

Item No 03

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 DECEMBER 2012
at 10.30 am.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Gambling, Haley, McAtominey, Mole, Mortimer, Mulvenna,
Ord, Padgett, Renton, Stephenson, Price and Wright.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors
M. Forbes and N. Forbes.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

47. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 19
November, 2012, Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Membership of Authority and Appointments to Committees 2012/2013

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority submitted a report advising Members that
since the resignation of Councillor Debra Waller from Tyne and Wear Fire and
Rescue Authority, Sunderland City Council at its Council meeting held on 28
November 2012 considered an appointment to this vacancy. During which,

the City Council resolved to appoint Councillor Bob Price to the Authority for the remainder of the 2012/2013 municipal year.

Members were advised further that the resignation of Councillor Debra Waller had also resulted in a vacancy on the Governance Committee and Human Resources Committee for a Labour Group Member.

Upon consideration of the report, it was:-

47. RESOLVED that: -

- i) The appointment of Councillor Bob Price to the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority for the remainder of the 2012/2013 municipal year be noted; and
- ii) Councillor Bob Price be appointed to the Governance Committee and the Human Resources Committee.

Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2011/2012

The Finance Officer submitted a report detailing the Audit Commission's Annual Audit Letter covering the year 2011/2012.

Steve Nicklin, District Auditor was in attendance to speak to the report which summarised the findings of the 2011/2012 audit of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service. Gavin Baker was also in attendance and was introduced to the meeting.

Members were advised that an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's 2011/2012 financial statements had been issued by the Auditors together with an unqualified value for money conclusion. The letter confirmed that the Authority had proper arrangements in place to secure financial resilience and that savings and efficiencies had been delivered effectively.

The Annual Governance Report stated that despite £3.4m funding reductions in 2011/2012, the Authority had managed to maintain general fund balances at over £3m and had transferred £3m earmarked as reserves to increase resilience for greater reductions in future years.

It was also recognised within the Annual Governance Report that Tyne and Wear Fire Rescue Authority was prioritising its resources within tighter budgets, for example by achieving cost reductions and by improving efficiency and productivity.

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

There were no other comments forthcoming.

Upon consideration, it was:-

48. RESOLVED to note the positive contents of the report.

Autumn Statement 2012

The Chief Fire Officer and Finance Officer submitted a joint report setting out for Members the main points announced on 5 December 2012 by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement 2012 and the implications for the Authority. A briefing note summarising the main points from the Autumn Statement was included in Appendix A which accompanied the report.

Members were advised the Autumn Statement was for information and was an important government assessment provided each year that helped to show Government's financial projections and their intended policy and actions to address the economy. The Autumn Statement helped to indicate the government's policy moving forward for the medium term and the implications for public sector.

At this stage although the UK economy had come out of a double dip recession and had seen growth in both Quarters 2 and 3 for 2012, the overall position was still an anticipated 0.1% negative growth for the year.

The economy had not performed as well as expected as the forecast growth made by government in their March Budget for the current year was 0.8% and all other projections into the medium term had also been downgraded.

Members were advised that given that recovery continued to lack momentum, government were forecasting lower growth forecasts well into the medium term. Consequently, government had reduced its growth forecasts upto 2017, however, since then it had more recently announced that the reduction plan would be extended by a further year to include 2017/2018

In terms of the fiscal outlook, government had announced further cuts to government spending of 1% in 2013/2014 and by a further 2% in 2014/2015 to those already trailed in the March Budget. The cuts were forecast to produce savings of £5bn, which government would use to finance investment in infrastructure projects including transport, mainly road upgrades and to build 100 new schools.

Members noted that local government would be exempt from the 1% reduction in 2013/2014, but the 2% reduction in 2014/2015 would apply. In the first half of 2013 government was planning to set out its spending plans for the next Spending Review period (2015/2016 to 2018/2019). As such, public sector funding continued to remain challenging over the medium term with a clear link between public sector finances and the state of the economy, prolonging public sector funding reductions until at least 2017/2018.

Members were advised that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) had been above the Government's target level of 2% since December 2009, and it was

anticipated that whilst non pay volatility would continue, there would be continued suppression of pay with average pay awards of no more than 1%. The rate of inflation was also forecast to continue to fall, and this position would be regularly monitored and reviewed.

The Bank Base Rate continued to remain at an all time low of 0.5% since 2009. Members were advised that most experts now agreed that there would be no rise in the base rate until the last quarter of 2014 at the earliest because of the latest government announcements on the economy.

In relation to funding changes, the Authority was awaiting the Finance Settlement which would set out the detailed funding it could expect for 2013/2014 and an indicative settlement for 2014/2015. Until then, the funding position remained unclear.

