

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 2 October 2007 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Box, Eade, Hartin, Holyoak, and West

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor West and seconded by Councillor Mrs Holyoak

That Councillor Eade be elected Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Eade was duly elected Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor West and seconded by Councillor Eade

That Councillor Mrs Holyoak be appointed Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Mrs Holyoak was duly appointed Vice-Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Minnery and Picken.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



5 Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007.

Resolved that the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

6 Public Questions

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

7 Integrated Strategic Planning Process – Service, Financial and Improvement Planning

This report outlined how the Service proposed to integrate further the Strategic Planning Process in order to align Service, Budget and Improvement Planning. The outcome of the proposals set out in the report would be two overarching integrated strategic documents – a forward-looking ‘Corporate Plan’ and a backward-facing performance report – ‘Annual Report.’

Members were fully supportive of the principles behind the process but commented that they had difficulty reading the Gantt charts appended. Officers, therefore, undertook to devise a better way of presenting such charts in the future.

In response to a question about how officers would deal with the uncertainties, if the Government were to announce only a one-year, as opposed to a three-year, settlement, the Programme Manager advised that, if that were to happen, officers would need to review the process.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Approve the further alignment of the Strategic Planning Process; and
- b) Recognise the interdependencies behind Service, Budget and Improvement Planning

8 Budget Strategy 2008/09 to 2010/11

This report informed the Committee of the present position on budget planning and was to be read in conjunction with the previous report on the agenda co-ordinating service and financial planning.

The Treasurer advised that the report derived from work carried out by the Budget Working Group at its meeting on 30 September. It did not present any new information but restated the position agreed in February.



It was noted that the Treasurer's main anxiety, referred to in recommendation c), was the short timescale available to the Fire Authority and its officers to conduct a considerable amount of work. Members discussed when the Government was likely to announce the grant settlement to individual authorities and reached the conclusion that it would be prudent to arrange a meeting of the full Fire Authority now, which would take place in January. Under his powers as Chair of the Authority, Councillor West asked officers to arrange such a meeting.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the current position on budget planning;
- b) Confirm the budget process and the financial parameters for planning service developments, reductions and efficiencies, as set out in paragraph 11; and
- c) Note the potentially short timescale between the provisional grant announcement and the December meeting of the Authority

9 Formula Grant Distribution Consultation Paper

This report sought the approval of the Committee to making responses to the Government's Consultation Paper on various options for the distribution of grant over the next three years.

It was noted that the Treasurer had picked out, and provided responses to, those questions, which were relevant to the Fire Authority. He advised that the response relating to area cost adjustments should be emphasised, given the belief that resources devoted to this adjustment were too high in a service where most costs were determined nationally.

Members agreed that more detail in support of this Fire Authority's case should also be included in the responses to questions 22 and 23.

Subject to the above, it was

Resolved that the Committee respond, as set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report

10 Audit Commission Value for Money Profile Tool

This report provided Members with details of a 'value for money profile tool' recently provided by the Audit Commission to support their auditors in undertaking this year's 'use of resources' and 'direction of travel' audits, which form important parts of the fire and rescue performance assessment for 2007.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Audit Commission team was currently with the Service undertaking this year's 'use of resources' and 'direction of travel' audits of the Fire Authority.



Members did not believe that there was any merit in officers' conducting more detailed analysis of the tool. They reiterated their concerns of last year regarding the accuracy and, therefore, the usefulness of statistics supplied to fire and rescue authorities with the aim of assisting in improving their performance. They discussed what this Fire Authority could do to eliminate the inaccuracies and how much work this involved for the Chief Fire Officer. After some debate Members agreed that it would be useful for the Chief Fire Officer to offer to work with the Audit Commission to achieve this end.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the findings of an analysis conducted by officers of the 'value for money profile tool' developed and provided by the Audit Commission;
- b) Agree that there were no areas where they felt that further, more detailed analysis would be beneficial; and
- c) Agree that they wished the findings of the analysis to be forwarded to the Audit Commission and the Chief Fire Officer to offer his services to assist with improvement of the 'value for money profile tool'

11 Audit Commission Performance Information Profile Tool

This report provided Members with details of a 'performance information profile tool' recently provided by the Audit Commission to support their auditors in undertaking this year's 'use of resources' and 'direction of travel' audits, which form important parts of the fire and rescue performance assessment for 2007.

The Chair asked about ill-health retirements and sickness absence. The Chief Fire Officer referred to a report (The Well Managed Organisation), which had been considered by the Fire Authority's Human Resources Committee in September. The report had shown the improvements, which had been made the previous year. Furthermore, the introduction of a new human resources information system, 'Resource Link' would provide management with better statistics, which would identify where performance needed to be improved.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the findings of an analysis conducted by officers of the 'performance information profile tool' developed and provided by the Audit Commission;
- b) Agree that there were no areas where they felt that further, more detailed analysis would be beneficial; and
- c) Agree that they wished the findings of the analysis to be forwarded to the Audit Commission to assist with improvement of the 'performance information profile tool'

12 Budget Monitoring Process for 2007/08

This report outlined the proposed method of monitoring the revenue budget for 2007/08, to the Committee and to the Fire Authority.



The Treasurer pointed out that the report did not set out any actual monitoring: this would be presented to the meeting of the Fire Authority scheduled for later that month. Officers proposed the format shown in the report but welcomed feedback from the Committee about what information it wished to be included and how the format might be improved.

