

## 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, 20 DECEMBER 2010  
at 11.00 am

### **Present:**

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Boyes, Charlton, Clark, Essl, N. Forbes, Haley, Jordan, Mole and Renton.

### **Part I**

#### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Clare, Trueman and Woodwark.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Minutes**

51. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Authority, Part I, held on 22 November 2010, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **Matters Arising**

Review of Emergency Planning and Resilience Arrangements in Tyne and Wear – Councillor N. Forbes advised Members that himself, the Chairman and Councillor Bell had met with the Tyne and Wear Leaders on 15 December to discuss the review of the EPU and re-iterate the concerns raised by Members at previous meetings of the Authority. Councillor N. Forbes explained that he did feel that their views had been listened to and that representatives of the Fire Authority had taken the opportunity to again stress the importance of being engaged and also involved in the overview and scrutiny of any change process. The proposal had been submitted to the Leadership Group on Friday 17 December.

## **Retirement of the Finance Officer**

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report to note the retirement of George Blyth, Finance Officer to the Authority and to agree the designation of Malcolm Page as the Authority's Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer.

Members were advised that the Finance Officer, George Blyth would retire in January 2011 after 40 years of service with Sunderland City Council. He had been performing the role of Finance Officer to the Authority since 1 April 2010.

Mr. Malcolm Page had been appointed to the new post of Executive Director of Commercial and Corporate Services, with Section 151 responsibilities for the City Council and would take up his appointment with effect from 1 January 2011.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Authority, thanked Mr. Blyth for the excellent advice given and the high standard he had maintained. Mr. Blyth responded accordingly and received a gift from the Authority.

It was:-

52. RESOLVED that the designation of Mr. Malcolm Page as the Authority's Finance Officer and as the responsible officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 be approved, with effect from 1 January 2011.

## **Annual Audit Letter 2009/2010**

Steve Nicklin and Lyn Hunt were in attendance.

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report providing Members with an outline of the content of the Audit Commission's Annual Audit Letter for 2009/2010 in respect of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority.

Members were advised that an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2009/2010 financial statements had been issued by the Auditors together with an unqualified value for money conclusion. The letter also stated that the Authority's financial statements and supporting working papers were prepared to a good

standard despite the introduction of complex changes to the accountancy arrangements which officers of the Authority had to address.

The letter also highlighted the fact that the Authority continued to manage its finances in an effective manner and that both costs and performance had generally improved when compared to the other metropolitan fire and rescue authorities. In particular there had been continued reductions in accidental and deliberate primary fires as well as high levels of public satisfaction.

With regards to future challenges, the Audit Letter highlighted the fact that the Authority was facing a 25% reduction in formula grant funding over a four year period and acknowledged the challenges this would present.

Councillor N. Forbes commented that although the national framework was being dismantled, some element of monitoring of performance should remain for good practice and continual improvement.

All staff and officers were to be thanked for contributing to the positive findings of the Audit.

It was:-

53. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the content of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2009/2010 be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **Budget Planning Framework 2011/12 Update – Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a report in respect of the Budget Planning Framework.

An addendum to the report was tabled at the meeting which included an update following the settlement on 13 December 2010. The announcement provided provisional funding allocations for the next two financial years only. Written responses were required by 17 January.

The Finance Officer advised the Authority that its 'revenue spending power' would reduce by £2.783m or 4.69% in 2011/12 and by a further £1.094m or 1.94% in 2012/13. However, the Authority's formula grant would reduce by £3.379m or 9.5% in 2011/12. This difference of £0.596 related to an indicative Council Tax Freeze Grant which would continue to be paid for each year of the spending review should the Authority elect to freeze its Council Tax for 2011/12.

Members noted that the formula grant loss of £3.379m was after floor damping of £3.489m had been taken into account. Without the floor, the grant would have fallen

by 19.3% which was the largest percentage grant reduction of all Fire Authorities in the country, as detailed in Appendix 1.

The amount of floor damping reduced from £3.489m to £2.764m in 2012/13 and, if it continued to annually reduce at the same rate, it would disappear in 3 to 4 years. However, the Government did intend to adopt a new distributional system from 2013/14. It was therefore hoped that the current anomalous position was corrected as if it was not, then the Fire Authority was potentially facing further large annual grant reductions of at least 9.25% and probably greater reductions in the last two years of the spending review.

Councillor Haley referred to the appendix and highlighted the differences seen across authorities with the most negative impact being on Tyne and Wear Fire.

Councillor N. Forbes agreed and also commented upon the further complications which could arise in the future if the 'damping mechanism' was lost.

In response to a question from Councillor N. Forbes, the Finance Officer advised that a further announcement would be made at the end of January, which related to specific grants.

