



**MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on 1 September 2010 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford**

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

**PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC**

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**A Apologies for Absence**

None

**C Declaration of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of Members Interests.

**D Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 1 September 2010**

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on Wednesday 1 September 2010 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:**

**Item 2 – Audit Opinion Plan 2009-10**

**Paragraph 3 - Delete 'developing a new Control and Command Centre at HQ' and replace with ' replacing the Control and Command system at HQ in October 2009'.**

**ITEMS REQUIRING DISCUSSION / DECISION**

**2 PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT**

The Head of Corporate Communications introduced the report which presented the draft Public Affairs Strategy 2010-2014 to Members, for approval.

The recent consultation exercise for the latest Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) demonstrated that the Fire and Rescue Service operated in an emotive sector where political and community pressures needed to be effectively balanced against sound risk analysis, data collection and intelligence. The Public Affairs Strategy would provide a clear and consistent framework for consultation and engagement with the Service's key stakeholders and would assist in the effective implementation of priorities and objectives set out in future IRMPs.

Members discussed the proposed Strategy and the role of Fire Authority Members in the consultation and engagement process. The Head of Corporate Communications explained that Officers would seek Member approval for individual public affairs and communications plans for key IRMP proposals. These plans would identify the key challenges and issues and key stakeholders relating to the implementation of the project. This would be the point at which Member involvement would be considered and support offered to Members where necessary. Members requested that details of Members' roles and responsibilities be added to the Strategy for clarity.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the issues raised in the report and the Public Affairs Strategy be noted;**
- [2] the roles and responsibilities as set out in the Strategy be noted: and**
- [3] the Public Affairs Strategy 2010-2014 be adopted and implemented, subject to the addition of details of Members' roles and responsibilities.**

### **3 RECRUITMENT TO GREY BOOK POSTS**

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) introduced the report which outlined the Service's proposal to alter the existing approach to the recruitment of Grey Book posts. The report recommended that, with immediate effect, all Grey Book vacancies were advertised internally in the first instance and Members were asked to approve the recommendations contained within the report.

The practice across the Service had been to advertise any Grey Book post vacancies internally and externally simultaneously. However in view of the economic climate and the current financial scenario delivery of significant savings would only be realised through change management and the effective management of resources. The proposed approach to restrict job applications to internal candidates should not result in any lowering of standards but should help facilitate the reduction of employment liabilities and reduce the likelihood of redundancies for the service.

The CFO provided an overview of staff defined as 'Grey Book' together with definitions of Gold Book, White Book and Green Book staff for Members. 'Grey Book' covers operational staff. Members discussed the review process for the proposal and requested that there was regular feedback to Members on the implementation and effectiveness of the change.

**RESOLVED: That, with immediate effect:**

**[1] Any Grey Book posts (with the exception of 'on-call' posts) which become vacant for any reason are advertised internally (within the Service) in the first instance:**

**[2] If internal recruitment fails to deliver a suitable appointment then exceptionally and with the agreement of the relevant Head of Department the vacancy may be advertised externally;**

**[3] The relevant Head of Department will give careful consideration to the status of any advertised position e.g permanent or temporary; and**

**[4] This approach to recruitment to Grey Book posts be subject to consultation with the representative bodies and will be reviewed on a regular basis at the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Panel (JCNP).**

#### **4 PROPOSED RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER : 'LOCAL REFERENDUMS TO VETO EXCESSIVE COUNCIL TAX RISES'**

Cheshire Fire Authority (CFA) had been invited by Communities and Local Government to respond to a consultation paper which proposed a mechanism to give local residents a veto over 'excessive' increases in Council Tax.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Planning introduced the report which identified the key issues within the Consultation paper and proposed a response for Members consideration. He explained that the Fire Authority had a history of setting comparatively low increases in Council Tax and had been well below the retrospectively set capping criteria and therefore it was unlikely that the Service would agree proposals for 'excessive' increases in the Council Tax precept.

Members debated the content of the report and felt that the CFA response should include reference to the fact that the potential costs of holding a referendum across the Service's operating area would effectively act as a cap on the Fire Authority's ability to pursue a Council Tax increase outside the proposed 'principles' even if there was a sound business case for doing so.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the consultation responses detailed in Annex A of the report be approved as Cheshire Fire Authority's response to the consultation document; and**
- [2] the Director of Finance and Corporate Governance sends the responses under a covering letter which highlights the Authority's views on the disproportionate costs that may be incurred if a local referendum was required.**

## **5 'On-Call' Firefighters**

The Head of Corporate Communications introduced this report which provided a brief update on a recent change in the description of what was previously referred to as the Retained Duty System (RDS) for Members to note.

As a result of detailed research carried out by the Department for Communities and Local Government a national recruitment pack had been developed which focused on the use of the term 'on-call' as a more readily understood description for the role of existing RDS staff. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service had agreed to adopt the term and the changes had recently been communicated to all staff.

**RESOLVED: That**

**the changes in the description from Retained Duty System to 'On-call' be noted.**

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

None