

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 17 SEPTEMBER 2012
at 10.30 am.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Ahad, Bell, M Forbes, N Forbes, Gambling, Haley, McAtominey, Mole, Mortimer, Mulvenna, Ord, Padgett, and Stephenson.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Renton and Waller.

The Chairman advised that Councillor Boyes of Gateshead Council had recently been unwell. A card had therefore been sent from the Authority wishing her a speedy recovery.

The Chairman went on to say that Andy Nobel had been involved in a serious accident. A card had again been sent, on behalf of the Authority.

The Authority was then advised of the successes of the recent FireFighters Memorial weekend. The Chairman expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to attend this and hoped that all Members of the Authority would be given the opportunity to attend in future years.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bell declared a personal interest in relation to Item 9 – Domestic Sprinkler Partnership Project, as a member of South Tyneside Homes Board.

Minutes

20. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority, Part I held on 16 July 2012, be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Committee, Part I held on 9 July 2012 be noted for information; and
- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Panel, Part I held on 16 July 2012 be noted for information;
- (iv) the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Panel, Part I held on 30 July 2012 be noted for information.

Bravery and Meritorious Conduct Award

Ff Shepherd was in attendance for this item of business.

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report for the Authority to recognise the meritorious and brave actions taken by Ff Jay Shepherd during an incident that occurred at the River Tyne adjacent to the Millennium Bridge.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that on 5 June 2012 crews were mobilised to an incident with a person reported to be threatening to jump from the Millennium Bridge. As they arrived the person had entered the water and three attempts had been made to throw a life belt towards the casualty, all without success.

As a result, Ff Shepherd entered the water, which was flowing untypically fast, and made a contact rescue mid-stream.

The Chief Fire Officer went on to say, that without Ff Shepherd's rapid intervention, good team work and thinking the outcome would have been less favourable for the casualty.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Authority, commended Ff Shepherd for his extremely brave and courageous actions and commented that it was these actions which upheld the finest traditions of the Fire Service whereby Firefighters who were called upon delivered, without hesitation a service to the community which was invaluable and made people proud.

The Chairman then presented Ff Shepherd with a Gold Award.

21. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Gold Award for Meritorious Action be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) thanks and congratulations be expressed to Ff Shepherd for his actions.

Localism Act 2011 – Appointment of Independent Persons

The Chief Fire Officer and the Deputy Clerk submitted a joint report to inform Members of the appointments made for the posts of Independent persons.

The Deputy Clerk reminded members that at its meeting on 30 April 2012, the Authority resolved to appoint two Independent Persons, each for a term of two years, with provision to extend for a further three years without re-advertising.

A panel drawn from the Governance Committee considered applications and interviewed candidates and had recommended that the Authority appoint Mr Anthony Atkinson and Mrs Sheba Joseph to the posts.

22. RESOLVED that the Authority appoint Mr Anthony Atkinson and Mrs Sheba Joseph to the posts of Independent Persons, pursuant to the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, for a period of two years, with provision for the Authority to extend for a further period of three years, without re-advertising the posts.

Business Rates Retention Technical Consultation July 2012

The Chief Fire Officer, Finance Officer and Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide Members with details of the technical consultation on the Business Rates Retention Scheme issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on 17th July 2012, seeking approval of the Authority's response.

Members were reminded that in July 2012 a Business Rates Retention technical consultation was launched with a closing date of 24 September. The document did not set out the financial settlement for 2013-14 and 2014-15, which was expected early December.

The document contained a number of exemplifications of what the baseline would look like for specific local authorities if the proposed changes were implemented in setting the baseline- "constructed by re-running the 2012-13 Local Government Financial Settlement as though the particular option in question had been in place for that year". This included the same scaling for floor damping.

The Autumn Statement 2011, made provision for New Development Deals; setting of pay awards at an average 1% for two years after the current freeze; and provision for local authorities to borrow against business rates after the scheme is introduced in April 2013. The impact of this was to reduce the local government spending control totals.

The control totals were further adjusted due to a decision that specific grants of £49.822m for national resilience assets (New Dimensions) should continue to be treated separately and not rolled into the start-up fund for the new scheme.

The spending control total had been further reduced by £7m in 2013/14 and 2014/15 to fund any safety net payments that may be due to FRAs when the new scheme is established.

Members then noted that this 14.5% saving over the next two years was likely to be followed by further cuts, with the last Budget Statement sending signals about a further 8% cut in 2015-16 and a 6% cut in 2016-17.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle explained that rural authorities had argued that rural areas were comparatively underfunded and there should be a correction applied to take account of the additional cost of running services in rural areas.

In addition, Government proposed a new sparsity top-up for FRAs of 1%. This was intended to provide support towards the additional cost of providing a fire and rescue service in a rural area.

TWFRA along with other Metropolitan authorities would be a loser from this adjustment, the overall impact of which was to shift funding away from urban and towards rural areas.

Overall, if all the proposals contained within the consultation which impact on FRAs were implemented, the exemplified formula would result in TWFRA receiving a 2.8% (£0.8m) increase in baseline funding before damping, reduced to 0.8% (£0.3m) after damping.

It was noted, however, that this would not increase the resources available to the Authority as overall funding levels will be reduced.

