

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
held on Wednesday, 16 December 2020, at 2.00 pm  
via Microsoft Teams**

**Present**

**Members**

Councillors Adams, Blundell, Carter (Chair), Dee, Hartin, Lavery, Mellings (Vice-Chair), Minnery, Pardy, Price, Roberts and Wynn

**Officers**

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Dave Myers	Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Simon Hardiman	Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
James Walton	Treasurer	
Paul Martin	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Clerk
Guy Williams	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

**External Bodies**

Tracey Onslow	West Mercia Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner	DPCC
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**1 Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Milner, Sahota and Thompson

**2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

Councillors Dee and Pardy declared interests in item 6 on the agenda – Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes – as it included reference to Firefighter Pensions which they are both in receipt of.

**3 Public Questions**

None

**4 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Fire Authority Annual Meeting, held on 14 October 2020, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## 5 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 12 November 2020, be noted and that the recommendation at item 7, as given below, be agreed.

### Item 6 – Financial Performance to September 2020, including Annual Treasury Review 2019/20 and Mid-Year Treasury Review 2020/21

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note the update on capital activities and approve the adjusted total of the scheme for emergency response vehicles;
- d) Note the update on corporate risk;
- e) Note the annual review of treasury activities for 2019/20;
- f) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2020/21; and
- g) Note the mid-year review of treasury activities for 2020/21.

## 6 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 3 December 2020, be noted and that the recommendation at item 13, as given below, be agreed.

### Item 8 – Ethical Framework Matters

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the review of, and agree the proposed amendments to the Members' Code of Conduct; and
- b) Note the review of related procedures and documents, and agree the proposed amendments to
  - Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure;
  - Code of Conduct Complaints Form;
  - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests Form; and
  - Dispensation Procedure

## 7 Review of Financial Regulations

This report reviewed the Fire Authority's Financial Regulations and asked Members to consider and approve the proposed amended version.

The HoF presented this report and explained that it is considered best practice to review the Financial Regulations annually. There are very few changes recommended from this review but there have been some amendments to the guidance on capital and revenue virements. The HoF also clarified that the guidance on imprest accounts only applies to Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service as Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service no longer use these accounts.

Referring to paragraph 1.1.6 which states that every member of staff is expected to read and understand the financial regulations and related documents, the Authority queried if this statement should be extended to include Fire Authority members. This would reflect the importance of the financial regulations in underpinning governance arrangements. The HoF responded that this was a valid point and agreed to amend the regulations accordingly. The amended version will then be made available to Fire Authority Members.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority approve the amended Financial Regulations.

## **8 2021/22 and Later Years Budget Summary**

This report summarised the budgets that are proposed by the Strategy and Resources Committee. The results are put forward to the Fire Authority for approval as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision at the Fire Authority meeting in February 2021.

The HoF presented this report and highlighted the following points regarding the one-year settlement that the Chancellor announced on 25 November 2020:

- The settlement is expected to be protected in real terms
- A flat cash Pension Grant is anticipated
- 75% of Collection Fund losses to be compensated by Government
- Public Sector pay is frozen for 2021/22, the exception being for those who earn under £24,000 per annum
- The Council Tax referendum limit for fire authorities is held at 2%
- A provisional settlement is due to be announced on 17 December. The HoF will circulate the headlines from this to the Fire Authority
- The Service is currently unable to undertake budget forecasting beyond 2021/22

The table on page 2 of the report sets out the figures considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee at their November 2020 meeting. The income figures in this table are based on the assumptions set out in the bullet points on page 3 of the report. A precept increase of £5 or 2%, whichever is higher, is still being pursued by the fire sector and Government Departments. The HoF also emphasised that the funding of the Telford Central project will require some additional borrowing. This will be factored into the revenue budget as the project progresses.

The HoF explained that planning for future years needs to go ahead with caution as Government's Fair Funding mechanism and anticipated reform of the Business Rates model has been postponed to 2022/23. Caution also needs to be applied to the Collection Fund and Council Tax Base figures due to the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is assumed that the deficit in these will be repayable to the constituent authorities, but this is not yet confirmed.

