

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, 24 JANUARY 2011 at
10.30 am.

Present:

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Charlton, Clark, M. Forbes, Haley, Huscroft, Jordan, Renton,
D. Trueman and Woodwark.

At the start of the meeting the Authority held one minutes silence in memory of
former Member Councillor Doreen James who had sadly passed away.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors
Boyes, Clare, Essl and Mole.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Bell, Charlton and Haley declared a personal interest in relation to
items 9 (FireControl Update) and 15 (FireControl Closure – HR Issues) as Members
of the RCC (Regional Control Company).

Minutes

62. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority, Part I held on 20 December 2010, be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor M. Forbes' apologies for absence; and
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee, Part I, held on 10 January 2011, be noted for information.

Revenue Budget 2010/2011 – Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising Members of issues relating to the 2010/11 Revenue Budget position and providing an updated statement of balances.

The Finance Officer outlined the report which estimated an underspend of £1,227,000. The following areas were drawn to Members' attention:-

- The low level interest rates had enabled the Authority to restructure its debt portfolio which would in turn, lead to lower borrowing costs than originally anticipated of £200,000.
- Slippage arising on capital projects of £125,364 would result in a reduction to the drawdown from earmarked reserves.
- An estimated underspend in the leasing budget of £64,000. Consideration would therefore be given to funding the remainder of the Vehicle Replacement Programme through outright purchase using anticipated underspend on the Revenue Budget.
- Recruitment freeze generating savings and also no ill-health early retirements realised savings of £83,000.

Members referred to Appendix A of the report and noted the estimated level of balances at £3,070,000 (as at 31 March 2011).

It was:-

63. RESOLVED that the Revenue Budget position for 2010/11, including the updated statement of balances, be noted.

Capital Programme 2010/11 – Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to review the current year's Capital Programme and reflecting changes from that presented to the Authority as a consequence of the Second Capital Programme Review, on 22 November 2010.

The Finance Officer spoke to his report and drew the following areas to Members' attention:-

- The Carbon Management Plan had slipped by £125,364.
- The contract for the Non PFI Station Refurbishment had now been awarded and as the tender price was lower than anticipated, it was envisaged that there would be savings.
- Funding for Positive Pressure Ventilation (PPV) equipment (£15,500) was now being classed as capital due to it being in excess of the Authority's de-minimus level of £10,000 for fixed asset equipment.

It was:-

64. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2010/11 be approved.

Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2011/12

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a report to set out details of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2011/12 and to provide a draft set of comments that could be used as a basis for a response to the Government's consultation on their provisional Local Government Finance Settlement proposals.

The Finance Officer reminded Members that the two year Settlement, announced on 13 December was consistent with the Government's Spending Review announcements with the exception that they had increased formula grant funding by £30m and had also introduced a new transition grant of £85m for 2011/12 and £14m for 2012/13 to ensure that no Authority would incur a reduction in its Revenue Spending Power of more than 8.9% in 2011/12. The Government also announced that the Settlement would see an average reduction of 4.4% in the overall funding to Local Government nationally.

Formula grant was to be reduced nationally by 9.9% however the Fire Service Settlement only showed reductions of 5.8% in 2011/2012 and 0.7% in 2012/13. If Fire Authorities were to receive 25% less formula grant funding over the entire Spending Review period and grant reductions were to be 'back loaded', the fact that the first 2 year grant Settlement was showing only a total combined reduction of 6.5% meant that in the last two years (2013/14 and 2014/15) Fire Authorities would face a further grant reduction of 18.5% over the two years.

The Finance Officer went on to explain that the Government had confirmed its intention to fund a Council Tax freeze in 2011/12. The grant would however, in cash terms, significantly benefit high tax base Authorities i.e. generally the more affluent areas of the country. This impact was seen as inequitable.

Members noted that the Authority had received an overall reduction in its spending power in 2011/12 of £2.783m equivalent to a 4.69% reduction in its overall resources.

