



MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on Wednesday 26 January 2011 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors D Topping (Chair), J Crockatt, G Merry, R K Polhill, L Redhead and J Weatherill.

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Booher, Fletcher, Joyce and Smith.

B DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members interests.

C MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2010

RESOLVED: That

the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 17 November 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.

D NOTES OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD

One of the outcomes of the Risk Management Internal Audit, completed in November 2010, was a recommendation that a standing item be placed on the Authority's Policy Committee agenda to complete the loop in terms of reporting to the Authority on the risk management activities undertaken by the Service.

To action this recommendation submission of the notes of the Risk Management Board meetings had been added as a regular item to the Policy Committee agenda. Consequently the notes of the meeting held on 2 December 2010 were submitted to the Policy Committee, for information. It was noted that Councillors Thorley and Musgrave sat on the Risk Management Board and that meetings of the Board alternated between an Officer meeting and an Officer/Member/Auditor meeting.

RESOLVED: That

the notes of the meeting of the Risk Management Board held on 2 December 2010 be received, for information.

2 2011-12 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Treasurer introduced the report which was the second of three budget reports to be presented to Members for consideration. It was noted that Members had already met to develop the Authority's financial plans at Awaydays in July, November and January and were fully briefed on the budget proposals.

The report provided background on the financial position of the Authority, referred to the provisional grant settlement and to the national context. The report also provided information on the Medium Term Financial Plan, efficiencies and savings, the capital programme, reserves and the overall effects on Council Tax.

The Treasurer explained that the report proposed a budget based on no increase in the precept, but on the assumption that the Authority wished to take advantage of the Government's offer of additional grant equivalent to a 2.5% precept increase. Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 28 where a summary of the draft core budget proposals had been produced. The Treasurer updated Members on the current position as the total estimated funding had been revised to £44.3 following further information from constituent authorities after the report had been published. The updated figures will be reflected in the report to be presented to the Fire Authority on 9th February 2011.

Members discussed the Authority's reserves and the need to ensure that there was awareness regarding the importance of holding the current level of reserves to mitigate against identified risks.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that the Medium Term Financial Plan was closely aligned to the Authority's Four Year Strategy 2011-15 (Planning for a Safer Cheshire) and also explained to Members that the impact of the Fire Futures review would also need to be considered as the Authority develops future plans.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2011-12 budget and precept be noted: and**
- [2] the intention to freeze the 2011-12 precept but to take advantage of the additional Council Tax grant available from the Government be confirmed.**

3 HOUSING FIRE SAFETY PROTOCOL

The Group Manager, Community Fire Safety (Policy), introduced the report which presented Members with the Housing Safety Protocol (the protocol), for approval. He explained that the protocol was a key element in the Service's aim to benefit communities in Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Halton and Warrington by setting out agreed standards to help deliver improved safety in relevant types of housing stocks.

The protocol underpinned the Community Fire Protection Strategy and contributed to the Service's objectives. It would also establish the principles and define lead enforcing roles to provide consistency for the joint working arrangements between Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and the four constituent authorities.

Members welcomed the approach being taken and were supportive of the principles of the protocol. Members discussed the types of housing stock covered by the protocol and those properties that currently were a high risk but were difficult to identify as they were likely to be rented accommodation owned by private landlords and accommodation above retail units.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service was working with communities to provide guidance on fire safety and raise awareness among communities in Cheshire.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Housing Fire Safety Protocol be approved subject to any final drafting changes; and

[2] the constituent authorities be asked to sign the protocol to affirm their commitment to fire safety.

PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

NONE