

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
held on Wednesday, 24 June 2020, at 2.00 pm
via Microsoft Teams**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Blundell, Carter (Chair), Dee, Hartin, Lavery, Mellings (Vice-Chair), Milner, Minnery, Pardy, Price, Roberts, Thompson (from 2.35 pm) and Wynn

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Dave Myers	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Anthea Lowe	Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Clerk
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Guy Williams	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HTC
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Ged Edwards	Planning, Performance and Communications Manager	PPCM
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Tracey Onslow	West Mercia Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner	DPCC
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1 Vote of Thanks and Welcome

The Fire Authority gave a vote of thanks to Councillor Kelly Middleton who left the Fire Authority in May.

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

2 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Sahota

3 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Councillors Dee and Pardy declared interests in item 14 on the agenda – Pension Scheme Delegations – as they are both in receipt of a Fire Service Pension. Councillors Dee and Pardy undertook to leave the meeting for this item.

4 Public Questions

None

5 Minutes

5a 12 February 2020

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 12 February 2020, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Committee Clerk's Note

Councillors Hartin and Lavery abstained from voting on this item as they were not present at the February Fire Authority meeting

5b 20 May 2020

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 20 May 2020, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Committee Clerk's Note

Councillor Lavery abstained from voting on this item as he was not present at the May Fire Authority meeting.

6 Strategy and Resources Committee Minutes

Resolved that the Fire Authority receive and note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 12 March 2020.

7 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 30 April 2020, be noted and that the recommendations at items 7, 10 and 15b, as given below, be agreed.

Item 7 – Code of Corporate Governance 2019/20

Resolved that the Fire Authority formally adopt the Code of Corporate Governance 2019/20.

Item 10 – Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy

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

Item 15b – Member / Officer Relations Protocol and Gifts and Hospitality Protocol

Resolved that the Committee approve the Protocols as recommended by the Committee

8 Meeting Schedule 2020

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the Meeting Schedule for June to December 2020.

Deputy Monitoring Officer Anthea Lowe left the meeting at this point (2.15 pm)

9 Appointment of Clerk and Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Jonathan Eatough, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Monitoring Officer has resigned from his role at Telford & Wrekin Council (T&WC). T&WC has provided this part time function to Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority under a Service Level Agreement since 2008. This report explored the limited opportunities for a replacement Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

The DCFO presented this report and talked through the options that had been considered for Monitoring Officer provision. These included the provision of Monitoring Officer services by Shropshire Council or a shared function with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (HWFRA). As set out in the report, there are issues with both of these options including the need for the maintenance of sovereignty between this Authority and HWFRA. Therefore it was recommended that the Authority continue to use T&WC for Monitoring Officer provision.

Members agreed that this was the most sensible option to fulfil a vital role for the Authority. The CFO added that this option would also ensure that the Authority is able to access independent legal advice within the Fire Strategic Alliance.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority agree

- a) The continuance of the provision of a Monitoring Officer from Telford & Wrekin Council;
- b) The appointment of Anthea Lowe as Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Fire Authority; and
- c) That in her capacity as Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Fire Authority, Anthea Lowe appoint a suitable candidate as Deputy Monitoring Officer to act in her absence.

Anthea Lowe returned to the meeting at this point (2.25 pm)

10 Financial Performance to March 2020

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

The HoF presented this report and talked through the variances as set out in the table on page 2 of the report.

