

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority held in the Oak Room, Headquarters on Wednesday, 22 June 2022, at 2.00 pm

Present

Members

Councillors Aldcroft, Barrow, Carroll, Carter (Chair), Evans, Hartin, Hignett, Jhawar, Lavery, Lea, Minnery (Vice-Chair), Offland, Overton, Pardy and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Richard Phillips	Deputy Clerk to the Fire Authority	Clerk
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Jan Morris	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Minnery and seconded by Councillor Wynn

That Councillor Carter be elected Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the election of Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Offland and seconded by Councillor Pardy

That Councillor Overton be elected Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the election of Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

It was resolved on a recorded vote with 10 out of 15 Members voting in favour, that Councillor Carter be duly elected as Chair of the Fire Authority.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin and seconded by Councillor Wynn

That Councillor Minnery be appointed Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the appointment of Vice-Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Overton and seconded by Councillor Offland

That Councillor Pardy be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority to hold office until immediately after the appointment of Vice-Chair at the next Annual Meeting.

It was resolved on a recorded vote with 10 out of 15 Members voting in favour, that Councillor Minnery be duly appointed as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority.

3 Apologies for Absence

None

4 Vote of Thanks and Welcome

The Chair welcomed Councillor Jhawar from Telford & Wrekin Council to the Fire Authority.

5 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Councillor Pardy declared an interest in item 15 - Firefighters' Pension Scheme Delegations as he is in receipt of a firefighter pension and his son is a current employee of the Service. It was agreed that Councillor Pardy would leave the meeting room for this item.

6 Public Questions

None

7 Non-Exempt Fire Authority Minutes

7a 16 February 2022

Resolved, with Councillors Barrow, Carroll, Jhawar, Pardy and Wynn abstaining as they were not present at the meeting, that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 16 February 2022, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

7b 23 February 2022

This item was deferred to the October 2022 meeting of the Fire Authority.

8 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 23 March 2022, be noted.

9 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 27 April 2022, be noted and the recommendations at items 7a and 12, as given below, be agreed.

Item 7a – Code of Corporate Governance 2021/22

Resolved that the Fire Authority formally adopt the Code of Corporate Governance 2021/22 as recommended by the Committee.

Item 12 – Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy

Resolved that the Fire Authority re-affirm the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy as recommended by the Committee.

10 Constitutional Issues

10a Committee Composition and Allocation of Seats to Political Groups

This report asked the Fire Authority to agree both the composition of its Committees and the allocations of seats on its Committees to political groups.

The Fire Authority agreed the following amendments to the numbers of seats allocated to its Committees in the Appendix to the report:

The seats on the Strategy and Resources Committee should be allocated as follows: Conservative – 3; Labour – 3 and Lib Dem / Independent – 1

The seats on the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee should be allocated as follows: Conservative – 4; Labour – 2 and Lib Dem / Independent – 2

The Fire Authority also agreed to increase the number of seats on the Strategic Advisory Group (StAG) from 7 to 8 to ensure that the membership of this Group meets the criteria set out in the StAG Terms of Reference.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree its Committee Composition and the allocation of seats to political groups as proposed in the Appendix to the report, subject to the amendments outlined above.

10b Committee Membership and Appointments

This report asked the Fire Authority to confirm appointments to its committees; to agree the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs to serve on committees; to appoint its representative on the Local Government Association Fire Service Commission; and to appoint its Member Champions.

A revised copy of the Appendix to the report was tabled to the meeting. This tabled document showed the nominations to those Committees which had vacancies on them and the proposed Chairs and Vice-Chairs for the Committees. A copy of this document is attached to the signed minutes of the meeting.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Agree the appointment of Members to serve on committees as set out in the Appendix to the report and the document tabled to the meeting;
- b) Agree the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs to serve on committees, as set out in the Appendix to the report and the document tabled to the meeting;
- c) Confirm the delegation to the Monitoring Officer as detailed in paragraph 5 of the report;
- d) Appoint Councillor Carter as its representative on the Local Government Association Fire Services Commission;
- e) Appoint Councillor Pardy as its Equality and Diversity Member Champion; and
- f) Appoint Councillor Evans as its Risk Management and Audit Member Champion.

10c Fire Authority Terms of Reference and Committee Constitutions

This report requested approval of the Terms of Reference for the Fire Authority and also asked the Fire Authority to agree the constitutions of its committees.

