

Item 3 (i)

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, 21ST SEPTEMBER,
2009 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

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

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bollands and M. Forbes.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

34. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 20th July, 2009 – Part I (circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Haley and Jordan within the apologies for absence; and

- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 27th July, 2009 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted.

Matters Arising

ICT Technology Refresh – EADS Ltd. Quotation

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Authority that further to the outcome of the independent evaluation of the EADS quotation for the above work, EADS had indicated that they would respond positively.

Future Uniform Provision

Members were advised that a business case in relation to the uniform provision was submitted to CLG. A few days later however, advice was received stating that these were no longer required.

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2010/2011 to 2014/2015

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) outlining the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 and seeking approval to the Budget Planning Framework for the preparation of the 2010/2011 Revenue Budget.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Finance Officer reminded the Authority that the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 saw a tightening of the national funding position in the three years of the review, with this Authority receiving grant increases of 2.40%, 1.26% and 1.10% in the years 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 respectively. In spite of the difficult economic position at a national level, the Government had confirmed that the grant increase for 2010/2011 would still be met, although expectations were for a far tighter position beyond that..

In relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme, the Authority was advised that it was intended to continue to review the position on LGPS deficiency payments with regard to the option of making a lump-sum contribution to the Pension Fund in order to reduce the annual revenue payments.

The Authority's target for cumulative ongoing efficiency savings to the end of 2009/2010 was £2.6 million (4.6%), which exceeded the Government target of 3.2%. As part of the Budget Planning Framework for 2010/2011, budget managers had been requested to identify savings of 3.5% on delegated budgets.

The Finance Officer referred Members to Appendix E of the report and highlighted the indicative budgets for the forthcoming years together with the percentage increase over the Previous Year's budget.

Councillor Woodwark asked whether, given the financial cuts anticipated by Government in future years, a slight increase in the indicative budget was realistic. Mr. Beardmore responded by advising that the indicative figures showed an extremely low level increase which were not modelled upon precept increases at this time. Members were advised that the low level increases for future years would need to be monitored and reviewed regularly in order to ensure a sustainable financial position was maintained.

Councillor Haley then raised issues associated with the Local Government Pension Scheme and asked what the likely deficiency amounted to in monetary terms. The Finance Officer informed Councillor Haley that he was happy to confirm the detail of this in writing.

35. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Budget Planning Framework for the preparation of the 2010/2011 Revenue Budget be approved; and
- (ii) the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 be noted.

Essential Building Works at the Barmston Training Centre

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) providing Members with information relating to the structural problems that had occurred within the Hot Fire buildings at the Training Centre and seeking approval to procure emergency building works to rectify the problems.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the Authority that in February 2009, the larger of the two Hot Fire buildings was subject to a partial roof collapse. This necessitated structural inspections of both buildings in order to identify the overall extent of the damage. These inspections identified areas of damage to protective tiles, the walls and the floor, caused, over time, by the extremes of heat which were generated inside the buildings in order to simulate real fire conditions.

In view of the fact that Members had previously approved the tender for the development of the USAR training facilities on the same site, the successful contractor (Lumsden and Carroll Construction) was approached to submit a quotation to undertake the general structural works to the Hot Fire buildings during the time they are on the site undertaking the USAR works as this was deemed to be the quickest solution.

The figure quoted for the works was £65,204. In addition to this, a cost of £9,330 was payable to Sunderland City Council for Professional Fees.

The Chief Fire Officer, in responding to a question asked by Councillor Renton in relation to inspections, advised that examination of these buildings was complicated by the use of heat resistant tiles which prevented close inspection of the underlying

structure. However the remedial works would restore the buildings to a condition which would enable continuity of training for the coming years.

It was:-

36. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the urgency of the emergency works to the Hot Fire training structures be noted; and
- (ii) the use of Lumsden and Carroll to carry out the works in accordance with Standing Order E5(g) be approved.

