



**MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on 20 January 2010 at Lecture Theatre, FSHQ at 10:00.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors D Topping (Chair), P Booher, J Crockatt, R Fletcher, J Joyce, R Polhill and L Redhead,

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors G Merry, G Smith and J Weatherill

**PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC**

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**A Apologies for Absence**

It was noted that apologies had been received from Councillors G Merry, G Smith and J Weatherill.

**B Declaration of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of Members Interests.

**C Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 18 November 2009**

**RESOLVED:**

**[1] That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on Wednesday 18 November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.**

**ITEMS REQUIRING DISCUSSION / DECISION**

**2 2010-2011 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

The Director of Finance and Corporate Planning presented the report to Members which proposed a budget based on a precept increase of 2.95% and provided background on the financial position of the Authority, the provisional grant settlement and referred to the National Context.

The report also made reference to the Medium Term Financial Plan, efficiencies and savings, the capital programme, reserves and the overall effects of the Council Tax.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Planning explained to Members

that the increase would be rounded down to 2.94% and provided the details of the proposed precept increases from neighbouring Fire Authorities. Members were also asked to note that the budget proposals provided for an inflation rate of 2% but it was likely that the actual rate would exceed this.

A copy of the Reserves Risk Assessment was distributed to Members at the meeting and the Director of Finance and Corporate Planning provided an outline of the risks and both the estimated cost and the managed risk costs. He also explained that the level of reserves available offered some mitigation against the likely difficult financial years following 2010-2011.

Members discussed the proposed budget and the information provided in respect of the Reserves Risk Assessment. Queries were raised on the risk of impositions of New Dimensions liabilities and the current position in respect of Communities and Local Government (CLG) proposals to transfer the New Dimensions assets to Fire Authorities. The CFO clarified the current position in respect of transfer of assets and it was noted that a response was awaited from CLG in respect of asset liabilities.

The FBU representative was also in attendance and made a verbal response to the budget proposals. The FBU commented that the investment in new fire kits and BA equipment was welcomed. However concerns were expressed in respect of the proposed service cuts that were currently being discussed in the national arena. The FBU re-iterated the comments made by Officer previously that the efficiencies already implemented in Cheshire should be taken into consideration when applying any grant reductions.

The FBU asked Members to note that posts had already been reduced in operational areas and the number of non-operational employees had risen from 118 to 249 from the period 2005 to 2008. The FBU representative also commented that fire damage costs were at an all-time high despite the reduction in the number of fires and that the 'value' of firefighters should be quantified. He also requested that any efficiency reviews to identify savings were carried out throughout the Service and not just on the operational side.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2010-11 budget and precept be noted; and**
- [2] the intention to develop a budget based on an increase in precept of circa 2.95%, subject to the final settlement, be confirmed.**

**3 HR STRATEGY**

The Director of People and Organisational Development presented a new HR Strategy for Members consideration. The current HR Strategy had been developed in 2007 and was now out of date. The new Strategy provided a framework against which HR service activity could be planned prioritised and delivered and had been prepared following the relevant consultation with Trade Unions. The HR Member Champion was also consulted.

The revised HR Strategy included the Service's vision for HR which was supported by four strategic objectives:

- To maximise the talent available to CFRS;
- To maximise Leadership, Management and Knowledge Capability;
- To promote and embed a High Performance Culture; and
- To provide a high quality Strategic People (HR) Service to CFRS.

There were ten priority themes that linked through to the objectives and the IRMP priorities.

Members discussed the objectives of the Strategy and how it would interlink with the Service's overall IRMP and budgets. The Director of HR and Organisational Development explained how the links were made and also how the Strategy would be implemented through Departmental Plans down to individual Officer's appraisal objectives.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the HR Strategy be approved.**

**4 COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY : RISK ANALYSIS AND TARGETING POLICY**

The Head of Community Fire Safety presented Members with the Community Fire Safety: Risk Analysis and Targeting Policy. The policy would support the delivery of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's IRMP Community Fire Safety objectives and the Community Fire Safety Strategy.

The policy provided the framework to ensure that Community Fire Safety delivery would be risk-based and intelligence led. The three pillars of the Community Fire Safety Strategy were Fire & Community; Road Safety and Children & Young People. These served to provide structure and focus to the analysis of risk and the targeting of risk reduction activity undertaken by the Service.