Members asked the following in relation to the Appendix to the report

- Under the pay section of the Corporate Governance Directorate, the spend on Corporate Communications is as high as on ICT - is this correct? Also why has so little of the non-pay budget for Corporate Communications been spent?
The HoF explained that the pay title is misleading as the spend does not all relate to corporate communications. This title will be changed to Service Development. The non-pay budget for corporate communications is £10k. £5k of this is for consultation but none has been done during the year. The IRMP consultation will be undertaken in 2020/21.
- What are the reasons for the non-pay overspend on IT and Communications?
The HoF explained that an ICT overspend of £13k is reported. This is related to several small areas of expenditure which the Service has decided not to report on here.
- What are the reasons for the underspend on the Members budget?
The HoF explained that the £12k underspend on this item relates to travel and conference costs together with a £3k underspend on Member Allowances.
- The Finance non-pay line under the Executive and Resources Directorate shows that -1054% of the budget had been spent which appears odd?
The HoF explained that this line contains items such as corporate movements and debt charges which will line up at the end of the year. Members suggested that a comment should be included in the covering report to explain and to ensure clarity for the public. The HoF noted the confusion caused and undertook to review and amend this item in future reports.
- Referring to the ICT overspend under Corporate Governance Directorate, the DPCC asked if it was expected that there would be an underspend on this and on utilities due to homeworking.
The HoF responded that due to the lockdown beginning in the fourth quarter of 2019/20 it is likely that any associated savings will be seen in the first quarter of 2020/21. The ICT overspend is attributed to mobile data terminals for use on appliances. No obvious savings on utilities have been identified at present.
- The DPCC also asked if there were any savings that could be attributed to the Fire Strategic Alliance.
The HoF explained that this issue would be covered in the Collaborative and Partnership Working report later on this agenda.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- Note the position of the revenue budget;
- Note, and approve where appropriate, virements to the revenue budget; and
- Note performance against prudential indicators to date in 2019/20.

Councillor Thompson and the Treasurer, James Walton, joined the meeting at this point (2.35 pm)

11 Statement of Accounts 2019/20

This report set out the key revenue issues, which had arisen from work on the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 and sought approval for use of the General Fund balance in 2020/21.

The HoF presented this report and advised the Authority that the information in it may change depending on the recommendations that come from the completed audit of the accounts later in the year. As shown in the report there are residual balances in a number of areas and slipped expenditure is detailed on page 3 of the report.

The HoF explained that Covid-19 has seen the majority of the Authority's spend since April. The Authority is able to cover these costs for the coming financial year, but it is unclear what the effects will be after 2020/21. It is possible that the costs to be borne by Central Government will affect grant provision going forward. Therefore, Officers propose the use of the General Fund Balance as set out on page 4 of the report and the Authority is asked to agree this.

Members thanked the Finance Team for their work on the closedown of the financial year and commented that the outturn was pleasing especially given that long-term financial planning has been complicated by the general election in December 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic. The Authority agreed that the proposed use of the General Fund Balance is a sensible provision in the short term especially as there are indications that council tax collection is likely to be slower in 2020/21.

Members also raised the following points in relation to the Revenue Budget and the variances identified

- What are the legal costs of the Judicial Review and what are the reasons for the £28k underspend on Legal Services?
The HoF explained that the costs of the Judicial Review are currently limited to adhoc hourly payments for work undertaken. The Legal Services title is to be changed as the £28k underspend covers £16k on legal fees and £12k on Member Allowances.
- What are the reasons for the £24k overspend on Income and Grant?
The HoF explained that the New Dimensions Grant income has dwindled over the past years. There has also been £19k of additional costs which are related to various items including the provision of Telford & Wrekin Council out of hours service and insurance claims.
- What were the costs to the Authority of the flooding incidents that occurred in 2019/20?
The HoF explained that the costs to the Authority were circa £40k. The Authority is not eligible to apply for the Bellwin Scheme as the application criteria states that in order to do so individual authorities must have spent 0.2% of their annual budget on works related to the emergency situation. For this Authority that is £44k.

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the final position of the revenue budget and the General Fund balance in 2019/20; and
- b) Approve use of the General Fund balance in 2020/21.

12 Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-25 – Consultation

This report requested authority to publish the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2021-25 for public consultation.

The CFO introduced the IRMP as one of the four fundamental Fire Strategic Alliance projects. The Fire Authority has previously approved a one-year extension to this Authority's IRMP to enable both Services to align their IRMP processes for delivery in April 2021. This Authority will consider in its IRMP a set of proposals which have been developed by the Authority's Strategic Advisory Group.

