

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
held at the Shirehall, Shrewsbury,
on Wednesday, 19 December 2007 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen, Box, Major Coles, Dr Drummond, Eade, Groom, Hartin, Mrs Holyoak (Vice-Chair), Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mason, Minnery, Picken and West (Chair)

Before business commenced, Members and officers stood and observed a minute's silence in memory of the four firefighters from Warwickshire, who lost their lives recently in the course of duty. A number of retired employees of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service had also died over the previous months and the Chair, therefore, asked that they and their families be remembered.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Davies, Mrs Greenaway and Mellings.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Lt Col Allen declared a prejudicial interest in item 19 on the agenda, The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances, in that he was the Member appointed to sit as the Fire Authority's nominated Director of the Board of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre and the report proposed a special responsibility allowance for the Director.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 17 October 2007.

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting, held on 17 October 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.



5 Constitution of Standards Committee

This report informed Members of the forthcoming changes to the ethical framework, which applies to elected Members, and sought permission to undertake work to ensure compliance with the new procedures contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer acknowledged that, since adoption of the Model Code of Conduct, the Fire Authority had not been required to deal with any cases regarding breach of the Code. Nevertheless, it was important that the Authority had in place the necessary sub-committees, should such a case arise.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve an increase in the number of Independent Members of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee from two to four and permit the commencement of an exercise to recruit the additional Independent Members required;
- b) Delegate authority to the Fire Authority's Clerk and Monitoring Officer to amend the membership of the Standards Committee to allow the Fire Authority to meet the requirements set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and also in accordance with any subsequent associated regulations; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Fire Authority's Clerk and Monitoring Officer to amend the Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee to incorporate the additional responsibility imposed upon the Committee by the relevant provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

6 Review of Scheme of Delegation to Officers and of Standing Orders

This report requested the Fire Authority to agree the additional amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business, which stood adjourned from the last meeting of the Fire Authority following the further review requested by Members at the Annual Meeting in July.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree the proposed amendments to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business, as set out in paragraph 3 of the report

7 Member Champion Presentations

In view of recent changes in the Councillors acting as various Member Champions and the illness of another there were no presentations to the meeting. Furthermore, the Fire Authority was asked to consider whether the presentations should be made annually as opposed to every six months, which would in turn reduce the number to be made at each meeting.



It was noted that the process had now been in operation for eighteen months, which had provided the opportunity to assess its appropriateness. Members concurred that twice yearly presentations were unnecessary. It was agreed, however, that a Member Champion might give a presentation prior to the annual scheduled date, where circumstances required it.

Subject to the foregoing, it was

Resolved that Member Champion presentations be made to the Fire Authority on an annual basis

8 Standards Committee

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 29 October 2007.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 29 October 2007

9 Strategy and Resources Committee

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 15 November 2007.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 15 November 2007

10 Audit and Performance Management Committee

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 22 November 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 5 and 6.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 26 July 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 5 and 6

11 Human Resources Committee

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 December 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 6, 7 and 10.

With reference to item 8 in the minutes (Employment of Firefighters on the Retained Duty System as Police Community Support Officers) Members felt that this issue needed to be resolved between the Home Office and Communities and Local Government. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer confirmed that the matter had been raised nationally with the Fire Lawyers Network.



Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting, held on 6 December 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 6, 7 and 10

12 West Midlands Regional Management Board

The Fire Authority received the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 25 October 2007, and considered the recommendations at items 36/07, 37/07 and 39/07.

Resolved that the Fire Authority note the minutes of the West Midlands Regional Management Board meeting, held on 25 October 2007, and agree the recommendations at items 36/07, 37/07 and 39/07

13 Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation Results

This report updated Members on progress with implementation of the actions in the 2007/08 Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Action Plan. It advised Members of the outcome of an extensive, three-month period of consultation on the Fire Authority's draft IRMP Action Plan for 2008/09, and recommended changes to these documents as a result of that consultation. In addition, it sought approval for the IRMP Members' Working Group to progress the 2008/09 IRMP process to the implementation phase.

Following a presentation on the 2008/09 Consultation Outcomes (a copy of the presentation slides is attached to the signed minutes), given by the IRMP Manager, a discussion took place about the effectiveness of the consultation process. Councillor Minnery, as Chair of the IRMP Members' Working Group, agreed that the Group would review the process and consider how the Fire Authority might connect better with the general public in future. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised, however, that this Authority's consultation process had been held up by the Audit Commission as an example of best practice.

