



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 9 December 2020 at 10.00am - Remote Meeting via Skype

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

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

The meeting was held using Skype for Business 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 broadcast. He also mentioned how the meeting would be monitored throughout.

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

B Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies submitted. Councillor David Brown joined the meeting at 10.45am.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of activities carried out by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service during the Coronavirus pandemic. Staff from across the Service continued to provide exceptional support to partners and the community in response to Covid-19 in a wide variety of areas. This was vital work to reduce risks and support the vulnerable in our community and was making a huge difference to many lives.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interest.

E Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

F Minutes of Fire Authority

Ged Small, from Grant Thornton (the External Auditor) attended the meeting to

update Members about the work that had been carried out in relation to the external audit since the Fire Authority meeting in October. He confirmed that the Audit Findings Report had been finalised a copy of which had been supplied to Members. The finalised 2019-20 Statement of Accounts and Letter of Representation had now also been signed.

Councillor Razia Daniels made reference to Minute 1D – Declarations of Members' Interest. She advised that the information recorded was incorrect as she was not a member of Cheshire Pensions Board. She stated that she was a recipient of a pension. Some other Members indicated that they were also in receipt of a pension from the pension fund. This declaration was in relation to Item 3 on the agenda of the previous meeting.

Note: These declarations are not contemplated in the Members' Code of Conduct and therefore the interests had no bearing on any of the Members being involved in the decision-making at the previous meeting. However, the original minutes will be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 7th October be approved as a correct record, subject to addition of wording to clarify the Members' interest point raised by Cllr Razia Daniels.

G Minutes of the Estates and Property Committee

A copy of the Fire Station Modernisation Programme report and the Crewe Fire Station report from the meeting of the Estates and Property Committee held on 16th November 2020 were annexed to the agenda for information only.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Estates and Property Committee held on 6th November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

H Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Manager's Pay and Performance Committee held on 16th November 2020 be noted.

I Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 16th November 2020 be noted.

J Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 25th November 2020 be noted.

K Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group held on 6th October 2020 be noted.

L Notes of the Risk Management Board

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Risk Management Board held on 13th October 2020 be noted.

M Programme of Member Meetings 2021-22

Members were asked to review and approve the Programme of Member Meetings for 2021-22.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Programme of Member Meetings for 2021-22 be approved.

2 2021-22 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Treasurer presented the report which provided an update on the progress made in preparing a draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2021-22. Members were also asked to consider the recommendations from the Estates and Property Committee held on 6th November 2020 concerned with the allocation of additional capital expenditure (Fire Station Modernisation Programme, £3m and Crewe Fire Station, £2m).

The Chancellor announced the Government's Spending Review 2020 on 25th November 2020. It prioritised funding to support the Government's response to Covid-19 and set departmental budgets for 2021-22 and devolved administrations for the same period, confirming the core day-to-day spending. Within the Spending Review there was no mention of Fire specifically and as such it was assumed that the funding levels would remain the same for 2021-22, although this had yet to be confirmed. This would be clearer when the Local Government Finance Provisional Settlement was published, which was expected mid-December.

Councillor Stef Nelson requested the Chair to write to the Prime Minister regarding

the pay freeze for public sector workers outside of the NHS urging the Government to reconsider its decision.

The Treasurer explained that there was considerable uncertainty about the funding position going forward due to there being another one-year settlement rather than a three year spending review originally planned pre-Covid. At the present time, for the purpose of planning for the four-year period from April 2022, assumptions had been made about the level of funding and about the potential cost increases that may be faced by the Authority. The current forecasts suggest that the Authority would be required to make cumulative savings of about £1.3m between April 2022 and March 2026. Notwithstanding the uncertainties, the Authority was likely to be required to make reductions in expenditure for the foreseeable future and fund from significant growth from savings. A further update on the medium term position would be available at the next meeting of the Authority.

Members would recall from a presentation at a recent Planning Day that additional capital funding would also be required for further property-related projects such as the Fire Station Modernisation Programme and the Wilmslow Emergency Services Facility. If Members were minded to approve additional capital expenditure for the projects this would have a further and significant impact on the revenue budget; circa £650k per annum would be required to fund the additional borrowing. When the budget was presented to Members on 10th February 2021, the MTFP and capital strategy would be updated to reflect any additional borrowing.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the position in the 2021-22 draft revenue budget and medium term financial plan be noted; and**
- [2] £3m additional capital funding be allocated for the Station Modernisation Programme; and**
- [3] £2m additional capital funding be allocated for the Crewe Fire Station project;**
- [4] the Chair write to the Prime Minister urging the Government to reconsider its decision to impose a pay freeze for public sector workers outside of the NHS.**

3 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REPORT 2020-21

The Head of Finance presented the report which provided an update on performance against the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy (TMS).

