

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE held in the Main Authority Room, Fire and Rescue Headquarters, Nissan Way, Barmston Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY, 19TH JUNE, 2006 at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Gibson in the Chair

Councillors Bollands, Cooney and Huscroft.

Appointment of Chairman

1. RESOLVED that Councillor P. Gibson be appointed as Chairman of the Committee for the forthcoming year.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006/08

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) to facilitate a discussion regarding the future policy issues which required further consideration and for inclusion in the Authority's future IRMP and Strategic Plan.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that the National Framework 2006/08 set out a vision of the Fire and Rescue Service for the next two years. The move to a two-year National Framework recognised the need for a consistent vision to support strategic planning processes and the Government's confidence that the pace of change and modernisation will continue.

The Government was responsible for setting clear priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire and Rescue National Framework did this by making clear:-

- the Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service;
- what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and
- what support Government will provide.

The National Framework was a strategic plan outlining how the PSA and other objectives can be delivered. Its three principal objectives remained:-

- to provide clarity about the outcomes and objectives the Government wants to be achieved;
- to set out what the Government expects Fire and Rescue Authorities and Regional Management Boards to do in order to meet these objectives; and
- to explain what the Government will do to support Fire and Rescue Authorities and Regional Management Boards to meet these objectives.

Members noted that the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 had given statutory effect to the National Framework and required the Secretary of State to report against it. The relevant sections of the Act being Sections 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25.

The Chief Fire Officer then reminded the Committee that at its meeting held on the 24th January, 2006 the Authority considered and approved a response to the draft National Framework document. Subsequent to this the Authority submitted a detailed response (attached as Appendices A and B).

In formulating and publishing its IRMP Action Plan 2006/07 and Strategic Plan 2006/2011 the Authority took due cognisance of the National Framework 2006/08. However there was now a need to review the National Framework and for Members to consider if there were other implications for future policy development which emanate for the policy direction set by Government.

Prior to consideration of the issues highlighted in the report, Mr. Rayner reminded the Committee that its primary function was to capture emerging policy issues early and make subsequent recommendations to the full Authority.

At this juncture a detailed discussion ensued in relation to future issues facing the Fire Service, in particular:-

Local Agreements – Members commented that discussions should be ongoing with the five districts and work carried out in Partnerships. Members suggested meetings be held in Community Fire Stations to link and involve the community and proposed that a letter be sent to Chief Executives and Leaders of Constituent Authorities together with the relevant spokesperson for each Authority requesting Member and Officer contact to arrange this.

Risk Management Planning – A move had been made to local planning processes and due to the financial situation, the Authority was ahead of target and the efficiency statement underpinned for 25 years.

IRMP – The current Plan covered 2004-09. As an Action Plan was produced annually the Authority was now in the 3rd year Action Plan. Due to this, Members requested a report on process, timetable and planning for the next IRMP.

Rank to Role – Members of the Committee noted that the Authority was currently following Government guidelines in relation to rank to role. Duty systems had been revised and working patterns were now to be considered, in particular shift layouts. Members recognised that the evaluation and justification of smoke alarms was a forthcoming major issue.

Home Risk Assessments – The Committee commented that this was an excellent model determining which local areas were at high risk. Market research also enabled analysis of risk together with Performance Indicators, however work was still to be developed in this area.

Consultation – The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that an extremely poor response (seven) was received in relation to the twelve week consultation exercise. Due to this, the Committee recognised the need for public meetings and Ward Surgeries in future. Councillor Gibson commented that the City of Sunderland used MORI as an annual survey and suggested including a question relating to Fire Safety in homes within this survey.

Communication – The Committee noted that communication was posing a problem in that the public were not aware of Fire Safety. Due to this, Councillors suggested enquiries being made in relation to information being broadcast on local radio stations. Alternatively the production of DVDs or the use of neighbourhood forums.

Road Traffic Collisions – The Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the statutory duty to attend road traffic collisions, therefore time and resources ought to be dedicated to developing a strategy for this in the future. The Committee discussed work with young offenders on the influence of drink and drugs as prevention strategies and the importance of developing partnerships and relationships with Police and the Ambulance Service.

Regional Human Resource Strategy – Members were informed of the regional assessment and development programme for supervisory management linked to diversity and equality. Vast research had been conducted in relation to encouraging people to apply for jobs in hope to reduce this largest diversity issue. The Regional Human Resource Strategy would be submitted to further meetings for ratification and consideration by Members.

Business Continuity – Members noted that this strategy involved continuation of good practice. The Committee commented upon industrial action and the importance of business continuity during these times.

Following a detailed discussion into the above-mentioned areas, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that:-
 - (i) the report be received and noted;
 - (ii) the issue of pensions be discussed at the following meeting;
 - (iii) a letter be sent to the Chief Executives and Leaders of Constituent Councils suggesting a presentation to a Cabinet meeting or alternatively inviting to a meeting of the Authority to raise awareness of current issues affecting the Fire Service; and
 - (iv) report on process, timetable and planning of the IRMP to be submitted to a following meeting.

(Signed) P. GIBSON,
Chairman.