



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 28 September 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, Kath Buckley, Brian Gallagher, Phil Harris, Marilyn Houston, Gina Lewis, Nick Mannion, Karen Mundry, Denis Murphy, James Nicholas, Nathan Pardoe, Stuart Parker, Rob Polhill, Peter Walker 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 Councillors David Brown, Razia Daniels, Robert Moreton, Jonathan Parry and Peter Wheeler.

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 Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chair reminded Members that since the last Fire Authority meeting the nation had faced the loss of her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. The Fire Authority formally paused for a moment's reflection on her remarkable 70-year reign and lifetime dedicated to public service. The Chair on behalf of the Fire Authority sent the new monarch, King Charles III the Authority's best wishes as he began his reign as Sovereign.

The Chair advised that Mr Mark Cashin, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive was due to retire from CFRS on 30th September 2022 and on behalf of the Authority he took the opportunity to thank Mark, for his commitment and support to both the Service and the Fire Authority over the years and wished him all the best for the future. A formal presentation would be taking place at the rise of the meeting.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

E Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

F Minutes of Fire Authority

The Director of Governance advised that since the last meeting took place two Member Champions had changed. Councillor Nathan Pardoe was Member Champion for Procurement; he had now become Member Champion for Information and ICT. Councillor Rob Polhill was Member Champion for Information and ICT; he had become Member Champion for Procurement. The Annex to the minutes reflected the current position.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 22nd June be approved as a correct record.

G Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 29th June 2022 be noted.

H Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 6th July and 7th September 2022 be noted.

I Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

The Director of Governance advised that since the meeting of the Governance and Constitution Committee took place both Councillors Kath Buckley and Denis Murphy had requested that the dispensation (Item 2 in the minutes) was extended to include them.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 12th July 2022 be noted; and

[2] the dispensation granted to Fire Authority Members on 29th January 2020, be extended to Councillors Kath Buckley and Denis Murphy, thereby allowing them to take part in debates and votes on the approval of the Members' Allowance Scheme (and any changes and/or additions).

J Minutes of Informal Meeting of the Closure of Accounts Committee

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 20th July 2022 be noted.

K Minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Manager' Pay and Performance Committee held on 2nd September 2022 be noted.

L Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group held on 5th July 2022 be noted.

M Notes of the Local Pension Board - Firefighters Pension Scheme

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Local Pension Board – Firefighter Pension Scheme held on 9th August 2022 be noted.

2 EXTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2021-22

Michael Green and Liz Luddington, from Grant Thornton (the External Auditor) introduced the report and provided an overview of its content and purpose. The report highlighted the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2022. It was explained that the External Auditor was required to report the audit findings in accordance with the requirements of International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland).

The External Auditor advised that the work was substantially complete with a small number of outstanding queries to be resolved. Once these queries were resolved the External Auditor expected to issue an unqualified audit opinion.

The External Auditor had identified two recommendations for the Authority as a result of issues identified during the audit. The recommendations had been agreed with management and progress on these recommendations would be reported during the 2022-23 audit. The two recommendations were:-

- To consider implementing a cybersecurity framework that was followed by design, implement, and monitor cybersecurity controls as well as providing cybersecurity

- training to employees on a regular basis; and
- To consider including a sample of land and buildings to be remeasured, perhaps on a rolling basis, as part of the valuer's scope.

The External Auditor advised that the Value for Money (VfM) opinion had not yet been completed and therefore the External Auditor was not in a position to issue the Auditor's Annual Report. A letter from the External Auditor explaining the reason for the delay was attached at Appendix G to the report. The External Auditor expected to issue the Auditor's Annual Report by no later than 31st December 2022. This was in line with then National Audit Office's revised deadline.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the External Audit Findings Report 2021-22 be noted.

3 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2021-22 AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Treasurer presented the 2021-22 final accounts to Members for approval. The Authority was required to approve its audited Statement of Accounts for publication on or before 30th September 2022. The report summarised the changes that had been made to the draft Statement of Accounts.

The Statement of Accounts included the Annual Governance Statement which the Authority was required to approve and publish within the same timeframe as the Statement of Accounts.

