



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 9th February 2022 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors Bob Rudd (Chair), Stef Nelson, Rachel Bailey, Michael Beanland, Mike Biggin, David Brown, Razia Daniels, Martyn Delaney, Phil Eastty, Brian Gallagher, Phil Harris, Jill Houlbrook, Marilyn Houston, Gina Lewis, Nick Mannion, Rob Moreton, Karen Mundry, James Nicholas, Stuart Parker, Rob Polhill, Peter Wheeler and Norman 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 Councillor Jonathan Parry.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included activities carried out by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service during the Coronavirus pandemic and details of Authority achievements and events Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chair advised that on 21st January 2022 he and Councillor Rachel Bailey (Cheshire East Sprinkler Champion) had attended a media event with Onward Housing to celebrate the newly completed sprinkler installations at three high-rise blocks of flats in Handforth, Cheshire East.

Members had a detailed discussion on promoting the installation of sprinkler systems in public buildings (specifically schools) and new build residential and commercial properties. Members agreed that the four unitary authorities needed to work together to promote the implementation of sprinkler systems and that the Fire Authority would put together a cross-party Motion to submit to each of the unitary authorities.

The Chair confirmed that he would also write a joint letter with the Member Champion for Sprinklers and Members of the Sprinkler Group to the four unitary authorities and local MPs promoting the installation of sprinkler systems and advising how the technology had changed.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive advised that further information on the national work taking place on sprinkler systems and the proposed wording for a Motion would be discussed in further detail at the next Member Planning Day in April 2022.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

The Chair stated that he understood that Members were like him likely to have a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 5 – Draft Budget 2022-23: Council Tax Precept; Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-27. All Members indicated that they did. A dispensation had been granted to Members to allow them to take part in the debate and vote on the item.

E Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

F Minutes of Fire Authority

The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that the issues mentioned in Minute 8 – Ethical Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy were discussed with Members at the Planning Day on 14th January 2022. As a result of the discussion a number of deletions/additions were proposed for the Ethical Procurement Strategy as detailed on the agenda front sheet.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 8th December 2021 be approved as a correct record;**
- [2] the Ethical Procurement Strategy including the deletions/additions as detailed on the agenda front sheet be approved; and**

Note: No changes to the Social Value Policy were proposed.

G Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 11th January 2022 be noted.

H Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee held on 24th January 2022 be noted.

I **Minutes of Estates and Property Committee**

The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that the Estates and Property Committee had made a recommendation to the Fire Authority that was to be considered at this meeting about the proposal to transition operations at Wilmslow Fire Station from the current nucleus duty system to a day crewed duty system.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the minutes of the Estates and Property Committee held on 24th January 2022 be noted; and

[2] delegated authority be given to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer to purchase nine properties in Wilmslow for day crewed housing subject to them consulting with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

Note: Decision [2] was made at the end of the meeting after the 2022-23 Annual Action Plan had been approved.

J **Notes of the Member Training and Development Group**

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group held on 18th January 2022 be noted.

2 **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022-23**

The Director of Transformation presented the report which sought approval to publish the Pay Policy Statement for 2022-23, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Members were advised that, under the Localism Act 2011, all local authorities were required to publish a pay policy statement on an annual basis. The document set out the Authority's policies for the financial year relating to the remuneration of its Chief Officers, the remuneration of its lowest paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of Chief Officers and that of other employees. The requirement was intended to increase transparency and accountability, and to give local people access to information to allow them to determine whether pay was appropriate.

Paragraphs 10-15 of the report provided an overview of changes to the Pay Policy Statement since last year. Changes included: increase in the employer contribution rates for the Firefighter Pension Scheme; the Living Wage being reviewed and adjusted every October; the publication of the fourth Gender Pay Gap Report; and reference to the public sector exit cap being removed.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Pay Policy Statement 2022-23, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and**
- [2] the Director of Transformation, in conjunction with the Director of Governance and Commissioning, be authorised to make any necessary in-year changes to the pay Policy Statement as necessitated by new legislation or guidance.**

3 2022-2023 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The Engagement and Public Affairs Manager presented a report which detailed feedback received as a result of the consultation activity concerned with the draft 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan and sought approval of the 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The draft Plan was developed to serve as a mid-point review of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that was approved by the Authority in July 2020.