Procurement of Communication Circuits

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Members of the additional costs incurred in respect of the installation of upgraded communications circuits that were originally tendered for in February 2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that prior to contract signature, KCOM Group PLC informed the service that they had misquoted in their tender in the sum of £59,225 and could not undertake the work at the original price. The Chief Fire Officer therefore re-tendered the work and the same two companies submitted quotations with KCOM Group PLC submitting a new tender cost of £701,601 and the second company submitting a revised cost of £801,278. Subsequently, the KCOM Group PLC was approved by the Chief Fire Officer using delegated authority in view of the fact that the cost increase was under a ten percent increase of the original quotation and a contract for the work was entered into.

The revised total cost for installation and rental over the four year period would now amount to a total of £744,384, a further increase of £42,783. Whilst this revised total remained lower by £56,894 than that of the next lowest tender of £801,278 it took the overall cost above a ten per cent increase of the original price. In such circumstances a decision to proceed with the remaining work would normally require Authority approval.

However, having considered the matter with the ICT department, the CFO was of the opinion that the resulting delay that would occur in this urgent work was such that it was not practicable to comply with Standing Orders as a swift decision was required. Consequently, following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Chief Fire Officer gave his approval to the continuation of the work at the revised price.

The Vice-Chairman commented that these costing errors by the company concerned seemed somewhat careless and due to this, their work should be closely monitored

and if the opportunity arose, these experiences should be communicated with other authorities.

It was:-

37. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Consideration of Failure to Attend Meetings

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report (circulated) for the Authority to consider an appropriate course of action for the extended period of absence from meetings of the Authority by Councillor Bollands.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Vice-Chairman introduced the report by reminding Members that Councillor Bollands had been unable to attend any such meetings for a period of almost a year due to a prolonged period of ill health. Members recalled that, at its meeting on 20th April, the Authority gave approval to the absence of Councillor Bollands from meetings of the Authority and its committees and sub-committees over the preceding six months due to his serious ill-health.

A detailed discussion ensued in relation to this issue, during which Members acknowledged the sterling work of this Councillor over the previous years and commented that he was an excellent ambassador and a pleasure to work with. Unfortunately however, the period of absence could no longer be sustained.

Careful consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

38. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) if Councillor Bollands did not attend a meeting before 20th October, Gateshead Council would be asked to consider an Alternative Labour nominee; and
- (ii) a letter be sent to Councillor Bollands thanking him for his hard work and wishing him well for the future.

Councillor Boyes abstained from this decision.

Consultation on Fire and Resilience Programme In-Service Management

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) outlining the content of a consultation document entitled Fire and Resilience Programme In-Service Management, published by the Department of Communities and Local Government and outlined some responses for Members to consider.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that it would be necessary to establish a body which had responsibility for ensuring that the national functions were properly managed and that they met the appropriate contractual requirements, such as maintenance of radio coverage, emergency service interoperability and technical functionality. The existence of such a body was deemed to be necessary by all of the interested parties.

In consideration of the four options available, it was the last one that was favoured by CLG, namely the incorporation of the national functions into Firebuy Ltd. The rationale behind this proposal was based on the grounds that Firebuy Ltd. already manage the service contract for New Dimensions and it would be a relatively straightforward administrative exercise to change the terms of reference of this existing NDPB to include the other national functions.

It was proposed that the NDPB should have its chair and the majority of the non-executive directors appointed following open competition, but that stakeholders such as the LGA and CFOA would have the ability to nominate candidates to the board. The consultation paper was silent on the actual numbers of positions that would be appropriate to ensure efficient and effective operation.

It was also heavily inferred that CLG should have a position on the Board together with a member(s) with direct experience of managing service contracts, procurement activities and financial expertise. There was an issue regarding the inclusiveness of the Board which would need to be worked through, as there were no concrete proposals to include representatives from the FRS regions.

It was:-

39. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to respond to the consultation paper in line with the information detailed above; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Publication of the Fire and Rescue Service National Procurement Strategy 2008/11

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) setting out, for the information of Members, an outline of the revised National Procurement Strategy for Fire and Rescue Services, covering the 2008/2011 period.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The document recommended that 50% of public sector common spend would be channelled through Professional Buying Organisations (PBOs) or other similar collaborative channels. In particular, the Chief Fire Officer was pleased to advise that the business case submission requirements had been removed in response to concerns expressed by this and other Authorities.

