

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, 24TH JULY, 2006 at
10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Gibson in the Chair

Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bollands, Boyes, Forbes, Fletcher, Heron, Huscroft, James, Jordan, O'Neil, Renton and Woodwark.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cooney.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

14. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 5th June, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record;

- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Disciplinary Appeals Committee held on 17th, 18th and 26th May, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted;
- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Advisory Committee held on 19th June, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted;
- (iv) the minutes of the meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 28th June, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted;
- (v) the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 26th June, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted with the addition of Councillor Bell's apology for absence;
- (vi) the minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 10th July, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received and noted; and
- (vii) the minutes of the meeting of the North East Fire and Rescue Regional Management Board held on 13th July, 2006 – Part I (circulated) be received, noted and approved as necessary.

Appointment of Independent Member

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report (circulated) considering the appointment of an Independent Member on the Governance Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members of the Authority were reminded that at the Annual Meeting held on 5th June, 2006 eight Members and an Independent Chairman were appointed to the Governance Committee. A vacancy remained for appointment of an Independent Member.

Following an advertisement inviting members of the public to express an interest in filling the vacant position, a letter was received from Mr. J.P. Paterson.

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

15. RESOLVED that Mr. J.P. Paterson be appointed as an Independent Member on the Governance Committee.

Amendments to Constitution

The Clerk to the Authority, the Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer, the Personnel Advisor and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) seeking Members' approval to amendments to the Constitution that had now been drafted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Clerk referred Members to the revised draft of the Constitution previously circulated and highlighted the amendments, which included changes approved by Members at the meeting on 20th March, 2006 together with consequential amendments and further minor updates/corrections.

Councillor Bolland commented that he disapproved of any references to “Councillors” being replaced by references to “Members” as Councillors were elected and therefore felt the current references should remain.

Upon discussion, it was:-

16. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the changes to the Constitution as outlined in the report and contained within the revised draft of the Constitution (June 2006) be approved, subject to the references to Councillors remaining the same and not amended to Members.

Members’ Allowances Scheme

The Clerk, the Deputy Clerk and the Finance Officer to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) considering proposals for a review of the current Allowances Scheme together with the membership of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Clerk advised Councillors that the Chairman of the Review Panel had enquired whether a review of the present scheme should be conducted and commented that present allowances (approved in 2003) had not since been revised to account for inflation. In addition to this, the Committee structure and membership had recently changed.

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

17. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) a review of the current Members’ Allowances Scheme be undertaken;
- (ii) the existing Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel be invited to serve again for this review;
- (iii) the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and the Finance Officer be given delegated powers to take all necessary action to facilitate the review; and

- (iv) in future, reviews be undertaken every three years.

Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees – 16th-17th October, 2006

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report (circulated) considering appointing a Councillor to attend the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority briefly advised Councillors of the Conference programme and focus and proposed appointing a Member of the Governance Committee to attend with a subsequent annual rotation of Councillors who were appointed to the Governance Committee.

Upon discussion, it was:-

18. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Councillor O'Neil attend the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conference to be held on 16th-17th October, 2006; and
- (ii) the attendance of this Conference be annually rotated within the membership of the Governance Committee.

Revenue Outturn 2005/2006 and First Quarterly Budgetary Control Report 2006/2007

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) advising Members of the Revenue Budget Outturn for 2005/2006, outlining issues affecting the 2006/2007 budget position and providing an updated statement of balances.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Finance Officer highlighted an underspend of £2,545,750 which was divided into four areas (underspend on delegated budgets, underspend on non-delegated budgets, IRMP savings and additional grant income).

Councillors were assured that regular monitoring of the budget was undertaken and subsequently focused their attention on the following three issues:-

- the proposed utilisation of the delegated surplus being brought forward.

- the release of £69,000 of the non-delegated underspend to contingencies to meet any incidental costs which may arise as a result of the PFI contract, and
- the return of the unutilised provision in relation to Firefighters' pay awards being returned to balances.

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

19. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Revenue Budget Outturn for 2005/2006 be noted;
- (ii) the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2006/2007 be noted;
- (iii) the utilisation of delegated surpluses be approved;
- (iv) balances of those delegated budget surpluses be returned and not carried forward;
- (v) the earmarking of non-delegated balances in respect of PFI incidental costs be approved, and
- (vi) the balances position be noted.

