

Minutes of the meeting of
the TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND
RESCUE AUTHORITY held in the
Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Barmston Mere on
MONDAY, 25 JANUARY 2010 at
10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, Boyes, Charlton, Clark, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Haley, Jordan, Mortimer, Renton, Scaplehorn and Woodwark.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mole and Clare.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

67. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 21 December, 2009 – Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the addition of Councillor Haley to the list of attendees, and

- (ii) the minutes of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 11 January 2010 – Part 1 be received and noted.

Matters Arising

It was highlighted that at a previous meeting, Members of the Authority had requested that a report be prepared on the relationship between the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority and the Scrutiny function in Local Authorities and brought to the January meeting.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle advised that she had written to the five Local Authorities requesting information but as responses had not been received from all authorities at this time, a report would be prepared for consideration at the February meeting of the Authority.

Capital Programme 2009/10 Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to review the current year's Programme and reflect changes from that presented to the Authority as a consequence of the Second Capital Programme Review on 23 November 2009.

The Finance Officer advised that regular monitoring of the Capital Programme continued to take place and no additional variations were being reported at the Third Review Stage.

The Finance Officer drew Members' attention to a number of issues. Difficulties had been experienced in the delivery of the final phase of the installation of the Buildings Management System (BMS) Energy Programme and tenders had not been awarded within the normal timescales. However, Officers remained hopeful that there would be no slippage at the year end.

The procurement of breathing apparatus communications equipment had been delayed due to compatibility issues and whilst it was expected that the scheme would be complete within the financial year, there was potential for slippage. Until the issue was resolved, there would also be a delay in delivering operational equipment so there was a potential for slippage within this scheme.

The Authority had delayed the procurement of two Operational Support Units and a Special Rescue Tender as a Firebuy Framework agreement was being developed and this should lead to greater value for money within the procurement. The delivery of these items would slip into the early part of the 2010/11 financial year.

The Finance Officer also confirmed that none of the Prudential Indicators agreed by the Authority for 2009/2010 had been breached.

Following consideration of the matter, it was:-

68. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2009/2010 be approved.

Revenue Budget 2009/2010 Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising Members of issues relating to the 2009/2010 Revenue Budget position and providing an updated Statement of Balances.

The Finance Officer advised that at this stage of the year, an additional net estimated underspend of approximately £150,000 was anticipated in relation to Employee costs.

Savings have also been made through a restructure of the Authority's debt portfolio and the slippage in the procurement of vehicles had given rise to an estimated underspend of £65,000 in the leasing budget for 2009/2010.

A number of areas were highlighted at the second Review of the Revenue Budget which potentially give rise to a further underspend in 2009/2010. These areas included the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay, the Firefighter Recruits Course and Firefighter Ill Health Retirements.

The Finance Officer advised that the actual and potential variations against the 2009/2010 Revenue Budget amounted to a total estimated net underspend of £1.322 million.

It was:-

69. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2009/2010 be noted as set out in the report, including the updated Statement of Balances as set out in Appendix A.

Draft Revenue Budget 2010/2011

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a joint report to outline the financial position facing the Authority for 2010/2011.

The Finance Officer referred Members to updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which took into account all supporting strategies and plans as well as member deliberations and comment. Firefighter Pensions continued to be a huge issue and whilst no timescales had been notified for the implementation of revised contribution rates it was envisaged that it would apply from 1st April 2011 onwards.

Attention being drawn to the Tyne and Wear Emergency Planning Unit (TWEPU), Members were advised of a reduction in contributions from the District Council's of 4% resulting in a budget provision of £513,887.

In relation to efficiency savings, Members acknowledged a tightening of the national funding position and the significant pressure brought with it, on the Authority's

medium-term financial position. In addition, the Audit Commission's national review outlined a number of findings, including that the service could save up to £200 million a year if all fire services adopted good practice. There was therefore clearly a need to continue to identify and realise efficiency savings.

