



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on 28 January 2009 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 a.m.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors A W Hooton, (in the Chair), R K Polhill, J Joyce, D Andrew, Mrs L Redhead, Mrs M Simon, Mrs S Roberts and M Byram

**APOLOGIES:** Mrs P Booher

**PART 1 – MATTERS DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC**

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on Wednesday 12 November 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

**2 2009-10 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX & MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Treasurer presented the second of three budget reports to Members, setting out options for the budget and Council Tax precept for 2009-10. In reaching a decision which it considered reasonable, the Authority would have regard to all the relevant factors, including the likely impact of policy options on the Fire and Rescue Service.

Members were advised that following discussions at the Committee, the final budget report proposals would be considered by the Authority on 11 February. Since the Authority meeting on 10 December, when Members considered initial budget proposals, a Member Away Day had been held on 14 January, at which the financial scenario for 2009-10 was considered.

The report proposed a budget based on a precept increase of 2.9% which Members, at their January away day, indicated that they wished Officers to develop. Members agreed that this was still the most favorable option, as it allowed for reserves to be maintained which would be vital in the event of a major incident and given the uncertain funding scenario in the medium term. Members also noted that significant resources had been raised through efficiencies in 2008-09, particularly the proposals for Wilmslow Fire Station and from across a range of back office functions.

Members also agreed that £100,000 be allocated and be divided equally between the four Unitary Performance Areas (UPAs) to create a permanent 'local budget'. It was the view of Members that this small allocation could go a long way in making an impact and encouraging innovation at the local level, but also that improved Member challenge was required to ensure value for money. Members asked that a six and twelve month review of the allocation be brought in 2009-19 for consideration and to influence the 2010-11 budget building process.

**RESOLVED:**

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2009-10 budget and precept be noted;
- [2] Members confirm their intention to develop a budget based on an increase in precept of circa. 2.9%;and
- [3] the local budgets allocations be divided equally between the four Unitary Performance Areas (UPAs) and the arrangement be reviewed in six and twelve month's time.

**3 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & VULNERABLE YOUNG ADULTS POLICY**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Community Risk Reduction presented a report, which informed Members that the Authority's increasing activity and interaction with children and young people through various initiatives increased the risks to the Authority and required more stringent governance arrangements to be put into place.

Members noted that with plans in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to enter 60,000 homes across Cheshire, Warrington & Halton in 2009-10 to conduct Home Safety Assessments (HSA) it was vital that strong policies were in place to protect both the public and staff. The policy presented set out a series of safeguards drawn from national guidance and best practice across the Public and Third Sectors.

Members agreed that there was a need to improve control and accountability and supported the policy and its aims. Members also restated their support for proposals to run criminal records checks on front line staff, also set out in the latest draft IRMP and to incorporate these important issues into their program of training for 2009-10.

**RESOLVED:** That

- [1] The report be received;

- [2] The revised policy and associated procedures be adopted; and
- [3] Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Young Adults be included in the 09/10 Member training programme.

#### **4 SUPPLY & FITTING OF CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Community Risk Reduction presented a report to Members, which considered the business case for front line staff installing and fitting CO detectors, when carrying out Home Safety Assessments (HSA) in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

At the last meeting of the Fire Authority on 10 December 2008, Members requested that Officers investigate the benefits of installing Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors during Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) and the report considered the different types of CO detector available, the costs and limitations of installing these devices.

Members noted that some national work had been undertaken by the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on this issue, which had concluded that detectors would be difficult to target, as those at risk were not easily identifiable and that the units were costly to purchase.

Members approved a proposal to improve the training of staff undertaking HSAs, to incorporate an awareness of Carbon Monoxide and to add the issue to the risk assessment used during that process. Members also asked that officers consider the particular risk posed to caravans and boats from CO, and to incorporate the issue in future targeting.

#### **RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the report be received; and
- [2] In future, HSAs include advice and education regarding carbon monoxide in the home.

#### **5 REPLACEMENT COMMAND MOBILISING SYSTEM – PROGRESS REPORT**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Emergency Response updated Members on the progress of the project to replace the Authority's current command and control mobilising system.

At the meeting of the Policy Committee on 19 September 2008 Members approved a project and funding to replace the existing command and control mobilising system and asked that briefings be brought back to the Authority for information. It had been agreed at that meeting that a substantial report would only be brought to the Authority if the estimated costs exceeded £600,000.

A project team was established and, in conjunction with an external consultant, a detailed specification was drawn up for a replacement system. Members noted that the issue was likely to become more political in the future, with the delays to the Regional Control Centre Project and an anticipated increase in costs.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be received and progress made be noted.

**6 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 12A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item	Paragraph
Role of Monitoring Officer/Secretary and Solicitor to the Fire Authority	(1) Information relating to an Individual

## **PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE**

### **7 ROLE OF MONITORING OFFICER/SECRETARY AND SOLICITOR TO THE FIRE AUTHORITY**

The Chief Fire Officer presented a report, which considered the role of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services and the link to the role of the Authority Monitoring Officer/Secretary and Solicitor.

The Authority noted a report that had been produced by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace), a group used because of their specialist knowledge in this area.

Members agreed to the recommendations set out in the report, to separate the role of Monitoring Officer and Secretary/Solicitor to the authority from the role of Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services. This would now be undertaken through a proper recruitment process.

**RESOLVED:** That

- [1] the independent review of the role and post holder be received; and
- [2] the recommendations set out in the Annex to the report to support the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer to the Fire Authority in their statutory functions be endorsed.