

Item 3

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 17 NOVEMBER 2014 at
10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Burdis, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Haley, Harrison, Mole, Mortimer, Perry, Renton, Stephenson and Stockdale.

Part I

Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced that he had attended the Great War Centenary in Belgium. This event had been extremely well attended and he was extremely proud to hear how highly regarded TWFRS was. On behalf of the Authority, the Chairman asked that thanks be extended to all those who represented the Authority at the event.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Bell, Ord and Price.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

25. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the Authority, Part I held on 15 September 2014, Part I, be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 29 September 2014, Part I, be noted for information; and
- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 13 October 2014, Part I, be noted for information.

Councillor N. Forbes moved, seconded by Councillor Mole to suspend Standing Orders B5 and B22 and accordingly it was: -

26. RESOLVED that Standing Orders B5 and B22 be suspended for the following item of business only to allow the consideration of a motion.

Notice of Motion – Firefighters Strike

Councillor Stockdale moved, seconded by Councillor Price that:-

TWFRA notes:

- The Coalition Government's plans to increase firefighter pension contributions and raise the retirement age of all firefighters to 60;
- The recent breakdown in talks between the Government and unions on this issue;
- The subsequent national 4 day fire strike that took place between 31st October and 3rd November 2014;
- That strike action on this issue has been avoided in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Authority believes:

- That firefighters across Tyne and Wear do a brave and heroic job putting at risk their own lives to protect our residents;
- That firefighters should be rewarded for this service to the public with a fair pension settlement upon retirement;
- That the current Coalition Government plan to force all firefighters to remain in active service to the age of 60 will put at risk the mental wellbeing of firefighters and potentially jeopardises the safety of the public;

- That, if the devolved Governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have negotiated a fairer deal, then the Coalition Government can achieve the same for England.

Whilst debating the notice of motion, Members acknowledged that the pension contribution was already high when compared to other sectors and that the increase may result in employees leaving the pension scheme due to it not being financially viable.

In addition to this, the increase in the retirement age to 60 years could result in a reduced fitness level of the workforce or difficulties in Firefighters maintaining the required fitness levels.

Councillor Haley went on to say that the failure of Government to compromise had already cost millions and that the larger pension contributions were unjustified.

Councillor N Forbes agreed and commented that firefighters do not strike willingly and only if they feel that they have been forced into a situation.

Councillor M Forbes commented that she was willing to support the first resolution namely to write to the Fire Minister urging her to enter into negotiations however did not feel she could support the second resolution given the lack of information in relation to where funds would be taken from and how this would be paid for. Councillor Mortimer agreed with this.

On being put to a vote it was declared to be carried with 9 votes for and 3 abstentions.

27. The Authority therefore resolves:

- To write to the Fire Minister urging her to enter into urgent negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union in England with a new offer over pension contributions;
- To write to Members of Parliament representing constituencies within the Tyne and Wear area and urge them to support Early Day Motion 454 (tabled by the Labour Party's Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) which calls on the annulment of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government's Firefighters' Pension Scheme (England) Regulations 2014;

Sunderland City Council Membership Vacancy

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report to notify Members of a membership vacancy from Sunderland City Council.

The representative of the Deputy Clerk to the Authority advised that on 13 October, 2014, Councillor N Padgett resigned as a Councillor for Sunderland City Council. As a result, his appointment to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was also terminated. Sunderland City Council would therefore be considering an appointment to the Authority in due course.

28. RSEOLVED that:

- (i) The resignation of Councillor Padgett be noted;
- (ii) The resultant vacancies to sub-committees be noted; and
- (iii) A further report be received in due course.

Operational Assessment Peer Challenge 2014 – Initial Feedback

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report informing Members of the initial feedback received from the team who undertook the Operational Assessment Peer Challenge from 30th September to 3rd October 2014.

Members were advised that the process consisted of a self-assessment against seven Key Assessment Areas (KAA) and an onsite peer review. The process being aimed to help FRS' develop self-awareness, understanding achievements and areas for development.

At the completion of the on-site review the peer challenge team provided initial feedback on their findings. A full report would be circulated to members in January/February 2015.

In summary, the TWFRS was deemed to be a proud organisation, a determined service focused on achieving positive outcomes, well regarded by partners, well placed to adapt and respond to the uncertain financial climate and able to identify and achieve efficiencies.

29. RESOLVED that:

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

Annual Audit Letter

Gavin Barker (Mazars LLP) was in attendance for this item of business.

The Finance Officer submitted a report detailing the Annual Audit Letter for 2013/2014 issued by the External Auditors, Mazars LLP.

Members were referred to a copy of the Annual Audit letter, appended to the report. Gavin commented that the AAL was very positive, providing strong endorsement for the financial management and governance arrangements in place across the Authority.

Gavin went on to say that he had issued an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements and an unqualified Value for Money conclusion. Financial statements were deemed to be well prepared and of a high standard. The professional approach adopted also made working relationships effective.

