

Minutes of the Meeting of the TYNE  
AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE  
AUTHORITY held in the Fire and Rescue  
Headquarters, Barmston Mere, Sunderland  
on MONDAY, 19<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2009 at  
10.30 a.m.

**Present:**

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Charlton, Clark, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Haley, Heron, Jordan,  
McIntyre, Renton, Scaplehorn and Woodwark.

**In Attendance**

Lynn Hunt and David Morton – Audit Commission

**Part I**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Haley to his first meeting of the Authority following his recent accident.

In addition to this, Members were advised how Councillor Bollands was progressing and wished him well.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bollands, Boyes and McMillan.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## Minutes

84. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 – Part I (circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Policy Advisory Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009 – Part I (Circulated) be received and noted; and
- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee held on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2008, Part 1 (circulated) be received and noted.

### **Fire and Rescue Direction of Travel and Use of Resources Assessments for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) outlining for the consideration of Members, the findings of the auditors. Both Lynn Hunt and David Morton were in attendance to outline their report and answer any questions.

With regard to the Authority's Direction of Travel, the Audit Commission was of the opinion that the Authority was 'Improving Well' having demonstrated '**Fair**' overall performance in 2005.

With regard to the Use of Resources, the auditors assessed the Authority to be at 'Level 4, Performing Strongly'. This was an improvement on last year's assessment of 'Level 3, Performing Well'. Furthermore, within the subset of scores that comprise the overall Use of Resources category, the Financial reporting and Financial Standing sub-categories were identified as particular strengths, with both being evaluated at 'Level 4, Performing Strongly'.

The remaining scores for each of the sub-categories comprising Use of Resources, were all graded at 'Level 3, Performing Well', including the Value for Money sub-category.

At this juncture, Councillor M. Forbes expressed her congratulations to the staff for all their hard work. The Chairman indicated he felt the audit process was a valuable one and that the results were such that all were to be congratulated on the achievements set out in the report, and that the Authority would continue to look for ways to improve performance.

A discussion ensued in relation to the average response times and Members commented that as Tyne and Wear response times were quicker than average, this demonstrated higher quality rather than higher cost.

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

85. RESOLVED that:-

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

### **Draft Revenue Budget 2009/2010**

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 financial position facing the Authority for 2009/2010, in light of the recent Provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2009/2010, including confirmation of the Indicative Settlement for 2010/2011, and related matters.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Finance Officer highlighted the following areas of his report:-

The Authority had set comparatively low increases in its precept, with the increases in both 2007/2008 of 2.4% representing the second lowest and lowest increases nationally, respectively.

As identified in the MTFS 2009/2010 to 2013/2014, the Chief Fire Officer had undertaken a base budget review of all delegated budgets. This review had identified efficiency savings on delegated budgets equivalent to 3%, which had been built into the MTFS.

As previously reported, the Public Private Partnership Scheme was now fully operational. The saving for 2009/2010 had been increased to £910,629 reflecting inflationary adjustments.

In relation to the Regional Control Centre (Fire Control) there was a funding shortfall (difference between current costs and estimated future costs when the RCC is live) of £602,000 to be met by a resilience payment from central government, which would be reviewed after three years. Additionally, there was a further funding gap, estimated at £600,000, caused by the difference between the staffing levels indicated by CLG and those considered prudent by the Local Authority Controlled Company. The overarching principle which the North East FRAs continue to pursue was that there should be no net increased cost incurred by any of the Fire and Rescue Services within the region. Members had previously agreed to establish a reserve of £350,000 to provide a means of offsetting any costs associated with the Project on the basis that the CLG position did not currently provide an absolute assurance to the Authority.

The provisional Formula Grant allocation for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 represented an increase of only 1.26% and 1.10% respectively, reflecting a tightening of the national funding position in those years.

Presently, the draft budget was approximately £58.98 million, however, this was under review and was subject to variation at this stage.

With regard to council tax levels, the government had retained its 'Capping and Reserve powers' and expected to see average council tax increases in each of the next three years of substantially below 5%. It had stated that local government should be clear that it was prepared to use its capping powers.

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

86. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report and the draft Revenue Budget position for 2009/2010 be noted; and
- (ii) the draft revised MTFS be noted.

### **Safetyworks!**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) outlining for the consideration of Members, a proposal to defer the new SafetyWorks! Project, contained within the Estates Development Plan, in favour of continued occupation of the existing SafetyWorks! Centre.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised that unfortunately since the Estate Development Plan was endorsed by the Authority, there had been a marked downturn in the UK economy, and the financial effects of this will undoubtedly impact on the public sector, including this Authority, in the months and years ahead.

In tandem with these economic pressures, the Audit Commission had just published a national study entitled, 'Rising to the Challenge, Improving Fire Service Efficiency'. The key message of this report was that the Audit Commission believes there was up to £200 million in efficiencies still to be extracted from Fire and Rescue Services.

