

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held in Long Mynd Room, Telford Central Fire Station
on Thursday, 5 December 2024, at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Aldcroft, Blundell, Burchett, Cook, Davis, Handley, Hartin, Hignett, Lea, Minnery (Chair), Overton (Vice-Chair), Pardy and Wynn

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Sam Burton	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Jason Kirby	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Karen Gowreesunker	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
Anthea Lowe	Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Clerk
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
Joanne Codey	Head of Finance	HoF
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Darren Bowe	Pensions Officer	PO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESS

Before consideration of the business on the agenda, a minute's silence was observed for Eric Carter, former Fire Authority Chair who passed away on 2 December 2024. The Chair of the Authority Councillor Minnery; the Conservative Group Leader Councillor Wynn and the Vice- Chair of the Authority Councillor Overton all paid tribute to Mr Carter and his work on behalf of the Fire Authority.

Welcome and Thanks

The Chair welcomed Councillor Stephen Handley, who has replaced Mrs Gemma Offland on the Fire Authority, to his first Fire Authority meeting. The Chair thanked Mrs Offland for her work and commitment to the Authority. It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to Mrs Offland from the Fire Authority.

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Evans

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Councillor Pardy declared a pecuniary interest in item 10a – Firefighters' Pension Scheme Delegations, as he is in receipt of a firefighter's pension.

His son is also currently employed by Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) as a firefighter. Councillor Pardy undertook to leave the meeting room whilst this item was discussed and voted upon.

Councillor Davis declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10b – 2024 Review of Local Government Pension Scheme – Employer Discretions Statement of Policy, as he is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme Committee. Councillor Davis undertook to leave the meeting room whilst this item was discussed and voted upon.

3 Public Questions

None

4 Fire Authority Non-Exempt Minutes

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 9 October 2024, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Strategy and Resources Committee Non-Exempt Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 27 November 2024, be noted and the recommendations at item 5 of those minutes, as given below, be agreed.

Item 5 – Financial Performance to September 2024, including Annual Treasury Review 2023/24 and Mid-Year Treasury Review 2024/25

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 annual review of treasury activities for 2023/24
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2024/25; and
- e) Note the mid-year review of treasury activities for 2024/25.

6 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance meeting, held on 2 October 2024, be noted.

7 Fire Authority Governance Review Proposal For decision

This report set out a proposal for Fire Authority to initiate a review of its governance arrangements for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. Fire Authority Members were asked to consider the proposed purpose and scope to the review as well as the approach and timeline as set out in appendix to the report.

The Clerk presented this report to the Authority and explained that initial feedback and areas for improvement identified through His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have identified the need for a review of the Authority's current governance arrangements.

The purpose and scope of the proposed review is set out in the Appendix to the report together with a broad outline of how the review will be undertaken and a planned timeline for the work.

It is envisaged that Officers will engage with Fire Authority Members throughout the three planned stages of the Review to influence and shape the governance of the Authority. To facilitate this, workshop sessions will be held during January to March 2025 with review findings and recommendations for change being brought to the Annual Meeting in June for approval.

Members welcomed the review being undertaken and highlighted that Member involvement and engagement with the process is key to its success.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the proposal set out in the appendix to this report; and
- b) Note specifically the purpose and scope, method, review dependencies and timeline.

8 Meeting Schedule 2025

Resolved that the Fire Authority approve the Authority and Committee meeting schedule for 2025.

9 2024/25 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 2024.

The HoF presented this report and explained that it is the second budget setting paper for 2025/26. The HoF then highlighted the following points to Members:

- The position with the Local Government Finance Settlement 2025/26 is:
 - An inflationary increase based on September 2024 CPI (1.7%) is anticipated for local government
 - Inflation is expected to fall from 2.6% in 2025 to 2.1% in 2027
 - Core spending power for the Fire sector, which includes precept, will increase in real terms by approximately 3.2%
 - No announcement has been made yet on referendum spending limits (RSL) for the Fire sector

- A provisional settlement is expected before Christmas. This will be a one-year settlement, with a multi-year spending review for subsequent years expected in Spring 2025
- Fire Pension Scheme Revaluation – the Service is still receiving grant to cover the increase in employer contributions following the 2020 valuation and clarity is needed as to whether grant will continue into the next spending review.
- The table on page 3 sets out proposed expenditure and the projected surplus or deficit using the following current assumptions for income:
 - Grant increased by 1.7% in 2025/26 and 25 thereafter; continuation of Services Grant, 1.7% increase in rates income from 2025/26
 - Precept increase of 2.99% for 2025/26 and later years
 - Council Tax base increase of 1.87% from 2025/26
 - Pay award of 2% from 2025/26
- Investment and growth are set out in section 5 of the report including Community Risk Management Plan outcomes
- The Capital programme will be considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2025 and revenue implications of this programme will then be added to the revenue budget.

The Government announced on Thursday, 28 November, after this report had been issued to Members, that there is the possibility of a £5 precept being set for fire and rescue authorities with an associated decrease in grant. The situation with this will be clearer after the formal settlement announcement later in December.

Members asked about expenditure and income, particularly related to pay awards. The HoF explained that the Authority is currently using the national picture of an expected 2% pay award; this can be adjusted if needed or required.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the report;
- b) Agree the recommendations on expenditure for 2025/26 and later years, set out in report 6 of the Appendix;
- c) Agree the recommendations on Reserves and Provisions, set out in report 7 of the Appendix, and
- d) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package in January 2025, for final decision by the Fire Authority in February 2025.

