



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Tuesday, 10 December 2019 at Lecture Theatre - Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors Bob Rudd (Chair), Michael Beanland, Mike Biggin, David Brown, Martyn Delaney, Phil Harris, Gina Lewis, Karen Mundry, Stef Nelson, James Nicholas, Stuart Parker, Rob Polhill, Peter Wheeler and Steve Wright

A minute's silence was held at the start of the meeting to remember Councillors Terry O'Neill and Dorothy Flude who had sadly passed away since the last meeting of the Authority.

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 Rachel Bailey, Razia Daniels, David Edwardes, Nick Mannion, Jonathan Parry, Morgan Tarr and Norman Wright and from the Police and Crime Commissioner David Keane.

Note: the meeting was brought forward 24 hours due to the parliamentary election being held on 12th December 2019.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of Authority achievements and events.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

Councillor Bob Rudd did, however, state that he had signed a petition which called for the return of a second fire engine to Chester. He went on to confirm that he appreciated the need to consider the consultation feedback that would be received before taking a firm view on the Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Councillor Martyn Delaney indicated that he had also signed the petition.

Note: A petition was submitted to the Authority at its meeting on 19th June 2019 which was concerned with the return of a second fire engine to Chester. The Chair and Councillor Delaney had informed Members at previous meetings of the Authority that they had signed the petition and that they did not believe they had an interest to

disclose under the Members' Code of Conduct.

E Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

F Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 18th September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

G Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee meeting held on 27th November 2019 be noted.

H Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee meeting held on 13th November 2019 be noted.

I Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee meeting held on 23rd October 2019 be noted.

J Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 23rd October 2019 be noted.

K Notes of the Risk Management Board

RESOLVED: That

The notes of the Risk Management Board meeting held on 15th October 2019 be noted.

L Notes of the Pension Board

RESOLVED: That

The notes of the Pension Board meeting held on 20th November 2019 be noted.

2 PENSION BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Authority considered recommendations from the Governance and Constitution Committee regarding updates to the Terms of Reference of the Pension Board. Proposed changes to the Terms of Reference were shown in red and included:

- Introducing a four-year term of office which could be extended for a further four-year term.
- Ensuring meetings were held quarterly.
- Increasing the quorum to three members of the Board, from two.

The Pension Board considered these recommendations at its meeting on 20th November 2019 and expressed a preference to retain a quorum of two members of the Board rather than three.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Pension Board Terms of Reference incorporating the amendments as drawn be approved.

3 FUNDING OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Treasurer informed Members that the Performance and Overview Committee had made a recommendation to the Fire Authority to change the way the training centre project was funded.

A decision was previously made to borrow £11 million to fund the training centre project. However, with a delay in capital spending, particularly on the project at the Crewe Fire Station site, reserves could be used to fund the training centre project with borrowing taking place at a later date as required for other capital projects.

RESOLVED: That

[1] a change to the way that the training centre project is funded (utilising reserves rather than borrowing) be approved, noting the removal of the cost of borrowing from the revenue budget for April 2020.

4 PROGRAMME OF MEMBER MEETINGS 2020-21

Members were asked to review and approve the Programme of Member Meetings for 2020-21. It was similar to the one followed during the current municipal year and had been created taking into account business needs.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Programme of Member Meetings 2020-21 be approved.

5 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2020-21

Members were asked to approve the Members' Allowance Scheme 2020-21, as recommended by the Governance and Constitution Committee.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Members' Allowance Scheme 2020-21 be approved.

6 DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020-24

The Policy and Transformation Officer presented the report which set out key information and proposals contained within the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-2024 (IRMP 2020-24). The report sought Members' approval of the draft IRMP 2020-24 for formal internal and external consultation. Details of the consultation process were contained within the report.

Members queried who the Service directly engaged with for feedback regarding the consultation. The Policy and Transformation Officer confirmed that the consultation was public-facing and accessible by all residents across the community. He informed Members that it was promoted across community groups within the Service area and that staff and stakeholders were also encouraged to respond. Councillors from all of the local authorities in the Service area were also contacted.

A Member queried how the Service engaged with young people regarding the consultation. The Policy and Transformation Officer informed Members that the Service engaged with cadet groups throughout the Service area and that consultation information was sent to local colleges across Cheshire.

The Chair referred to the 'Our finances' section of the draft IRMP 2020-24 and requested that officers emphasise within the document that the Authority had not received capital funding from the Government since 2014.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive confirmed that working groups would be set up to engage with staff during the consultation. He formally thanked officers who had driven the production of the draft IRMP 2020-24 and thanked Members for their input too.

A Member moved a motion intended to alter Proposal 3 in the draft IRMP 2020-24 concerned with the location of the second fire engine from Ellesmere Port. The

motion was not seconded.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24 be approved for formal internal and external consultation.**

7 2020-21 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL POSITION

The Treasurer presented the report which provided an update on progress made in preparing a draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2020-21. He referred Members to paragraph 4 of the report which contained an overview of indications provided by the Government regarding funding principles for 2020-21, including:

- A proposed “roll forward” of the 2019-20 Local Government Finance Settlement;
- Revenue Support Grant to continue in 2020-21 and to be uplifted for inflation;
- Council tax increases to be limited to 2% without triggering a local referendum; and
- The planned local government funding reforms (including Fair Funding, resetting of the business rates scheme and retention of 75% of business rates) were to be delayed until April 2021.