Referring to the final recommendation in the report, Councillor Box asked that a letter be sent to each station and the Fire Brigades Union, thanking them for their work and involvement. Councillor Minnery thanked all Members for their extensive participation, which was appreciated by staff.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the progress with the implementation of the 2007/08 IRMP Action Plan;
- b) Approve the introduction of response standards for 'Life Risk Water Incidents', as detailed in section 6 of the report;
- c) Note the extent of the consultation exercise undertaken with staff, stakeholders and the public with regard to the draft IRMP Action Plan 2008/09;
- d) Approve the changes to the IRMP documents, as proposed by the Fire Authority's IRMP Members' Working Group as a result of feedback obtained through the consultation process, detailed in section 11 of the report;



- e) Delegate responsibility to the IRMP Members' Working Group to progress the IRMP process, as detailed in section 12 of the report; and
- f) Note the thanks of the IRMP Members' Working Group to all staff, the Fire Brigades Union and the officers involved in the IRMP consultation

14a Budget Monitoring to October 2007, including Prudential Guidelines

This report detailed further variances that had been identified, whilst monitoring the revenue budget for 2007/08, and provided summary financial information for the Fire Authority as a whole. The Fire Authority's performance against its prudential indicators was also reported.

Referring to the revenue budget underspend, the Chief Fire Officer asked Members whether £80,000 could be earmarked for the Senior Management Team to participate in the Executive Development Programme run by the Fire Service College. He felt this was important, as none of the Team had received development during the last three years. All Members were in favour of this proposal and agreed that two of the Team should participate during 2008/09 and two in 2009/10, provided that places were available and the Team maintained operational cover.

Following a question from Councillor Box about how savings had been made in drills and training for the Retained Duty System, the Principal Accountant undertook to clarify the issue and report back to Members.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget as a whole;
- b) Approve the virements detailed in section 4;
- c) Note the performance against prudential indicators; and
- d) Earmark £80,000 for development of the Senior Management Team

The Chair advised that the Treasurer wished to deal with report 14d – 2008/9 to 2010/11 Budget Summary and Options – first and then return to reports 14b and 14c

14d 2008/09 to 2010/11 Budget Summary and Options

This report summarised the budget situation so far. It presented the various options for further consideration and consultation during January, leading to a final decision by the Authority on 13 February 2008. Copies of the Strategy and Resources Committee reports 5 and 5a to 5e were attached to this report for information.

The Treasurer explained that the three reports, 14b, 14c and 14d needed to be taken together. He asked that, for the time being, Members accept the content of 14b and c, to which he would return, once 14d had been considered.

It was noted that, as a result of data changes, the provisional grant settlement for this Authority was good compared to that awarded to some others.



Communities and Local Government had confirmed that they did not intend to change the data during the three-year period of the settlement or to amend in retrospect a grant once given, unless there were exceptional circumstances. The grant should, therefore, be stable for the next three years.

It was further noted that a one percent increase in the precept would provide an additional £120,000 to the Fire Authority.

Councillor Box said that he would like to see the Fire Authority in a break-even position at the end of the three-year settlement period, whilst keeping to the Authority's commitment to bring council tax down. According to the figures provided by the Treasurer the Authority would be in such a position, if it were to set an increase of just below 3.9%.

After some discussion Members agreed in principle to an increase of 3.75% and asked the Treasurer to set out the precise implications of this approach. Once this information was available the Fire Authority would agree its budget strategy.

The Treasurer then returned to report 14b.

14b 2008/09 to 2010/11 Capital Report

This report updated the capital programmes, which were presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee in November, for more recent information.

The Treasurer advised that the St Michael's Street project was a major one, which would build up a large amount of prudential borrowing with debt charges continuing to rise into the fourth year. Consequently, the Fire Authority must have a coherent strategy to deal with it. Although the report provided outline figures, there were bound to be other financial implications, which it was not yet possible to forecast.

The Chief Fire Officer then ran through the advantages and disadvantages of the options put forward in the report. Councillor Minnery felt that Option A was not feasible but he supported Option B. He also agreed with Option C, provided that safety was not compromised and it would not leave the Fire Authority vulnerable.

