

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
on Thursday, 16 September 2021 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Aldcroft, Carter, Hartin (Vice-Chair), Offland (Chair) and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Support)	ACFO (CS)
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Lavery and Pardy

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 18 March 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

5 Committee Constitution and Training

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members. It also asked Members to consider what training, if any, they wish to receive in order for them to fulfil their role on the Committee.

A list of potential training topics will be circulated to the Committee by the ESO for Members to indicate which ones they need and/or want to undertake.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) note the constitution of the Strategy and Resources Committee (attached at the Appendix to the report); and
- b) agree that the Committee should receive training on topics as advised by Officers in order to fulfil their role on the Committee effectively.

6 Financial Performance to July 2021

This report provided information on the financial performance of the Service, and sought approval for action, where necessary.

The HoF presented the report and highlighted the following issues to the Committee:

- Expenditure on pay budgets are on track across Service areas.
- On Call payments and overtime are a month behind as these are paid in the following month
- There are also a number of staff who are seconded to projects in other organisations and these costs will be recharged
- There are variations in spend across Service areas due to annual costs such as insurance and/or rates payments being made in the first quarter of the year
- Budget variances are detailed in the table on page 2 of the report
 - Ketley incident additional costs are activity payments caused by On Call attendance at incident – to be covered with contribution from the Extreme Incidents Reserve
 - Technical Services incurred additional costs from Ketley incident including protective equipment and decontamination – to be covered from the Extreme Incidents Reserve
 - Savings have been made on fuel costs due to reduced movement of staff in pandemic
 - Debt charges – no borrowing this year
 - Fire Alliance – final costs related to ICT – covered by contribution from Service Transformation Board (STB) Staff Reserve
 - Pay and Prices – pay awards will have to be built into the 2022/23 budget
- Covid-19 Grants totalling £446,000 have been received from the Government. At the end of March 2021, there was a balance of £36,000 remaining. Monitoring of the spending of this grant will continue and will be reported to the Fire Authority.
- Capital Programme
Members are asked to agree an increase of £146,000 to the outstanding appliance replacement schemes to cover the inflationary increases to those schemes.

- **Treasury Review**
The HoF advised that this is being reviewed in line with the Telford Central Redevelopment Programme. Any changes arising from this will be reported to the Committee
- **Current Investments**
The HoF reminded the Committee that local authorities are deemed to be safe counterparties for investments as they are unlikely to go bust
- **The Authority has earned £10,696 of interest on its investments to the end of July 2021 which is an average rate of return of 0.21% against a target rate of 0.08%**

Members asked if there was any indication that the Covid grant payments would be continued. The CFO advised that the funding would not be continued.

Members asked for further detail of the staff shortages in workshops. The CFO explained that there had been capacity issues due to unanticipated staff movements which had now been resolved.

Referring to the £15,000 virement for subscription to the West Midlands Employers Recruitment service, the Committee asked if this was good value. The HHRA advised that the service provides online management of recruitment processes which does provide a cost saving, as well as time and efficiency savings to the Service.

In reference to the Covid-19 grants, Members asked what activity the Service was currently undertaking in relation to the vaccination programme. The ACFO (SD) responded that the Service intends to work with its health partners on the roll-out of vaccines to 12–15-year-olds. Also, as the vaccination centre at Shrewsbury Bowling Centre closes, it is anticipated that fire stations will be used as pop-up vaccination sites.

The Committee queried the reasons for the different levels of investments with different providers. The HoF explained that it may depend on the notice periods required to request the return of the investment. The Treasurer advised that investment decisions are based on the security of the counterparty, the liquidity and the yield from the investment. An investment of £2m gives diversification; amounts below this depend on when the Authority needs the cash to be returned.

Resolved that the Committee agree to recommend that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note income and expenditure relating to Covid-19; and
- d) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2020/21.

7 Capital Update on Activity and Finance

This report provided an overview of all the capital schemes within the Service and their current status.

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and talked through appendices.

Members commented that work reported in this item is important as it shows the Service is not standing still and is improving its smaller stations such as animal rescue at Wellington, investing in its ICT systems and its responses to climate change and issues such as flooding.

Members asked for more information on the roll-out of the second tranche of electric vehicle (EV) charging points at stations such as Ellesmere and Tweedale. The CFO advised that forthcoming major station refurbishments include provision of EV points. The CFO advised that a paper on environmental considerations will be brought to the Fire Authority following completion of collaborative work with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service on a strategic document to address environmental issues.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress so far on current schemes.

8 Updated Internal Dispute Resolution Procedures

This paper updated the post and committee references within Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP). The procedure remains in line with the requirements of the Pension Act 1995, and subsequent amendments, and in accordance with the recommendations contained with Fire Service Pensions Scheme Circular 1/2009.

Resolved that the Committee note the updated post and committee references at Stage 2, Internal Dispute Resolution.

9 Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment Campaign

This report gave an overview of the 2020/21 Wholetime Firefighter recruitment campaign in terms of applicants; and outlined applied recommendations from the 20218 campaign, with further recommendations for future campaigns.

The HHRA presented the report and highlighted the application data for 2016 to 2021 on page 5 and the recommendations for future recruitment campaigns.

The Committee noted that diversity is an important aspect of the HMICFRS Inspection and as such is an important priority for the Service. Members asked if it was possible to undertake comparisons with other rural fire and rescue services regarding diversity. The CFO explained that it is very difficult to obtain comparator and/or benchmarking data for this purpose.

The ACFO (SD0 reported that he had attended the Passing Out parade at the Fire Service College for the recruits and the quality of recruits is notable with the silver axe for the best performing recruit being won by a female firefighter from the Service. It is also pleasing to note that three of the six recruits have On Call experience which shows the real quality of firefighters in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Committee asked if there has been an increase in On Call applicants due to the pandemic. The CFO explained that application levels remain stable with no real effect of pandemic being seen over the last 18 months. The ACFO (CS) added that the Positive Action taster sessions did see more applicants from airline / travel sectors which may be an effect of the pandemic.

Members also queried how the Service will keep those people on the Reserve List engaged. The HHRA explained that the Service maintains intermittent contact with those on the Reserve List. Once applicants have got to this stage, they know what have achieved and so tend to stay interested in working for the Service. Members asked if the 12 – 18 months wait for those on the Reserve List to join would be reduced at all. The HHRA responded that it may but this is dependent on developments that may occur in staffing.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Note the recommendations for future campaigns

10 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the Committee being satisfied in all the circumstances of the case that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information, formally resolve that the press and public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

11 Capital Update on Activity and Finance (Paragraph 3)

The Committee received Appendix B to report 7 – Capital Update on Activity and Finance, which was considered in closed session, as it contained exempt information.

Resolved that the Committee note exempt Appendix B to report 7.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....