The Authority's formula grant allocation for 2011/12 had reduced in cash terms by £3.379m to £32.191m which represented a reduction of 9.5%. These reductions would have been significantly worse had the floor protection not been put in place (these illustrations were shown in Appendix 1 of the report).

The Chief Fire Officer added that he had attended a meeting where, in the absence of the Fire Minister, he had spoken with Civil Servants regarding the funding settlement. During this meeting the Chief Fire Officer expressed the view that the Settlement was unfair for TWFRAs and also voiced his concerns in relation to the impact this would have on the service. Members acknowledged that if large cuts were necessary in years 3 and 4 of the Settlement, then tough decisions would need to be made with regard to front line services.

Having then given consideration to the draft comments on the Settlement, as detailed within section 6 of the report, it was:-

65. RESOLVED that the report be noted and the proposed comments in response to the consultation on the provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2011/12, be approved.

Draft Revenue Budget 2011/2012

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a joint report outlining the financial position facing the Authority for 2011/2012 and 2012/13, in light of the recent provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and related matters.

Members were referred to the revised summary Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as set out at Appendix A of the report and were advised of the following:-

- Efficiency savings on delegated budgets had been built into the MTFS.
- The Inception of the Public Private Partnership Scheme had realised savings of £956,730.
- The IRMP 2011/2012 included a series of reviews which could generate efficiencies and the potential impact had been built into the MTFS.

- There had been no ill health early retirements to date.
- Ongoing discussions were taking place at a local level to identify the most appropriate methods of apportioning shared regional costs relating to the Firelink Project, and
- The Chief Fire Officer continued to undertake a full review of the Authority's operational staffing profile and associated salary structure.

With regards to the Emergency Planning Unit, Members were advised that the budget for 2011/2012 had been prepared on the basis of a 10% reduction equating to a budget of £462,490, followed by a standstill position for 2012/2013 to 2014/2015.

Taking account of the level of risk, the retention of a minimum level of general fund balances of approximately £3 million was considered at that stage, to be appropriate.

With regards to Council Tax increase, the Government had retained capping and reserve powers but planned to introduce powers for residents to veto 'excessive' Council Tax increases through a local referendum which was included in its proposed Localism Bill.

The Settlement also confirmed that the Government was to provide £650m nationally to fund the implementation of a Council Tax freeze in 2011/2012.

It was:-

66. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report and the draft Revenue Budget position for 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 be noted;
- (ii) the revised MTFs attached at Appendix A be noted; and
- (iii) the provisional budget proposals be reported to a future meeting.

Schedule of Precept Instalments 2011/2012

The Finance Officer submitted a report explaining that the Billing Authorities required that payments should be made by twelve equal monthly instalments, commencing in April, payable on the last working day of each month, to continue with practice adopted in 1993-94.

The proposed dates were as follows:-

Thursday	28 th April 2011
Tuesday	31 st May 2011
Thursday	30 th June 2011
Friday	29 th July 2011

Wednesday 31st August 2011
Friday 30th September 2011
Monday 31st October 2011
Wednesday 30th November 2011
Friday 30th December 2011
Tuesday 31st January 2012
Wednesday 29th February 2012
Friday 30th March 2012

It was:-

67. RESOLVED that under paragraph 4(4) of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) Regulation 1992 the schedule of instalments proposed, be agreed.

FiReControl Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to update Members with regard to the FiReControl Project and to outline the anticipated next steps that would be undertaken.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch referred Members to Appendix A which detailed the statement to the House of Commons, formally announcing the closure of the FiReControl Project.

Members were advised that as a result of this decision, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had notified all Fire and Rescue Authorities that all funding for work would cease. Action would therefore have to be taken to ensure that the Authority had a viable plan in place to replace the current command and control system by 2014.

DCLG were about to commence a full consultation process to consider what the future of fire control mobilising infrastructure and systems may look like. The consultation process will run for twelve weeks, ending in early April 2011.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch informed the Authority that the Chief Fire Officer would be considering the questions posed within the document, when it was published. The proposed response, would in turn be submitted to the Authority for approval by Members.

