



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on
12 March 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, Mrs S Roberts and Mrs M Simon.

APOLOGIES: Councillors D Andrews

PART 1 – MATTERS DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC

10 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 30 January 2008, be confirmed as a correct record.

11 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2008-09

The report was presented by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services (DCFO CS) and sought the Fire Authority's endorsement for the Fire Authority's Treasury Management Strategy, for the year 2008-09.

The report also sought approval for the Authority's 2008-09 Annual Investment Strategy. This was a requirement under guidance issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, now the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), in March 2004.

The DCFO CS confirmed that the report presented nothing new or radically different to the information presented in previous years. The Prudential borrowing regime capped spending and limited borrowing in line with achieving the objectives of the Authority. Borrowing had been limited to Emergency Response equipment as refurbishments at stations had been self financed.

It was agreed that information would be given to Members at a future meeting on the comparative figures on Fire Authority revenue and balances between government and council tax.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] approval be given to the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy for the year 2008-09; and
- [2] the 2008-09 Annual Investment Strategy (as detailed in Annex 1) be formally adopted and a limit of £8m in total be approved for non-specified investments.

12 PUBLICATION OF INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN / CORPORATE PLAN

The Head of Communications presented the report on the publication of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) / Corporate Plan which sought Members' approval to publish the Authority's Plan.

The final draft had been updated to include responses and amendments following the 10-week consultation period and copies had been circulated with this agenda. A summary of key issues and a comprehensive report featuring all comments received was presented to the Fire Authority on 8 February 2008 which delegated authority to the Policy Committee to authorise publication.

While the formal consultation period on IRMP5 was over, there would be ongoing negotiation and discussion with both local communities and trade unions over the implementation of a number of specific projects.

The Head of Communications confirmed that IRMP was a continuing process and that IRMP 5 picked up activities initiated in IRMP4 for example the restructuring of Community Risk Reduction (presentations on the reviews of Community Safety (CS) and Community Fire Protection (CFP) were taken later on the agenda), and the realignment of Performance Delivery Group PDG areas.

Members discussed the issue of Sprinkles in Schools and it was agreed that a letter be sent to Jim Fitzpatrick

RESOLVED:

That subject to Members' comments, approval be given to publish the IRMP / Corporate Plan 2008/09 by 31 March 2008.

13 NEW MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services introduced the paper on the New Members Code of Conduct. It was confirmed that the Authority will need to have in place a localised process for the investigation and hearing of complaints by 1 April 2008. The requirement was set out in the

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which gained Royal Assent in October 2007.

At the meeting of the Fire Authority on 13 February 2008, Members agreed a process for filtering complaints, which proposed using the monitoring officer from a neighbouring fire authority to provide a review of the both the filtering and hearing stage of complaints.

Members also indicated their intention to appoint additional independent Members to sit on the Committee, to provide further capacity for any increased future workload.

The report sought to address the matter of the appointing an independent Member of the Committee as Chair, which was referred back to the Committee by the Authority meeting on 13 February 2008. The requirement to appoint an Independent Chair to the Committee was set out in the new Act and would come into force on 1 April 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] proposals for appointing Bill Ravenscroft an independent Member to chair the Standards Committee from 1 April be agreed;
- [2] the requirement and process for recruiting new independent Members to the Standards Committee be noted and agreed; and
- [3] the process for filtering of complaints, as agreed at the meeting of the Fire Authority on 13 February 2008, be noted.

14 COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT PILOT APPLICATION

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services introduced the paper on the Comprehensive Area Assessment Pilot Application. As part of the Authority's improvement journey, in December 2007, Members agreed that the Authority pursue re-categorisation of its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) baseline score of "good", awarded in 2005, with a view to achieving 'excellent' status.

In January 2008, the Policy Committee considered the Fire & Rescue Services' response to the Audit Commission's consultation document on its new inspection regime, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which was to commence in April 2009.

In recognition of the Authority's performing strongly assessment history Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service had been approached by the Audit Commission to consider involvement in a CAA pilot.

RESOLVED:

That the Authority apply to the Audit Commission for participation in a CAA pilot during 2008, instead of pursuing re-categorisation within the CPA process

15 COMMUNITY FIRE PROTECTION REVIEW (Presentation)

The Head of Community Fire Protection gave a presentation on the review of the department. The review had been carried out from November 2007 to January 2008. The presentation set out the principal themes and recommended changes to the responsibilities and operating regime of the Community Fire Protection Department to meet the demands of the Communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington in the future.

The following vision was set out in the executive summary presented to Members:

“Our vision for the future of the Community Fire Protection is rooted in maximising the impact of the fire protection skills in the department to deliver our statutory requirements under the Fire Safety Order 2005 and improve the safety for the users of all buildings, and fire-fighters in the event of fire.

“In simple terms we see ourselves as the custodians for the fire safety of all non-domestic premises in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington and, by working with Building Control, Licensing, Environmental Health Departments and others; our aim is to provide the most effective fire prevention framework possible for non domestic building stock anywhere in the UK, for the benefit of the communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.”

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

16 COMMUNITY SAFETY REVIEW (Presentation)

The Head of Community Safety gave a presentation on the review of the department. The presentation set out the principal themes and recommended changes to the responsibilities and operating regime of the Community Safety Department to meet the demands of the Communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington in the future.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

17 CHANGES TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (LGPS) – POLICY ON PART YEAR DEDUCTION OF AMENDED EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services introduced the paper on the changes to the LGPS – Policy on part year deduction of amended employee contributions. The paper informed Members of the changes to the employee pension contributions to the LGPS from 1 April 2008 and to seek approval of a policy on part year amendments.

Members were invited to consider three options and determine the overall policy for the Service. It was agreed that Option 1 would be implemented as the overall policy for the Service. In Option 1 employees would be allocated to a band once per year in respect of communal amendments i.e. to base the banding on the rate of pay applicable at 1 April each year. Therefore, if the national pay award is agreed after 1 April in any one year, amendments to employees contribution bandings will only be made on the following 1 April.

However, the banding will be revised on an individual basis if the employee is promoted or demoted part year with effect from the date of change.

The option chosen creates the least amount of transactions and therefore the least cost in terms of Human Resource administration and payroll provision.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] Members noted the contents of the report; and
- [2] Members endorse policy option 1 outlined in the report as the Service policy for dealing with part year changes to employee pension contributions.