



Minutes

Members Present:

Brigadier P Jones CBE (Chair), Mr. S J Clee (Vice Chair), Mrs. P A Andrews, Mr. T J Bean, Mrs. M Bunker, Mr. J Campion, Mr. J H R Goodwin, Mr. D Greenow, Mrs. L Hodgson, Mrs. F Oborski, Mrs. J Potter, Mr. D W Prodder MBE, Mr. C T Smith, Mr. T Spencer, Mr. D C Taylor, Mr. K Taylor, Mr. J Thomas, Mr. R M Udall, Mr. P J Watts and Mr. G C Yarranton.

At the outset of the Meeting, the Members observed a minute's silence in memory of Gary Williams, Dave Taylor and Brian Thompson, all Service personnel who had passed away since the last Meeting of the Authority.

No. Item

1. Apologies for Absence

The Meeting noted apologies for absence from Mr. J Cairns, Mrs. L Duffy, Mrs. L Eyre, Mr. A I Hardman and Mrs. G Hopkins.

2. Declarations of Interests (if any)

The Chairman invited any Member to declare any interest in any of the items on this Agenda; no Member declared any such interests.

3. Chairman's Announcements

3.1 The Chairman told the Meeting that the Service's Annual Awards Ceremony now took place in both Worcester and Hereford; the Worcester event was in the Guildhall on Friday 3 September and there would be a similar event on Friday 15 October in the Town Hall in Hereford. Having officiated at the Worcester event, the Chairman felt that the new format was better and allowed the recipients, their families and friends a better opportunity to celebrate their achievements.

3.2 The Chairman told the Meeting that the Chief Fire Officer would make his first annual appearance at Worcestershire County Council on 18 November.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

5. Questions from Members of the Public

The Meeting noted that no questions had been received from members of the public.

6. Appointment of Treasurer

The Chief Fire Officer told the Meeting that Mr Mike Weaver had resigned his position as Treasurer for the Authority in August and that under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Authority was required "...to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs."

Since August the Director of Finance (Deputy Treasurer) had carried out the section 151 duties for the Authority and fulfilled the role of Treasurer.

The Chief Fire Officer had consulted with the Chairman and Group Leaders regarding the position of Treasurer and there was agreement that Mr Tony Wood should be appointed on an interim basis for 6 months during which period the Authority would carry out a review of the Section 151 role.

Mr Tony Wood previously worked in an interim Principal Management position in the Service assisting the Director of Finance in administering the financial affairs of the organisation. It was considered that Mr Wood was ideally placed to act as Treasurer, due to his previous experience in Local Government generally and this Authority in particular.

The CFO proposed an interim contract for a six month period with a maximum of 25 days over the six months and additional days for exceptional items at the discretion of the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority. This arrangement would enable the Authority to contain the expenditure on the Treasurer's post within existing Service budgets. He told the meeting that the interim arrangement and the review of the Section 151 role would be considered by the Authority at its meeting in February 2011

Resolved that the Authority confirm the appointment of Mr Tony Wood as an interim Treasurer to the Authority with immediate effect.

7. Chief Fire Officer's Service Report

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members of recent key developments and activities, together with performance information for the period 1 April 2010 to 30 June 2010. The Meeting noted that the total incident numbers for Quarter 1 2010-11 showed the best quarterly performance over the same period in the last five years

The Chief Fire Officer also updated the Authority on the revised proposals for the Warwickshire Improvement Plan/IRMP that were published in July 2010. It was noted that the revised Warwickshire Plan contained proposals to reduce the number of stations from 19 to 16, reduce the number of pumping appliances from 26 to 22 appliances, in addition to one 'small fires unit', and to upgrade Alcester from retained status to wholetime.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that following analysis of fire cover in the affected area and the number of incidents in the Studley/Alcester area that attracted attendances from both Services, the proposals were likely to have little detrimental impact on the operations of HWFRS.

Following discussion, the Vice-Chair moved the following recommendation which was subsequently agreed:

RESOLVED that:

- i. this Authority notes Warwickshire County Council's final proposals in relation to fire cover along the border area of Worcestershire/Warwickshire;***
- ii. following consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Group Leaders this Authority does not have any concerns regarding the implementation of Warwickshire County Council's "Option B" for fire cover, and***
- iii. the Chief Fire Officer monitor the provision of fire cover along the Worcestershire/Warwickshire border once the Warwickshire County Council Improvement Plan is implemented and, in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Group Leaders, report back to the Authority any changes resulting from the same.***

The Chief Fire Officer also informed the Meeting that:

- The Service had completed the roll out and familiarisation training of the new Water Rescue Vehicles (WRVs) at Hereford, Worcester and Evesham Fire Stations with each station 'going live' during July and now being fully operational
- The Service was rolling out new uniform (workwear) to all relevant staff which, when coupled together with the new firefighting uniform expected to arrive in the Service early next Spring, would give firefighting staff the most up-to-date protection and workwear available to UK firefighters. This was expected to "go live" during October 2010
- All uniformed roles in the Service would change from the term "Manager" to "Commander" i.e. Watch Manager to Watch Commander, Station Manager to Station Commander, etc. The Chief Fire Officer and staff (that had been consulted) agreed that this was a subtle but important change to reflect that both firefighting and firefighter safety were of the highest priority. A Member expressed concern regarding the public perception of the proposed name change and after some discussion it was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Vice-Chairman:

that all uniformed roles in the Service would change from the term "Manager" to "Commander" in accordance with the content of the Chief Fire Officer's Service Report.