The HTC then presented the IRMP Consultation Document to the Authority highlighting that the document has been set out as the story of the Service and how it is changing. The alignment of the IRMP with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's is crucial as both Services are looking at the same aspects of organisational risk. There is also shared technology which is supporting staff across the Fire Strategic Alliance.

The IRMP process is set out in the consultation document together with changes to the county such as increased independent living for older people and the growth in diversification in the agricultural sector. The document also clearly sets out the differences between areas of the county.

The HTC particularly drew Members' attention to Section 7 of the document – Stage 2: Manage and Reduce Risk - which sets out the following headline proposals for the IRMP 2021-25

- **Revised Response standard**
Previously this standard measured the average response time for the Service which was confusing. Under the proposed changes the response times remain the same but there is clarification as to what these mean and to the definition of what an emergency is.
- **Resource Deployment Review**
It is proposed that a resource deployment review be undertaken to ensure the Service has the agility to move appliances to risk as the risk profile of the county evolves.
- **Increased Protection Team**
This proposal looks at what the Service can do to help 'keep businesses in business' along with the implementation of recommendations that have emanated from incidents such as the Grenfell Tower fire.

- **Increase Prevention Capacity to target changing rural communities**
This proposal looks at the challenge of undertaking prevention work in rural communities especially with the increase in residents over 65 living in these areas. This proposal will explore the views of rural communities on the use of technology, partnerships and volunteers to deliver prevention work to them.
- **Vision, Aims and Objectives for 2021-25**
There are proposed changes to the Service's vision, aims and objectives which need to move forward as the Service evolves.

Various monitoring and evaluation tools will be implemented to measure the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of prevention, protection and response activities. The use of such tools across the Fire Strategic Alliance will aid scrutiny of performance both within the Alliance and at a national level.

The HTC advised that as well as the online consultation survey, three focus groups consisting of members of the public will also take place. It is currently envisaged that these will be virtual meetings due to the Covid-19 restrictions that are in place. The use of social media tools within the consultation process enables the targeting of specific groups and/or members of society

The HTC also explained that the IRMP consultation documents for both Services have a shared design element which uses a curve within the layout of the document to give it a 'comforting feel'. As this is a public facing document emphasis has also been put on the use of up to date imagery and infographics to both hold the audience's attention and to try to maintain ease of reading.

The CFO commented that the IRMP is the Service's highest-level strategic document which is reviewed and updated on a four to five year basis. Previous IRMP decisions have been strongly driven by the need to make financial savings whereas this one is as much about making investments in risk reduction. As such it contains a number of initiatives that may require further public consultation during the life of the IRMP.

The CFO also highlighted that the IRMP is a challenging document to write as it has to fulfil several different functions including being the Fire Authority's contract with the public of Shropshire; giving strategic direction to the Service management; providing evidence for HMICFRS Inspections and setting out the vision to the Service's employees.

The Chair thanked the HTC for the well-informed presentation of the IRMP consultation document and commented that the IRMP is a very important subject for the HMI. The Chair stated that the document looks excellent and highlighted the importance of the public being able to relate to it.

The Chair's feelings were echoed by the Authority Members who commented that the document's presentation and the colours used made it feel inviting. Members queried the correctness of the statement on page 8 of the document that the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is in Shropshire. The HTC undertook to check and amend this as necessary.

Members also raised the point that as approximately 90% of the county is rural, is there any potential for the use of Google and/or Alexa devices to improve fire safety etc. The HTC explained that there is a lot of ongoing work that is looking at the possible uses of this assistive technology. Shropshire Council are due to start a pilot of assistive technology usage and the outcomes of this will form part of the Service's consideration of future usage of such technologies.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Having considered the contents of the Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-25, approve it for public consultation; and
- b) Having considered the consultation methodology, also approve this.