Members commented that it is prudent to cover the cost of the Telford Central project through the Authority's reserves and queried what percentage of the project costs would be covered by borrowing. They also asked for further information on the recent letter from the Fire Minister regarding the levels of reserves held by fire authorities. The HoF explained there is currently £16m held in reserves. £9m of this is allocated to the Telford Central Project which has anticipated costs of £12m. More funding will be allocated through underspends as the project progresses.

It has been 10 years since the Authority undertook borrowing and the current Minimum Revenue Provision is circa 10% but this is moveable. Regarding the letter from the Treasury, a response has been sent to the Minister setting out the Authority's reserve position together with an indication of the capital scheme amount. The Chair added that this Authority has always been prudent in its approach to reserves and this has been made clear in the response to the Fire Minister. The Chair undertook to share the response with Fire Authority Members.

The HoF then talked through the table on pages 5 and 6 of the report, this sets out the current budget assumptions, which give a deficit in each of the four years, and the predicted effects of changes to those assumptions over the next four years, together with the effects of a varying precept increase. The changes in each scenario are shown in bold in the table but can be summarised as follows:

- Scenario 1 – there is still a deficit in each year, but deficit figures are not as large due to the impact of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and the public sector pay freeze
- Scenario 2 – Pension Grant is included giving a surplus in each year – confirmation is awaited as to whether the pension grant will be included in the base budget
- Scenario 3 – this assumes an inflationary increase to the RSG and growth in the Council Tax base giving a surplus in each year
- Scenario 4 – shows the effect of the Collection Fund deficit being spread over three years – this assumption will be updated as further guidance on this issue is received from Government.

The precept increase options are set out on page 6 of the report. The assumptions in Option 1 on the table are the same as those set out in Scenario 4 on page 5. The indicative figures for the revenue implications of the capital programme are also shown on page 6 of the report. These will be added to the revenue budget following consideration by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2021. Members were asked to bear in mind the long-term view on the budget strategy when making the precept decision.

The CFO added that the most significant factor in budget planning is the Pension Grant and the likelihood of this being baselined. The revaluation of the Fire Pension Schemes in 2016 led to a predicted £1m contribution from employers. A new Pension Scheme will also be introduced in 2022.

The Vice-Chair commented that this report builds on the options discussed by the Strategy and Resources Committee which can be seen in Paper 8 of the Appendix to the report. 2020/21 was a single year settlement for the first time even though a multi-year approach was expected. The Authority is in a strong position but there are a number of uncertainties and there is, therefore, a need to build resilience going forward. On this basis, the Vice-Chair stated that the only option secure enough to move forward with is Option 1 on page 6 of the report and proposed the recommendations in the report with the inclusion of Option 1 in recommendation a). This was seconded by Councillor Hartin and it was

**Resolved unanimously** that the Fire Authority

- a) Approve the recommendation set out in section 5 of the report, choosing Option 1 for 2021/22, allowing officers to continue to work on a range of planning scenarios for later years of the planning period;
- b) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 7 of the Appendix; and
- c) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package in January 2021, for final decision by the Fire Authority in February 2021.

## **9 Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-25: Consultation Findings**

This report presented the findings of the public consultation on the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2021-25 and requested the Fire Authority to authorise the Chief Fire Officer to amend, where necessary, and finalise the document for publication. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has also been prepared for consideration and approval.

The HTC presented this report and began by highlighting the following points in relation to the IRMP consultation process.

- The consultation ran from July to September and was carried out through a mix of email and face to face focus groups
- This was the first time that the Service has used social media to facilitate the consultation process and it has managed to blend the use of traditional and social media
- Engagement levels are illustrated on page 4 of the report and the website bounce rate of 38% is a great success as this is the percentage of people who logged in and progressed beyond the initial page. A rate of over 20% is considered very positive
- Staff engagement has been ongoing during the design and delivery of the IRMP
- Engagement with Town and Parish Councils has been facilitated through the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC)
- Of the five key proposals, the only challenge was to the Response Standards changes where 32% of questionnaire respondents disagreed that 20 minutes response time in rural areas was acceptable. This was not mirrored in the focus groups perhaps because the officers present could clarify the reasons for the proposal.