Capital Outturn 2005/2006 and First Capital Review 2006/2007

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) setting out the Capital Outturn for 2005/2006 together with the results of the review of the 2006/2007 Capital Programme in light of the actual outturn for 2005/2006.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Finance Officer advised the meeting that the outturn for 2005/2006 showed an underspend against the revised estimate of £180,665. Due to the flexibility provided within the Prudential Regime for capital borrowing, the resulting spare SCE(R) would be rolled forward into 2006/2007 and utilised when the expenditure was incurred.

With regards to the Capital Review 2006/2007, the revised estimate for the 2006/2007 Capital Programme was £3,579,885, which was £114,525 higher than the original estimate.

The prudential indicators set during the budget process were currently being reviewed in the light of the capital outturn. Any amendments to these indicators would be reported upon at the second capital review.

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

20. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the capital outturn for 2005/2006 be noted; and
- (ii) the revised capital programme for 2006/2007 as detailed in section 3 of the report and set out at Appendix A be noted.

Regional Control Centre (RCC)/Firelink

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) updating Councillors with regards to the Regional Control Centre and Firelink National Projects.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Councillors that Cleveland had undertaken the role of Lead Authority since the inception of the RCC/Firelink projects with ACO J. Burke appointed as Project Director. All costs to date associated with this role had been absorbed by Cleveland Fire Authority. The involvement and time demands on the Project Director had increased significantly and to such an extent that Cleveland could no longer sustain and fund this role on an ad hoc basis.

Due to this, the RMB had recommended that the Project Director be established on a full-time basis with ACO J. Burke undertaking that role and that the costs of this provision be shared equally between the Constituent Authorities. As an interim measure and to allow further analysis of the requirements of the post to be undertaken, it was proposed to establish the post from 1st August, 2006 to 31st January, 2007, with a review at the 4 monthly period. The costs of this would be in the region of £8,624 per authority.

With regards to Firelink a number of concerns had been highlighted particularly in respect of future funding requirements and the consequential impact upon the Constituent Authorities budgetary position for 2007/08, not only in terms of functionality and transitional arrangements but also in terms of staffing resources to undertake detailed technical work. These were presently being assessed by the Chief Fire Officer and would be reported to the Authority for consideration in due course.

At this juncture, the Authority noted, that the RMB at its last meeting discussed the appointment of two Directors to the Company and agreed that these should not be Members of the Board due to a potential conflict of interest and risk of liability. In addition to this, the RMB agreed that the quorum be set at 75% with each of the constituent Authorities represented.

With regards to political balance, the Deputy Clerk to the Authority reminded that there was no legal requirement placed upon the Authority to consider political balance in respect of nominations to the Company

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

21. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the recommendations of the RMB as detailed in paragraph 1.1 of the report be endorsed;
- (ii) the appointment of a Project Director and associated costs being met from existing budgetary provisions 2006/07 be approved;
- (iii) it be noted that the Firelink Project would have financial implications for the Authority to consider in 2007/08 and future years;
- (iv) two Members be nominated to serve as Directors on the RCC Local Authority Company subject to notification of changes in guidance when issued;
- (v) a special meeting of the Authority be held, if necessary, to consider a final draft of the Memorandum and Articles of Association; and
- (vi) Councillors O'Neil and Fletcher be appointed to serve as Directors on the RCC Local Authority Company, subject to the resignation of Councillor O'Neil as a substitute Member of the RMB and the appointment of Councillor Bolland as a substitute Member for both Councillors Gibson and O'Neil on the RMB.

NEFRA – PFI Project

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) requesting that the Authority give consideration to the recommendations made by the RMB and to endorse the actions taken.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority that as an interim measure it was proposed to retain the services of Mr. A. Holmes for a period of 6 months with a review of the position at the 4 monthly period.

It was also proposed that Tyne and Wear act as the host employer and that Mr. Holmes be employed on a part-time basis (3 days per week) beginning the 26th July, 2006 and concluding on the 31st January, 2007.

In relation to the financial implications associated with the appointment, the report suggested that the costs be divided equally between the Constituent Authorities concerned i.e. £5,800 + on-costs per Authority.

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

22. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the recommendations of the RMB as detailed in paragraph 1.1 of the report be endorsed; and
- (ii) the appointment of an interim Project Director be approved and the costs associated with this be met from existing budgetary provisions in 2006/07.

Annual Efficiency Statement

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Councillors of the contents of the Annual Efficiency Statement submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government, in accordance with the Fire Service Circular 33-2006.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer reminded the Authority of the requirement to achieve a total efficiency gain of £105 million gross cashable efficiency savings, or 5.67%, in 2007/08 when compared to the net current revenue expenditure in 2004/05.