18 Members voted for the proposal, with 1 against and one abstention.

- Freedom of Information requests and complaints about the Service had all fallen during the period 1 April 2010 to 30 June 2010
- The new station at Pebworth was under construction and was expected to be operational early in 2011
- In early July, Peterchurch Fire Station hosted the joint emergency services Dying to Drive event, an initiative aimed at reducing the number of young fatalities on the county's roads, which had also been held in Worcestershire. A Member requested that the Service explore options for campaigns to reduce the number of accidents in the agricultural sector and the CFO replied that the Member would be contacted regarding this matter.

- There was a serious industrial fire at Kidderminster on Monday 23 August and the Meeting complimented the Service on the manner in which the fire was dealt with and the rapid communication with local communities to ensure their well being.
- The Service's Community Safety Volunteer Programme had been extended to Herefordshire

RESOLVED *that the Report be noted.*

8. Review of Committee Structure

The Authority had agreed at its Annual General Meeting on 25 June 2010 to defer the appointments of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees until this Meeting, pending the review of the Committee Structure, as part of the overall review of the Authority's governance arrangements. The review was carried out by the Governance Review Working Group, chaired by Mr. D. Prodger, MBE. The Working Group had consulted Group Leaders and Principal Management as well as various other Officers as part of the review. The external auditors had also been consulted in relation to the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee.

Feedback from the consultation highlighted two main concerns:

- The current Committee Structure separated policy consideration (the Best Value, Policy and Performance Committee) from financial strategy (Budget Committee); it was proposed that a single Policy and Resources Committee be formed to ensure an integrated approach between finance and policy which will be critical during the coming months and years as the Authority faced a worsening budgetary situation
- The second area where improvement was sought related to Committees' decision-making powers.

The Working Group also considered the following matters:

- Forming a joint Standards Committee; however, further discussion on this issue was shelved pending the Government's announcement on the abolition of Standards for England
- Amendments to the Appointment Committee's terms of reference to include the Section 151 Officer and The Monitoring Officer's appointments, terms and conditions and dismissals, as well as further duties in relation to grievances and appraisals.

Following consultation with Group Leaders it was proposed that the Urgent Decisions Committee be disbanded and that decisions be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with Group Leaders, where the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, agreed that the decision was urgent and that it would be impractical to call a meeting of the Authority.

These proposals were supported at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Audit Committee on 7 September and by the Standards Committee on 21 September. The Audit Committee felt that the restructure should give each Member of the Authority the opportunity to participate at Committee level and, in order to accommodate this, the proposal before the Authority was to appoint 15 Members to the Policy and Resources Committee and 10 Members to the Audit Committee.

Concern was expressed that the proposals shifted some decision-making functions from Members of the Authority to Officers and to address this it was proposed that there should be Member involvement in approving a work programme for each Committee and that use of the proposed Urgent Decision procedure should be reported to the full Authority meeting.

The Meeting considered the proposed Committee Structure as set out in appendix 2 and the amended terms of reference for the Committees and unanimously:

RESOLVED that:

- i) the proposed revised Committee Structure, amended Terms of Reference of Committees and delegations to the Chief Fire Officer, as set out in the report, be approved;*
- ii) Members approve the work programme for each Committee; and*
- iii) The use of the proposed Urgent Decision procedure is reported at full Authority meetings*

9. Allocation of Seats to Political Groups and Appointments to Committees

Following the Authority's approval of the proposed changes to the Committee structure the Meeting considered appointments to the offices of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority's Committees and to the allocation of seats on Committees to political groups.

RESOLVED that:

- i) appointments be made to the offices of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority's Committees as follows:*

Appointments Committee

Chair: Brigadier P Jones CBE

Vice-Chair: Mr Stephen Clee

Audit Committee

Chairman: Mr Derek Prodger, MBE

Vice-Chair: Mrs Lynne Duffy

Policy & Resources Committee

Chair: Mr Adrian Hardman

Vice-Chair: Mr Kit Taylor

- ii) Mr. John Goodwin and Mrs. Gay Hopkins be appointed the Authority's representatives on the Standards Committee;*
- iii) the Clerk be authorised, following consultation with the respective Group Leaders, to take any necessary action to give effect to proportionality requirements, determine the numbers of seats on Committees and make appointments to those Committees and other bodies in accordance with the wishes of the Group Leaders;*
- iv) appointments be made to the following Member Champion roles:*

Asset Management Champion - Mr. Gordon Yarranton

Equality & Diversity Champion - Mr. Richard Udall

Risk Management Champion - Mr. Peter Watts

10. Amendment to Principal Officer Structure

At the meeting of the Authority on the 25 June 2010 it was agreed that the Chief Fire Officer carry out a 12 months' rolling review of the organisational structures of the Service and present a paper(s) to the Authority containing any major proposed structural changes and, once they had been through the appropriate consultation, to seek Authority permission to implement.

