



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 18 July 2018 at Lecture Theatre - Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors B Rudd, D Beckett, M Biggin, D Flude, P Harris, G Hayes, E Johnson, N Jones, D Mahon, J Mercer, G Merry, K Mundry, S Nelson, S Parker, R Polhill, T Sherlock, M Simon, M Tarr, J Weatherill 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 D Barker, M Barker, B Dooley and the Police and Crime Commissioner D Keane.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of the Authority achievements and events Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest received.

E Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 20th June 2018 be approved as a correct record.

F Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 4th July 2018 be noted.

G Minutes of Estates and Property Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Estates and Property Committee held on 5th July 2018 be noted.

H Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 11th July 2018 be noted.

I Minutes of Closure of Accounts Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 11th July 2018 be noted.

2 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2017-18

Andy Smith, Engagement Lead from Grant Thornton was in attendance and presented the report.

The report highlighted the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the period ended 31st March 2018 and was also used to report the findings to management and those charged with governance in accordance with the requirements of International Standards of Auditing (UK), and the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Grant Thornton advised that subject to the following outstanding queries being resolved it was anticipated that it would give an unqualified audit opinion:-

- Work in progress on journals and the pensions liability;
- Receipt of management representation letter; and
- Review of the final set of financial accounts.

Grant Thornton had identified one issue during the audit which led to a recommendation in the Action Plan:-

'The Authority should publish the Annual Governance Statement alongside the Financial Statements and Narrative Report in future years to ensure full compliance with the regulations'

Grant Thornton had agreed the recommendation with management and it would be implemented when the accounts were prepared next year.

In conclusion, Grant Thornton confirmed that based on their review of the Authority's Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement they were satisfied that they were consistent with the audited financial statement.

Grant Thornton took the opportunity to put on record their appreciation for the

assistance provided by the finance team and other staff during the audit process.

RESOLVED:

That the Audit Findings report for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority – Year Ended 31st March 2018, be noted.

3 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2017-18

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive which sought approval of the Final Accounts 2017-18 prior to publication before the end of July 2018. The report provided an overview of the accounts and have be read in conjunction with the Audit Findings Report 2017-18 (Minute 2 refers).

The final draft accounts were reported to the Performance and Overview Committee acting as the Closure of Accounts Committee on 30th May 2018 (Minute 1I refers). The End of Year Finance Report 2017-18 was reported to the meeting of the Fire Authority on 20th June 2018 (Minute 1E refers) which identified a forecast underspend against the Authority's revised budget of £90k.

The Head of Finance introduced the finalised Statement of Accounts and provided an update on the changes made and the reasoning for these since consideration on 30th May 2018.

A Member sought clarity about the possibility of paying a 2% pay rise to Grey Book staff now prior to the conclusion of the Fire Brigades Union pay negotiations. In response, the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive advised that this would not be acceptable to the unions.

Members were recommended that there was a requirement for a signed Letter of Representation to be given to the Auditors which explained the Authority's responsibilities in relation to the audit. This would need to be approved by the Authority and signed by the Chair.

On being put to the vote the four recommendations were carried with 19 votes in favour and 1 abstention by Councillor N Jones.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) The accounts be approved for publication;**
- (2) The current balances of the Authority's reserves be noted;**
- (3) The Authority's underspend in 2017-18 be transferred to the general reserve; and**
- (4) The Letter of Representation, detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved for signature by the Chair on behalf of the Authority.**

4 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2017-18

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Commissioning which sought approval of the Annual Statement of Assurance 2017-18, detailed at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was reported that the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012 required the Authority to publish an Annual Statement of Assurance. The 2012 document had recently been superseded by the 2018 National Framework. The 2018 version had altered the requirements of the Annual Statement of Assurance and would be taken into account when the Statement was prepared for 2018-19. For 2017-18 the 2012 document, which applied throughout the year, had been considered in preparing the Statement. It was the intention to revise the format of the Statement of Assurance for 2018-19.

The purpose of the Statement of Assurance, was to provide an easy and accessible way in which communities, government, local authorities and partners could make a valid assessment of the Authority's performance and governance arrangements. Members' attention was drawn to key sections of the Statement, including financial assurance, the Annual Governance Statement, operational assurance and key areas of improvement.

In the interests of transparency all compliance and assurance documentation and other relevant links and signposts would be accessible from the Service's website.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Statement of Assurance 2017-18 be approved.

5 TRAINING CENTRE PROGRAMME AND SADLER ROAD SITE REQUIREMENTS - UPDATE AND FUNDING

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Commissioning which outlined the progress and outputs from the initial design phase of the project and sought the allocation of additional funding.

The Director of Governance and Commissioning explained that the main challenge had been unexpected, abnormal costs and that officers had spent time looking at the potential for reducing the project to fit the available budget, as well as considering the potential termination of the project and refurbishment of the existing facilities.

It was reported that some options to reduce the current design and bring the project within budget were described to Members at the Estates and Property Committee on the 5th July (Minute 1G refers). However, officers did not believe that reducing the current design (or refurbishment) would deliver the vision and meet the stated training need and Members of the Estates and Property Committee were unanimous in recommending to the Fire Authority that the project should proceed as described in the initial design and valued in the initial cost plan.

Members considered the situation and were in agreement that the project should continue as planned with the allocation of the necessary.

A Member sought clarity on how much was currently spent per year in sending firefighters to the Fire Service College for training. In response, the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive advised that at present approximately £100k per year was spent on firefighter training at the College. He informed Members that some courses at the College ran for several weeks with staff away from home for long periods. The Training Centre at the Sadler Road site would bring greater flexibility and avoid sending staff a significant distance to obtain training. There would be a significant saving too.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) The content of the report and comment raised be noted;**
- (2) Commitment to the project be confirmed;**
- (3) The sum of £1.95m of additional capital funding be allocated – to be financed from borrowing; and**
- (4) A contingency of 5% be allocated.**