The Fire Authority agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Advisory Group should be updated to reflect the decision made at item 10a on this agenda, namely that the membership of the Group should be increased from 7 to 8.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the report;
- b) Agree the Terms of Reference for the Fire Authority, as set out in Appendix A to the report; and
- c) Agree the constitutions of its Committees, as set out in Appendix B to the report.

10d Review of Member Role Descriptions

This report asked the Fire Authority to review and agree its Member Role Descriptions.

Resolved that the Fire Authority have reviewed the Role Descriptions detailed below and agreed the proposed amendments to them:

- Member
- Chair of the Fire Authority
- Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority
- Leaders of the Main Opposition Groups
- Chair of Strategic Advisory Group
- Equality and Diversity Member Champion

10e Review of Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation to Officers

This report reviewed the Fire Authority's Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business, Standing Orders relating to Contracts and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and asked Members to consider and decide upon the amendments proposed.

The Fire Authority asked if it was possible for electronic papers to be sent to Members for future meetings to reduce the amount of printing and postage. The Clerk confirmed that this was possible under the Standing Orders for Proceedings and Business as there is only a requirement for the meeting summons to be posted to Members. It was agreed that the Executive Support Officer will email Members to check who wishes to receive electronic papers.

The CFO also added that a review of Fire Authority and Committee agendas will be undertaken to identify 'information only' items that may not need to go to meetings, with an alternative method for sharing these with Members being developed.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the amendments, as set out in the report, to

- Standing Orders for Regulation of Proceedings and Business
- Standing Orders relating to Contracts
- Financial Regulations; and
- The Scheme of Delegation to Officers

11 Financial Performance to March 2022

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 for Quarter 4 of the 2021/22 financial year

- Spend on pay is at £18m and this is broadly in line with the budget that was set in February 2021
- The non-pay element of the expenditure includes variances that have previously been reported to the Authority and the balance of the pay and prices contingency of £676k

- Underspends have been identified on the On Call Duty System; these are set out in the table on page 3 of the report and are attributable to reduced activity levels throughout the year.
- As shown on page 3 of the report, additional costs have been incurred during the recent flooding events that have occurred in the county and it is proposed that these overspends are covered from the Extreme Incidents Reserve.
- As shown on page 4 of the report, there has been an underspend on debt charges as no capital borrowing has yet been undertaken for capital projects.
- A contribution into the Pensions Account is required following an ill-health retirement and it is proposed that this will be taken from the Pensions Reserve.
- In total, £52k of variances will therefore be transferred to individual contingencies where they will be managed with future variances.
- As shown on page 5 of the report, the Fire Authority currently has £16.3m of funds invested with organisations that are on the Authority's current acceptable counterparties list for investment.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve virements to the revenue budget, where requested, and
- c) Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2021/22.

12 Statement of Accounts 2021/22

This report set out the key revenue issues which have arisen from work on the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 and sought approval for use of the General Fund balance in 2022/23.

The HoF presented this report and advised that the final audited accounts must be published by 30 November 2022 in line with the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulation 2020 which was issued in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers have, however, worked as closely to the original timetable as possible and it is likely that the Treasurer will sign off the accounts by the end of the week.

As shown on page 3 of the report, the Fire Authority has approved net changes to the revenue budget of £478k during 2021/22. Underspends of £645k, which includes unspent balances on budgets and expenditure that will slip into 2022/23, have also been identified and are set out in the table on page 3 of the report.

The General Fund balance at the end of 2021/22 is £1.173m; £307k of this will be slipped to 2022/23, leaving a balance of £866k that can be distributed to reserves. Work is continuing on the major refurbishment of the Telford Central site and the capital reserves currently stand at £9.1m.

It is not proposed that any further transfer be made to these reserves as the most appropriate allocation of funding from reserves will be determined as is necessary.

The HoF informed the meeting that it is proposed that the balance on the General Fund is earmarked for a transfer to the Strategic Transformation Board Staff Reserve to provide capacity for the suite of seven major projects that the Authority will commence in 2022/23. Officers will monitor the progress of these projects and will report to the Fire Authority when and where these funds are required to support project areas other than staff.

The Chair thanked the HoF for her reports and commented that the Fire Authority is in a good position financially as it has been prudent and taken the right action in the past.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the final position of the revenue budget and the General Fund balance in 2021/22; and
- b) Approve use of the General Fund balance in 2021/22.

13 Strategic Planning Process Timetable 2023/24

This report outlined how the Service will continue to align service, financial and improvement planning, the result of which will culminate in the 2023/24 budget and the publication of the 2023/24 Annual Plan.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report and agree the timetable set out in the Appendix to the report.