As a result of this, having re-examined the case for re-locating SafetyWorks!, the Chief Fire Officer did not believe that the benefits to be derived from re-locating and expanding the facilities currently on offer could be justified in light of the potential financial difficulties that could emerge in the near future. Consequently it was proposed that the SafetyWorks! Project be deferred in favour of maintaining the existing community safety facility in Benwell.

It was also proposed that the funding set aside in the Authority's Capital Programme (£160,000) to purchase and install the proposed new scenarios was earmarked to allow an upgrade of the existing SafetyWorks! facilities in line with any findings arising following a full condition survey and needs analysis.

It was:-

87. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the relocation of SafetyWorks! be deferred; and
- (ii) the existing SafetyWorks! be refurbished in accordance with the outcome of a condition survey/needs analysis, with the funding currently earmarked for the move to the new centre.
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **Capital Programme 2008/2009 – Third Review**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) 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 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The following issues were highlighted to Members:-

Slippage of £93,000 had arisen due to procurement delays of up to four months for specialist heat resistant tiles which were required to fit out the training facilities at the BTC.

The Authority had been successful in attracting LAA Pump Priming grant from North Tyneside Council to assist in the delivery of the North Tyneside Fire Team Project which would assist in fulfilling the Government's expectations in the National Framework document in relation to anti-social behaviour. £18,820 of this was to be used to finance the purchase of a minibus which was included in the Capital Programme for 2008/2009.

It was:-

88. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2008/2009, as set out at Appendix A, be approved.

### **Revenue Budget 2008/2009 – Third Review**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) advising Members of issues relating to the 2008/2009 Revenue Budget position and providing an updated Statement of Balances.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

At this stage in the financial year, a net estimated underspend of approximately £330,000 was anticipated to arise in relation to Employee costs taking account of all of the variations and proposed actions.

The Authority had invested in health awareness and intervention measures through its Occupational Health Unit and there had been no firefighter ill health retirements in the year to date. If this position continued for the remainder of the current financial year, as anticipated, this would generate an underspend in the current year of approximately £200,000 which would be ongoing into 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

With regards to interest rates and the significant recent reductions in the base rate, it was anticipated that there would be a shortfall of income of approximately £300,000 during the current year.

It was:-

89. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2008/2009 as set out in this report be noted, including the updated Statement of Balances set out at Appendix A.

### **Schedule of Precept Instalments 2009/2010**

The Finance Officer submitted a report (circulated) detailing the Schedule of Instalments for 2009/2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

It was:-

90. RESOLVED that under paragraph 4(4) of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) Regulation 1992, the Schedule of Instalments as detailed within the report be approved.

### **Partnership Update**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) updating Members in respect of the main partnerships undertaken by this Authority.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that, in Sunderland, the Phoenix course continued to have a positive impact, which was clearly demonstrated by the figures produced by Newcastle University.

Additionally, Newcastle Phoenix run the FLAME course which had been developed to increase contact between TWFRS (Newcastle West district) and the hard to reach BME communities. The idea was to promote fire safety awareness within such communities, to increase positive contact and to raise the awareness of the fire service as a career.

The partnership with Sainsbury's commenced in November 2007, had already achieved success by delivering tangible benefits to both organisations with Sainsbury plc removing traditional chip pans from over 1,000 stores and committing not to reintroduce them in the future.

Upon discussion, it was:-

91. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the benefits and contribution these partnerships make to the community safety agenda be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **LGA Annual Fire Conference – 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2009**

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report (circulated) advising of the Local Government Association (LGA) twelfth Annual Fire Conference, scheduled to be held on 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 in Bristol.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that the theme of the Conference was 'Improving outcomes for communities through partnership working – the role of fire and rescue'. The conference would explore a range of strategic issues including: the role of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's Unit; the elected member contribution to driving improvement in performance; the wider role of fire and rescue in creating safer communities and improving the quality of people's lives and the future of operational leadership in the fire and rescue service.

The cost of the conference was envisaged to be in the region of £360.00 plus VAT per person for LGA member authorities, which covered conference and workshop sessions.

At this juncture, the Vice-Chairman advised that he was unable to attend. Due to this the Chairman would attend with two Members from the rota.

It was:-

92. RESOLVED that the attendance of the Chairman and two Members at the conference, be approved.

### **Road Traffic Collision Policy**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) is to seek the approval of Members regarding the formal introduction of the Road Traffic Collision (RTC) Policy into mainstream service delivery and also outlining the Authority's approach towards

achieving reductions in deaths and injuries resulting from road traffic collisions in Tyne and Wear.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that the 'Changing Lanes' report, published by the Audit Commission in February 2007, provided a clear recommendation for Fire and Rescue Services to become fully involved with the road safety agenda.

It was:-

93. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the actions detailed in this respect be endorsed and noted;
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **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).

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

(Signed) T. WRIGHT,  
Chairman.