



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 29 September 2021 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am

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

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements that 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.

Members asked if there had been any further information received from Government on the review into the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the proposal to mandate the transfer of fire and rescue functions to the PCC. In response, the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive advised that the second part of the review was due to be published in the autumn, but nothing had been received to date.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 23rd June 2021 be approved as a correct record.

G Notes of Informal Meeting of members of Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 14th July 2021 be noted.

H Notes of Informal Meeting of members of the Performance and Overview Committee and Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 21st July 2021 and minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 8th September 2021 be noted.

I Notes of Informal Meeting of members Closure of Accounts Committee

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Closure of Accounts Committee held on 21st July 2021 be noted.

J Minutes of Staffing Committee and Notes of Informal Meeting of members of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 23rd June 2021 and the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 25th August 2021 be noted.

K Notes of the Informal Meeting of members of Estates and Property Committee

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Informal Meeting of the Estates and Property Committee held on 17th August 2021 be noted.

L Notes of the Member Training and Development Group

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group held on 6th July 2021 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 11th August 2021 be noted.

2 EXTERNAL AUDIT FINDINGS REPORT 2020-21

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 2021. 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 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. An audit letter 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 2021. This was in line with then National Audit Office's revised deadline.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the External Audit Findings Report 2020-21 be noted.

3 FINAL ACCOUNTS 2020-21 AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Treasurer presented the 2020-21 final accounts to Members for approval. Members were advised that under normal circumstances, the Authority was required to approve its audited Statement of Accounts for publication on or before 31st July. However, due to the on-going impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the deadline had been extended to 30th September 2021.

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. In response, a Member suggested that more detail was provided on finance reporting at a future Member Planning Day.

Members were advised that since the draft accounts were approved there had been several changes made in terms of external issues and 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 normally, the External Auditor would issue a final audit opinion, which would be available at the meeting when the Statement of Accounts was to be considered. However, this year, due to the lateness of changes to the Statement of Accounts for reasons beyond the control of officers and the External Auditor, this opinion was not yet available. The Letter of Representation would be updated upon receipt of the finalised audit opinion.

Members thanked officers for the report. However, some Members made comment on the lateness of the report and felt that they had not had adequate time to read and make an informed decision on the information provided.

On being put to the vote the the recommendations were carried with 14 votes in favour and 6 abstentions by Councillors Rachel Bailey, Michael Beanland, Razia Daniels, Jill Houlbrook, Stuart Parker and Norman Wright.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] The 2020-21 Annual Governance Statement be approved;**
- [2] The 2020-21 Statement of Accounts be approved and the Chair, Treasurer, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer (as necessary) be authorised to sign the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement upon receipt of the finalised audit opinion; and**
- [3] The Letter of Representation, as detailed at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved for signature by the Chair on behalf of the Authority, upon receipt of the finalised audit opinion.**

4 STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2020-21

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

The Statement had been prepared in accordance with national guidance and included sections on financial assurance, governance and operational assurance.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Statement of Assurance 2020-21 be approved.

5 ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Communications Manager introduced the report which presented Members' with the Annual Report 2020-21 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.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Report 2020-21 be approved for publication.

6 2022-23 DRAFT ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The Consultation and Engagement Officer introduced the report which sought approval to publish the 2022-2023 draft Annual Action Plan (the draft Plan) and begin a period of consultation on the proposals within the draft plan.

Members were advised that the draft Plan contained an overview of the Authority's work to support the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic and an update on progress with the plans outlined in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The draft Plan also highlighted two projects that required specific mention: a revised approach to delivery of the new crewing arrangements at Wilmslow Fire Station; and the proposal to progress emergency cardiac response.

It was proposed to continue the Authority's tried and tested approach of undertaking comprehensive consultation to ensure that the public, staff and stakeholders were able to contribute their views. Consultation activity would centre on the new and amended proposals, as well as the anticipated 1.99% increase in the precept for 2022-2023. There would also be engagement on broader issues regarding public satisfaction with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. It was proposed to run a 13-week consultation from 4th October 2021 until 7th January 2022.

Members welcomed the document and raised a number of questions and comments, relating to: water safety initiatives in schools; emergency cardiac response; looking after our people; and road safety. Officers responded accordingly

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be noted

[2] the publication of the 2022-2023 draft Annual Action Plan and launch of the consultation process be approved.

7 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2021-24

The Director of Transformation introduced the report which sought approval of the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-24 (the EDI Strategy).

Members were advised that the EDI Strategy was a key corporate document, setting out the organisation's approach to EDI. The EDI Strategy outlined the Service's intent to reflect on whether there was more that could be done to keep underrepresented communities safe and carry on fighting their corner as visible allies. The EDI Strategy highlighted roles and responsibilities and included priorities that aimed to help us further develop the Service's approach to EDI.

Councillors Razia Daniels and Jill Houston, Member Champions for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion welcomed the EDI Strategy and took the opportunity to thank all officers involved for their hard work and commitment in this area of work.

RESOLVED: That:

[1] the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-24 be approved.