



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 14 December, 2011 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, D Brickhill, B Crowe, D Flude, E Johnson, J Joyce, J Kerr-Brown, J Leather, B Livesley, G Merry, H Mundry, K Musgrave, S Nelson, R K Polhill, L Redhead, B Rudd, T Sherlock, M Simon, A Tate, C Thorley, D Topping and J Weatherill.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Julian Farmer, Audit Commission Representative

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P Campbell.

B CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Achievements

Guardian Public Services Awards - Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service volunteers have triumphed at the Guardian Public Services Award. The eight strong Post Fire Support Team won the coveted Citizenship and Volunteering category in the national newspaper's showcase for innovation and best practice across public sector services. The Chair commented that this was a fantastic achievement by the team and it was commendable that their work had been recognised at a national level.

Prince's Trust Celebrate Success North West 2011 – Two former members of the Crewe Princes Trust team, Siobhan Dawson and Fiona Morris, had been nominated for the Young Achiever of the Year award at this event. Fiona Morris won the award that recognised the achievements of exceptional young people who had been helped by the Prince's Trust. Fiona would be hosting the Prince's Trust Graduation Evening event at Wychwood Park that evening.

Launch of the Kids Count Saving Lives Campaign - Councillor Bill Livesley wished to place his thanks on record to Martin Dowle and Pete Shields who contributed to the launch of this campaign with a presentation on Drive Survive which took place in London with the Transport Minister, Mike Penning.

C DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members interests.

D MINUTES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 21 October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

E MINUTES OF THE BRIGADE MANAGERS PAY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee held on 11 November 2011 be received, for information.

F MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 30 November 2011 be received, for information.

2 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2010-11

A representative from the Audit Commission, the Authority's external auditors, attended the meeting to present the Annual Audit Letter to Members. The Annual Audit Letter provided an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of Cheshire Fire Authority for 2010-11.

The Auditor provided a brief summary of the key messages in the Annual Audit Letter and concluded that the Authority was financially sound and the Authority's strategy set out how it planned to maintain a stable financial position over the next four years. This included £4.8m of savings that were intended to help achieve this whilst maintaining service standards. The Auditor noted that the savings planned for 2013/14 and 2014/15 would be challenging to deliver.

The Auditor explained that the letter also drew attention to the current context in which the Authority operated. The main challenges would be the economic downturn and pressure on the public sector particularly the expected cuts in Government Grants and also the proposed joint control centre (North West Fire Control) whose aim was to deliver an improved service at lower cost than the current arrangements.

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update on the North West Fire Control proposals and informed Members that TUPE consultation had commenced on 5th December 2011. The more detailed consultation with the Unions on Terms and Conditions would begin on 16th December 2011. He also confirmed that the agreement with CLG to transfer the New Dimensions Assets to the Authority had been signed.

Members thanked Paul Vaughan and the Finance Team for the work they had completed which contributed to the positive statement from the Audit Commission.

RESOLVED: That

the 2010-11 Annual Audit Letter be noted.

3 2012-13 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Head of Finance presented the report which was the first of three budget reports to be presented to Members and provided information relevant to the setting of the 2012-13 budget and precept. The report provided background to the financial position of the Authority, referred to the national context and identified some risks that the Authority would need to take into consideration.

The Head of Finance explained that the report recommended that the Authority should accept the Council Tax Grant being offered for 2012-13 but should leave the base budget at a level that did not take it into consideration for spending purposes. This would avoid the need to increase the Authority's precept in 2013-14 just to cover this Grant. He also explained that he was in the process of risk assessing the general reserve against risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register to ensure that the reserves were adequate.

Members discussed the information provided and welcomed the risk analysis that was being undertaken on the Authority's reserves. A Member commented that the current economic climate could lead to an increase in pressure on the Service's resources.

A Member commented that in his view a council tax freeze would lead to bigger financial problems in the future as the Government Council Tax Grant was artificial and the Authority was storing up problems by not increasing the base budget.

A query was raised on the assumption in the report of non-pay inflation of 3% for 2012/13 and Members sought assurance that this figure would be adequate. The Head of Finance explained that the Finance Team did carry out quite an extensive exercise to arrive at the assumptions that were made

and further details on the figures would be provided at the January Planning Day.

The Chief Fire Officer concluded by drawing Members attention to the indicative figures in respect of the reductions to the Revenue Support Grant which would have a significant impact on the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He also explained that the changes to the Capital Grant allocation from 2013-14, whereby a proportion would be allocated on the current basis of population and the remainder through a bidding process, could also impact on the MTFP. He commented that this would lead to an estimated £4million reduction in the Authority's budget over the next four years with further reductions anticipated for future years. The Authority would need to make some difficult decisions and the prospect of compulsory redundancies might need to be considered.

A number of specific policy options for making the required savings would be explored further at the Members Planning Day on 20 January 2012 together with options for raising income through an income and charging policy.

RESOLVED: That

the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2012-13 budget and precept be noted.

