amendment to the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2008 was required and in addition an amendment to the Minutes of the Policy Committee held on Wednesday 12 November.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the amended Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on Wednesday 1 October 2008 be confirmed as a correct record;
- [2] the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance & Overview Committee held on Wednesday 26 November 2008 be received;
- [3] the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday 19 November 2008 be received;
- [4] the amended Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee on Wednesday 12 November 2008 be received;

The Treasurer presented a report, to advise Members of their need to approve a budget and set the Council Tax precept for the financial year commencing 1 April 2009. In reaching a decision which it considered reasonable, the Authority must consider all the relevant factors, including the likely impact of Service policy options on the level of Council Tax.

Members noted that this report was the first of three; the others would be considered by Policy Committee on 28 January 2009 and the final report by the Authority at its meeting on 11 February 2009. In addition, Members were informed that they would be asked to consider a range of policy options for the 2009-10 Budget, building on the exploratory work undertaken at the Member Workshop on 29 October 2008, at their Away Day planned for 14 January 2009.

The Treasurer informed Members that the first part of this report provided background to the financial position of the Authority, outlining the provisional settlement for 2009-10 and referring to the national context. The report also referred to the Medium Term Financial Plan, efficiencies and savings, the capital programme, reserves and the overall effects on Council Tax.

The Treasurer informed Members that at present, subject to confirmation of the funding settlement, an anticipated balanced budget for 2009-10 could be achieved with an increase in Council Tax in the region of 3%.

The Treasurer reported that the Authority was in a strong financial position. In response to comments, Members were reassured that The Authority held a good level of reserves commensurate with the risks facing it and it continues to deliver one of the most ambitious home safety assessment (HSA) programmes in the country.

The Authority had also funded a programme of building refurbishment and new build at headquarters that will provide a modern Service with enhanced training and office facilities to meet the challenges it will face over coming years.

Members accepted the Treasurers report and agreed to take the precept increase of 3% forward to the Away Day on 14 January 2009, as a basis for finalising the budget for February 2009/10.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2009-10 budget and precept be noted; and
- [2] Members provide further guidance as to the range of precept levels to be explored.

3 MID-YEAR REVIEW

The Treasurer presented a paper to Members reporting on the Authority's financial position and performance against key indicators, based on the mid-year position of 2008-09.

Members were informed that both finance and performance against indicators were to be reported firstly at the “service wide” level and then by function and department. The final section of the paper outlined a proposal to utilise the residual revenue under spend which invited Member comment and consideration.

Members were also informed that following consideration of the report, the Performance and Overview Committee would be invited to identify any areas of performance against targets and indicators that might benefit from further scrutiny.

Members were also informed that the residual revenue underspend had arisen from the Service’s retirement profile and a number of vacant posts arising from the Emergency Response department restructure. The report proposed the residual under spend be used for an enhanced training facility at Manchester Airport with a further proportion of the costs being met by Manchester Airport.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services informed Members that a review of workforce planning would be considered by Officers in January and would be brought to Members for consideration in April.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the performance and financial position of the Authority as a whole and of individual functions and departments be noted; and
- [2] the proposal for the use of the forecast underspend be considered.

4 INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE STANDARDS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response presented a report to Members reminding them that in the current Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2008/09 (IRMP 5), the Authority committed to carrying out a fundamental review of the Standards of emergency response, in order to continue to target its resources in the best way to protect local communities.

Members were informed that the current Standards had been in place for five years and had served the Authority well in the transition from nationally set standards to the deployment of resources based on local risk analysis.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members of the Rapid Risk Calculator, profiling risk calculated as an algorithm based on a National level. Members noted that this new calculation enabled risk to be calculated over a five year period and be measured at Ward level and could also be produced for any Unitary Performance Area (UPA) if required.

Members noted that the paper provided the background to how the review was undertaken and outlined the main findings. Members sought and received assurances that the new methodology would provide a more suitable approach to preparing for and responding to a range of risks and incidents.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Authority accept the review; and

[2] the new standards of Emergency Response, which had been based on these findings and which are set out in the IRMP 2009/10 considered elsewhere in the agenda, be approved.

5 DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP) 6/CORPORATE PLAN 2009-10

The Chief Fire Officer presented a report which highlighted the key themes and issues set out in the draft IRMP / Corporate Plan 2009/10 and, sought approval for a proposed timetable for internal and external consultation and publication.

Members noted that a number of the current proposals in IRMP5 were medium to long-term projects, which would continue into 2009/10 and beyond. IRMP6, therefore, concentrated on the Service's response to new and emerging risks and issues.

Members were informed of a number of the key themes, for example, enhanced Home Safety Assessment targets, the development of new training facilities in East Cheshire, and a strong focus on both internal and external customer service.