Members were reminded that the Authority was required to consult on its precept for the forthcoming financial year. A 1.99% increase in the Authority's precept for 2022-23 had been consulted upon.

Members had a discussion on the outcomes of the consultation feedback and commented that the majority of respondents owned their own home with a small number living in social rented/private rented properties. In response, the Engagement and Public Affairs Manager advised that due to the Covid restrictions the consultation had been conducted through online methods and it was the intention that for the next consultation process there would be more face-to-face interaction to engage more effectively. Further work would also be undertaken with the local resident groups and registered housing providers.

Members discussed water safety and how this could be improved across Cheshire by providing water safety advice to young people, improving signage and providing swimming lessons to children from deprived families. Officers advised that this would be explored further outside the meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- [1] the report be noted;**
- [2] the 2022-23 Annual Action Plan be approved; and**
- [3] the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive be authorised to make any final changes to the 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan prior to publication.**

4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-23

The Head of Finance presented a report that sought approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-23 (the Strategy). This was a requirement of guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the CIPFA Prudential Code. It also assisted the Authority in showing its compliance with requirements contained in the Local Government Act 2003.

The Strategy comprised of four main elements, namely:-

- Capital Expenditure Plans and Prudential Indicators
- Borrowing Strategy and Prudential Limits
- Annual Investment Strategy
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

The Head of Finance referred Members to Table 7, the operational boundary and Table 8, the authorised limit for external debt. These were the two key prudential indicators that set the maximum limit for external debt based on the capital programme and the current borrowing requirements. The authorised limit in Table 8 could not be exceeded.

A Member asked the Head of Finance whether borrowing arrangements involved organisations with ethical policies. In response, the Head of Finance confirmed that for any banking organisation the Authority utilised, security was the first and major concern, i.e the ability to get all funds back when required. However, the Authority currently invested in UK based organisations only and all major banks in the UK had some form of ethical, social and environmental policy

RESOLVED: That:

- [1] the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-23 be approved; and**
- [2] the Authority's Prudential Indicators including the Authorised Limit (paragraph 5.2.7 of the Strategy) be approved.**

5 DRAFT 2022-23 BUDGET; COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT; AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022-27

The Head of Finance presented a report that sought Members' approval for the Authority's budget for 2022-23, the Authority's precept, as required by law, for 2022-23 and its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022-27.

The Authority was required to approve its budget and set the council tax precept for the financial year commencing 1st April 2022. The Authority was required to take into account Government funding, precept regulations and organisational demands. This requirement was supported by the production of a MTFP with the annual budget forming the first year of the MTFP. The creation and maintenance of the MTFP was fundamental in promoting good financial planning and delivery of value for money.

The MTFP was Appendix 1 to the report.

Members had considered the Authority's financial position at their Planning Day on 14th January 2022 where they had the opportunity to challenge the assumptions and proposals being put forward by officers as part of the draft budget and MTFP.

The Head of Finance indicated that the report followed a similar format to those that had been presented in previous years.

The 2022-23 budget proposals were based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement as published on 16th December 2021. The Settlement included the Government's Funding Assessment and grant allocations for 2022-23 together with the Council Tax Referendum Principles that allowed for an increase in council tax of up to 2% without triggering a local referendum. An increase of 1.99% in the council tax was assumed; this would generate additional funding of £1,169k compared to 2021-22, based on the tax bases of Band D equivalent properties. When all elements of funding were included such as revenue support grant and business rate income the overall net revenue budget would increase by £384k compared to the previous year, including a 2022-23 one off Service Grant of £653k.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Medium Term Financial Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved;**
- [2] the Budget Requirement of £46.587m as set out in Table 1, paragraph 10 at the report be agreed, noting the adjustments for inflation, growth, one off items and savings as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report;**
- [3] the proposed council tax increase of 1.99% be approved and Band D council tax precept of £82.48 be set for 2022-23;**
- [4] the levels of council tax precept as set out in Table 2 paragraph 23 of the report be agreed;**
- [5] the proposed capital programme for 2022-23 set out in Table 3 paragraph 24 of the report together with its associated financing be approved;**
- [6] the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 3 of the report be approved;**
- [7] the Reserves Strategy set out in Appendix 4 of the report be approved;**
- [8] the Statement of Robustness of Estimates set out in Appendix 5 of the report be noted; and**
- [9] the Financial Health Targets as set out in paragraph 27 of the report be adopted.**