It was:-

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

### **Review of Prevention and Education (P&E) Provision**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to inform Members of the findings of the review of the Prevention and Education function within the service, undertaken as part of the Integrated Risk Management Annual Action Plan for 2009/2010, and seeking approval to the associated recommendations resulting from the review.

Members were reminded that there was no doubt that the investment in Community Safety/Preventative activity had helped the Authority to achieve notable reductions in fires and related injuries over the years, thereby reducing the risk to community.

The number of accidental dwelling fires had fallen from 1593 to 710 the previous year (55% reduction). This improvement in performance was expected to continue with a forecast of 666 in 2010/11.

Despite the clear successes, the department as a whole had not been subject to a fundamental review since its creation. Therefore, the current review was felt to be appropriate.

As a result, it was considered that the scope existed for a realignment of the P&E function, in that the existing neighbourhood Fire Team and CS teams would be merged into five compact teams with one based at each of the districts managed by the District Management Structure and supported by PAG. If approved, this structure would reduce the establishment by 15 posts therefore realising significant

efficiencies without reducing service quality. These reductions would be achieved through natural wastage and re-deployment and it was estimated that the adoption of these changes would save in the region of £625,735 in a full year.

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

55. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the Implementation of the review of Prevention and Education, including the removal of posts as set out in 4.4 of the report, be approved from April 2011; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **Bonfire and Fireworks Campaign 2010**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to inform Members of the incident activity levels, intervention programmes and incidences of anti-social behaviour (ASB) within the Authority area over the Bonfire period covering 1 to 6 November 2010.

Members were advised that a campaign was initiated with a budgetary provision of £1,000., one key initiative being the production of a DVD entitled 'The Journey of Connor Rowntree'. Connor was a young person who had suffered severe burns in an accidental fire in May 2009. The intention of the DVD was to highlight to young people in the target age group (11-14 year olds) the potentially devastating effects of burn injuries. Connor was awarded a local Sun FM Hero award and a national Radio One Teen Hero Award. The DVD was viewed by approximately 25,000 young people.

Members were then referred to Appendix A and noted the following statistics:-

- A 13% reduction in the total number of calls;
- A 10% reduction in the number of incidents attended;
- A 4% reduction in the number of deliberate ASB secondary fires;
- An increase in the number of attacks on firefighters from 7 to 12;
- The Strategic Health Authority (SHA) reported 10 injuries during 1 - 6 November;
- There were 2 firework related property fires in 2010.

Members discussed their concerns in relation to the number of attacks on firefighters. Further information was currently being collated as to the locations and circumstances of the attacks and this intelligence would be utilised in the prevention strategies employed in future campaigns.

Councillor Mole asked how many attacks resulted in prosecutions and was advised that although none of them had, due to the perpetrators not being caught, work was ongoing with the police particularly in areas of high activity.

It was:-

56. RESOLVED that:-

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

### **Regional Fire Control – Update**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an update in respect of recent developments in the FiReControl Project and the Regional Control Centre (RCC) in the North East.

Members were reminded that in November 2010, CLG placed Cassidian 'in material breach' of the contract for the FiReControl Project. Cassidian had 20 days to reply. Regardless of the outcome the final decision would rest with the minister and an announcement was expected in the House once the decision had been made.

Without a visible main system and a project plan that had the potential to deliver, the Chief Fire Officer was unlikely to recommend formal acceptance of any contract. In addition the Mobilising and Resource Management System (MRMS) was the critical element within the overall project as without a fully functioning system the operations at RCC would not be able to commence. The lack of demonstrated progress in this area was impacting on all key areas of the project nationally and regionally.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch advised Members that a ministerial statement was expected that day, however, had not yet been received.

It was:-

57. RESOLVED that:-

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

### **National Training Awards**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to inform Members of the success of the Authority's Phoenix Project at the National Training Awards 2010, held in London on the 1 December 2010.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Phoenix Project was nominated for entry into the national finals ceremony, held on 1 December at Old Billingsgate Hall, in London. On the night, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority and Sunderland Youth Offending Service were presented with the National Award in the Partnership and Collaboration category for the Phoenix Project.

A second award was also presented to Tyne and Wear, namely the Linda Ammon Award. This individual award went to Watch Manager, John Ord, who was the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service Lead on Sunderland Phoenix, and it was presented to him for his outstanding contribution to training and development in the UK.

The award specifically highlighted his willingness to refresh and redevelop the programme, his holistic approach to the programme and especially the involvement of parents both formally and informally in their children's learning activities all of which had assisted in changing people's lives.

It was:-

58. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) a letter of congratulations and thanks be sent to Watch Manager, John Ord.

### **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.

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

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

60. 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 information relating to any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual 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 1, 2 and 4).

(Signed) T. WRIGHT,  
Chairman.

**Note:**

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

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