A new Business Rates Retention Scheme would be introduced to replace the formula grant funding from 2013/2014. Members were advised that the scheme was being consulted upon and the final financial details would be set out in the Finance Settlement.

Members were updated in relation to the Local Income Position. During which, it was highlighted that the Localism Act that received royal assent on 15 November 2011 provided for the provision of referendums to veto excessive council tax. The threshold percentage to hold a referendum would be reduced to 2% across all sectors for 2013/2014. Government also announced grant funding to allow local authorities to freeze council tax for 2013/2014 (based on a 1% council tax increase) and this funding be provided for both 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

Upon consideration, it was:-

50. RESOLVED to:-

- (i) note the contents of the report; and
- (ii) note that more detail would follow in the government's Local Government Finance Settlement for 2013/2014 which was to be announced on Wednesday 19 December, 2012, which would help clarify the resources position for the Fire Authority for the next two year period 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

Fireworks and Bonfire Incidents 1st – 6th November 2012

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report informing Members of the incident activity levels, intervention programmes and instances of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) within the Service area over the Bonfire period, 1st to 6th November 2012.

Members were advised that the bonfire period was traditionally the busiest time of the year for the Service and this year was no exception. As in the

past, measures had been taken to ensure that the Service had the capability and resources to deal with the increase in calls to bonfires, whilst maintaining the operational capability to respond effectively to life threatening incidents.

A proactive Darker Nights Campaign was undertaken during the weeks prior to the 5 November. This was developed in conjunction with local partners and incorporated educational activities, publicity and media messages, bonfire uplift schemes and operational Command and Control arrangements.

The key objectives of the campaign were to:

- Raise awareness of the dangers and consequences of the misuse/abuse of bonfires and fireworks.
- Encourage people to attend organised displays.
- Reinforce the detrimental effects of anti-social behaviour and impact of attacks against emergency workers.

Following on from the success of the 2011 bonfire safety DVD "Be Safe not Sorry", which had subsequently been employed by other Fire Services and Police Forces nationally, a new educational DVD had been produced for the 2012 campaign. The DVD had been produced with assistance from the burns unit at Newcastle RVI and approximately 20,000 young people from across Tyne and Wear viewed the film, which had received extremely good feedback from them and educational professionals alike.

A service-wide media and public relations campaign was carried out, which involved liaising with reporters and various media agencies. Local Authority bonfire uplift schemes were in operation throughout the bonfire period and in terms of the sale of fireworks, the Service registered 124 retailers and issued 24 licences. All premises authorised to store and sell fireworks were inspected by Protection Technical staff or operational firefighters.

In terms of incident validated statistics during the period 1st to 6th November, Members were advised that there had been: -

- A 10.6% increase in the total number of calls received by Service Control (from 930 in 2011 to 1029 in 2012).
 - A 0.3% reduction in the total number of incidents attended (from 599 in 2011 to 597 in 2012).
 - A 6.3% reduction in the number of deliberate ASB secondary fires (from 303 in 2011 to 284 in 2012)
 - An increase in the number of attacks on fire-fighters, from 3 in 2011 to 9 in 2012.
 - 6 bonfire/firework related injuries reported in A&E departments in 2012, compared to 13 in 2011.
 - No firework related property fires in 2012, compared to 6 in 2011.
 - A 62% decrease in the number of firework related incidents attended and a decrease of 18% in the number of bonfire related incidents attended.
- The number of bonfire/firework related arrests increased from 9 in 2011 to

11 in 2012.

Members were advised that the overall number of incidents attended, including the number of ASB secondary incidents, showed a reducing trend in recent years. An appendix was attached to the report which referred to additional details regarding statistics.

Sadly, attacks on fire fighters had increased from three in 2011 to nine in 2012. Members were advised that previously reported attacks amounted to seven in 2009 and twelve in 2010. It was confirmed that there had been no reported injuries to fire fighters over the 2012 period.

Councillor Haley enquired if the attacks on fire fighters were linked in any way with arsonist attacks and other attacks throughout the year. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that there was no link, however the Authority did closely monitor attacks of all types and looked to identify linkages.

Councillor Bell commented that organised bonfire displays were excellent, however one of the challenges fire authorities faced was the volume of unauthorised bonfires.

Councillor Stephenson added that unauthorised bonfires linked strongly with anti social behaviours issues.

Councillor Mulvenna stated that issues such as these could be tackled through partnership working.

Members thanked the Chief Fire Officer for his informative report.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

51. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) note the report; and
- (ii) receive further reports as necessary

Correspondence List

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.

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

(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.

