



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 7 December 2016 at – Fire Service Headquarters, at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors D Bailey, P Booher, H Deynem, A Dirir, D Flude, P Harris, E Johnson, D Mahon, D Marren, J Mercer, G Merry, L Morgan, K Mundry, S Nelson, S Parker, B Rudd, J Saunders, T Sherlock, M Simon, M Tarr, J Weatherill and S Wright

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair proposed that Item 11: Proposals Relating to Chester Fire Station should be considered at the start of the meeting. Members were content with this change to the order of business. Members excluded the press and public (Item 10) and dealt with Item 11 after Procedural Matter 1B and then reverted to the agenda.

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Polhill.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's Announcements which included details of the Authority's achievements and events Members had attended since the Authority's last meeting in September. It also included dates for Members diaries for forthcoming events in December and the New Year.

The Chair also introduced and welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, Mr David Keane, who attended the meeting to observe as a visitor.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

E Minutes of Fire Authority Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 21st September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

F Minutes of Policy Committee

The meeting of the Policy Committee scheduled for 14th September 2016 was cancelled.

G Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on the 16th November 2016 be received, for information.

H Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 5th October 2016 be received, for information.

Matters Arising: Item 2 – Dispensations

Since this decision was made, Councillor Deynem had indicated that he wished to benefit from the dispensations agreed for both the Council Tax precept and Members' Allowances Scheme. The Fire Authority were asked if they would extend the dispensations made by the Governance and Constitution Committee to include Councillor Deynem.

RESOLVED:

That the decision to grant dispensations allowing Members to take part in debates and votes concerning the setting of the Council Tax precept and approval of the Members' Allowances Scheme be extended to include Councillor Deynem.

I Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee held on 9th November 2016 be received, for information.

J Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group meeting held on 4th October 2016 be received, for information.

2 2017-18 DRAFT BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Head of Finance presented the report which advised Members that the Authority was required to approve a budget and set the Council Tax precept for the year commencing 1st April 2017. He informed Members that, for the budget to be approved, the Authority must consider all relevant factors. These included the likely impact of policy options on the Authority, the prevailing economic climate and the impact of anticipated future grant reductions.

Members were informed that this was the first of two budget reports and that the final report would be considered by the Authority in February 2017. In addition, Members would be asked to consider a range of options to be built into the 2017-18 budget at their planning day on 13th January 2017.

He advised that the report provided background to the financial position of the Authority and referred to the national context, identifying risks that the Authority should take into consideration. It also provided an update on the Authority's funding position, the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Capital Programme and the Authority's reserves.

The Head of Finance concluded that the report reflected the continuing climate of austerity in which all public sector bodies were operating and the difficulty in planning for the future given the level of uncertainty about funding. Members were informed that the bulk of savings required over the life of the latest plan would be from Emergency Response Programmes 1 and 2. Officers were also considering further savings proposals which would, if pursued, involve difficult decisions in future years.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report and information relevant to the setting of the 2017-18 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan be noted.

3 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER FOR CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY: YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2016

The Head of Finance informed Members that representatives from Grant Thornton had sent apologies for the meeting and that he would present the report in their absence. He explained that the Annual Audit Letter provided an overall summary of the audit carried out by the External Audit and drew Members' attention to the key messages.

He informed Members that an unqualified audit opinion had been issued together with an unqualified value for money opinion in the Audit Findings report presented to Members on 21st September 2016.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Audit Letter for Cheshire Fire Authority for the year ended

31st March 2016 be noted.

4 APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

The Head of Finance introduced the report which sought their approval for a process for the appointment of external auditors for 2018-19. He drew Members' attention to the two options that were proposed to appoint an auditor.

The first option required the setting up of an auditor panel, either on its own or jointly with others, to appoint an auditor. The second option required the Authority to opt into the appointing person arrangements made by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA). He advised Members that the second option was recommended by officers. A timeline was included in the report of the next steps that would be taken if the Authority accepted the recommendation and agreed the second option.

He concluded by explaining that it would not yet be possible to assess the impact of a change in the arrangements on the external audit fee, but that fees had generally fallen significantly in recent years and it would seem likely that a national procurement exercise carried out by PSAA would lead to a lower level of fees.

RESOLVED: That

[1] Option 2 (as outlined in paragraph 8) be approved and the Authority opt in to the appointing person arrangements for appointing the auditor from 2018-19 for a period of 5 years.

