

**Minutes of the meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
on Thursday, 18 November 2021 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

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

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
James Walton	Treasurer	
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Jan Morris	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Lisa Vickers	Human Resources Manager (Contracts)	HRM
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Lavery and Pardy did not attend the meeting.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Non-Exempt Minutes

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 16 September 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Financial Performance to September 2021, including Annual Treasury Review 2020/21 and Mid-Year Treasury Review 2021/22

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

The HoF presented this report and highlighted the following

- **Revenue Budget**
 - Spend on the Revenue Budget for the year so far is 43%
 - Spend on pay budget is 51%, which is average for this point in the financial year
- **Variances**
 - Numerous variances have been identified and are set out in the table on page 4 of the report
 - The overspend on Service Delivery Pay – Overtime is likely to have been caused by the impact of self-isolation guidelines following close contact with positive Covid cases. Officers will investigate the overspend further to confirm if this is the case
 - There is an underspend of £200k in Executive and Resources – Debt Charges which is due to there being no requirement for borrowing during this financial year
 - There are likely to be further savings going forward in Corporate Governance – ICT in relation to the Wide Area Network
 - There is a total underspend of £224k to date in 2021/22
- **Covid Grant**

A further £248k of Covid-19 grant has been received in 2021/22 in addition to the £36k that remained at the end of 2020/21. At the end of September 2021, the remaining balance of the grant received was £108k
- **Capital Programme**

Work on the Service's Capital Programme continues as previously reported with the main areas of activity in the reporting period being the continuation of building improvements at Ellesmere, Whitchurch and Market Drayton and the major refurbishment of Telford Central Fire Station
- **Corporate Risk**

Monitoring of the Corporate Risk Register is ongoing with the risk rating for service disruption due to Covid-19 being reduced
- **Annual Treasury Review**
 - There are no exceptions in the Annual Treasury Review 2020/21 with the Service meeting all the stated requirements.
 - The situation is the same for the Mid-Year Treasury Review 2021/22
- **Investments**

The Authority's current investments are as set out on page 11 of the report.

Members expressed how pleased they were with the financial out-turn to date and commented that the proposed inflation rate changes may have a positive impact on the Authority's investments. The HoF replied that this is likely to be seen on the next Financial Performance report to the Committee but there will be some investments that will remain at same rate for the full year.

Members asked for further information on the extra overtime incurred. The HoF advised that this overspend will be investigated to assess if this is a consequence of the Covid pandemic. The ACFO (SD) added that the real impact on overtime was due to the changes to close contact guidance from Public Health England. The Service has managed this well but there have been cases where this has had a real impact on service delivery, for example where entire On Call crews have had to isolate until one of their members has received a negative PCR test result. The CFO also added that there has been no evidence of workforce transmission yet. The ACFO (SD) concluded that there are opportunities for the Service to be more efficient in relation to this and will introduce 'tweaks' to achieve these.

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested;
- c) Note activity on capital schemes;
- d) Note the update on corporate risk;
- e) Note the annual review of treasury activities for 2020/21;
- f) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2021/22; and
- g) Note the mid-year review of treasury activities for 2021/22.

6 2022/23 and Later Years Revenue and Capital Budgets

This report brought together the elements of an initial revenue budget, based on current planning assumptions, and sought the Committee's approval for this outline to be recommended to the Fire Authority in December 2021.

The HoF presented this report and advised the Committee that it is the first of the budget setting papers for 2022/23 with the final budget package being agreed by the full Fire Authority in February 2022.

The HoF then talked through the information set out in the report and highlighted the following points:

Budget Review and Committed Charges

- The table on page 3 of the report sets out the review of the revenue budgets, incorporating changes that have been made to date in the 2021/22 revenue budget and anticipated changes for future years
- This includes the one-off contribution that was made in 2020/21 for the Telford Central Project, which will be removed going forward
- The £200k reduction in the Capital Programme is due to a reduction in the minimum revenue provision together with a reduction in the debt charge required to fund the Telford Central Project

Pay and Price Contingency

- Although no pay contingency was included in the base budget for 2021/22 in line with the Chancellor's Spending review announcement for 2021/22, pay awards are being negotiated for the current financial year and will be funded from existing balances and one-off underspends elsewhere in the budget. These pay awards will now have to be incorporated into the revenue budget for 2022/23.
- With regard to Prices, CPI inflation has risen to rates of 4% and this has been accounted for in the Price Contingency; however, it may be necessary to increase this further due to inflation changes this week

Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26

- Capital schemes for 2022/23 are currently being reviewed by Officers and the proposed capital programme will be brought to the Committee in January 2022 for consideration before being approved by the Fire Authority at its February 2022 meeting

Efficiencies

- Work is ongoing to identify, record and report cashable and non-cashable (productivity) efficiencies.