With regard to Council tax levels, the Government had retained its Capping Powers and expected to see average increases fall further than this years average increase of 3%. The Finance Officer added that notwithstanding any variation in budget requirement and receipt of the latest council tax bases and collection fund positions, a precept increase of significantly below 3% would be possible, however he reminded that figures were indicative only at this stage.

Councillor N. Forbes took the opportunity to share the views of the Policy and Performance Committee which had considered this report previously. In doing so he stated the firm view of the Committee that the Authority had a good record of delivering value for money whilst also improving its services and he was confident that this clear direction of travel was well understood by Authority Members, employees and the public of Tyne and Wear.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

70. RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the contents of the report and the draft Revenue Budget position for 2010/2011 be noted; and
- (b) the draft revised MTFS as attached at Appendix A of the report, be noted.

Schedule of Precept Instalments 2010/2011

The Finance Officer submitted a report detailing Schedules of Instalments for the payments of precepts.

Members were reminded that payments should be made by twelve equal monthly instalments, commencing in April, payable on the last working day of each month, to continue the practice adopted in 1993-94.

It was:-

71. RESOLVED that the Schedule of Instalments be approved.

LGA Annual Fire Conference – 9/10 March 2010

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report inviting Authority representation at the conference.

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the report and explained that LGA Annual Fire Conference was scheduled to be held in Manchester on the 9th and 10th March, 2010. The Conference theme had been planned to address the pressures that authorities would be subject to, in striving to improve services in the face of the economic turndown and with a general election scheduled for the first half of 2010.

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority advised that Councillor Bell was next on the Conference rota followed by Councillor Boyes. Councillor Bell declined the invitation due to prior commitments. Councillor Boyes therefore agreed to check her availability and notify the Lead Authority. The cost of the Conference was £360.00 +,VAT per person.

It was:-

72. RESOLVED that the attendance of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman plus one other Member (according to the rota) be approved.

Fireworks and Bonfire Incidents 1st-6th November, 2009

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to provide Members with information with regard to the bonfire incident levels and the associated community safety initiatives within the service during the period between 1st and 6th November, 2009.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Copeling outlined the report and referring to paragraph 4.1 explained that whilst the number of anti-social behaviour bonfires was down when compared with 2008, the number of calls received and the number of all incidents attended were both up on last year, as were injuries to members of the public which was disappointing. However, when these figures were compared against those for 2006 and 2007 it could be seen that the overall reduction in incidents remained impressive.

Councillor Bell commented upon the amount of fireworks seen over new year and asked whether the sale of fireworks over this period was also monitored?

ACFO Copeling responded and explained that injuries around this time were mainly linked to bonfires, not fireworks. Also, incidents attended were monitored all year round, however, 5th November remained the busiest time.

Councillor Woodwark referred to the number of attacks on firefighters and although pleased to note the significant reduction on operational personnel from 22 to 7, commented that 7 attacks were still too many.

It was:-

73. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as necessary.

Tyne and Wear Review of Joint Services: Resilience Arrangements

The Chief Emergency Planning Officer, the Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Adviser submitted a joint report providing Members with information on the current status of the joint service review involving the EPU.

The review of the EPU had commenced and a review team established. This was led by Paul Dowling (Programme Director, Gateshead Council) and supported by Linda Scott.

It was anticipated draft options for future working would emerge over the next 2-3 months. The outcome of the review would be subject to consultation with the Authority and the stakeholders/interested parties prior to any resolution.

Councillor Woodwark expressed his concerns in relation to the 4% efficiency savings which had been imposed and the lack of consultation or information regarding where and how these figures had been derived.

The Chief Fire Officer shared these views and was also disappointed in the lack of consultation commenting that he did not feel it right for decisions to be taken in isolation.

Upon discussion, it was:-

74. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received.

Correspondence List for Information

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a list of items of correspondence that had been received since the last meeting of the Authority, and were not subject to a separate report.

74. RESOLVED that the correspondence list be received for information.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

63. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or information relating to consultations/negotiations in connection with

any labour matter arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 3 and 4).

(Signed) T. WRIGHT,
Chairman.

Note:

The above minutes comprise those relating to items of business during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.