Councillors noted that the efficiency target was not meant to be interpreted as a reduction in spend. Rather, it was stressed that the overall aim of the initiative was an intention to raise productivity and enhance value for money in the public sector.

Councillors noted that the efficiency gains achieved by the Authority were set out in the attached document to the report.

Despite the range of efficiency gains contained in the statement two key areas of note were those relating to crewing levels and the Strategic Review of Fire and Rescue Cover.

The Chief Fire Officer was pleased to report that the Authority had a realised cashable efficiency gains to the value of £2.3m or 4.47% by the end of 2005/06. The milestone that was set for 2005/06 was 1.27%. This Authority had therefore significantly exceeded the target set for the last financial year.

The Authority had used the efficiency gains to re-direct resources into Community Safety services whilst ensuring that the financial impact of the firefighters pay award had not been passed onto the Council Tax payer.

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

23. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the efficiency statement attached to this report for 2005/06 be endorsed; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Monitoring of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) to present the CPA Improvement Plan Progress Report for the information of and comment by Members.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer reminded the Authority that the CPA Improvement Plan contained ten improvement outcomes and associated targets. These being subject to frequent rigorous monitoring within the annual planning process by Officers and Members as appropriate. In addition to this, nominated Lead Members/Officers would meet to discuss work in progress and to scrutinise actions taken to ensure achievement of the designated outcomes within the agreed timetable.

Due to changes in the membership of the Authority, Councillors considered the nominations for Lead Members.

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

24. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Improvement Plan Progress Reports had been scrutinised;
- (ii) nominations for Lead members be confirmed; and
- (iii) further Improvement Plan Progress Reports be received on a regular basis.

Member Representation on the Corporate Risk Management Group

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) seeking approval of the Authority to the inclusion of a Member representative on the Corporate Risk Management Group (CRMG) in order to assist in the identification, evaluation and management of key risks to the Authority.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the CRMG was comprised of Officers of the Authority and its remit was to periodically assess existing risks and identify new risks as they arise and subsequently ensure that appropriate measures are identified to manage them where this is practicable.

Despite this Group previously carrying out its role in an effective manner the report proposed appointing a Member of the Authority to the Group to provide a strategic perspective to assist in risk identification and the risk mitigation process.

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

25. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Councillor Gibson (Chairman) be nominated to serve on the CRMG; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

“You’re the Coach” Innovative Community Safety Initiative

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Councillors of an Innovative Community Safety Initiative focused on young people and in areas identified for focused actions and initiatives.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer informed Councillors of key elements in achieving these targets and objectives in focusing of resources and trained personnel on those members and groups within our community who have been identified as particularly vulnerable to death and injuries from fire.

A community firefighter based at Tynemouth Community Safety Department, FF Steven Walker, had devised a programme which proposed an innovative community fire safety initiative based on a sports activity programme. The programme involved the Community Firefighter undertaking a series of 6 lessons to years 3 and 4, (ages 7-9) initially within primary schools.

It was proposed that the pilot scheme operated initially in North Tyneside for a 6 week period commencing on 11th September, 2006 and including three x primary schools.

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

26. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be endorsed and thanks extended to FF Steven Walker for his foresight;
- (ii) the initiative be promoted in their respective Authorities subject to the evaluations/outcomes;
- (iii) additional detail be forwarded to Councillor Boyes in relation to sports available for females; and
- (iv) further reports and updates be received.

Joint Community Safety Initiative with Northumbria and Kyoto Universities

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Councillors of the proceedings of the Seminar and the opportunity for developing a research project within Tyne and Wear to complement the work of these two Universities.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillors were advised that Northumbria University had established a Disaster and Development Centre. As a result of the mutually compatible and complementary research between Northumbria University, Kyoto University, the Japan Foundation and the UK Disaster Prevention Research Institute (DPRI), a review of Centres of Excellence in Disaster Risk Reduction was initiated.

Since this time a framework for future liaison had been developed. In particular a study of community awareness about disaster management and pre-planning in a geographic area in Tyne and Wear and Kyoto was proposed. The study would consider in the broadest terms how communities could be better informed about disaster preparation and how they could be even more aware of the prevention and preparation for disasters.

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

27. RESOLVED that the Fire and Rescue Service involvement in the proposed research project be endorsed, and further reports be received as appropriate.

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

28. 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 is considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to any individual or likely to reveal the identity of an individual and to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or information relating to any consultation or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of, or office holders under, the Authority (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4).

(Signed) P. GIBSON,
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.