



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 21 September 2016 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors D Bailey, P Booher, A Dirir, D Flude, P Harris, E Johnson, D Marren, J Mercer, G Merry, K Mundry, S Nelson, R Polhill, S Parker, B Rudd, M Simon, M Tarr and S Wright

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

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

B Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H Deynem, D Mahon, L Morgan, J Saunders, T Sherlock and J Weatherill.

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 Annual Meeting in June. It also included dates for Members diaries for forthcoming events in October and November 2016.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that those Members from Warrington Borough Council appeared to have a Disclosable Non-Pecuniary Interest in Item 15, Option to Purchase Land adjacent to Stockton Heath Fire Station. He suggested that the decision did not appear likely to significantly affect the financial interests of Warrington Borough Council so that those Members should be able to take part in any debate and vote.

E Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 15th June 2016 be approved as a correct record.

F Minutes of Policy Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Policy Committee held on 22nd June 2016 be received, for information.

G Minutes of Closure of Accounts Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 22nd June 2016 be received, for information.

H Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 28th June 2016 be received, for information.

I Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 6th July 2016 be received, for information.

J Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 24th August 2016 be received, for information.

K Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group meeting held on 5th July 2016 be received, for information.

2 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2015-16

Robin Baker (the Auditor) introduced the report and provided an overview of the content and purpose which was to highlight the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2016. He referred Members to the key messages arising from the audit and explained to them that everything was satisfactory.

He informed Members of a late adjustment to the 2015/16 accounts of Cheshire East Council relating to the national non-domestic rates provision in mid August. The impact of this on the Authority's accounts was a reduction in the expected income recorded in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement of £36k. This figure was not considered material to the Authority's 2015/16 financial statement and the accounts were not amended.

The Auditor concluded by referring Members to the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion within the report. He explained that Cheshire Fire Authority had proper arrangements in all significant respects to ensure it delivered value for money in its use of resources.

A Member queried why the net pension liability of the Authority had decreased. The Head of Finance explained that this figure was calculated for the Authority by a firm of actuaries, who used a number of assumptions, and therefore the figure was subject to annual fluctuations.

A Member queried why the Authority had recommended including a share of the assets and liabilities of North West Fire Control (NWFC) in the Authority's accounts. The Auditor explained that under the relevant Accounting Standard in relation to group accounts it was considered necessary to do this. However, since the accounts involved in 2015/16 were not material, no amounts had actually been included. The portion would be received in 2016-17, in adjunction with the three other Fire Authorities involved in NWFC.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the Audit Findings Report 2015-16 be noted.

3 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2015-16

The Head of Finance presented the 2015-16 Final Accounts to Members for approval prior to publication before the end of September and explained that the overview of the accounts needed to be considered in conjunction with the Audit Findings Report. He informed Members that full copies of the accounts had been provided in group rooms prior to the Authority meeting and had been made available on the Service's website.

The Head of Finance gave Members an overview of the Final Accounts, the reserves and capital. He concluded by noting that the Authority was required to sign a letter of representation to the External Auditors which explained the Authority's responsibilities in relation to the audit. A copy of the letter was distributed with the agenda and it was recommended that the Authority approve the signing of the letter by the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive.

A Member congratulated the Head of Finance and his team for the work completed on the accounts for 2015-16, but added that the Authority must ensure that the transfers to reserves and the balances of reserves were justified. The Chair confirmed that it was important that the Authority maintained a robust reserves strategy to ensure that the current high levels could be accounted for.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the accounts for 2015-16 be formally approved for publication;

[2] the current balances of the Authority's reserves are noted;

[3] the Authority's underspend in 2015-16 is transferred to the capital reserve: and

[4] the Letter of Representation is approved and the Chair of the Authority is authorised to sign it.

4 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2015-16

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which presented Members with the draft Annual Statement of Assurance, for approval, to meet a requirement in the Fire and Rescue National Framework (2012).

He explained that the Statement outlined the significant financial and operational issues facing the Authority and areas where further improvements could be made to evidence compliance with the Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance.

Members thanked officers for their work and congratulated the Service for its efforts regarding partnerships and collaboration, with particular reference to the work on 'Safe and Well' training and the work with troubled families.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Statement of Assurance 2015-16 be approved and published on the Service's website.

5 EFFICIENCY PLAN AND FOUR YEAR FUNDING SETTLEMENT

The Head of Finance introduced the report and explained that Member approval was sought to apply to the Government in relation to the offer a four year funding settlement. A copy of the letter to the Authority offering four year funding allocations to 2019-20 in return for robust and transparent efficiency plans was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. Appendix 2 to the report contained the proposed Efficiency Plan 2015-16 to 2019-20 which had been drafted to meet the Government's requirements outlined in the letter.