The one note of caution to be sounded was in respect of the proposal to merge Firebuy Ltd. into a larger national body that would be responsible for managing the New Dimensions, Firelink and FireControl contracts as well as national procurement activity.

Under the New Burdens principle there was a commitment to fund any additional costs falling on Fire and Rescue Authorities arising as a result of the Implementation of the FireControl and Firelink projects. However it had already been stated that, in the case of this Authority, the additional financial support already identified as New Burdens in respect of FireControl (£670,000 per annum) would be subject to an efficiency review three years after transition. Consequently, it was possible that the Authority could find the payment reduced.

40. RESOLVED that:-

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

Draft Integrated Risk Management Action Plan for the Period April 2010 to March 2011

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Members of the proposed content of the Authority's draft Integrated Risk Management Annual Action Plan for the period April 2010 to March 2011 and to seek approval for the draft IRMP Action Plan to be subject to the statutory public consultation period of twelve weeks.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Four new actions were proposed for the 2010/2011 Action Plan, as follows:-

- Low Activity Stations – explore a low activity staffing model;
- Fire Appliance – full examination of the value or otherwise of maintaining call sign T1 3P2, based at Birtley Community Fire Station;
- Risk Prevention Work and Resources – a full review of how resources were used aimed at identifying an efficiency savings from Community Safety through smarter working, improved targeting, increased partnership work and greater use of risk data;
- Back Office Functions – a review of the efficiency of back-office functions is proposed in order to ascertain the extent to which improvements and efficiencies would be introduced.

During the SMT workshop the proposal to include the IRMP and its Action Plans within the Authority's Strategic Community Safety Plan was discussed. It was felt that merging the two strategic documents would give a single statement of strategic direction and would still conform to all national guidance on IRMP. It was proposed that the consultation exercise would commence on 28th September, 2009 and would conclude on 21st December, 2009.

The Chairman pointed out that employees should also be included within the List of Consultees. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed this was planned into the consultation process.

It was:-

41. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the draft 2010/11 Action Plan be noted;
- (ii) the draft 2010/11 Action Plan be subject to public consultation, as detailed within the report;
- (iii) the proposal to include the IRMP and Action Plan within the Authority's Strategic Community Safety Plan be approved; and
- (iv) the Chief Fire Officer reports the results of the consultation exercise to the Authority for consideration prior to final approval and implementation of the 2010/2011 IRMP Action Plan.

IRMP – Operational Response Monitoring 2008/2009

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) providing Members with information regarding the performance of the Authority's operational resources in respect of average attendance times to building fires for 2008/2009.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the figures obtained showed that the Authority's average attendance times to building fires for 2008/2009 were similar to the base year of 2003/2004. Members were also asked to note that the figures demonstrated a slightly faster average time than that published by the Minister for Communities and Local Government in response to a Parliamentary question from Fraser Kemp MP, the Authority's Honorary Parliamentary Advisor, in June 2008. This demonstrated once again that this Authority was continuing to provide an extremely effective overall operational response to fires in accordance with the IRMP commitments.

The Vice-Chairman commented that these response times show the professionalism of staff and therefore on behalf of the Authority expressed his thanks.

42. RESOLVED that:-

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

FireControl Project: Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) providing Members with the current status of the FiReControl Checkpoint and Gateway activities, which the project team was required to report against to Communities and Local Government (CLG).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that a transition plan had been developed which set out in detail what needed to be achieved, by whom and by when, in order for the project to be delivered successfully. These activities had, in turn, been grouped into a number of checkpoints and gateways for each individual Fire and Rescue Service and each of the nine regions of this Authority had reached Gateway 1a.

The further extension in the timescale for completion of the work announced by the Minister was to be broadly welcomed as it formally acknowledged the outstanding workload which still required to be completed prior to go live. However, even with this extension, the project remained a challenging one which would require significant effort on the part of all concerned to ensure that the new go live date was achieved. An assessment by the regional project team clearly indicated that all of this additional time would be needed in order to complete the necessary work to ensure a successful transfer to the RCC by May 2011.

It was:-

43. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress made to date be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as each Checkpoint and Gateway date is reached.

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.

For copy report – see original minutes).

44. RESOLVED that the Correspondence List be received for information.

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

45. 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 any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual or information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3).

(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.