Moreover, whilst the proposed formula changes may slightly improve the proportion of funding reduction borne by the Authority compared with the previous two years, this was not sufficient to reverse the disproportionate reduction experienced by TWFRA along with other Metropolitan areas during this period.

Finally, the level of funding would be affected to a great degree by the approach taken in the final grant distribution to population, tax base and floor damping. The proposal relating to population was to use interim 2011-based projections, if available in time. The degree to which our population growth was proportionately greater or less than other areas will affect the final settlement.

Members were advised that work was ongoing on the TWFRA MTF and the budget for 2013/14. A joint presentation was delivered by the Finance Officer

and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle which outlined the challenging financial context.

A discussion then ensued in relation to the Business Rates Retention Scheme and members were advised of the proposal FRAs have a 2% share of the local authority billing rate baseline, equating to 1% of the income because of the 50/50 split with half going to Government. The point is made that with this level of income from business rates, more FRA income would come from an index linked top-up which is generally regarded in the sector to be a more positive position.

23. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the consultation response attached at Appendix B of the report be approved.

Command and Control

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to inform the Authority of the progress being made with regard to the replacement command and control system and associated sub-systems.

In addition, the report also asked the Authority to consider the evaluation of the tendering process which, subject to acceptance by Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, would present a preferred bidder for the joint Command and Control project.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch advised Members that the prequalification process was completed and a full tender process commenced in January 2012. Tenders were received by the closing date of 16 April and a comprehensive joint evaluation was undertaken.

The timescale would enable the replacement system to be fully functional by mid 2013.

24. RESOLVED that:-

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

Boiler Replacement Programme (Stations 21, 33 and 52)

The Chief Fire Officer, Finance Officer and Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of progress a recent tender exercise to procure the replacement of boiler installations and associated plant and equipment to three of our Stations (21 Newcastle North, 33 North Tyneside South and 52 Sunderland East).

Members were advised that there had been a special need for the Estates Officer to seek approval outside of normal procedures in order to mobilise the contractor to undertake the works across the summer period in order to minimise disruption to the stations. Approval had therefore been given to proceed under Standing Order E1.

An open tendering exercise was carried out by Sunderland City Council via the NEPO E-Tendering portal and tenders were received from nine suppliers.

The tender from H Malone and Son Ltd was identified as the Most Economically Advantageous tender and the total project cost (inclusive of fees) was £294,910.67.

25. RESOLVED that:-

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

Domestic Sprinkler Partnership Project

The Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of plans to extend partnership working to install sprinkler protection in dwellings within Tyne and Wear to improve the safety of some of the most vulnerable people within our community.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Baines explained that the Service believed that the targeted use of domestic sprinklers would save lives and was committed to working with partners to promote the benefits of domestic sprinklers. As a result, TWFRAs identified vulnerable households through intelligence led targeted methodology which enabled resources to be directed to those most in need.

To further expand the use of domestic sprinklers Officers were in the process of meeting with partners with the aim of securing sprinkler installation in a number of homes of those most vulnerable within Tyne and Wear, both during initial building and as a retro-fit option.

In addition, Officers were hosting a seminar for partners, private landlords and installers to promote the benefits and encourage installation during initial build or refurbishment of housing stock in the rental sector. Members of the Authority commented that they would also like to attend.

Due to the success of the Welsh Assembly Order, the Service continued to lobby to CLG regarding the requirement to fit automatic fire suppression systems in all new residential premises.

The Vice Chairman commented that he had had discussions with Newcastle City Council's Planning department however they had expressed concerns relating to the damage caused by false alarms.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that he was grateful for these approaches being made on the Fire Services behalf and added that documentation was available which explained that this was not the case and that any damage caused by false alarms did not outweigh the installation of the system.

Councillor Mulvenna suggested that Authority become a statutory consultees on planning applications and this was felt to be an excellent idea. At the present time, the Service was only consulted on commercial and high-rise builds.

In response to a question from Councillor M Forbes, ACFO Baines advised that yes, statistics and intelligence led work showed a higher number of fires in rented properties.

26. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) the installation of Sprinklers in each LA area be championed.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Occupational Health and Safety Gold Award

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report informing Members that the Authority had been awarded the RoSPA Occupational Health and Safety Gold Award. This Award would be presented at a ceremony on Thursday 20 September 2012.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer was pleased to announce that the Authority had been awarded this prestigious award for the eighth time. This achievement was an excellent reflection of the commitment and team approach to the positive health and safety culture that existed within all levels throughout the Service.

Members were also advised that as this was the seventh consecutive year the Authority had achieved the Gold Award this placed the Authority on course for the next category which is the President's Award.

The Chair, on behalf of the Authority emphasised that the RoSPA Gold Award was an excellent accolade for the Authority and its employees. He also wished to record his appreciation to all members of staff for their direct responsibility for health, safety and welfare, and in seeking to maintain a safe working environment.

27. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the accolade given to the Authority in maintaining the RoSPA Gold Award be recognised; and
- (ii) the Chief Fire Officer conveys congratulations and thanks to all staff and their representative bodies for their contribution to a safe working environment.

Correspondence List

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.

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

(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.