It was:-

68. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the actions taken to date be endorsed; and
- (iii) further reports be received, as appropriate.

Review into the Suitability of the Low Activity Staffing Model (LASM)

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of the findings of the review into the potential use of a Low Activity Staffing Model (LASM) within the Service, undertaken as part of the Integrated Risk Management (IRMP) Annual Action Plan 2009/2010, and seeking approval to the recommendations resulting from the review.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Tom Capling outlined the report explaining that the LASM incorporated a two-stage duty system comprising a period of working hours followed by a period of standby hours for staff who resided on, or near to, the fire station for the duration of their 'on call' duty period. This ensuring that operational response times remained broadly the same, but costs were reduced significantly. This system however, could only effectively be deployed at stations where level of risk was deemed to be low.

Taking this information into account, a review team undertook a careful examination of the data relating to Sunderland South and Gateshead South Community Fire Stations in relation to the viability of introducing a LASM.

With regards to Sunderland South, Chart 1 of the report highlighted that this station was one of the least operationally active stations in the Service. Furthermore the number of operational incidents within this area had fallen significantly (20% reduction).

In relation to Gateshead South, again this was one of the least operationally active fire stations in the Service and incident rates were also falling (39% reduction). The Chief Fire Officer was therefore of the opinion that both fire stations could operate effectively utilising a LASM. Due to the duration of the shifts that firefighters would be required to work, both locations would require dedicated accommodation to be provided.

Councillor Haley asked how confident the Fire Service were that they had the capacity to operate this model. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Capling responded by advising that relatively low levels of staff were required to work this pattern and early indications suggested that a sufficient number of staff would be willing to do so.

Councillor Haley then went on to ask questions in relation to the consultation process and was advised that consultation would be part of the process and that information would be made available reiterating that the level of service for the public will remain exactly the same.

Councillor Woodwark referred to the graph detailed within the report and commented that given such low levels of activity at these stations and the required to finding significant savings, the proposals were logical and necessary.

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

69. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) the commencement of work towards the implementation of a low activity staffing model at Sunderland South and Gateshead South Community Fire Stations be approved; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Investors in People (IIP) Achievement of Gold Award Standard

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report informing Members of the outcome of the Investors in People (IIP) re-accreditation audit undertaken in November 2010.

The Independent Assessment Team visited the organisation for approximately two weeks, during which time they undertook a comprehensive audit against the IIP Framework. The Chief Fire Officer was pleased to report that the Authority had been successful in gaining accreditation at Gold Award Standard, thereby becoming the first Fire and Rescue Authority in the country to achieve this.

Following further discussion with IIP North East, it had been identified that the Authority qualified for 'champion' status. This would provide the Authority with additional recognition as a 'role model organisation' enabling the Service to share best practice with other organisations at a local and national level.

Members acknowledged that this Award represented a significant achievement for the Authority and it served as a testament to the work of Members and staff in establishing excellent management practices and, most importantly, it recognised the efforts of all the staff who had embraced the considerable change that had been necessary to move the Authority forward.

It was:-

70. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Authority note that the IIP Gold Award Standard had been awarded;
- (ii) staff of the Core Work Team be congratulated and thanked for their assistance in this achievement; and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

LGA Annual Fire Conference – 8th and 9th March 2011

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to propose Authority representation at the fourteenth Annual Fire Conference of the Local Government Association (LGA), scheduled to be held in Gateshead on 8th and 9th March.

Members were advised that the theme for the Conference was 'The Future of Fire' which had been planned to address the issues surrounding the unprecedented financial pressures that Authorities would be subject to in the coming months and years.

The cost of the Conference was £360 per person for LGA Member Authorities which covered the main Conference and Workshop Seminars.

The Chairman commented that as the Conference was in the local area it would be beneficial for as many Members as possible to take advantage of the offer. The Chief Fire Officer agreed and advised that contact would be made with each Member of the Authority to determine whether or not they were able to attend.

It was:-

71. RESOLVED that the invitation to attend the LGA Fire Conference be extended to all Members of the Authority.

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.

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

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

73. 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.