The Head of Finance explained how the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) indicated the level of the efficiency challenge the Authority faced (up to 2019-20). He also outlined the savings proposals contained within Appendix 2, which showed how the Authority intended to meet this challenge. He concluded by referring Members to specific areas of the draft Efficiency Plan 2015-16 to 2019-20, such as the sections on collaboration and the reserves strategy which sought to address issues raised in the Minister's letter.

A Member asked whether the decision on retention of business rates (referred to in Agenda item 5A) would impact upon the four year settlement. The Head of Finance explained that the Government had undertaken to honour the figures shown in the four year settlement if the Authority was no longer part of the business rates retention scheme.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft Efficiency Plan for 2015-16 to 2019-20 be approved; and

[2] the Authority apply to the Government in relation to the offer of a four year funding settlement.

**5A RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION SELF SUFFICIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
100 % BUSINESS RATES RETENTION**

This report was submitted to the Authority as an Urgent Business Item and was distributed to Members on 20th September 2016. Whilst the consultation document was almost entirely technical in nature and aimed at local billing authorities, there was one question that was directly relevant to the funding of fire authorities. The Head of Finance had discussed the issue with fire finance colleagues and considered that there was merit in providing a response to the question posed. Given the significance of the proposed response the Head of Finance felt that Members should have an opportunity to approve it. As the deadline for responses was 26th September 2016 the Chair ruled that the item be considered as a matter of urgency.

The Head of Finance introduced the report and explained to Members that the Government had issued a consultation which concerned a proposal to allow local authorities to retain 100% of the business rates that they collect. Members were asked to consider the proposed response to a question contained in the consultation concerning whether fire funding should be removed from the business rates retention scheme.

Members discussed the proposed response and were satisfied with it.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft response shown in paragraph 4 of the report be approved.

6 PUBLICATION OF ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

The interim Head of Communications presented the report to Members which sought approval for the publication of the Service's Annual Report for 2015-16. The draft report incorporated statutory information on the annual Statement of Accounts, summary information about key areas of performance during the last financial year, information about future plans and proposals and key safety messages and advice.

Once approved, an electronic copy of the publication would be published on the Service's website by 30th September and delivery of printed copies to residents would commence on 12 October 2016 and be completed within a week.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Report 2015-16 be approved for publication.

7 DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017-18 (IRMP 14)

The Policy and Inclusion Manager presented the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2017-18 (IRMP 14) to Members for approval. He explained that the proposals within the plan were broken down into three areas: developing the organisation; protecting local communities; and responding to emergencies. The

proposals also included projects that would be implemented over the next four years as part of the Emergency Response Review.

The report also provided details in respect of the twelve week consultation programme which would allow public, staff and stakeholders the opportunity to comment on and shape the proposals.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2017-18 (IRMP 14) be approved for formal internal and external consultation.

8 PROVISION OF TRAINING FACILITIES - FUTURE OPTIONS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the report which presented a number of options for the future provision of operational training facilities for the Service. He informed Members of the five possible options that were identified in the initial options appraisal for the Service's training facilities. He highlighted to Members the suitability assessment criteria that were used to determine the recommendation to Members.

He informed Members that options 1 and 1A detailed in the report were no longer deemed suitable by the review team, and were therefore not recommended. He also informed Members that following discussions with police colleagues Option 3 (to have a joint training facility at Sadler Road for use by both Cheshire police and fire) was not possible or achievable at the present time. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that option 2A (to have a new training facility at the Sadler Road site, developed and improved to meet future needs) provided the most viable option going forward, as it offered a long term arrangement for the Service's training facilities. Approval of this option would also meant that it was still possible to explore joint police and fire training in the future.

A Member queried if officers could specify the anticipated costs for upgrading the Incident Command Training Suite (ICTS) and whether an ICT upgrade would be required to keep the equipment up-to-date even if nothing else was developed. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that an upgrade would be required within the next year or two to ensure that the training suite had the latest technology available.

RESOLVED: That

[1] option 2A be endorsed as the preferred option; and

[2] expenditure up to a maximum of £500,000 be authorised for officers to develop option 2A to the next stage of a detailed business case.

9 BLUE LIGHT COLLABORATION UPDATE

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report to Members which provided further information about the Blue Light Collaboration (BLC) Programme. He referred Members to the section of the report containing information

on the scope of the BLC Programme and explained the implications of the decision to retain the Sadler Road site on several areas of the Service.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services referred Members to the financial aspects of the BLC Collaboration. He informed them that the decision to retain the Sadler Road site had resulted in a number of changes to the programme implementation costs which they now stood at £5.5m. He added that there were still a number of uncertainties surrounding the figures provided and reminded Members that the Authority would be expected to pay 25% of the implementation costs which would now be funded from reserves. He also reiterated that programme savings would be offset by the upkeep costs associated with Sadler Road.

A Member queried what the new Police and Crime Commissioner's position was in respect of the programme. The Chair explained that he had an introductory meeting with him but had not met him to discuss the programme specifically yet.