The Treasurer advised that the Audit Commission encouraged the 'traffic light' system for budget monitoring and he went on to explain what this was. After some discussion the Committee decided that it did not wish to adopt this system. It did, however, wish to receive information on problems areas and exception issues, where there was a risk of over or underspends.

Resolved that the Committee note and agree the proposed format for budget monitoring for the current year

13 Capital Schemes Progress 2006/07 and 2007/08

This report advised the Strategy and Resources Committee of the progress with schemes in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 capital programmes. It addressed the improvement idea, identified by the Member Champion for Asset Management and Procurement, that Members should receive regular updates on the progress of capital schemes.

The Head of Resources emphasised that this and the following report on the agenda had been prepared at the request of the Fire Authority's Member Champion for Asset Management and Procurement.

The committee considered the Service's approach to delivery of its capital programme and endorsed prioritisation on maximising benefits over early delivery.

In response to a question from Councillor Hartin regarding improvements at the Shrewsbury site, the Head of Resources confirmed that expenditure was being kept to that required to ensure that the site was operating safely.

Although the issue was more relevant to the following item on the agenda, Members, at this point, had an extensive discussion about the optimum time for purchasing appliances and the effect, which this would have upon future capital budgets. They appreciated that uncertainty surrounding future Government settlements was a major factor affecting how and when such decisions would be made.

Resolved that the Strategy and Resources Committee note the position with the agreed schemes

14 Use of Capital

This report advised the Strategy and Resources Committee of capital investment made over the last three years and the benefits, which had been obtained from this investment.



The Head of Resources highlighted that the report also summarised the lessons learned from the procurement process, adding that he had brought the report to this meeting because of its relationship to the annual Asset Stewardship Report (item 15 on the agenda).

Having considered the benefits achieved, the Committee

Resolved to take these into account when considering future capital funding requests

15 Asset Stewardship Report

This report advised the Strategy and Resources Committee of the current condition of assets owned by the Authority and changes, which had occurred in the financial year 2006/07. This was a summary of information previously provided in the form of budget working papers, capital appraisals and capital budget reports, together with additional information.

The Head of Resources pointed out that the date of September 2008, given in section four of the report, for delivery of three new appliances was now anticipated to be January 2008.

Resolved that the Committee note the current asset position

16 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This was the latest of the regular risk summary reports to the Strategy and Resources Committee. As previously, these reports were intended to enable Members to meet the requirements of the Committee's Terms of Reference as they related to the Fire Authority's management of corporate risk. The progress reported related to that achieved since the Annual Summary Report, received by the Fire Authority at its meeting in July 2007.

The Head of Performance and Risk highlighted the most significant risks, details of which appeared on pages thirteen and fourteen of the report. He asked Members for their comments on the usefulness of the current reporting format and how it might be improved. After some discussion Members agreed that there was too much information, which was, in some instances, confusing. They, therefore, asked that all of the graphs on pages eight to eleven of the report be omitted in future, with the exception of the final graph relating to overall risk levels with current levels of control in place. They also felt that it would be helpful to have more details of all of those risks, which appeared above the tolerance level, rather than just the most significant.

Referring to risk 67, Councillor Box asked whether there was not also a risk that the Fire Authority might be held liable, if its officers failed to take enforcement action under the Regulatory Reform Order and a member of the public was injured or died because premises presented a fire risk. Officers undertook to clarify the position with the Authority's legal advisers.



Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Agree changes to the structure and contents of the report, as outlined above

16a Annual Treasury Report 2006/07

This report informed Members of the treasury activities for 2006/07, as required by the Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

17 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, in accordance with section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of items 18, 19 and 20 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, by virtue of paragraphs 3 and 4

18 Exempt Minutes (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007.

The Committee Clerk pointed out that the list of Members present, given at the head of the exempt minutes, was incorrect: it should have read Councillors Box, Eade, Hartin and West.

Having noted the above correction, Members

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 24 May 2007, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

19 Corporate Risk Management – Exempted Information (Paragraphs 3 and 4)

The Committee had already received an open session report, which summarised the Fire Authority's current exposure to corporate risk. This report supplemented the open session report, as it contained information that was exempt from publication by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A.

Resolved that Members note the contents of this report, in conjunction with the Corporate Risk Summary, discussed at item 16



20 Special Exemption from Standing Orders relating to Contracts (Paragraph 3)

This report advised Members of special exemptions from Standing Orders relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

Exemptions were requested in the form of a memorandum from the responsible officer to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer. These were then discussed at regular Chair's briefing sessions, where the agreement, or otherwise, was noted and a copy of the memorandum placed on the Authority's contract register. This report included information taken directly from those memoranda to enable Members to consider the information on which the decision had been taken.

Having considered the report, Members

Resolved:

- a) To note the special exemptions from Standing Orders relating to Contracts, which had been agreed by the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer, after consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority;
- b) That the exemption procedure had been applied appropriately; and
- c) To offer no advice on future implementation of this policy

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....



Definitions of Exempt Information Local Government Act 1972 – Schedule 12A

Part 1 Descriptions of Exempt Information: England

Paragraph 1

Information relating to any individual

Paragraph 2

Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual

Paragraph 3

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information)

Paragraph 4

Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority

Paragraph 5

Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

Paragraph 6

Information which reveals that the authority proposes:

- (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
- (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.

Paragraph 7

Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