The Treasurer referred to the Balance Sheet and explained in detail each amount to provide Members with further clarity on the information provided.

Members were advised that since the draft accounts were approved there had been a few minor changes made in relation to areas raised by External Audit. The revised version of the report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Head of Finance gave Members an overview of the final accounts and the reserves and capital position.

The Head of Finance advised that each year, the Authority was required to sign a Letter of Representation addressed to the Auditors. The Letter explained the Authority's responsibilities in relation to the audit, and a copy was attached as Appendix 2 to the report. It was recommended that the Authority approved the letter and authorised the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive to sign it. It should be noted that at the time of writing there were some audit work to be completed that may need to be reflected in the letter, as explained by the auditors. Should this be the case a revised letter would be prepared for signature.

Members thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Annual Governance Statement, which will not change (which will, in fact, be signed by the new Chief) be approved.
- [2] the Treasurer, Head of Finance and Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, following consultation with the Group Spokespersons, be authorised to publish the Statement of Accounts (once the final Audit Findings Report has been received) provided that there has not been any meaningful change to the Statement of Accounts from the version that has been presented to the Fire Authority today.
- [3] the Chair and Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive be authorised to sign the final version of the Letter of Representation (which will be included in the final Audit Findings Report) provided that there has been no meaningful change to the Letter of Representation.
- [4] that it be noted that if there are meaningful changes to either the Statement of Accounts, or Letter of Representation officers will consult with the Chair with a view to convening a further meeting, which will need to take place in good time to allow the Statement of Accounts to be published before the end of November.

4 ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

The Head of Communications and Engagement introduced the report which presented Members' with the Annual Report 2021-22 for approval and publication on the Service's website.

Once approved, an electronic copy of the Annual Report would be published on the Service's website to coincide with the conclusion of the Statement of Accounts. Publication would be announced through the Service's social media channels and via mainstream media. It was also confirmed that hard copies would be made available in libraries and other public places, following the same approach as in previous years.

Members were advised that the 'Summary of Accounts' had been left blank. The figures would be included once the audit had been concluded (minutes 2 and 3 refer).

The Chair took the opportunity to encourage all Members to attend future events such as the Long Service and Good Conduct Award Ceremony and Prince's Trust Events.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Annual Report 2021-22 be approved for publication, once the 'Summary of Accounts' figures had been inserted.

5 MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT

The Head of Procurement and Contracts presented a report that sought approval for the publication of a Modern Slavery Statement on the Cheshire Fire and Rescue website.

Members were advised that following the Transparency in Supply Chains Consultation, the Government had announced its commitment to extend Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to public bodies in England and Wales, which would apply to the Fire Authority. Since the Act had come into force many public bodies had published modern slavery statements voluntarily. The Government was encouraging those organisations that had yet to produce statements to submit one covering the 2021-22 financial year by 30th September 2022.

Members asked how the organisation ensured that contractors did not use modern slavery. In response, the Head of Procurement and Contracts advised that all contractors were requested to sign a statement that set out steps that had been taken to address the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking occurring with partners and supply chains.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Modern Slavery Statement for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service be approved for publication on the website.

6 APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Director of Transformation introduced the report which asked Members to consider the recommendation from the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee (BMPPC) to appoint Mr Alex Waller to the role of Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive.

Members were advised that the role had been advertised externally and that two applications were received. The two day assessment process for the candidates comprised of: a technical interview with an independent Chief Fire Officer and external HR Consultant; media assessments; a presentation to Members of the BMPPC on a topic given prior to the interview; and a formal interview with four members of the BMPPC.

Members who were on the BMPPC interview panel (Councillors Bob Rudd, Denis Murphy, Stef Nelson and Stuart Parker) were invited to provide feedback to the Authority on the process. The Chair informed Members that the BMPPC Committee were given the opportunity to meet the candidates over lunch on the first day of the assessment. He explained that members of the interview panel were briefed on the second day of the process on the results of the media assessments and psychometric tests. Members involved felt that the interview panel were updated thoroughly throughout the process and that the interview process with the candidates had been thorough.

Members were unanimous when asked to vote on the appointment of Mr Alex Waller.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] Mr Alex Waller be appointed to the post of Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive.**