



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 20 September 2017 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors D Bailey, D Beckett, M Biggin, A Dirir, D Flude, P Harris, E Johnson, N Jones, D Mahon, D Marren, G Merry, S Nelson, S Parker, R Polhill, B Rudd, 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 apologies were received from Councillors J Mercer, K Mundry, J Saunders and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire – David Keane.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of the Authority's achievements and events that Members had attended since the last Fire Authority meeting in June 2017.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

E Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 21st June 2017 be approved as a correct record.

F Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee meeting held on 28th June 2017 be received, for information.

G Minutes of Closure of Accounts

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee acting as the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 28th June 2017 be received, for information.

H Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee meeting held on 5th July 2017 be received, for information.

I Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group meeting held on 6th July 2017 be received, for information.

2 AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2016-17

Robin Baker, Engagement Lead for Grant Thornton (the External Auditor) introduced the report and provided an overview of the content and purpose of the report which was to highlight the key matters arising from the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2017. He 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 findings of the report showed that there were no significant matters to report to the Authority and no adjustments that would affect the Authority's reported position. Robin commented on the issue raised the previous year in respect of the accounting treatment for North West Fire Control. He explained that there was ongoing dialogue with finance colleagues in respect of the audit recommendation to incorporate all of its share of NWFC into its accounts commencing 2017-18.

Robin confirmed that the External Auditor was able to provide an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements and conclusion that there were proper arrangements in place to deliver value for money i.e. secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2017. Robin informed Members that the work on the value for money conclusion highlighted that the Authority continued to have effective arrangements in place to manage its financial position by pursuing new ways of working, investing in new facilities and developing its collaborative working with Cheshire Police.

Robin thanked the Authority's finance team for all their hard work and the co-operation received during the audit. He informed Members that this would be the last year of his current cycle as the lead Auditor. He explained that Grant Thornton were liaising with the finance team to ensure a smooth transition and to align with Cheshire Constabulary's external audit cycle (and the joint Finance team) where possible.

Members thanked Grant Thornton for the report and in particular Robin for all his work over the last few years as the lead auditor for the Authority.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the Audit Findings Report 2016-17 be approved.

3 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2016-17

The Head of Finance presented the 2016-17 final accounts to Members for approval prior to publication before the end of September and explained that the overview of the accounts needed to be considered in conjunction with the Audit Findings Report. It was noted that full copies of the accounts had been provided in group rooms prior to the Authority meeting and had been made available on the Service's website.

The Head of Finance gave Members an overview of the final accounts and the reserves and capital position. She explained that there was an overall underspend of £2.336m for 2016/17 and it was recommended that this underspend was transferred into the capital reserve to fund future capital expenditure. The position in respect of pension liabilities and the Authority's net assets and reserves, as detailed in the report, were also highlighted.

A Member queried the increase in the amount owed by short-term debtors. The Head of Finance explained that the figures in the final accounts were just a snapshot taken from a specific day and that more detailed information could be provided. The debt position was not considered to be a concern.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the accounts for 2016-17 be formally approved for publication;

[2] the current balances of the Authority's reserves are noted;

[3] the Authority's underspend in 2016-17 is transferred to the capital reserve: and

[4] the terms of the Letter of Representation are approved and the Chair of the Authority is authorised to sign it.

4 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2016-17

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which presented Members with the draft Annual Statement of Assurance for approval, as required in the Fire and Rescue National Framework (2012).

He explained that the draft Statement had been reviewed by Governance and Constitution Committee prior to submission to the Authority and outlined the areas where further improvements could be made to evidence compliance with the Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance.

RESOLVED THAT:

- [1] the Annual Statement of Assurance 2016-17 be approved for publication on the Service's website.**

5 ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive presented the report to Members which sought approval for the publication of the Authority's Annual Report for 2016-17. The draft report incorporated statutory information on the annual Statement of Accounts together with summary information on key areas of Service performance during the last financial year. He drew Members attention to the current costs which equated to less than 5p per head of population.

Once approved, an electronic copy of the publication would be published on the Service's website by 30th September and delivery of printed copies to residential/mixed business addresses in Cheshire would commence on 9th October 2017.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Annual Report 2016-17 be approved for publication.**

6 DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2018-19 (IRMP 15)

The Consultation and Engagement Officer presented the report to Members which sought approval for the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2018-19 (IRMP 15) for consultation. He provided a brief overview of the key proposals. The draft IRMP outlined a range of new and ongoing projects, as well as the detailed risk analysis and planning processes that had been carried out in order to ensure current and future projects continued to meet the Authority's objectives and future financial challenges.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer informed Members that the document had been re-designed and streamlined to make it more user friendly. He also drew Members attention to the proposed consultation programme which would allow public, staff and stakeholders the opportunity to comment on and shape the proposals.

