



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.30 a.m.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors M Biggin, P Booher, R Daniels, D Flude, P Harris, J Joyce, D Mahon, D Marren, J Mercer, L Morgan, S Nelson, S Parker, R Polhill, B Rudd, T Sherlock, M Simon, N Wright and S Wright.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Perminder Sethi, representative from Grant Thornton and Tony Cobain and Mike Nulty, representatives from Mersey Internal Audit Agency.

**PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC**

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**A RECORDING OF MEETINGS**

The Chair reminded Members that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

**B APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bailey, P Carey, S Edgar, G Merry and J Weatherill.

**C CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair asked Members to note the content of Chair's Announcements which included details of the Authority's achievements and events Members had attended since the last Fire Authority meeting in February. He drew Members attention to the Blue Light Collaboration Board meetings he attended and added that these meetings were supplemented by regular meetings between himself and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

A Member wished to provide feedback to Officers about an event she had attended at a local school with the Road Safety Advocates. She commented that the session she attended was excellent and that the officers involved were a credit to the Fire Service.

**D DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **E-H MINUTES**

Members were asked to confirm the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 10th February 2016 and receive, for information, minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee, Staffing Committee and Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee.

### **RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the Minutes of the meeting of the Cheshire Fire Authority held on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016 be confirmed as a correct record; and**
- [2] the Minutes of the following meetings be received:  
Performance and Overview Committee – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016  
Staffing Committee – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016  
Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016.**

## **2 EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN AND UPDATE IN RESPECT OF THE AUTHORITY'S ACCOUNTS FOR 2015-16**

The Head of Finance introduced this item and explained that Perminder Sethi, the Authority's relationship manager from Grant Thornton, was in attendance at the meeting to present the External Audit Plan in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2015-16 for Members information.

The External Auditor provided an overview of the plan which provided the details of the audit methodology and identified some developments and risks which underpinned its priorities. Members' attention was drawn to the forthcoming challenges which included continuing financial pressures and collaborative work, specifically Blue Light Collaboration (BLC) and its impact on management capacity. The Plan also detailed the criteria used to produce the Auditors' value for money conclusion and the audit fee for this work for 2015-16 which Members were asked to approve.

The Chair thanked the Auditor for the report and added that the audit reports were particularly important with the proposed changes to the Service going forward. He added that the results of the audit work would be presented to the Authority in September which would give Members an opportunity to review how the changes in respect of BLC and in particular management capacity was being managed.

### **RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the External Audit Plan in respect of the Authority's accounts for 2015-16 be noted; and**
- [2] the audit fee of £29,860 for 2015-16 be approved.**

### **3 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2016-17**

The Head of Planning, Performance and Communications introduced the report which contained the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2016-17. He drew Members attention to the detailed operational plan for the coming year and explained that the majority of timelines for the audit work had yet to be determined due to the impact of the BLC programme. Dates would be identified as BLC timelines for specific departments were finalised. He then introduced Tony Cobain and Mike Nulty, representatives from Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) who presented the Internal Audit Plan 2015-16 to Members for approval.

The Internal Auditor informed Members that the plan had been developed following consideration of the Authority's plans and risk profile and after discussions with the Heads of Departments. He provided a brief summary of the proposed internal audit plan coverage over the next 3 years and explained that the strategic plan was subject to risk assessment each year, or more frequently, if required. Progress against the Plan would be monitored by the Performance and Overview Committee and any specific issues during the year could be escalated to the Policy Committee.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Internal Audit Plan for 2016-17 be approved.**

### **4 FIREFIGHTER APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME**

The Head of People and Development presented this report which provided Members with details in relation to the Apprenticeship scheme design, governance, funding arrangements and costs. She explained that the Service's "Step into Work" initiative was introduced in 2014 following the pledge outlined in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 11 to extend the Service's range of youth engagement initiatives. This was fulfilled through the introduction of a traineeship scheme and two apprenticeship schemes based in HQ (in Workshops and in the Prevention department). IRMP12 had outlined the Service's intention to develop a firefighter apprenticeship scheme for launch during 2016/17.

Members had received an initial presentation on the proposal to launch a pilot scheme for a cohort of up to twelve Firefighter and Community Safety Apprentices to commence in September 2016. The report outlined the key drivers for the introduction of the scheme which included the Government's proposals to introduce an Apprenticeship levy and the Service's workforce planning, specifically improvements to succession planning as part of the Service's overarching talent management strategy. It also provided details of the proposed scheme design and outputs, apprenticeship scheme support, apprentice pay arrangements and funding arrangements.

Members were very supportive of the proposals and commented that it was essential that there was succession planning in place for firefighters. However

Members felt that it was important that there was the prospect of a full time role at the end of the scheme and the aim must be to bring young people into the Service.

The Head of People and Development explained that, to ensure that the Service benefits from the ready made talent pool for maintaining wholetime firefighter staffing levels and to support workforce planning, it was intended that all apprentices who successfully undertake and complete the apprenticeship scheme to the required standard would be offered a permanent position as a trainee firefighter.