RESOLVED:

That subject to Member comments, the draft IRMP / Corporate Plan 2009/10 be approved for consultation.

6 COMBINED AERIAL RESCUE PUMP (CARP) PROJECT UPDATE AND ENHANCED BUSINESS CASE

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response presented a presentation of a report which set out a business case for the purchase of a second CARP, the report was provided for Members' consideration and approval. Members noted that at the Away Days held in January and April 2008, the proposals had received support pending a future business case.

Members were assured that all potential methods of purchasing had been thoroughly considered and noted that the Treasurer would also look at more advantageous forms of financing if it was deemed necessary.

RESOLVED:

That the report be considered and the allocation of funds from the IRMP reserve be approved

7 REVISED MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT & PROPOSED OFFICER CODE OF CONDUCT - CONSULTATION

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services presented a report to Members that outlined a number of proposals, set out in a consultation from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG), and proposed a number of minor changes to the Member Code of Conduct and the Standards regime. CLG had decided that the time is now right to review the new Code, after twelve months of operation

Members also noted that the consultation asked for views on proposals to introduce a Code of Conduct, similar in scope to the Member Code, for local government employees.

Members of the Standards Committee at their meeting on 19 November had considered the proposals and their views, along with additional feedback received from the Chair of the Fire Authority, formed the basis of a draft response, which Members were asked to approve.

Members were informed that the first part of the Consultation sought views on proposals to clarify the Code when it applied to Members acting in a non official capacity, as well as proposed changes to the definition of a criminal offence. The consultation document also outlined proposals for the introduction of an officers' code of conduct, which the Authority had previously supported and considered introducing locally in the absence of national guidance.

Members broadly supported the response to the consultation as set out in the Annex and supported proposal to introduce a single code, applicable to all employees of the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be received and the content of the consultation be noted; and

[2] the draft response to the consultation be approved and forwarded to CLG

8 CONSULTATION RESPONSE – REAL PEOPLE, REAL POWER STANDING FOR OFFICE

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services presented a report to Members outlining a number of proposals set out in a Consultation from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The proposals were firstly designed to encourage more and different people to take up specific civil roles by helping remove the time that people have available as a barrier, and secondly, to consider what could be done to encourage participation in governance roles in the third sector.

The Consultation described a number of potential benefits to employers, which could be seen to be as a result of their staff taking part in civic roles, and also outlined the potential costs which could be incurred by employers as a result of an extension to time off entitlements.

Members reviewed the proposals and requested that the draft response be forwarded to them for comment before submission to CLG.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be received and the content of the Consultation be considered; and

- [2] the draft response to the Consultation be adopted as the view of the Authority and submitted to CLG

9 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION [LGA] EQUALITY & DIVERSITY CHARTER FOR FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY MEMBERS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services informed Members of the LGAs commitment to promoting equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service, and establishing political leadership on the issue. In order to make this a reality, Members noted that the LGA was asking all Fire and Rescue Authority Members to sign up to a 5-point charter, to demonstrate their commitment to equality and diversity.

Members were reiterated their achievement in being on of the first Fire Authorities to attain Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard. This had been followed up with a commitment to achieve Level 4 by July 2009. Members noted that political leadership and a hands on approach to steering the equality and diversity agenda was an essential component of the journey towards Level 5 accreditation. It was also seen as a key component of the role of being an elected Member by the Government.

RESOLVED:

That every Member sign the Equality & Diversity Charter for Fire & Rescue Authority Members.

10 CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP

The Chief Fire Officer presented a report to Members outlining the continuing development of the Cheshire and Warrington Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (CWIEP). Members were asked to consider and approve a number of key strategic recommendations in relation to the CWIEP, in particular for the period relating to 1 April 2009 and beyond.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Cheshire and Warrington Improvement and Efficiency Strategy 2008/11 be received and adopted;
- [2] the Authority lobbies for a Fire Authority seat on the sub-regional leaders group in order that the Authority might exercise strategic political influence with regard to the partnership;
- [3] the Authority leads on the transfer agreement from the existing sub regional bodies to CWIEP;
- [4] the Authority leads on the Partnership agreement for CWIEP to apply from 1 April 2009;

- [5] a further report on the Partnership agreement and the expected financial contribution to the partnership by the Authority be presented to a future meeting of the Authority;
- [6] the CWIEP Statement of Collaboration be noted;
- [7] the Authority lobbies for continued financial support for 2009/10 for the Equality and Diversity project which it leads on behalf of the CWIEP partners;
- [8] the draft CWIEP Communications Strategy be approved; and
- [9] that the Authority supports the expansion of the CWIEP to include Cheshire Police and the Primary Care Trusts.

11 URGENT BUSINESS

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.

RESOLVED:

There were no issues to be considered under urgent business