A Member queried how the Authority would ensure that the Service's vehicle maintenance would not be impacted by the collaboration. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised Members that he did not have any concerns and that officers were collaborating with Cheshire Constabulary to ensure that standards were maintained.

Members discussed staffing issues and a request was made for an update at a future date. It was confirmed that this would be covered at the next Members' Planning Day in November.

RESOLVED: That Members

- [1] the revised scope of the BLC Programme be agreed;**
- [2] the current implementation budget for the BLC Programme be noted;**
- [3] the requirement to fund the BLC Programme be agreed;**
- [4] the situation regarding savings from the BLC Programme be noted;**
- [5] the position concerning the BLC Programme documentation be noted;
and**
- [6] the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to enter into the Programme Collaboration Agreement and Multi-Force Shared Service documentation when he is satisfied with the terms.**

**10 PROPOSAL FOR PARTNERSHIP UNDER PRIMARY AUTHORITY SCHEME
WITH CERTAS ENERGY UK LIMITED**

The Head of Protection introduced the report to Members which provided details of a proposal to enter into a partnership under the Primary Authority Scheme and sought Members approval to apply to the Secretary of State to become a Primary Authority in relation to Certas Energy UK Limited.

The Head of Protection explained the background to the report and what would be required if the Service entered into this partnership. He informed Members that if the partnership was to go ahead any officers assigned to the partnership would undertake further training to address any gaps in knowledge.

RESOLVED: That Members authorise officers to:

- [1] seek nomination from the Secretary of State as required by the Primary Authority Scheme; and**
- [2] enter into a partnership with Certas Energy UK Limited subject to the agreement of satisfactory terms and conditions.**

11 UPDATED CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The Head of Communications introduced the report and expanded on the key changes within both the Corporate Communications Strategy and the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

She highlighted national trends in the current communication landscape and how these compared to Cheshire's own communication landscape. She explained to Members how these trends had influenced the digital strategy of the Service but noted that local papers still played a crucial role in communication in Cheshire. She informed Members that the theme of the Service's strategy was layered messaging to target all groups within Cheshire.

A Member queried whether Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) visits were used for consultations. The Head of Communications informed Members that face-to-face engagement with the public did occur during HSAs and residents were offered an opportunity to complete satisfaction surveys to provide feedback.

A Member enquired as to whether the Service collected and monitored feedback from social media sites. The Head of Communications informed Members that the Service collected feedback from all communication platforms.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Corporate Communications Strategy 2016-18 and the Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2016-19 be approved.**

12 RECTIFICATION OF TITLE FOR MACCLESFIELD FIRE STATION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and explained to Members that the purpose of the report was to secure their approval for the rectification of the registered titles associated with Macclesfield Fire Station (MFS) and Macclesfield Ambulance Station (MAS). He informed Members that the current registered title for MFS included a title plan that actually showed the site of MAS and that the current registered title for MAS included a title plan that actually showed the

site of MFS. Members' approval was sought to rectify this issue.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the rectification of registered titles associated with Macclesfield Fire Station and Macclesfield Ambulance Station be approved.

13 LEASE OF PART OF MACCLESFIELD FIRE STATION TO THE NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and explained that the National Probation Service (NPS) had approached the Service with a proposal to operate part of its services from Macclesfield Fire Station and Members were asked to consider this proposal.

A Member queried whether this proposal was part of the 'Community Pay-Back Scheme' and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that he understood that it was.

RESOLVED: That

[1] a five year lease of part of Macclesfield to the National Probation Service be granted.

14 SURPLUS LAND OFF HALLWOOD LINK ROAD, RUNCORN

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which sought approval from Members for the disposal of a surplus piece of land off Hallwood Link Road, Runcorn.

Members discussed the proposal and a Member queried whether the Authority would seek planning permission prior to selling the land. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that advice would be sought about the best approach to the sale with a view to achieving the best sale price. He noted a Member's comment about 'overage' being considered if there was a sale without planning permission.

RESOLVED: That

[1] officers be authorised to arrange for the disposal of land off Hallwood Link Road, Runcorn.

15 OPTION TO PURCHASE LAND ADJACENT TO STOCKTON HEATH FIRE STATION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and informed Members that the Authority had an option to purchase a piece of land adjacent to Stockton Heath Fire Station. He informed Members that there was no operational requirement to extend the fire station site, but purchasing the option land would be likely to enhance the potential value associated with the extended fire station site

should the Authority decide to sell the fire station site in the future.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the option to purchase a piece of land adjacent to Stockton Heath Fire Station be exercised; and**
- [2] the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to complete such documentation as is necessary to effect the purchase.**

16 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:

Paragraph

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

17 PROPOSALS RELATING TO CHESTER FIRE STATION

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

Members discussed the content of the report and requested further information before making a decision.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be deferred for further consideration by Members.**