A Member queried the partnership with local colleges as a lot of the training would be carried out in-house. The Head of People and Development explained that the benefit of partnering with a training provider or college was that they were able to obtain funding from the Skills Funding Agency. The Chair added that there was a review of Further Education colleges currently being undertaken in Cheshire to provide county-wide opportunities which could lead to students having to travel further and he queried if the Service would be factoring travel expenses into the budget requirements. The Head of People and Development explained that, although the majority of training would be in-house, she would ensure the criteria for travel expenses was considered. She added that all apprentices would be offered assistance towards obtaining their driving licence.

**RESOLVED That:**

- [1] the content of the report be noted; and**
- [2] the proposal to pay the new apprentices at 26% above the national minimum pay for apprentices be agreed.**

**5 BLUE LIGHT COLLABORATION – UPDATE (INCLUDING PEOPLE STRATEGY)**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which provided an update in respect of progress on the Blue Light Collaboration (BLC) Programme. The report provided information on the following issues: general update; how the new arrangements were being designed and the emerging discussions about the overall management of the collaboration; the developing proposals about the joint headquarters and associated facilities; and an outline of the proposals for the People Strategy document.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the work to produce the People Strategy was being facilitated by an external consultant and the first draft had been produced. Unfortunately the Strategy was not quite ready and was the subject of internal due diligence before it could be released and submitted to Members for approval. As the Strategy was one of the key documents it was important to ensure that it was carefully considered before release. Members had agreed, at the December meeting that approval of the People Strategy should be reserved to the Fire Authority along with the

approvals to enter into other key documents required for BLC. Members' views were sought on how they wished to deal with the approvals to enter into key documents going forward for BLC and were asked to consider delegating such approvals to Policy Committee to assist in ensuring the programme was not delayed.

Members discussed the update provided and a number of issues/comments were raised.

A Member requested that officers consider how to preserve the history associated with the Service's tenure at the current site before the Service relocated to Clemonds Hey.

Members commented that they recognised the importance of delivering the programme against the milestones identified as far as possible but asked officers to note that it was more important to get it right than completed quickly. The Chair explained that it would be beneficial to embed the principles of the programme before the forthcoming elections but noted that caution was required.

A Member expressed the view that the Fire Authority should be involved in the approval of key documents to ensure that there was adequate scrutiny and consensus on these key decisions.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive provided responses to the queries made. He reassured Members that, in respect of the timescales for the programme, there would be a measured pace which was methodical and practical. He referred to the management capacity concerns raised in the earlier External Audit report and offered assurances that this issue was constantly being reviewed at the Service's management meetings and that the Service would utilise its IRMP reserves to help alleviate any capacity issues that arose. Finally he drew Members attention to the information in the report in respect of an emerging proposal regarding the feasibility of having a joint Fire and Police training facility which could be based at Fire HQ. This proposal needed to be reviewed further and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been appointed as project sponsor.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested that officers, in consultation with the Chair, could identify the most appropriate route for the approvals to enter into key BLC documents. The Chair added an assurance that all Members would be consulted prior to any key documents being considered by the Policy Committee. This would ensure that Members could insist that key documents be approved by the Fire Authority. To facilitate this approach reports would be provided to all Fire Authority Members.

The Chair added that an action be recorded for the Head of Planning, Performance and Communications to ensure that the history of the building as Cheshire Fire HQ was captured and recorded for the Service's archives.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the content of the report be noted; and**
- [2] Members of the Fire Authority be consulted about the most appropriate route to secure approval to enter into key documents relating to Blue Light Collaboration.**

**6 SENIOR MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITY**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced this report which sought Members approval to share the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (CFO) with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). He outlined the key elements of the proposal which included a commitment of working two days per week for Cumbria FRS, an outline of the proposed role and the funding of £60,000 from Cumbria FRS equating broadly to the salary for days 'lost' at Cheshire FRS. He added that the proposal was to establish the role for twelve months initially. However for the protection of Cheshire, this would include a provision allowing the CFO to withdraw (or be withdrawn) upon two calendar months notice.

The CFO provided some background information on the proposal and the potential benefits of the collaborative arrangements. He explained that, as a result of changes to CFOA's governance model, he would be handing over the presidential role in June 2016 (three months earlier than anticipated) and offered assurances to Members regarding the commitment required to take on the Cumbria role. He added that Members of the Authority's Staffing Committee had considered the collaboration opportunity at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> March and were supportive, subject to the Authority's approval.

Members were supportive of the proposal and felt that this was an opportunity for Cheshire to demonstrate it was being innovative in its approach to collaboration. However concerns were expressed over the impact on both the CFO and his management team over the next 12 months and the need for regular monitoring and reviews of the arrangements. A Member commented that she had reservations over making a decision today without having the opportunity to seek officers views on the proposal. A Member drew attention to the audit report (an earlier item on the agenda) regarding management capacity and the need to be cautious over the impact on the Management Team during a period of considerable change. However he felt that if the Management Team were satisfied that the proposal could work then the potential benefits should outweigh the risks.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided reassurance to Members that officers views had been sought and explained that he and the CFO were a well established Principal Officer team and had a mature senior management team to support them. He was confident that the collaboration would be beneficial but added that regular monitoring of the shared role and the opportunity to withdraw from the arrangement if it was not working provided additional

safeguards. It was noted that there would be regular reports to Staffing Committee concerned with monitoring and review.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the proposal to share the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive with Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, upon the terms contained within the report, be approved; and**
- [2] regular monitoring and review of the arrangements to be facilitated through Staffing Committee.**