Councillor Minnery, therefore, proposed, it was seconded by Councillor Hartin and

Resolved unanimously that the Fire Authority:

- a) Adopt the revised phasing of the St Michael's Street project, as in Option B;
- b) Adopt the rephasing of appliance replacements, as in Option C;
- c) Adopt the changed programme for information technology investment, subject to detailed scrutiny of the project appraisal; and



- d) Agree that the following revenue consequences of the revised capital programme be included in the next phase of the budget, subject to Member scrutiny of individual project appraisals:

	Total Capital	Revenue Consequences		
	Cost	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000	£000
2008/09 starts	1,025	61	138	138
2009/10 starts	2,285	-	134	271
2011/12 starts	3,299	-	-	108
		61	272	517

14c 2008/09 to 2010/11 Service Developments, Efficiencies and Reductions

This report set out potential service developments that had been identified for the three years of the Public Spending Review. It also dealt with efficiencies and service reductions.

Councillor Eade left the room at this point (3.30 pm).

In response to a question from Councillor Box regarding the development issues listed in the Appendix to the report the Chief Fire Officer advised that the issues had been risk assessed and the implications of not pursuing them considered.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree that the service developments, totalling £438,000, set out in paragraph 4 and the appendix, be included in the next phase of the budget, subject to Member scrutiny of individual project appraisals;
- b) Agree, for budget planning purposes, to include a further £200,000 in 2009/10, and £400,000 in 2010/11 for service developments;
- c) Agree, for budget planning purposes, to include a further £150,000 in 2009/10, and £300,000 in 2010/11 for efficiencies; and
- d) Consider service reductions, if it became clear that a service development of sufficient priority could not be funded, once the grant settlement became known

14d 2008/09 to 2010/11 Budget Summary and Options

Having considered reports 14b and 14c the Fire Authority then returned to the recommendations in report 14d.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Confirm its decisions on the capital programme (as set out at item 14b above);
- b) Confirm its decisions on growth, efficiencies and reductions (as set out at item 14c above);



- c) Confirm its approach to reserves, provisions and funds (as set out in sections 5 and 7 of the report);
- d) Confirm its policy on precept levels over the next three years (as set out at item 14d on page 6 above); and
- e) Request the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider the budget package in light of its views, detailed consideration of individual proposals and any subsequent new information

The Chair advised that, as the Fire Authority had agreed, in principle, its approach to the budget, it would no longer be necessary to hold the Special Meeting, which had been scheduled for the afternoon of 11 January 2008. This date would, however, be retained for its original purpose, namely a development session for Members. Officers undertook to advise Members of full details in due course.

15 Review of Charges for Special Services

Councillor Eade returned at this point (3.35 pm).

This report provided details to the Fire Authority about the number and nature of special services requested by the public, and reviewed the current tariff for consistency with other brigades, both regionally and nationally.

At the request of Councillor Box the Principal Accountant undertook to include the average figure for all charges in future Tariffs of Charges.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the information on the nature of special service requests within the report;
- b) Note the regional and national comparisons of tariffs for special service charges; and
- c) Request that officers present an updated tariff of special service charges, incorporating inflationary increases, to the Authority in February

16 Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 Consultation Document

This report brought to the attention of Members the recently issued Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11, together with the supplementary Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Councillor Box advised that the Local Government Association Fire Services Management Committee, of which he was a member, had discussed the proposed Equality and Diversity Strategy. It was concerned that brigades, such as this one, with a large proportion of Retained Duty System staff would find it difficult to meet the targets set. Councillor Box emphasised that, as assessment of such targets would form part of future audits, it was extremely important that the Fire Authority's response to the consultation reflected this concern.



The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that the Fire Authority's officers shared this view and would ensure that it was included in the response.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the new Framework document; and
- b) Authorise officers to prepare, for consideration and approval by the Strategy and Resources Committee, a response to the Framework and associated Equality and Diversity Strategy consultation survey

17 West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Company Members' Agreement

This report updated Members on the legal documentation required to complete the setting up of the Local Authority Controlled Company, known as 'West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Company'. In particular, the report discussed the Members' Agreement, which was attached as an appendix to the report.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Programme Board of the West Midlands Regional Management Board had met recently and recommended that, for the time being, costs of the Regional Control Centre be shared between the Constituent Authorities on the basis of population. Since then, however, one of the authorities had considered and rejected this recommendation.

