

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, 22ND FEBRUARY, 2010
at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Bell, Boyes, Charlton, Clark, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Haley, Jordan,
Mole, Mortimer, Renton and Woodwark.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare and Scaplehorn.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Haley and Bell declared a personal interest in relation to item 12 –
Regional Fire Control Update, as a Member of the North East Fire Control Company
Limited.

Minutes

78. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 25th January, 2010 – Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record,

- (ii) the minutes of the Civil Contingencies Committee, Part I, held on 18th January, 2010 be received and noted,
- (iii) the minutes of the North East Fire and Rescue Regional Management Board, Part I, held on 15th December, 2009 be received and noted, and
- (iv) the notes of the Budget Consultation Meeting held on 12th February, 2010 be received and noted.

Final Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2010/2011

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising the Authority of the Final Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2010/2011.

The Finance Officer referred Members to his report and advised that although the Aggregate External Finance had been marginally reduced due to small changes to Special Grants, this did not affect the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Authority's final grant entitlement for 2010/2011 had remained unchanged from the figure of £35.570 million announced in November which represented an increase of 1.10%.

It was:-

79. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Revenue Budget 2010/2011

The Chief Fire Officer, the Chief Emergency Planning Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to present for consideration and approval by Members, the Revenue Budget for 2010/2011, including the precept required to be levied on the District Council in Tyne and Wear.

Members were advised that the Authority's PFI Scheme provided for a review of Facilities Management Support costs, including cleaning, security and grounds maintenance, 5 years after commencement of the scheme. Officers of the Authority, assisted by the Lead Authority, were undertaking benchmarking of these costs and had begun discussion with the PFI contractors on this, although these discussions were likely to be ongoing for some time.

Councillor M. Forbes questioned how this benchmarking exercise was being undertaken and whether there was a right of appeal. Councillor Forbes was advised that the arrangements for reaching a final outcome were set out in the contract and included an arbitration process. Financial provision has been made to cover any additional costs.....

Referring to paragraph 7.3 of the report, Councillor Haley queried why Newcastle were showing a deficit of £46,912 as their estimated balance on Council Tax Collection Funds. Councillor N. Forbes explained that the deficit was a result of the numerous Council Tax appeals the Council had received, with the refunds issued resulting in a collection fund deficit.

In setting the revenue budget of £59,365 million, the Authority would precept the five District Councils which would increase the Band D Council Tax from £72,50 to £73.16 representing an increase of 0.91%.

Councillor Forbes commented on the successful way in which the IRMP process had been utilised to improve the overall performance of the service whilst consistently realising efficiencies, which has once again enabled a low precept increase to be set.

Councillor Woodwark confirmed that, taking into account the traditional high cost per head of the service, this performance was to be welcomed.

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

80. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the revised estimate for 2009/2010, as summarised at Appendix A, be noted;
- (ii) the Revenue Budget for 2010/2011, as summarised at Appendix A, be noted;
- (iii) the position on general and earmarked balances and reserves, the associated risks and their mitigation, as outlined at Appendices C, D and E be noted;
- (iv) the Medium Term Financial Strategy as detailed at Appendix F, be noted;
- (v) the Council Tax base of 324,619 for the year 2010/2011, as notified by the billing authorities within Tyne and Wear, be noted;
- (vi) the following amounts now be calculated by the Authority for the year 2008/2009, in accordance with Sections 43 and 44 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-
 - (i) £67,334,051 – being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(2)(a) to (d) of the Act;
 - (ii) £7,969,511 – being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(3)(a) to (b) of the Act;

- (iii) £59,364,540 – being the amount by which the aggregate at (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (ii) above, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 43(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year;
- (iv) £35,615,494 – being the aggregate of the sums which the Authority estimates will be payable for the year into its Authority Fund in respect of redistributed non-Domestic Rates, Revenue Support Grant and additional Grant, and as increased by the net Surplus on the Billing Authorities' Collection Funds;
- (v) £73.1598 – being the amount at (iii) above, less the amount at (iv) above, all divided by the amount in paragraph 7.4 above, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 44(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- (vi) Valuation Bands

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| A | 48.7732 | Being the amount given by multiplying the amount at (v) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation and divided by the number which that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands. |
| B | 56.9021 | |
| C | 65.0309 | |
| D | 73.1598 | |
| E | 89.4175 | |
| F | 105.6753 | |
| G | 121.9330 | |
| H | 146.3196 | |

Capital Programme 2010/2011 Including Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy and Policy

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Chief Emergency Planning Officer submitted a joint report, to present for consideration and approval, the Capital Programme for 2010/2011, including the prudential indicators and the Treasury Management Strategy and Policy.

Referring Members to paragraph 3.3 of the report, the Finance Officer explained that the Capital Programme included provision of £1,254,328 to fund new starts, and in addition, £393,850 to fund continuing projects.

Councillor Woodwark referred to Appendix E-Adoption of the revised CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice 2009, and queried whether this was likely to be submitted to the Governance Committee for more detailed consideration. The Finance Officer advised that yes, this would be the case whereby the Committee would be asked to scrutinise the Treasury Management Strategy in detail.

The Chairman asked how well equipped the fire stations were to accommodate female firefighters and Chief Fire Officer Bathgate responded by advising that all PFI stations were well equipped and the remaining stations were being adapted with an aim to bring them to an equal standard.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

81. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Capital Programme and Vehicle Replacement Programme for 2010/2011, as set out at Appendix A, be noted;
- (ii) the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement set out in Section 6 be approved;
- (iii) the amendments to the Prudential Indicators for 2009/2010 in respect of the Authority's Authorised Limit for External Debt to £51.137 million and to its Operational Boundary for External Debt to £46.137 million, be approved;
- (iv) the Prudential Indicators for the years 2010/2011, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 as set out in Appendix B, be approved;
- (v) the adoption of the Revised Treasury Management Code of Practice, as set out by the Lead Authority in Appendix E, be approved;
- (vi) the Treasury Management Policy, as set out in Appendix C, be approved; and
- (vii) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2010/2014, as set out in Appendix D, be approved.