Members were referred to the section of the report containing information on the current economic background. The Head of Finance highlighted the economic uncertainty currently being faced within the UK and globally due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The table in paragraph 15 of the report contained a forecast of interest rates from September 2020 to March 2023. The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK was probably relatively even, but was subject to major uncertainty due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Members were referred to the section of the report containing information on the Authority's capital programme and borrowing. The Authority had a loan portfolio of £1.012m at 31st October 2020, with plans to borrow a further £11m early in 2021-22. Historically the Authority had financed the majority of its capital programme from reserves and capital grants. Looking ahead, it seemed certain that there would be no future capital grant funding for fire authorities and capital reserves were now fully committed to the existing capital programme. As a result, any future new or additional approval of capital expenditure over and above the currently planned programme, would need to be funded by further new borrowing. This would be in addition to the £11m borrowing already approved.

A summary of projected interest rates was provided at paragraph 15 of the report. The Head of Finance advised that interest rates were not due to rise until 2022.

The Head of Finance referred Members to information within the report regarding the Authority's investment portfolio for 2020-21, which totalled £1.012m at 31st October 2020, with plans to borrow a further £11m early in 2021-22.

RESOLVED: That:

[1] the report be noted; and

[2] the requirement to borrow to support the capital programme be noted.

4 MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY 2021-2025

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Transformation which set out the background to the Service's approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Members were informed that the Strategy described how the Service would support the mental health and wellbeing of staff through education, leadership, and access to positive and professional support. It also described how the Service intended to mainstream mental health awareness and how the culture would promote the ability of staff to speak out openly about mental health concerns without judgement.

Councillor Steve Wright, Member Champion for Mental Health and Wellbeing endorsed the Strategy and took the opportunity to thank officers who had been involved in its development.

Councillor Jill Houlbrook requested further information on both family and emergency support for employees. In response, the Director of Transformation advised that she would provide a response to this question outside the meeting.

Members welcomed the Strategy and requested that a session was held providing

further information on delivering the Strategy at the next Member Planning Day.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Mental Health Strategy 2021-25 be approved for publication.**
- [2] the Mental Health Strategy 2021-25 be discussed in further detail at the next Member Planning Day.**

5 SERVICE MANAGEMENT TEAM STRUCTURAL REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive which provided information about the outcomes of the review of the Service Management Team (SMT) structure. The report asked Members to consider the recommendations from the review and determine the way forward.

The review was commissioned by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and was intended to determine whether the current Service Management Team structure was fit for purpose and sustainable. The initial findings from the review had been considered by the Staffing Committee on 16th November 2020 and it was supportive of the recommendations as set out in the report.

A vote was taken in relation to the decision set out below. 22 Members were in favour and one abstained.

RESOLVED: That:

- [1] the establishment of the role of Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the removal of one Assistant Chief Fire Officer post be approved; [Note: The creation of any role that attracts a salary package of more than £100,000 must be approved by a vote of Members];**
- [2] the changes to the Constitution set out in Appendix 2 to enable the recruitment of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to take place be approved;**
- [3] an increase in budgeted hours for the Section 151 Officer (Treasurer) role to allow the postholder to work up to two and a half days per week be agreed;**
- [4] the way that the Director of Transformation role is to be redefined and intention to ultimately remove the role be noted.**
- [5] the removal of the Head of Prevention post, with the responsibilities being combined with another function be supported.**

6 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2020-21

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Commissioning which sought approval of the Member Training and Development

Programme for 2020-21.

The report contained a review of the Member development activities for 2020-21 which included a summary of delivery of the Member Training and Development Programme to date. Due to the Coronavirus-related restrictions, Member training and development sessions between March and June 2020 had been postponed. Since then a number of virtual sessions had taken place which had been a success. These would continue to be arranged until it was possible to carry them out in person.

Councillor Gina Lewis, Chair of the Member Training and Development Group thanked all Members of the Fire Authority for their attendance and contributions to the Authority's Member Training and Development Programme throughout the year. Councillor Gina Lewis. She made specific reference to the virtual Equality and Diversity training which had taken place during October and November 2020 advising how interesting this session had been and requested that an additional session was arranged to take place in early 2021, encouraging all Members to attend.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Member Training and Development Programme for 2020-21 be approved: and**
- [2] progress against the delivery of the Member Training and Development Programme for 2020-21 be noted.**

7 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2019-21

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Commissioning which sought approval of the Member Development Strategy for 2019-21.

The Member Development Strategy sets out how the Fire Authority would further develop its elected Members to ensure that they were effective in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. It provides a structured framework for the delivery of the Member Development and Induction Programme, future Member support and training and development and promotes continuous improvement.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Member Development Strategy for 2019-21 be approved.**