Members asked if there had been much consultation response from young people. The HTC explained that there had been a good response from the elderly age group which is positive as engagement with this group is one of the key challenges for the Service. There is no breakdown of social media response and only a limited number of surveys (circa 90) were returned. Members suggested, and the HTC noted, that it may be worth contacting the Shropshire Youth Association for future consultation processes.

The HTC then talked through the IRMP document highlighting the amendments detailed below, which have been made in addition to those detailed in Appendix 7 to the report:

### Page

- 13 Addition of further detail on joint working with Police and Partners. This is in response to feedback from the Police and Crime Commissioner. The HTC thanked the DPCC for their comments which had been taken on board.
- 20 Inclusion of data on numbers of dementia cases in the county to indicate the scale of this issue and to support the EQIA
- 21 In response to feedback, a paragraph has been included related to neurodiversity issues and how the Service will engage with this issue.
- 23 Reference included to Safer West Mercia Plan, Safer Roads Partnership and the River Severn Partnership in relation to the issues of road traffic collisions and flooding events
- 24 Reference included to wildfire events as part of impacts of environmental and climate change
- 33 Inclusion of further information related to the Response Standard to give greater context regarding this.
- 34 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic included as identified from the EQIA and the increased use of volunteers and/or technology to engage with communities  
A new visual of the organisation's cultural 'impeller' will also be added to this page
- 41 The blue text box sets out the Service's high level 'outcome' based strategic indicators  
Reference also included to the National Fire Chiefs Council development of measures to recognise the economic and social cost of fire

The HTC advised that there are likely to be further additional minor amendments needed for example in relation to document layout and correction of typos.

Members expressed concern about the time they had had to consider the document before this meeting. The CFO acknowledged the comments and clarified that the amendments being considered are set out clearly in Appendix 7 to the report. The HTC echoed the CFO's response and advised the Authority that there were no substantial changes to the draft IRMP document which was initially considered and approved by the Fire Authority in June 2020.

The Chair thanked HTC for the work that he, and his team have undertaken on the IRMP and emphasised that the IRMP shows the future shape of fire and rescue service roles including responding to increased numbers of flooding and wildfire incidents.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority

- a) Noted the report from Opinion Research Services setting out the findings of the public consultation on the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- b) Approve the amended Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-25 and authorise the Chief Fire Officer to publish the document with any further minor amendments as may be necessary; and
- c) Approve the Equality Impact Assessment as attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

Councillor Minnery left the meeting at this point (3.10 pm)

## 10 Fire Strategic Alliance Update

This report updated Members on progress in preparing priority projects developed by the Strategic Fire Alliance between Shropshire (SFRS) and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services (HWFRS).

The HTC presented this report and talked through the project updates set out in it including the changes to the Senior Responsible Owner roles for each project as detailed on page 2 of the report and the challenges to progress with those projects as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the development of the Communications Strategy has been severely impacted by the Communications Teams prioritisation of support to the pandemic response and the IRMP consultations.

The Chair commented that the Authority is committed to the Fire Strategic Alliance and emphasised the benefits that it is producing for the Service.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the report.

## 11 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report updated Members on the status of risks on the Corporate Risk Register.

The DCFO presented this report and advised the Authority that there were no changes to the Corporate Risk Register entries and that all risks recorded on it are being managed appropriately.

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report.

## 12 Exclusion of Press and Public

**Resolved** that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting room for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12(A) to the Act, by virtue of Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4.

## 13 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

**Resolved** that the Fire Authority note the exempt Appendix to Report 11 – Corporate Risk Management Summary.

### Close of Meeting

The Chair closed the meeting by wishing Members a Merry Christmas and a happy, safe and hopefully better 2021.

As this was the last Fire Authority meeting before the DCFO's retirement at the end of the year, the Chair and Members thanked him for his work for the Service and wished him all the best for the future.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....