Capital Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report seeking approval of the Capital Strategy which set out the organisations approach to using capital to deliver corporate objectives.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle outlined the report and drew the attention of members to the detailed strategy appended to the report. She explained that the strategy set the framework for planning and financing capital expenditure to ensure decisions were taken in the context of overall corporate strategy as set out in the Strategy Community Safety Plan.

It was:-

82. RESOLVED that the Capital Strategy be approved.

Appointment of External Auditor

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report confirming the Appointment of Steve Nicklin as Auditor to the Authority.

Members were advised that at its meeting on 17th December, 2009, the Audit Commission Board approved the appointment of Steve Nicklin, an Officer of the Commissions in-house audit practice, as Auditor to the Authority. This covered the audit of the accounts for the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12.

It was:-

83. RESOLVED that the appointment of Steve Nicklin as auditor be noted.

Provision of Reinforcement Arrangements

The Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report outlining the proposed formalisation of arrangements for the provision of operational assistance between Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority and the Fire and Rescue Authority for Northumberland (Northumberland County Council).

Members were advised that arrangements had been made for Tyne and Wear to provide reinforcements to Northumberland in the event of an emergency in Northumberland's area with reciprocal arrangements applying in the case of an emergency within Tyne and Wear. In particular, each Authority was committed to supplying one pumping appliance to supplement attendance by the "Home" Authority at emergencies in the vicinity of Heddon, parts of Prudhoe and Crawcrook.

Tyne and Wear was also in a position to supply aerial and other specialist appliances and also provide assistance in relation to swift water rescue and/or flooding incidents.

In response to a question asked by Councillor Haley, the Chief Fire Officer advised that plans were also in place with Durham Fire and Rescue Service.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

84. RESOLVED that the execution of an agreement with Northumberland County Council be approved under Section 13 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 for the provision of mutual and specialist assistance, as detailed within the report.

Co-option of Fire Authority Members to Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report detailing the outcome of correspondence with the five Local Authorities in Tyne and Wear, following a request from Newcastle City Council for the Authority to provide a Co-opted Member to its Community Safety Scrutiny Committee.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle informed Members that only Newcastle had a specific policy decision to co-opt statutory partners to Scrutiny of Community Safety; North Tyneside and Gateshead had considered the matter and had decided upon other approaches for the time being; and Sunderland and South Tyneside would be considering the co-option issue in the future.

Councillor Woodwark expressed his support for this proposal and commented that this arrangement could benefit all parties.

Councillor Mole felt that the issue required more thought prior to a decision being made. Councillor N. Forbes agreed by commenting that clearly this was an opportunity, however the role of the Co-opted Member needed to be discussed further, to determine what was expected and also help ascertain the role of this member.

Both Councillor Mrs. Forbes and Councillor Renton commented that they were not entirely supportive of the idea and struggled to see how it would add any value.

As a result of the mixed views of Members, the Chairman turned to a vote with only one Member voting in favour of the proposal.

Councillor Bell then proposed that although a member was not to be co-opted now, the Authority should agree in principle to the request but request additional clarity about the role followed by a further report to a future meeting.

Therefore, it was:-

85. RESOLVED that the proposal be agreed in principle, subject to further investigative work being undertaken to clarify the role and expectation of the Co-opted Member.

Integrated Risk Management 2009/10 Action Plan – Quarter 3 Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to provide an update for Members in respect of the implementation of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Annual Action Plan for 2009/10, approved by the Authority in March 2009.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brindle outlined the report and drew the attention of Members to the action relating to the Community Engagement Team. The

recruitment process for the appointment of the Diverse Community Relationship Manager was completed and an offer of employment made. However unfortunately, due to personal medical reasons, the candidate later declined the offer. As no suitable alternative candidate was successful during the process, the post was being re-advertised.

With regards to the environmental impact of incidents, investigative work was now complete on how the impact of operational activity fire incidents on the environment may be measured.

It was:-

86. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress made in relation to the implementation of the 2009/10 IRMP Action Plan be noted and endorsed, and
- (ii) further reports upon the completion of the outstanding actions be received, as appropriate.

Regional Fire Control – Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Finance Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with an update in respect of developments with the FiReControl project and the Regional Control Centre in the North East.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch provided an update on the project and explained that a draft written response to the Fire Service Circular 73/2009 consultation had been prepared, and was attached as Appendix B. The deadline for responses was 5th March.

On behalf of the Regional Management Board a consultancy firm was appointed to conduct a business continuity and options appraisal in the case of significant delays or potential termination of the FiReControl project. A final report would be made available in March 2010.

Members were reminded of the significant annual revenue costs associated with the RCC building. Given these costs, some tentative approaches had been made to other organisations to ascertain whether there was an interest in some form of sub-letting arrangements being mutually beneficial. Members were to be kept informed of any decisions.

Councillor Renton queried why the costs associated with these buildings were so high, and was advised that this was partly due to the security arrangements which in turn, led to high costings. When asked if this was the same for all RCC's, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Hindmarch advised that regional variations in property did result in higher costs in some areas. As all buildings were virtually built to a standard design, some had more capacity than was actually needed.

Consideration having been given to the matter, it was:-

87. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Chief Fire Officer submits a response to the consultation in line with that proposed in Appendix A, and
- (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.

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

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

89. 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 any individual or information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual or information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3).

(Signed) T. WRIGHT,
Chairman.