Councillors Davis and Pardy left the meeting at this point (2.20 pm)

10 Pensions Scheme Delegations

10a Fire Fighters' Pension Schemes For decision

This report resulted from a routine review of the discretionary powers of the Fire Authority under the Firefighters' Pension Schemes.

The HHRA presented this report and drew Members' attention to section 4 which summarises the proposed changes to the Scheme discretions, with the full discretion policies being attached at Appendices A, B and C to the report.

The HHRA explained that the discretions that are marked "to be archived post remedy" will remain in place until the age discrimination remedy has been completed for all employees.

Three additional discretions have been added to the Firefighters Pension Scheme 1992 Discretions, as attached at Appendix B to the report. The PO advised that these are included in the Local Government Association's discretion template but were not present in the Service's policy when it was reviewed. They have been added as it is deemed better to have these included than not.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the review of the Delegation of powers under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015, 1992 Scheme and 2006 Scheme (as set out in Appendices A, B, C to this report); and
- b) Approve the proposed changes to these Schemes.

10b Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS) For decision

This report informed the Fire Authority of the review of the employer discretions Statement of Policy for the Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS).

The HHRA presented this report and explained that following the annual review of this policy by Officers, there are a number of changes proposed to the discretions to bring them in line with the discretions policy template produced by the LGPS. The changes are detailed in section 4 of the report and are highlighted in yellow in the Appendix to the report.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the 2024 review of the Statement of Policy for the Local Government Pension Scheme; and
- b) Agree the new Statement of Policy.

Councillor Davis and Pardy returned to the meeting at this point (2.27 pm)

11 Service Update – December 2024

This report was provided to members of the Fire Authority to update on key areas of progression within Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. The report covered His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection Report.

The CFO presented this report which the DCFO had written before the HMI report was received. Commitment from Service as to how will update.

Since the Fire Authority met in October 2024, the Service has received the HMICFRS Inspection report on the inspection that they undertook in July 2024. The HMICFRS judge the Service against the characteristics of good performance, and when required link their judgments to causes of concern and areas of improvement. The four-tier system of graded judgments has now been extended to five tiers.

A broad overview of inspection outcomes was presented to the Service in August 2024, after which a high-level action plan was developed to address the areas for improvement (AFIs) that are summarised in section 5 of the report. An action plan to address the issues identified as a cause of concern was submitted to HMICFRS on 29 October 2024.

A communications plan has been developed to ensure the Fire Authority is sighted on the implementation of the action plan with quarterly progress reports being brought to Fire Authority and the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee. Monthly progress reports will go to Chair's Briefing and Service Management Team (SMT).

Councillor Davis thanked officers for the overview and commented that the HMICFRS report is not good reading but transparency about the report is good. Councillor Davis feels that more frequent reporting of progress to the Fire Authority would be beneficial. The inclusion of details of horizon scanning and how the Service is measuring and/or demonstrating how it is addressing the AFIs would also be helpful. The CFO advised that consideration is being given to how the frequency of reporting etc can be improved.

Councillor Hartin agreed that the inspection report is not an easy read and emphasised the need for the Service to look at the overall picture to make absolutely sure it is addressing all aspects of the inspection outcomes. The CFO assured Members that this detail will be provided to them. The CFO also explained that Officers have considered the report narrative and any areas that have the potential to become AFIs in the future.

Councillor Overton said that Members need to see the line-by-line response to the report to ensure they are confident that the AFIs are being fully addressed. The CFO commented that the AFIs identified in the last inspection report were seen as "small tweaks" and the Service's relationship with the HMI was not what it should be.

Councillor Davis said that it is important that the focus is on owning the AFIs rather than finger-pointing. Horizon scanning will be of benefit as this will help to identify the “moving targets” on each inspection round. The Governance review should also help to address some of the issues raised in the inspection report.

The CFO asked that formal thanks be recorded to Councillor Davis for the work he has done on reviewing HMI reports and supporting development of the Service action plan and subsequent reporting requirements.

Councillor Hartin also said that there needs to be clear communication with staff around the work that needs to be done. The ACFO (SS) said there are processes in place, but she is not sure how embedded they are. A communications and engagement strategy will be published in the New Year and officers are working hard on face-to-face interactions with staff.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report and its contents.

12 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

13 Fire Authority Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 9 October 2024, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

14 Strategy and Resources Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 27 November 2024 be noted.

15 Standards Audit and Performance Committee Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 2 October 2024, be noted.

16 Executive Leadership Team, incident Command Capability and Capacity, and statutory Officer Structure (Paragraph 3)

This report outlined proposals and recommendations regarding the future structure of the Executive Leadership Team and Statutory Officers. The report was produced with recognition of, and alignment to, proposals for wider structural changes, with the overall objective of improving capacity, capability and performance of the Service.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Approved the proposals outlined within the report;
- b) Approved the additional financial requirements associated with the proposals set out in this report at section 10;
- c) Delegated authority to the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel to commence recruitment of individuals to permanent posts as outlined in this report; and
- d) Approved the proposal (in principle) relating to Monitoring Officer and s.151 Officer roles.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....