It was noted that the Fire Authority's Solicitor had advised that the following wording should be added at section 7.3 (c) of the Agreement:

"in accordance with the cost apportionment model".

The Chief Fire Officer went on to say that the best method of cost apportionment for this Authority would be on the basis of call volumes. It was not, however, possible at present to measure calls consistently throughout the five Authorities, because of the different recording methods. It was likely that this method would be adopted eventually, when consistency in call recording had been achieved.

On the advice of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer recommendation a) was amended from 'by the Chair' to 'by an authorised signatory'. Members also felt that an additional clause should be added to recommendation a) to the effect that the cost apportionment method must be acceptable to this Authority.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Agree in principal to the signing of the agreement by an authorised signatory of the Fire Authority, once the agreed cost apportionment method is formally part of the document (provided the method is acceptable to this Authority); and
- b) If necessary, to delegate authority to the Strategy and Resources Committee to agree the document, if there are financial concerns surrounding the cost apportionment method



Councillor Hurst-Knight left at this point (3.50 pm).

18 European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo da Vinci)

18a Members' Falck Visit

This report provided an overview of the recent visit to Falck in Denmark of three Members of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.

The Chief Fire Officer reiterated his thanks to Henrik B Hansen, the Chief Fire Officer of Falck, for hosting the visit. He also thanked ECOTEC, the administering body, for their help and encouragement and proposed that the Assistant Chief Fire Officer send a letter to that effect from the Fire Authority. This was agreed by Members.

A discussion then ensued about various aspects of the visit, including the Falck Youth Fire Brigade, Falck regional control rooms, training and the involvement of Members of this Fire Authority in Fire Service matters.

Resolved that the Fire Authority:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Acknowledge the vision, drive and hard work of Assistant Chief Fire Officer Worrall and his team in making the Leonardo da Vinci exchange programme such a resounding success

18b Update on Progress and Proposals

This report appraised Members of progress with the current Staff Exchange Programme facilitated through the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme and set out proposals for further Member / staff development opportunities during 2008/09.

Having considered the report the Fire Authority,

Resolved:

- a) To note progress to date with the current Exchange Programme; and
- b) To approve the submission of further applications for funding for 2008/09

Having previously declared a prejudicial interest in item 19, Councillor Allen left the room at this point.



19 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances

This report outlined the current position regarding Members' allowances and asked the Fire Authority:

- To agree its 2008/09 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances;
- To agree a special responsibility allowance for the Member nominated to serve on the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Fire Services Regional Control Centre; and
- To note that the Independent Remuneration Panel would carry out a full review of Member allowances in autumn 2008.

It was noted that the deadline for submission of travel and subsistence claims was 7th of each month.

Councillor Coles asked whether the subsistence rates were to be increased and, if so, whether they would be backdated. The Corporate Services Manager responded that a full review of the Allowances Scheme would be carried out in autumn 2008 by the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Panel would be asked to make recommendations on this issue, which would then be considered by the Fire Authority.

Resolved that the Fire Authority agree:

- a) To maintain the current Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances, in which case the allowances would increase automatically by the percentage to be agreed by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services with effect from 1 April 2008;
- b) The wording of the Scheme for 2008/09;
- c) A special responsibility allowance of £2,562 per annum for the Member appointed to sit as the Fire Authority's nominated Director on the Board of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre;
- d) That this allowance should be backdated to the date of the appointment, namely 18 July 2007; and
- e) To note that the Independent Remuneration Panel would carry out a full review of the Scheme in autumn 2008

Councillor Allen returned to the meeting at this point.

20 Dates of Meetings

This report advised Members of the dates already agreed and proposed for meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees for 2008 and 2009.

The Corporate Services Manager advised that no dates had yet been planned for Member training seminars in 2009. As soon as they had been Members would be advised.



At the request of Councillor Coles officers undertook to ask Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin to include the dates of Fire Authority meetings in the diaries, which they produce.

Resolved that Fire Authority Members agree and note in their diaries:

- a) The proposed amendments to dates of meetings of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, as set out in Appendix A to the report; and
- b) The proposed dates for all meetings of the Authority and its committees for 2009, as set out at Appendix B to the report

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair wished all Members and officers a merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

The meeting closed at 4.20 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