5 TREASURY MANAGEMENT- MID YEAR REPORT 2016-17

The Head of Finance introduced the report which provided an update on performance against the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy. He informed Members that the Authority agreed its annual Treasury Management Strategy for 2016-17 at its meeting on 10th February 2016. He updated Members on the Authority's treasury portfolio as at the end of September 2016 and also expanded on investments, borrowing and compliance with Prudential Indicators for 2016-17.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Treasury Management – Mid Year Report 2016-17 be noted.

6 UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS - POLICY PROPOSALS

The Head of Protection presented the report which proposed amendments to the Authority's Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) policy. He explained that the proposals were in keeping with the plan previously agreed by Members to incrementally change the Service's response to automated fire alarms (AFAs).

He advised Members of the current attendance policy and explained that, for any further reductions to the number of AFAs attended to occur, the policy needed to be reviewed. He reminded Members of the impact on the Service of responding to UwFS, such as appliances being unavailable to respond to genuine life threatening

emergencies and the unnecessary risk to staff and other road users of responding to AFAs under blue light conditions.

The Head of Prevention presented two proposals (Option 1 and Option 2) to Members. Option 1 involved non-attendance for all non-domestic buildings during 0900-1700hrs, which would realise a 16.8% reduction based on 2015-16 figures. Option 2 involved non-attendance for all non-domestic, non-sleeping risk premises (extending the current 0900-1700 policy to 24 hours), which would realise a 66.8% reduction based on 2015-16 figures.

A Member queried whether the policy would exclude non-occupied historic buildings. The Head of Protection confirmed that the policy currently excluded non-occupied historic buildings and that the two proposed policy options would also continue to do so.

A Member queried the implications of the policy on public service buildings, with particular reference to schools, and asked whether there would be an increased risk of a serious incident occurring as a result of amending the policy. The Head of Protection informed Member that the most successful way to alleviate the risk of fires in schools was to ensure that sprinklers were fitted. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Service did not currently attend these premises under the existing policy and reiterated the importance of sprinklers being fitted in these premises. Members discussed methods for ensuring that schools were fitted.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the adoption and implementation of Option 2 to assist the Service in reducing the number of Unwanted Fire Signals be approved.

7 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2017-18

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report to Members which presented the draft Member Development Strategy for 2017-18. The Chair of the Member Training and Development Group (MTDG) updated Members with progress on training for the current year and the proposals for next year. The Member Training and Development Group would be developing a role/job description for Fire Authority Members and reviewing the information provided to constituent authorities to raise awareness of the commitment required from Fire Authority Members.

The Chair of the Member Training and Development Group also reminded Members of the importance of attending induction and training sessions to gain an understanding of the Authority, particularly in light of the forthcoming Fire Reform Programme.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Member Development Strategy 2017-18 be approved.

8 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2017-18

The report provided Members with details of the proposed programme of meetings for the Fire Authority for 2017/18 for approval.

Meetings were scheduled to tie in with relevant dates for budgetary and policy requirements and to satisfy the requirements of the Fire Authority's constitution. The 2017-18 timetable also included dates for a number of additional Member meetings and planning days to assist Members with diary planning for the coming year.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the programme of Member meetings for 2017-18 be approved.

9 BLUE LIGHT COLLABORATION - FURTHER CHANGE TO SCOPE

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided an update for Members on proposals to further change the scope of the Blue Light Collaboration (BLC) Programme.

He advised Members that the BLC Programme included a requirement to deliver a joint vehicle workshop at Clemonds Hey. However, after a great deal of work the following conclusions had been reached: the creation of a joint workshop would involve some compromises for police and fire; it would be costly to create; and savings would be minimal. Therefore, officers recommended to Members that the joint vehicle workshop should be removed from the BLC Programme and the facility should be retained at Sadler Road.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the creation of a joint vehicle workshop be removed from the BLC Programme; and

[2] the facility at Sadler Road be retained and workshop staff remain as Fire Authority employees.

10 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Order 2006, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item of business listed below on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act in the paragraph indicated:

Item 11: Proposals Relating to Chester Fire Station

Paragraph

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

11 PROPOSALS RELATING TO CHESTER FIRE STATION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report to Members which contained details of various options for the potential redevelopment of the Chester Fire Station site.

RESOLVED: That

[1] officers be authorised to negotiate and conclude an agreement with the developer based on the approach in Option 2 as described in the report to the Fire Authority of 21st September 2016 upon terms that satisfactorily deliver the Authority's requirements.

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