He explained that, although there was potential for the final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2020-21 to depart from the position set out in the consultation document, it provided the most reliable basis on which to plan for 2020-21. The draft budget had therefore been compiled on this basis. He informed Members that further announcements from the Government were likely to be made prior to the Authority’s meeting in February 2020.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the position on the 2020-21 draft revenue budget and medium term financial plan be noted.**

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REPORT 2019-20

The Head of Finance presented the report which provided an update on performance against the Authority’s Treasury Management Strategy (TMS).

Members were referred to the section of the report containing information on the current economic background. The Head of Finance highlighted the economic uncertainty currently being faced within the UK and globally.

The table at paragraph 14 of the report contained a forecast of interest rates from September 2019 to March 2022. No movement in interest rates was forecast until December 2020 and assumptions had been based on a deal being reached on Brexit. However, given the current level of political uncertainty, the Head of Finance acknowledged that forecasts may need to be materially reassessed in the coming months.

Members were referred to the section of the report containing information on the Authority's capital programme and borrowing. Historically, the Authority had financed the majority of its capital programme from reserves and capital grants. It appeared almost certain that there would be no future capital grant funding for fire authorities and the Authority's capital reserves were now substantially committed to the existing capital programme. As a result, the ongoing requirement to fund an annual capital programme for essential vehicle, equipment and technology replacements along with current and future building projects would require the Authority to enter into new external borrowing and make suitable revenue provision for the borrowing charges. The Head of Finance assured Members that, if required, a recommendation to borrow would be brought to the Authority when officers felt that the time was right.

The Head of Finance referred members to information within the report regarding the Authority's investment portfolio for 2019-20, which totalled £27.7m at the end of October 2019. This was invested with Aberdeen Standard Liquidity Money Market Fund, Bank of Scotland, Santander, Goldman Sachs and NatWest.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be noted; and

[2] the requirement to borrow to support the capital programme be noted.

9 AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT AND SECTOR UPDATE

Ged Small, Engagement Manager for Grant Thornton (the External Auditor), introduced the report which included information about progress with the external audit as well as a summary of emerging national issues and developments that may be relevant to the Authority.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Audit Progress Report and Sector Update for the year ending 31st March 2020 be noted.

10 STAFF ENGAGEMENT FORUM 2018-19

Mark Shone, Safety Central Manager and Watch Manager Jo Collier presented the report which provided Members with an overview of the Staff Engagement Forum 2018-19 (Forum). It also provided an update on the subjects considered by the Forum during the period November 2018 to November 2019 and the outcomes of work undertaken.

The Forum was developed to improve engagement between staff and the Service Management Team, providing a way for staff to be involved in shaping the future plans of the Service. It was made up of 15 individuals from across the Service who established a list of topics for discussion over the course of the year, including:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Culture and values
- Reward and recognition
- Training and development
- On-call duty system
- Occupational health
- Promotion processes
- Equality and diversity
- Apprenticeships

An action plan was developed by the Forum containing ideas and recommendations relating to each of the topics listed above and was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Members and the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive thanked all staff who had been on the Forum during 2018-19 and for the work that they had undertaken.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the contents of the report be noted.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES CONCERNED WITH 10 MINUTE RESPONSE STANDARD

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive presented the report. It allowed the Authority to consider recommendations from the constituent authorities concerned with the 10 minute response standard. The recommendations were set out in a table at paragraph 2 of the report. The report covered the following three issues:

- Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain building types
- Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain incident types
- Arrangements for reporting of the 10 minute response standard

A Member referred to paragraph 17 of the report which stated that the 10 minute response standard (the standard) focused on dwelling fires and road traffic collisions because such incidents involved the greatest risk to life. He queried why the standard wasn't applied to all risks. The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive explained that a blended approach was taken to risk; as the majority of fatalities occurred in dwelling fires and road traffic collisions the standard focused on such incidents. The work of the Prevention and Protection teams provided a dedicated approach to tackling risks in other area, such as heritage buildings and business premises.

Members queried whether call handling times were reported to the Authority. The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive confirmed that call handling times were reported to the Performance and Overview Committee.

A Member raised concerns over the classification of the Service area as significantly rural by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive shared the concerns raised over the

classification due to risks such as the motorway networks and COMAH sites within the area.

The Chair expressed the view that the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Fire Officers should take the opportunity to visit the constituent authorities. The visit could cover the matters raised in the recommendations as well as to present an overview of the work the Service and Authority do.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the contents of the report be noted; and**
- [2] the Chair, with the assistance of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, be authorised to prepare and send a suitable response to the Leaders of the constituent authorities.**

12 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES CONCERNED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

The Director of Governance and Commissioning presented the report which enabled Members to consider recommendations from the constituent authorities concerned with climate change. The recommendations from the constituent authorities were set in a table below paragraph 2 to the report.

The Deputy Chair suggested that a working group consisting of the Lead Members of the constituent authorities should be set up to consider climate change. The Chair agreed that a working group should be formed and work in conjunction with the Director of Governance and Commissioning. It was also agreed that the work of the group should be reported back to the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] a working group consisting of the Lead Members of the constituent authorities be established to consider climate change.**