Members were informed of the Service's commitment to strengthening its intelligence gathering processes through collaboration with an increasing range of partners within formal data sharing protocols.

A Member raised a query in respect of the Service's involvement in a Road Safety initiative for young people in Wilmslow which was led by Cheshire Police. The Head of Community Fire Safety explained that the Service had worked in partnership with the Police on similar events in the past and he would check whether the Service had been involved in this event.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Community Fire Safety : Risk Analysis and Targeting Policy be approved.**

**5 Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Review**

The Head of Policy, Planning and Resilience presented a report which outlined a proposal to Members to consider discontinuing the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team and the under-pinning partnership arrangements with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS).

MFRS had developed a flexible staffing model and had confirmed that they were now able to provide a 'stand-alone' USAR response and no longer required Cheshire to provide a 'retained' or supporting elements to the team.

The report also identified the implications of the proposal for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service in the ongoing maintenance of the International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team which would arise as a consequence of dissolving the USAR team.

The CFO explained that the International Search and Rescue team would continue to be available for international disasters and be registered on the voluntary national register of responders. The USAR capabilities would also be retained for flood responses (water rescue) and would remain on the National Asset register.

Members discussed the proposal and the following comments/queries were raised:

Further clarification on the funding implications was required;  
Search and Rescue work was an emotive issue and the communications of the changes would need to be handled carefully;  
Re-assurance was required that if there was a major building collapse in Cheshire that CFRS would respond;  
Timing of the report meant that the public perception of the proposal might be negative and this should be taken into consideration.

As there were a number of issues that required clarification and the financial and political implications of any decision needed further consideration it was proposed that the report be referred to the next full Authority meeting to enable all CFA Members to have an input into any

decisions made.

**RESOLVED: That**

**The report be referred to the full Cheshire Fire Authority meeting on 10 February 2010.**

## **6 Staff Satisfaction Survey**

The Communications Manager presented a report on the results of the recent Staff Satisfaction Survey. It was noted that Members had received a presentation on the headline findings from the survey at their recent awayday and the Committee report provided more comprehensive results together with a proposed action plan.

It was noted that full copies of the report were available for Members on request and it was suggested that, as the report was lengthy, copies should be provided on CD.

Members discussed the role of the Performance and Overview Committee in scrutinising and monitoring the action plan. Members felt that it was important that this role was undertaken with regular reports back to the Policy Committee on progress/outcomes. This would assist Members and Officers when reviewing and compiling the next Staff Satisfaction Survey and would also show the Authority's commitment towards improving the work environment for its employees.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the information contained in the report be noted;**
- [2] a detailed action plan be presented to Performance and Overview Committee for approval;**
- [3] Performance and Overview Committee be tasked to monitor the action plan and report back to Policy Committee on a regular basis; and**
- [3] a further Staff Satisfaction Survey be held in 2011/12.**

## **7 Chester Fire Board**

The interim Head of Community Fire Protection was in attendance to present a paper to Members which provided information on the re-formation of Chester Fire Board.

It was reported that Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) had taken a decision to re-form the Fire Board in October 2009 following the lapse of the Board during Local Government Re-organisation. The Board was an advisory group drawn together to oversee and promote strategic fire safety

in Chester as it was considered that there was a 'unique' risk to be considered for heritage buildings in the City.

The report provided information on the Board's membership. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service would provide an advisor at each meeting and other Officers would be invited as and when required. It was noted that two of the Members appointed to the Fire Board by Cheshire West and Chester were also Fire Authority Members.

**RESOLVED: That**

**the content of the report and the progress of Chester Fire Board be noted.**

**8 Cabinet Office Consultation Response – Improving the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure**

The Head of Policy, Planning and Resilience presented a draft response to a consultation document titled 'Improving the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure' for Members approval.

The consultation related to a draft framework document issued by the Cabinet Office seeking views on how the Government might best and most appropriately set standards for resilience of critical infrastructure, and on the potential impact and costs of setting such standards.

It was noted that the closing date for receipt of formal responses was 18 January 2010 which did not allow for the draft responses to be presented to Members for approval. Officers had secured agreement from CLG to reply by 21 January 2010 to allow Members to consider and approve the response.

The Committee discussed the financial implications for the Service which could arise as a result of the publication of the framework and Members felt that specific reference should be made to funding issues in the Authority's response.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**The consultation responses detailed in Annex A be approved and submitted to Cabinet Office, subject to the addition of the issue over funding in the covering letter.**

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

None