



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on
Wednesday, 1 July 2020 - Remote Meeting commencing at 10.30 am**

PRESENT: Councillors Bob Rudd, Rachel Bailey, Michael Beanland, Mike Biggin, David Brown, Razia Daniels, Martyn Delaney, David Edwardes, Phil Harris, Jill Houlbrook, Marilyn Houston, Gina Lewis, Nick Mannion, Karen Mundry, Stef Nelson, James Nicholas, Stuart Parker, Jonathan Parry, Rob Polhill, Peter Wheeler, Norman Wright, Steve Wright and Police and the Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, David Keane

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Appointments for 2020-21

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which set out the political proportions, political proportionality rules and allocations of seats on committees. It also allowed appointments to be made for 2020-21. The report had been prepared on the following bases: that there would be no changes to the responsibilities of the Fire Authority and its committees, boards and groups from 2019-20; and that appointments would be carried forward from 2019-20, as far as possible.

Appendix 2 to the report contained details of all of the appointments. The Director of Governance and Commissioning informed Members that three positions had been confirmed since publication of the report: Councillor Karen Mundry had been appointed as Lead Member for Warrington Borough Council; Councillor Peter Wheeler had been confirmed as the replacement on the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee; and Councillor Steve Wright had been confirmed as the Member Champion for Mental Health. These names needed to be added to those contained in the printed version of Appendix 2 to the report.

Councillor Bob Rudd proposed that the recommendations in the report should be approved (as supplemented by the names added to Appendix 2 to the report). This was seconded by Councillor Stuart Parker.

The Director stated that he understood that the proposal was agreed but gave Members an opportunity to speak if they disagreed. No-one indicated and the Director confirmed that the proposal was approved.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the political proportions on the Fire Authority as set out in paragraph 5 be noted and the approach to the allocation of seats explained in paragraph 6 and 7 of the report and Appendix 1 be noted;**
- [2] the continuing involvement of the independent (non-elected) members as set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 of the report be agreed;**

[3] the appointments contained in Appendix 2 as supplemented at the meeting (suspending those parts of the Constitution that dictate how certain appointments are made) be agreed; and

[4] the continuation of the Member/officer buddy arrangements be agreed.

Councillor Bob Rudd took the Chair at this point.

B Recording of Meeting

This was the first meeting to be held using Skype and in accordance with the Remote Meeting Rules. The Director of Governance and Commissioning confirmed how participants were connected to the meeting and how it would be broadcasted. He also mentioned how the meeting arrangements would be monitored throughout.

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

C Fire Authority Membership 2020-21

The agenda contained details of the appointments to the Fire Authority for the 2020-21 municipal year:

Appointed by Cheshire East Council (3 Con, 3 Lab, 2 Ind)

Labour

Cllr Marilyn Houston
Cllr Nick Mannion
Cllr Jonathan Parry

Conservative

Cllr Rachel Bailey
Cllr Michael Beanland
Cllr David Brown

Independent

Cllr David Edwardes
Cllr James Nicholas

Appointed by Cheshire West and Chester Council (4 Con, 4 Lab)

Labour

Cllr Martyn Delaney
Cllr Gina Lewis
Cllr Bob Rudd
Cllr Peter Wheeler

Conservative

Cllr Razia Daniels
Cllr Jill Houlbrook
Cllr Stuart Parker
Cllr Norman Wright

Appointed by Halton Borough Council (3 Lab)

Labour

Cllr Phil Harris
Cllr Stef Nelson
Cllr Rob Polhill

Appointed by Warrington Borough Council (3 Lab, 1 Lib Dem)

Labour

Cllr Les Morgan
Cllr Karen Mundry
Cllr Morgan Tarr

Liberal Democrat

Cllr Mike Biggin

Cllr Steve Wright

Note: The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, Mr David Keane, has also been afforded certain rights in relation to Fire Authority business, including the right to attend meetings.

D Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Les Morgan.

E Chair's Announcements

The Chair outlined some of the ways that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service had adapted as an organisation to meet the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Firefighters had changed their shift systems to protect the Service's ability to respond to incidents. They had supported and protected their local communities in a number of ways, e.g. through producing safety messages, hosting virtual open days and raising money for charities, as well as responding to operational incidents.

Protection staff had changed how they operated to keep buildings safe throughout the emergency and had undertaken additional work, such as supporting the running of emergency mortuaries and face mask fitting tests for North West Ambulance Service.

Mechanics had worked flexibly to ensure the Service's vehicles were available to respond. Support staff had carried on with their roles from home and many had also taken on new tasks.

Prevention staff and volunteers had continued to work with young people and to protect the most vulnerable from fire. They had also taken on additional roles, such as delivering shopping and prescriptions to shielded people and many other essential jobs.

The Chair thanked all staff and volunteers for their work during this period.

F Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

Councillor Bob Rudd did, however, refer to Item 2, the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24, and stated that he had signed a petition which called for the return of a second fire engine to Chester. He informed Members that he had kept an open mind regarding the best use of the second fire engine currently located at Ellesmere Port Fire Station.

Councillors Razia Daniels, Martyn Delaney and Jill Houlbrook indicated that they 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 Councillors Razia Daniels and Martyn 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.

G Questions and Petitions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the public. However, a petition had been received and the Chair asked the Director of Governance and Commissioning to confirm details for the record as the petitioner was not in attendance.

The Director of Governance and Commissioning informed Members that Justin Madders, MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston, promoted a petition that stated:

“This petition calls on Cheshire Fire Authority to retain two engines at Ellesmere Port Fire Station.

Ellesmere Port Fire Station currently has two fire engines but draft plans from Cheshire Fire Authority recommend reducing this to just one. There is a strong case for the retention of the fire engines in Ellesmere Port. Ellesmere Port is a growing town with more and more houses being built as well as a long standing large industrial base which needs fire cover.”

The petition was part hard copy and part online. There were a total of 3,893 signatories. The Director of Governance and Commissioning explained that the Fire Authority had a Petitions Protocol, which contained rules about how petitions were handled. The rules in the Protocol were not intended to cause a hindrance to petitioners, they ensured that officers had adequate time to validate petitions.

The hard copy petition signatories totalled 728. 714 of these were from Cheshire postcodes; 7 were from non-Cheshire postcodes; and 7 were incomplete.

The online petition signatories totalled 3,255. 1,981 of these were from Cheshire postcodes; 1,269 were from non-Cheshire postcodes (albeit 765 postcodes were near the Cheshire border); 59 were international; and 5 were incomplete.

Justin Madders MP had recorded a short statement concerned with the petition which was played at the meeting.

The Chair informed Members that a petition concerned with the return of a second fire engine to Chester was presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting in June 2019. The Director of Governance and Commissioning explained that the petition was part hard copy and part online.

The hard copy petition stated, “To see the return of Chester’s second fire engine and objection to the proposed spending of £5/£5.5m on a replacement fire station. Presented by Chester retired firefighters. Still caring for you”

The online petition stated, “Two fire engines for Chester. Listen to the experience and concerns of retired firefighters, return Cheshire’s second fire engine and scrap plans to demolish and rebuild the current Chester fire station at a cost of £5m.”

The hard copy petition contained 3,896 signatures and the online petition contained 2,521 signatures. There was a total of 85 signatories that were from postcodes outside Cheshire or neighbouring localities (15 from the online and 70 from the hard copy). The total number of signatures was 6,495.

The petition was directly relevant to the issue that was considered at Item 2, Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24. Chris Matheson MP had recorded a short statement concerned with the petition which was played at the meeting.

H Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 12th February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

I Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee meeting held on 26th February 2020 be noted.

J Minutes of Estates and Property Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Estates and Property Committee held on 13th March 2020 be noted.

K Urgent Business - Additional Capital Funding to Improve Environmental Performance of new Chester Fire Station

The Chair informed Members that a decision was taken to add £300k to the allocated capital funding for Chester Fire Station to improve the environmental performance of the new building. As there was no meeting of the Fire Authority in April due to the Coronavirus pandemic and because it was necessary to instruct the contractor, the decision was made using the procedure for Urgent Business to be determined between Fire Authority meetings.

There were no matters arising.

L Fire Station Modernisation Programme - Release of Balance of Capital Funding

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which sought to secure the release of the balance of allocated capital funding for the Fire Station Modernisation Programme (the Programme).

He informed Members that Year One works of the Programme at Birchwood,

Middlewich, Runcorn and Sandbach had all been completed. The Year Zero works at Bollington and Tarporley were completed at the end of the last financial year.

Current spend on the Programme stood at £3.3m. £5m of the allocated funding (and approximately £200k of the initial £3.5m) was left. Officers anticipated that the Programme would cost between £11.5m and £12m in total, although the figures were speculative because a number of matters that might have an impact, e.g. Brexit and Covid-19.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Fire Station Modernisation Programme – Progress Report and Funding (Appendix 1) be noted; and

[2] the balance of allocated capital funding for the Fire Station Modernisation Programme be released.

M Programme of Member Meetings 2020-21

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic some meetings scheduled for 2020-21 had been missed and others that were scheduled were no longer required.

The Director of Governance and Commissioning informed Members that an updated version of the Programme of Member Meetings for 2020-21 would be circulated.

N Urgent Business - Remote Meeting Rules

The Remote Meeting Rules were introduced using the procedure for Urgent Business to be determined between Fire Authority meetings so that a meeting could be held with rules in place to help facilitate the meetings. It was mentioned that the Rules contained a provision enabling the Monitoring Officer to make changes to them, as required.

There were not matters arising.

O Constitution

The constitution had been updated to include the changes made by the Fire Authority during 2019-20 and published on the Authority's website.