13 Strategic Planning Process Timetable 2021/22

This report outlined how the Service will continue to align service, financial and improvement planning, the result of which will culminate in the 2021/22 budget, publication of the 2021/22 Annual Plan and a four-year Action Plan 2021-25.

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

Councillors Dee and Pardy left the meeting at this point (3.40 pm)

14 Pension Scheme Delegations

14a Firefighters' Pension Scheme Delegations

This report resulted from a routine review of the discretionary powers of the Fire Authority under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the review of the Delegation of Powers under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 (as set out in the Appendix to the report) of which items 1-52 remain unchanged.

14b 2020 Review of Local Government Pension Scheme Employer Discretions – Statement of Policy

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the 2020 review of the Statement of Policy for the Local Government Pension Scheme; and
- b) Agree that the appended Statement of Policy remains unchanged.

Councillors Dee and Pardy returned to the meeting at this point (3.50 pm)

15 The Scheme for the Payment of Members Allowances 2020/21

This report asked the Fire Authority to consider and agree its 2020/21 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances.

The DCFO presented this report and highlighted Appendix B to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) report which sets out additional information regarding the allowances for Leaders of Political Groups. The Clerk clarified that the Liberal Democrat / Independent Group has 4 members which is equivalent to the membership of the main Labour opposition group. The Clerk advised that whilst the Fire Authority needs to consider the IRP's recommendations it can choose to implement them differently and therefore the Authority may wish to consider an amendment to the recommendations.

The Clerk then suggested that recommendation 4 of the IRP should be amended as follows:

The Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for Leaders of Opposition Groups with 4 or more members be set at £3,290 and the SRA for Leaders of Opposition Groups with 3 members be set at £1,645

Members agreed that this was a reasonable proposal and stated that it seemed obvious that as the two groups are of equal size, the Leader's SRAs should also be equal.

The DPCC queried that the reduction in the size of the Fire Authority by two members had reduced allowances paid to £66k but these recommendations would increase this to £71k. The DCFO confirmed that these proposals do increase the allowances but there have been no substantive changes to member allowances since 2009. The HoF offered to provide further information on this issue to the DPCC after the meeting.

Members stated that they welcomed the change to engage in an open and honest debate about the allowances paid to them.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Hartin, and

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority note the report and

- a) Accept the amendment of Members Allowances as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel, subject to the amendment around the Leaders of the Opposition Groups Special Responsibility Allowances; and
- b) Accept the recommendation by the Independent Remuneration Panel to bring Members' travel and subsistence allowances in line with those of the Fire Authority's constituent authorities.

Councillor Minnery left the meeting at this point (4.20 pm)

16 Summary Report outlining the Service Response to Covid-19

This report provided Members with an overview and awareness of the planning and measures put into place to date, to enable Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and continue to deliver its services, whilst also assisting partners to support vulnerable individuals and communities within Shropshire.

The ACFO presented this report and gave an update on current performance in relation to Covid-19. As of today, Covid-19 related absence levels are 0.7% which is equivalent to 4 individual employees who are all self-isolating. Overall absence levels are 3.3% which is believed to be influenced by the measures taken in response to the pandemic such as improved hygiene practices and social distancing. Section 6 of the report sets out activities that have been undertaken to support partner agencies. These include 25 deliveries of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face fit testing of masks for hospital and care staff.

The ACFO then provided further clarification in response to points raised by Members.