The Chief Fire Officer had commenced this review and the process of taking appropriate actions to ensure the Authority could properly deal with the anticipated budget pressures as it was facing an uncertain financial future. Discussions had taken place between all members of the current Principal Officer team and it was agreed that a reduction of one Principal Officer post was feasible. The Chief Fire Officer believed that it was probable that savings would have to be achieved throughout the structure and within all departments should the Chancellor's anticipated reduction in public sector financing transfer to the Authority's grant settlement. The Chief Fire Officer also believed that it was right and proper for any reductions to commence at the top tier of management and these proposals demonstrated that belief.

The reduction of an Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) would mean additional responsibilities falling on an already fully committed Principal Officer team. However, with the commitment already demonstrated by these Officers, the Chief Fire Officer was confident that the changes could be made without any adverse affect on the smooth running of the Service. He told the meeting that the proposals could realise total savings of £149,100 per annum, (maximum) and that these savings would be considered when preparing the budget for 2011/12.

The full year savings would have to be offset against the need to upgrade one Area Manager to full "Operational Commander" status - to ensure operational command resilience and the full year cost (including on costs) of this upgrade would be £12,200.

The Chief Fire Officer told Members that a consequence of the removal of an ACFO post from the Service's structure would be to commence consultation on a review of the Principal Officer Secretariat which could result in a redundancy of a Personal Assistant.

The Service's Head of Human Resources would ensure all appropriate processes were followed so that this review would be in accordance with current employment law and good practice.

The Authority unanimously **RESOLVED:**

- (i) to approve the removal of one Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) post from the Service's structure;***
- (ii) that the timing of the implementation of the removal of the ACFO post is determined by the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with Group Leaders but in any case before the financial year 2011/12;***
- (iii) that the Chief Fire Officer may implement any minor structural changes that result from the removal of an ACFO post;***
- (iv) that the savings from the removal of the ACFO post be considered within the budget setting process for 2011/12; and***
- (v) that the Authority recognises the additional responsibility and operational requirements placed on the Principal Officers in the proposed new structure.***

11. Members' Allowances Scheme

Members considered the level of Members' Allowances in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (the Regulations) and noted that the relevant CPI index for the period would increase the rates by 4.2%. However, it was agreed unanimously that it would be inappropriate to raise rates at this time, given the current financial climate.

RESOLVED that:

- i) the level of Members' Allowances applicable from 1 April 2009 is retained for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011***
- ii) the level of Members' Allowances is reviewed by June 2011.***

12. Formula Grant Consultation

The Director of Finance told the Meeting that formula grant allocation was last reviewed for the 2008/09 to 2010/11 grant settlements under the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) round and, that in accordance with normal practice, would be reviewed for the next grant round.

The Government was consulting on the formula grant review and this provided an opportunity for the Authority to raise its concern over the low level of grant it received. A draft response to the consultation had been considered by the Group Leaders, prior to consideration by the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer told the Members that he and the Principal Officers would be encouraging Members of Parliament and local political leaders to support their views in this matter in order to seek the best possible outcome for the Authority.

RESOLVED that the Authority responds to the Government's consultation on formula grant settlement in line with the draft letter attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

13. Future of West Midlands Regional Management Board

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the history of the establishment of the West Midlands Regional Management Board and its role.

The Meeting heard that the Board had received the recent announcement from the Fire Minister which would allow the dissolution of Regional management Boards at its annual meeting on 25 August 2010. The Board resolved to recommend to the 5 constituent Fire and Rescue Authorities that they agree to dissolve the West Midlands Regional Management Board at the earliest practical date, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

The approval of the Secretary of State was received by the Clerk to the WMRMB on 14 September and the Authority unanimously:

RESOLVED that:

- i) the Authority agrees to dissolve the West Midlands Regional Management Board; and***
- ii) delegated authority be granted to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority, to take all necessary steps to achieve the dissolution of the West Midlands Regional Management Board at the earliest practical date.***

14. Audit Committee Report

Mr D Prodger MBE, Chair of the Audit Committee, reported on the proceedings of the Audit Committee meeting on 30 June 2010. He told the Authority that the Committee considered the Annual Governance Report from the Audit Commission which had been circulated to all Members of the Authority and that the Committee approved the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Authority's Annual Governance Statement 2009/10 for publication.

RESOLVED that the Authority notes the proceedings of the Audit Committee meeting held on 30 June 2010.

15. Budget Committee Report

The Meeting received a report on the proceedings of the Budget Committee meeting on 29 July 2010.

RESOLVED that the Authority notes the proceedings of the Budget Committee meeting held on 29 July 2010.

16. Best Value, Planning and Performance Committee Report.

The Meeting received a report on the proceedings of the Best Value, Planning and Performance Committee held on 8 September 2010.

RESOLVED that the Authority notes the proceedings of the Best Value, Planning and Performance Committee meeting held on 29 July 2010.

The Meeting finished at 12.15 pm

Signed: _____
Chairman

Date: _____