RESOLVED:

That the Fire Authority's constitution be adopted.

2 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020-24

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive introduced the report which sought Members' approval of the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24 (IRMP). He thanked all those who had been involved in the formation of the IRMP.

He introduced the Policy and Transformation Officer who guided Members through the cover report which contained information about the consultation process, consultation feedback and independent support provided in relation to consultation.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Operational Assurance and Service Improvement, referred Members to Appendix 3: Review of Response Plans Following Consultation. The document was developed to explain how various options had been considered and why particular options were recommended.

A representative from Greenstreet Berman, Michael Wright, also addressed Members referring them to Appendix 5: Independent Review of Cheshire FRS Emergency Response Proposals 2020-24. The document had been produced by Greenstreet Berman and provided assurance on the validity and reliability of the data and the methodology used to assess options in the development of the final response plan proposals.

A Member queried how feedback on the IRMP from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had been considered by the Service. The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive informed Members that feedback from the FBU had been fed into the IRMP consultation process and was available in Appendix 2: Consultation Feedback Report – Consultation Responses and Additional Resources.

A Member asked for further information from the Service regarding the concerns raised by the FBU about firefighter safety in its response to the Service's plans to expand its response to road traffic collisions (introduction of 13 Rapid Response Rescue Units). The Assistant Chief Fire Officer informed Members that there had been no accidents involving firefighters using the existing Rapid Response Rescue Units. However, he confirmed that the FBU would be consulted.

A Member also asked why Greenstreet Berman had not met with the FBU regarding their feedback on the consultation. The representative from Greenstreet Berman informed Members that the FBU's response to the IRMP was taken into account by Greenstreet Berman and that they challenged the Service on several areas that the FBU had raised. He explained that Greenstreet Berman felt satisfied with the analysis presented by the Service.

A Member moved a motion intended to alter the proposal within the IRMP concerned with moving the second fire engine at Ellesmere Port Fire Station to Powey Lane Fire Station. The motion was not seconded.

Members were asked to vote on whether to approve the proposals within the IRMP. The proposals were carried with Members' unanimous support.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the contents of the report and appendices be noted;**
- [2] the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24 be approved; and**
- [3] the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive be authorised to make any**

final changes to the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24 prior to publication.

3 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020-21

The Internal Auditor, Ann-Marie Harrop, from Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) presented the Internal Audit Plan for 2020-21.

A Member queried whether the Coronavirus pandemic had resulted in any additional internal audit costs for the Authority. The Internal Auditor confirmed that there were no additional costs.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Internal Audit Plan for 2020-21 be approved.

4 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2019-20

The External Auditor, Michael Green, from Grant Thornton presented the External Audit Plan for 2019-20.

A Member queried whether the Coronavirus pandemic had impacted the current external audit schedule for the Authority. The External Auditor confirmed that the schedule for the delivery of audits had been put back and that deadlines for local government financial audits had also been extended.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the External Audit Plan for 2019-20; and

[2] the external audit fee for 2019-20 be approved.

5 END OF YEAR FINANCIAL REPORT 2019-20

The Treasurer introduced the report which provided a review of the Service's financial performance at the end of the 2019-20 financial year and reports on progress against 2019-20 capital projects.

The Treasurer informed Members that there was an underspend of £613k in relation to the Revenue Budget for 2019-20. He referred Members to the section of the report containing information on the Authority's Reserves. He explained that the General Reserve was approximately £2.2m, which was equivalent to 5% of the net revenue budget and in line with the approved Reserve Strategy.

The Treasurer drew Members' attention to the section of the report containing information on the Authority's Capital Programme. He explained that the table at paragraph 10 of the report contained details of proposed capital funding.

A Member referred to paragraph 5 of the report which contained a table summarising revenue spend for 2019-20 and asked for further information regarding

the headings 'Finance Resources' and 'Collection Fund Surplus'. The Treasurer informed Members that 'Finance Resources' consisted of non-department budgets and contributions to/from reserves. The 'Collection Fund Surplus' referred to the Authority's shared surplus or deficit with the constituent authorities once funding from Council Tax, business rates, levies and incomes was finalised.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the outturn position (subject to audit and the finalisation of the local authorities non-domestic rates collection fund/Section 31 grant) be noted; and

[2] the movement in reserves as set out in Appendix 2 be approved.

6 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

The Treasurer presented the report which provided a review of the Authority's treasury management activities undertaken during 2019-20.

He referred Members to the section of the report on the portfolio position at 31 March 2020. Borrowing had decreased due to a loan being repaid on 31 March 2020.

The Treasurer also informed Members that borrowing for the Training Centre project had not yet been required due to the current levels of reserves held. Interest rates were expected to remain low and would continue to be reviewed to ensure borrowing occurred at the most appropriate time.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report on treasury management activity for 2019-20 be noted; and

[2] performance against the prudential and treasury management indicators be noted.