4 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2012-13 (IRMP 9)

The Head of Corporate Communications presented the report to Members which provided initial feedback regarding the consultation programme being carried out in respect of the Authority's draft annual action plan for 2012-13 (IRMP 9). The consultation programme would run until 19 December and the information in the report was based upon views and comments received up until the end of November.

The Head of Corporate Communications explained that the enhanced programme of community roadshows and more detailed partner and stakeholder engagement which started with IRMP8 was continuing to pay dividends this year. There had been the largest resident consultation response to date and the report briefly highlighted some of the emerging themes from the feedback received so far. It was noted that the final consultation report containing full details of all responses received due to be presented to the Fire Authority meeting on 8th February 2012.

Members congratulated the Head of Corporate Communications and his team for the improvements made in the consultation process which had seen the response rate double this year.

Members discussed the cancellation of the briefing session for Cheshire MPs and the proposal for the Chief Fire Officer to have one to one discussions with individual MPs. The Head of Corporate Communications commented that it would be more critical to engage with MPs for 2013-14 (IRMP10) as this was likely to contain more challenging proposals to be delivered. This requirement would be considered when developing the consultation programme next year.

RESOLVED: That

the interim feedback on the consultation programme for the draft 2012-13 Annual Action Plan (IRMP 9) be noted.

5 PROPOSAL – LEAD MEMBERS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented this report to Members which contained information about the proposed role of Lead Member (to represent those constituent authorities that were not represented by an appointment to the roles of Chair/Vice-Chair).

The report also provided the details of the consequential changes to the Fire Authority's Constitution aimed at ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities. Members were also asked to note and authorise a change to the Constitution to remove 'Regional Management Board' and replace it with 'North West Fire and Rescue Partnership Board'.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the title of Vice Chair be changed to Deputy Chair;**
- [2] the designation and role of Lead Member as described in paragraphs 12 to 14 and appendices 3 and 4 of the report be introduced;**
- [3] the process for the appointment of Lead Members as described in paragraph 15 of the report be approved;**
- [4] the level of Members allowance for the role of Lead Member be set at £1,000;**
- [5] the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make the necessary changes to the Constitution to give effect to the decisions made; and**
- [6] the change to the Constitution at paragraph 3.118 (role of Chair) to remove 'Regional Management Board' and replace it with 'North West Fire and Rescue Partnership Board' be approved.**

6 PROGRAMME OF MEMBER MEETINGS 2012/13

In accordance with the Authority's Constitution the programme of meetings for the Fire Authority and all other bodies within the political structure, for the following municipal year should be agreed by the Authority no later than its last meeting (December) in each Calendar Year. The report provided details of the proposed programme of meetings for 2012-13 for approval.

RESOLVED: That

the programme of Member meetings for 2012-13, set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved subject to the following amendment:

Members Planning Day scheduled for 24 August 2012 to be moved to early September 2012.

7 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES 2011/12

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which asked Members to agree the level of allowances for the current year. The report included details of the Members Allowance Scheme and current allowances as well as providing some contextual information to assist Members. In his opening remarks he explained that whilst Members clearly had a prejudicial interest in the item there was a specific exemption which allowed them to deal with it.

The current scheme was approved by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 10th February 2010 in line with the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations. The scheme provided for an annual inflationary increase to the allowances based on the prevailing Retail Price Index (excluding mortgage interest), known as RPI (x). This indicator had been used previously and had resulted in measured increases. However, at present if the scheme were followed, this indicator would lead to an increase of 5.3% for 2011-12.

Members had previously considered this issue at the Fire Authority meeting on 9 February 2011 and had agreed to postpone a decision for 2011-12 until later in the year. The report explained that the economic situation remained difficult with considerable pressure on public sector budgets and reminded Members that public sector pay remained frozen for 2011/12. There was also information on the situation in constituent authorities and other Fire Authorities where Members had agreed to make no increases for 2011/12.

RESOLVED: That

the annual inflationary increase will not be applied to Members' Allowances for 2011/12.

8 CUMBRIA CONTROL COLLABORATION

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the report which provided an update on progress since Members had agreed, in principle, to the proposed collaboration with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (Cumbria FRS).

Members had previously considered a report on Cumbria Control at the Fire Authority meeting held on 14 September 2011. However at this point Cumbria County Council's Cabinet had not met to discuss its preferred approach to the collaboration. It met on 15 September 2011 and decided that the Control Room Function would be transferred to Cheshire pending the establishment of the sub-national collaboration.

The report provided details of the change of scope of the project and the proposed agreement governing the relationship of Cheshire and Cumbria FRS's during the life of the project.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the scope of the project be approved; and

[2] Officers be authorised to take all necessary steps to deliver the project.

9 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That

The final item on the agenda was for information only and as Members did not wish to discuss this item there was no requirement to exclude the press and public and the meeting was closed.

10 DECISION RELATING TO THE POST OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING AND SECTION 151 DUTIES (LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972)

This item was submitted to the Fire Authority, for information, in accordance with paragraphs 3.84 to 3.86 of the Constitution – Urgent Business to be determined between Fire Authority meetings.