In relation to Value for Money, the Authority was deemed to be financially resilient and had managed its financial position well despite the difficult economic climate. £4.1 m savings had been delivered demonstrating the ability to deliver continued financial savings despite cuts in government funding and other cost pressures.

Councillor Harrison commented upon the need to deliver continued financial savings and asked whether audit fees were likely to increase. Gavin advised that audit fees would not increase in 2015-2016, therefore the previously agreed 25% reduction would also be realised by the authority for the next financial year.

Councillor N. Forbes referred to the fact that the Annual Audit Letter noted that the actions already taken were in line with those that Sir Ken Knight proposed that the fire service nationally deliver in the future and commented that as these savings had already been made. It demonstrated that Tyne and Wear's actions were ahead of others and that this had now been independently verified. This did however have implications on further funding reductions as Tyne and Wear had already completed this piece of work and made these efficiency savings, and was being placed in a more difficult position as a result.

30. RESOLVED that the positive nature of the report be noted and the comments endorsed.

Capital Programme 2014/2015 – Second Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to review the current year's programme and reflect the further changes to those that were presented to the Authority as a consequence of the First Capital Programme Review on 23 June 2014.

The Finance Officer referred Members to Appendix A of the report which detailed the position for 2014/2015 and explained that the Capital Programme was showing a reduction of £385,840 from £7,189,284 to £6,803,444.

Issues brought to Members' attention included the refurbishment of West Denton at a cost of £144,840 slipping into 2015/2016 and also the in year purchase of five Targeted Response Vehicles at a cost of £500,000 which was to be funded from Fire Capital Grant.

To support the response to operational incidents, the Authority would purchase and fit blue lights to Station Managers cars. This estimated cost of £10,000 would be funded from the Operations and Resilience revenue budget.

Members were then advised that the Vehicle Replacement Programme had been reduced by £750,000 to recognise that the replacement Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) would now form part of the 2015/2016 programme instead.

31. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2014/2015 as set out at Appendix A be approved.

Revenue Budget 2014/2015 – Second Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising Members of issues relating to the 2014/2015 Revenue Budget position at the half way stage of the financial year.

The Finance Officer informed Members of a net reduction of £0.966m in the use of reserves to support the revenue budget as compared to the initial estimate of £2.099m as a result of the earlier implementation of Phase One of the IRMP Response Review.

A total net projected saving of almost £1.3m had been identified for the year when compared to the revised budget position which included the IRMP savings.

The report detailed the main variances with the attention of Members being drawn to employee costs and industrial action costs. At present, there was a projected net underspend on the employees budget of £1.231m as a result of various factors, which included an increase in the number of retirements and also more Firefighters in the development stage than budgeted for, incurring lower salary costs. In addition, there had been underspends on Control Staff salaries due to vacancies, part time working and reduced pay for sickness absence.

In response to a query from Councillor Stockdale relating to sickness absence, ACFO Brindle explained that the policy had not changed however the service were using best endeavours to drive down sickness and levels were extremely low. The Authority also do not provide cover for sickness absence where possible, which was reflected as savings.

Councillor Renton enquired whether there had been a reduction in training and was advised that there had been a reduction in the use of external training programmes and that the Authority would receive reports in relation to this in due course.

Costs incurred as a result of the continuing strike actions were being monitored. The additional costs in 2014/2015 would be met from the Contingency Planning Reserve, however the reserve may need to be replenished.

32. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2014/2015 as set out in the report and at Appendix A, be noted.

Fire Transformation Bid Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Chief Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform the Authority of the outcome of the bidding process for the Government Fire Transformation Fund grant scheme 2015-16.

Members were advised that in March 2014 CLG announced the bidding process for a £75m Transformation Fund. Authorities were allowed to submit up to three bids with a good strategic fit with the 5 aims of the fund. TWFRAs submitted two bids to the process namely: Fire and Police: serving neighbourhoods together (£930,000) and Changing the operational response model (£7,000,000).

On 17th October, the Authority was notified that the Fire and Police collaboration bid had been successful. 30 FRAs were awarded grants, which were appended to the report.

Councillor N Forbes commented that as the 5 aims of the fund built on Sir Ken Knight's review and TWFRS had already implemented many of these, this again demonstrated how the Authority was a victim of its own success. He went on to say that co-terminosity between 'Shire' Authorities and the Police was greater and that this had been demonstrated in the number of successful bids in these areas.

Councillor Stockdale queried when further information in relation to proposed co-locations would be available and was advised that the Police needed to identify suitable sites which were in the curtilage of where police stations were closing. ACFO Brindle agreed to circulate this information to Members as soon as it was available.