14 Further Amendments to the Pay Policy Statement 2022/23

This report set out proposed amendments to the Pay Policy Statement for consideration by the full Authority, as required under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the process agreed by the Fire Authority in February 2021.

Members were mindful that a check should be kept on the frequency of the Pay Policy Review because of the current economic climate.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Agree the further amendments to the Pay Policy Statement.

Councillor Pardy left the meeting at this point (2.47 pm)

15 Firefighters' Pension Scheme Delegations

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 advised that the amendments proposed relate to the issue of abatement which is the ability of the Authority to reduce or stop a member's pension if that member is re-employed by any Fire and Rescue Authority in any capacity after retiring. The general abatement rule is that on re-employment, the salary paid for the new role when added to the pension paid (plus inflation) cannot be more than the member salary (plus inflation) when they retired. Abatement provisions only apply to the 1992 and 2006 Pension Schemes.

Officers have reviewed the Pensions Discretions in light of a recent case involving another Fire Authority where it was found that the Authority concerned had applied a blanket policy which stipulated that abatement would apply and which left no room for 'discussion' regarding circumstances in which abatement would not apply. The review found that the discretions for this Authority need to be amended to avoid the same thing occurring and the proposed amendments are as set out in Appendices B and C to the report. In addition, it is recommended that the Fire Authority approve the formal documentation of each decision made under the amended discretions to evidence that an informed decision has been made.

Members asked how any detriment to members is measured if decisions are considered on a case-by-case basis. The HHRA explained that the Authority has very few cases of abatement; there is currently one individual who has been re-employed after retirement and abatement does not apply to them as they earn less in their new role than at the time of their retirement.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the review of the Delegation of Powers under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 (as set out in Appendix A to the report) of which items 1-52 remain unchanged;
- b) Approve and accept the proposed changes to the 1992 Scheme – point 40 – and the 2006 Scheme – points 29 and 30; and
- c) Approve the recommendation to formally document each decision to evidence that they have made an informed decision.

Councillor Pardy returned to the meeting at this point (2.55 pm)

Councillor Overton left the meeting at this point (2.55pm) and returned to the meeting at 3.00 pm.

16 Annual Report on Collaborative and Partnership Working

This report provided an overview of collaborative and partnership working being undertaken by the Fire Authority and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).

The HoTC presented this report and gave a summary of the partnership and collaborative working highlighted for Prevention and Protection, Operational Response and Equality and Diversity.

The HoTC also talked through Appendix A to the report, which updated on the Fire Alliance between Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services, and Appendix B to the report, which detailed the costs that are incurred when mobilising to support West Midlands Ambulance Service and West Mercia Policy under collaborative working practices.

The Chair added that the Fire Alliance is moving forward on the identified priority projects with the Fire Control Project now becoming the focus of the Alliance's work. The Chair also highlighted that collaboration would become even more important going forward.

Councillor Overton congratulated the Service on its partnership working and particularly thanked it for its work on the Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy (MATES) which focuses enforcement activity on high-risk premises with links to various criminal activities.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report.

17 Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2021/22

This report informed Members of the corporate risk management work that has been undertaken during the previous twelve months.

The ACFO (SS) presented this report and highlighted the following

A new risk related to the wholetime duty system pilot scheme was added to the Risk Register in November 2021

The risk related to the delay in replacing the Integrated Communications Control System was removed from the Risk Register in April 2022 together with the risk related to Service disruptions due to Covid.

The Appendix to the report details the current Risk Register and gives a Direction of Travel for each of the ten risks with one further risk being detailed in the exempt Appendix B to the report (Item 21 on this agenda). The Directions of Travel for each of the 10 risks detailed has either been maintained or has reduced with none increasing.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report.

18 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 paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

19 Exempt Fire Authority Minutes (Paragraph 3)

Resolved, with Councillors Barrow, Carroll, Jhawar, Pardy and Wynn abstaining, as they were not present at the meeting, that the exempt minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 16 February 2022, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

20 Brigade Managers Employment Panel Minutes (Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Brigade Managers Employment Panel meeting, held on 28 February 2022, be noted.

21 Exempt Appendix to Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2021/22 (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Resolved that the Fire Authority receive and note the exempt Appendix B to the report 17 – Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2021/22.

22 Supply Chain Briefing (Paragraph 3)

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the Briefing on current supply chain issues and the impacts they are having on the Service as given by the Head of Resources.

The meeting closed at 3.50 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....