Members discussed the report and welcomed the revised format as they felt it was an easier read for the intended audience. Members requested that engagement with young people and key industries was included in the consultation programme. Members also requested that the Sprinkler Campaign be prioritised in the list of proposals.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2017-18 (IRMP 15) be approved for formal internal and external consultation.**

7 ENHANCEMENT OF CURRENT PROVISION FOR MATERNITY AND ADOPTION LEAVE

The Equality and Inclusion Officer presented the report which provided details of proposals to enhance the current provision for Maternity and Adoption Leave (including the pay associated with such leave). Member approval was sought to implement the proposed changes to the policies.

The Equality and Inclusion Officer drew Members attention to the tables in the Appendix which gave a clear indication of the enhancements that were proposed (i.e. moving to 45 weeks full pay with the prospect of an entire year's leave at full pay). She explained that if the proposals were approved the Service would become the leading fire and rescue service in providing these benefits which she felt would demonstrate the Service's commitment to being a family friendly and diversity driven organisation.

Members welcomed the proposals in the report and felt that this was a very positive approach. A Member queried whether there had been further benchmarking against other fire and rescue services than was detailed in the report. The Equality and Inclusion Officer explained that the benchmarking exercise had been more extensive and the details could be distributed to Members if required.

The Chair concluded that the recommendations were supported by Members and the proposals had been received extremely positively. He also clarified that it was intended that the new proposals would be implemented from April 2018.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the proposal to increase the current provision for occupational maternity/adoption pay as outlined in paragraphs 10-12 of the report be approved; and**
- [2] changes to the maternity and adoption policies to reflect the proposals be approved.**

8 TRAINING CENTRE PROGRAMME AND SADLER ROAD SITE REQUIREMENTS

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report which updated Members on the progress made on the training centre programme and Sadler Road requirements. The report also provided information about the requirements for the replacement of the Incident Command Training Suite (ICTS), vehicle workshop renovation and security enhancements at Sadler Road and the consolidated budget requirements for the associated works.

The report provided details of the previous decisions made in respect of the future options for the provision of training facilities and the retention of the vehicle workshop at Sadler Road. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the decision to retain the vehicle workshop at Sadler Road had reduced the space available for the training centre and it had been a challenge to fit all the requirements on the existing site. This had implications for the ICTS which would need to be re-located

and the subsequent upgrade/refurbishments costs had been added to the overall programme budget.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the total cost of the capital project was forecast at £9.05m. This included £7.5m for the core training centre facility, £0.3m workshop renovations, £0.25m site security and the £1.0m ICTS upgrade which it was intended to fund from reserves. He also drew Members attention to the proposals to build and upgrade training facilities at some of the fire stations in order to move the centrally delivered training courses from Sadler Road during the build phase. Provision for the necessary upgrades to current facilities were included in overall costs but Members were asked to note that there would be additional revenue costs (circa £100k per year) due to the requirement to temporarily outsource some courses during the build phase.

A Member queried if the Authority would need to take out a loan and how it would deal with the VAT arrangements for the build. The Head of Finance explained that the capital costs would be covered by reserves so there was no requirement to borrow and the risk to VAT recovery had been reviewed. It was noted that the Authority had taken specialist advice on the VAT recovery risk and would continue to monitor the risk throughout the build.

A Member asked for further detail on the practicalities of the interim plans for training and requested that the interim training arrangements be monitored by Performance and Overview Committee. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the project team were linking into the proposed station refurbishment programme and also looking at other possibilities to provide some of the training such as commissioning from neighbours. It was anticipated that the interim training plan would be implemented by April/May 2018.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the training centre programme and Sadler Road requirements be delivered subject to successful procurement being undertaken;**
- [2] the following sums be approved:**
 - £7,500,000 Training Centre (funds already earmarked and including the £0.5m approved in September 2016)**
 - £300,000 Vehicle Workshops Renovation**
 - £1,000,000 Incident Command Training Suite Re provision**
 - £250,000 Sadler Road Site Security**
 - £9,050,000 Total**
- [3] an overall contingency of 5% be approved (to be applied as necessary and appropriate);**
- [4] the Estates and Property Committee be required to identify Members to engage in procurement, contract award and contract management;**
- [5] the requirement for further funding to ensure continuity of operational training during the redevelopment of the Sadler Road site be noted.**