Referring to Note 5 on page 4 of the report, Members requested an update on the situation with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Clothing. The ACFO (SD) responded that the Head of Resources has initiated a short-term replacement project to address this issue. This project will be followed by an officer led project which will fully review the PPE and Clothing situation. The CFO confirmed that the Service is in a safe position regarding PPE with the issues to be addressed being caused by changes to the BSI standards. There is a further discussion to be had regarding whether a managed programme should be established for PPE and firekit.

Members also requested reassurance from Officers that the Service's Capital Programme is on track. The CFO confirmed that it is but there have been some minor delays with projects being affected by the cost of supplies and contractor staffing issues.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority

- a) Notes the revisions and the committed changes to the base budget, as shown in section 4 of the report;
- b) Bases its pay and price contingency in the revenue budget on the calculations set out in section 5 of the report;
- c) Notes the process for the approval of the capital programme; and
- d) Approves the expenditure figures associated with those approved assumptions as a basis for developing the budget at the meeting of the Fire Authority on 15 December 2021.

7 Reserves and Funds

This report set out the issues, which the Fire Authority will need to consider as part of its annual review of reserves and funds.

The HoF presented the report and highlighted that the table on page 1 of the report shows the current position of the £17m Reserves. It should be noted that the Major Projects Reserve will reduce as the TC Project progresses.

Pages 3-5 of the report set out the reasons why the Reserves are held. The General Fund is the net balance of over and underspends during the year. Service Policy is to reduce the balance of the General Fund to zero at the beginning of the financial year with the Fire Authority approving how the balance accrued during the previous year is allocated to the Reserves.

Resolved that the Committee propose to the Fire Authority that it confirms the current position of its reserves and funds.

8 Corporate Performance Indicators – April to September 2021

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to September 2021.

The HoTC presented this report and highlighted the following

CPI 1 – All fires

Performance against this CPI is improving month on month and is currently within the tolerance level.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

The cumulative total is less than anticipated with September's total being the lowest since recording started.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

The cumulative total for the reporting period is 178; in the second quarter there have been 74 deliberate fires which is an increase of 2.77% on the previous year.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

Unfortunately, one fire related death was recorded during Quarter 2 of the reporting period.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

Incident numbers are currently slightly below upper tolerance but the direction of travel for this indicator is positive.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff through Operational Activity

To date, there have been 9 injuries sustained to staff through operational activity; 3 of these were RIDDOR reported as they involved absences of over 7 days.

CPI 7 – Response Standard

The combined average of 85% attendance has been passed in all three of the response standard areas.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

Performance is good against this CPI with a steadier performance trajectory being seen than in the previous year.

CPI 9 – Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

The Service has a total establishment of 611; of this 505 are male and 106 are female. 442 employees give their ethnicity as White British whilst 148 cite their ethnicity as unknown.

Members asked if there is any backwards looking benchmark data available for diversity to show where the Service is now as opposed to previous years. The CFO suggested that a direction of travel indicator could be included in future reports.

Members also expressed how pleased they are that the Service has achieved and maintained performance against the Response Standard which is important evidence for the HMICFRS inspection. The CFO added that this target is Shropshire specific and forms part of the Service's contract with the public.

Members asked if all training accidents are investigated. The CFO confirmed that they are and learning points identified from each incident.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

9 Occupational Health Provision Annual Update

This report provided the annual update on the Occupational Health Provision for the Service.

The HRM presented this report and talked through the data contained in it, highlighting the following points:

- Fitness assessment figures are set out on page 3 of the report.
- Attendance levels for the OH Nurse and Doctor are set out on pages 4 and 5 of the report.
- There has been a reduction in the 'did not attend' rate for OH appointments with measures being put in place to confirm attendance with individuals two days prior to their appointment.
- The most common reason for attendance at an OH appointment is in relation to mental health issues

Members asked what a 'Bruce Protocol' assessment was. The HRM explained that this is a fitness test which is done at the Cardiology Department after an individual has suffered a heart attack or similar.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group Update

This report provided an update on the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group from November 2020 to October 2021.

The HRM presented this report and highlighted the following

- The Service now has 10% of its workforce trained as Mental Health First Aiders
- A Reasonable Adjustments passport document has been introduced
- The Voices Group has been launched

Members thanked Officers for the report which evidences that the Service are taking note of EDI issues, which is especially important for the HMICFRS Inspection.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

11 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.

12 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 16 September 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm

Chair.....

Date.....