Councillor M. Forbes referred to the bid description from Essex Fire and Rescue Authority in that it was establishing an insurance pooling arrangement open to all fire and rescue authorities with additional secondary insurance to cover extreme events, and suggested that this may be worth considering.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the bid submitted by Cheshire to fund a safety and life-skills centre to educate those most at risk of accidental death or injury, focusing on prevention and protection and commented that this was very similar to the proactive work undertaken by the Authority several years ago with the Safetyworks project. This highlighting that other services were just moving into this arena now.

ACFO Brindle agreed and added that the Phoenix Project had also been notable practice for some time and these examples of good practice would be communicated to CFOA.

In response to a question from Councillor Mole, ACFO Brindle confirmed that yes, the Police and Crime Commissioner had been involved and signed off the bid.

33. RESOLVED that:

- (i) The outcome of the bidding process for the Fire Transformation Fund 2015-16 be noted; and

- (ii) Further reports be received as required in future.

IRMP Review of Diversionary Activities

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to update the Authority on the outcome of discussions carried out with partners since March 2014 about Safetyworks, Princes Trust and the Phoenix Programme; and to seek a decision on the future provision of these activities in light of these discussions.

Members were reminded that in October 2013 the Authority agreed that there was a strong case for continuing to deliver diversionary activities however some of the activities are not solely targeted at reducing fire risk, but have much wider agendas which benefit a number of partners. A consultation exercise was therefore undertaken and the report summarised the discussions which had taken place.

With regards to Safetyworks, of the £177,244 running costs only £36,500 was expected to be covered in 2014-15. However a number of partners had expressed a commitment which included a willingness to provide co funding with a successful bid to Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative for £20,000 per annum and Nexus approving £15,000 per annum both for 3 years co-funding.

In relation to the Phoenix Programme, the running cost was £121,149 and again, the consultation process indicated partners being supportive of continuation. As a result, funding from Sunderland and the North Tyneside residual grant would cover 38% of running costs in 2014-2015 and 54% of the cost to be covered in 2015-2016.

With regards to Prince's Trust, £221,489 of income was received in 2013-14 which covered running costs. The 2014-15 funding package consisted of £143,000 from Sunderland College and £27,000 from the Springboard Trust, in total, covering 64% of the costs of delivering the programme.

In 2014-2015, 46% of the total costs of Safetyworks, Princes Trust and Phoenix was now covered by income. This Rising to 50% in 2015-16. In light of this, it was recommended that these three projects continue to be delivered as part of TWFRS's overall approach to prevention.

Councillor Stockdale questioned whether private sector sponsorship (for example Choice Works) had been considered, and was advised by ACFO Brindle that this would be looked into.

34. RESOLVED that:

- (i) The latest position in terms of partner commissioning and co funding of diversionary activities be noted;
- (ii) Safetyworks, Phoenix and Prince's Trust should continue to be funded by the Fire Authority as part of a wider approach to prevention;

- (iii) The Chief Fire Officer continue to monitor sustainability and seek further opportunities to collaborate with partners on Diversionary activities; and
- (iv) Further reports be received as required.

Integrated Risk Management Plan 2014-2017

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report to present the feedback from staff and partner consultation on two proposed new Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) actions, and seeking an Authority decision on whether to proceed with the proposed new actions.

Members were reminded that in July 2014, the Authority proposed two additional actions being added to the IRMP subject to consultation with staff and partners. These being an organisational review and joint working with other emergency services and key partners. The consultation process ran from 19th August to 24th October 2014, a period of 10 weeks.

In terms of the proposal to carry out a further organisational review, the majority of staff who responded to the consultation were of the view that there was value in a further review and also made comments in relation to how it should be conducted and what should be included.

On the issue of collaboration, all partners expressed a willingness to collaborate and engage in further discussions about opportunities.

35. RESOLVED that:

- (i) An organisational review be commenced, with detailed timescales to be agreed through the Chief Fire Officer;
- (ii) further work be done with partners and staff on developing collaborative opportunities, building on the partner responses given to the consultation; and
- (iii) full reports be brought to Members as required on any specific proposals.

DCLG/CFOA Urban Search and Rescue Review

The Chief Fire Officer, The Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of a national review of the UK Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability which was being carried out by the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Members were advised that DCLG had informed the Strategic Resilience Board that they wish to maintain a capability sufficient to respond to the identified risks within NRA and NRPA whilst delivering as estimated efficiency of £2m.

DCLG had indicated that as the risk had reduced by a third it was reasonable to expect some reduction in the current USAR capability and still maintain the current levels of resilience.

Both parties were now in negotiation to identify how the USAR funding grant that host FRS receive would be affected by this review. CFOA had stressed to DCLG that it needed to be concluded in time to allow host FRS to complete their budgetary processes for 2015.

Members commented that this should be brought to the attention of MP's given the requirement to provide a new level of resource with less funding which could impact on standards. In addition to this, Members acknowledged that national resilience was not a responsibility for the Fire Authority and expressed their concerns around potential risks levels and contradictory messages.

36. RESOLVED that:

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

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

37. 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 was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relations matters 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.