- To date, 13 employees have been tested for Covid-19. There have been variances in the waiting time for the results of these tests to be received of between 2 – 5 days.
- The potential effect on staffing of proposed quarantine measures is a concern for the Service. The National Joint Council have advised that if staff choose to take a foreign holiday, the Service can voluntarily enable them to work from home, where possible, on their return. Uniformed employees are encouraged to discuss any such plans with their managers to allow arrangements to be made on a case by case basis. At present, it appears that there are very low numbers of staff who intend to take foreign holidays during this year.
- There has been a visible effect on incident numbers with a reduction in road traffic collision incidents. There has however been an increase in fires in the open as more people burn rubbish due to waste disposal centres being closed. The Service has undertaken various media campaigns to address this issue.
- As a possibly more proactive approach to testing, particularly as many people do not have symptoms whilst infected with Covid-19, the Service may look to utilise antibody testing alongside the current point of contact testing. Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service are currently trialling antibody testing and the results of this pilot scheme are awaited.
- Moving forward, the Service can provide assurance that there will be a phased approach to moving back to a normal operating model and to dealing with a potential second wave of infections. All decisions made will be in line with Government guidance.

Members asked that their thanks and congratulations be passed onto all staff for the tremendous achievement on absence figures during lockdown. The Chair added that he was very proud of the Service's response to the situation.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the contents of the report and acknowledge the ongoing work associated with a response to Covid-19 locally, regionally and nationally.

17 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 HTC presented this report and highlighted the following points to the Fire Authority:

- The Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy partnership work also includes Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS)
- It is hoped that a similar care package assessment protocol will be signed off soon by Shropshire Council
- The Appendix to the report gives an update on the ongoing work that is being undertaken by the Strategic Fire Alliance with HWFRS. The four main projects are detailed below, and the aim is for these to act as catalysts for other service developments and innovations.

Fire Control – this is a complex project which is being informed by the lessons learnt from the Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing

Integrated Risk Management Planning – both Services have commissioned their data analysis from the same firm. This will help with sharing methodology

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – the ICT and Digital Transformation Manager is developing the ICT Strategy which will detail how the joint ICT will be achieved

Procurement – mapping of where opportunities for joint procurement will occur is being undertaken. This is assisted by the development of joint tenders and specification documents.

- The primary aim of the Fire Strategic Alliance is to enhance capacity and resilience across both Services
- It is estimated that £307k of savings and/or efficiencies have been achieved through projects that commenced before the establishment of the formal Fire Strategic Alliance

The Chair commented that partnership and collaborative working will be a key factor for the Authority going forward and by working in this way the Fire Authority is doing what has been asked of it by the Government. It is also important that this message is given to the public

The Vice-Chair endorsed the Chair's comments and added that one of the benefits of the current Covid-19 crisis has been the increased use of technology.

The Vice-Chair then referred to the review of the Fire Strategic Alliance which has been commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and queried if this would still be undertaken if the PCC's new business will not be considered by the Government until after May 2021. The Chair advised that this will be discussed further tomorrow at the Fire Alliance Review meeting that is scheduled for tomorrow.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report

Councillor Hartin and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Simon Hardiman left the meeting at this point (5.00 pm)

18 Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2019/20

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

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the report.

19 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.

20 Exempt Appendix to Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2019/20 (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the exempt Appendix B to report 18 – Corporate Risk Management Summary Annual Report 2019/20 be noted.

21 Service Executive Officer Structure (Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3)

This report asked the Fire Authority to review the current Executive Officer Structure in light of the recent Deputy Chief Fire Officer recruitment process and to consider alternative structures to ensure adequate succession planning, operational cover and executive leadership capacity in the medium term.

Resolved that the Fire Authority

- a) Agree to a new structure of the Brigade Management Team of a Chief Fire Officer and two Assistant Chief Fire Officers;
- b) Delegate authority to the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel to review and amend the job descriptions and delegations for the Assistant Chief Fire Officers; and
- c) Direct the Brigade Managers' Employment Panel to undertake the recruitment process for the appointment of two Assistant Chief Fire Officers.

Simon Hardiman returned to the meeting at this point (5.15 pm)

22 Telford Central Refurbishment Project Update (Paragraph 3)

This report updated Members on the latest position regarding the tender process for the refurbishment of Telford Central Fire Station and the Service Training Centre.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the latest position regarding the Telford Central refurbishment programme.

The meeting closed at 5.20 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....