

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 18 JANUARY 2016 at
10.30AM.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Burdis, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Haley, Harrison, Lauchlan,
MoleMaughan, Pickard, Perry, Price, Renton and Stephenson and Stockdale.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

The Chairman advised that an award had been received at the 'Spirit of Fire Awards 2015' for Team of the Year for the StrongArm challenge which was a joint Durham and Darlington and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue team fundraising event over a number of years in memory of firefighter Peter Metcalfe.

The Chief Fire Officer was also congratulated for receiving a Queen's Fire Service Medal and also becoming Clerk to the Authority.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

55. RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Authority, Part I, held on 14th December, 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Capital Programme 2015/2016 – Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to review the current year's Programme and reflect further changes to those that were presented to the Authority as a consequence of the Second Capital Programme Review on 16th November 2015.

The Finance Officer advised Members that the Capital Programme was showing a net reduction of £683,589 from £7,604,639 to £6,921,050. The main reasons for the reduction were explained and as reported at the second review, delivery lead-in times meant that the Aerial Ladder Platform vehicle would now be delivered in August 2016 and as a result £666,290 would need to be slipped into 2016/2017. The Capital Programme had been updated to reflect to this and the other variations set out in the report.

Regular reviews of the Prudential Indicators were undertaken and the Authority was operating within its Authorised Borrowing Limit, with no areas of concerns to highlight to Members.

56. RESOLVED that the variations since the Second Review be noted and approval be given to the revised Capital Programme for 2015/2016, as set out at Appendix A.

Revenue Budget 2015/2016 – Third Review

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to advise Members of issues relating to the 2015/2016 Revenue Budget position at the third quarterly review stage.

The Finance Officer advised Members that regular monitoring of the Revenue Budget continued to take place and the underspend at outturn was now projected to be £284,000. Members were referred to the summary set out at Appendix A which showed the actual costs compared to the budgeted position for the main budgeted areas. The main variances were detailed within section 2 of the report. The general fund balance of £3.882m was not expected to change within the current financial year.

57. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2015/2016 as set out in the report, and at Appendix A, be noted.

Schedule of Precept Instalments 2016/2017

The Finance Officer advised that the Billing Authorities required that payments should be made by twelve equal monthly instalments, commencing in April, payable on the last working day of each month, to continue with the practice adopted in 1993/1994. The proposed schedule of instalments was detailed within the report.

58. RESOLVED that under Paragraph 4(4) of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) Regulation 1992, approval be given to the schedule of instalments proposed.

Provisional Local Grant Settlement 2016/2017

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report to provide Members with information on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/2017 announced on 17th December 2015, the main details of which were set out in Appendix 1 of the report for information; and for Members to note that an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) would be presented in February when the final Revenue Budget 2016/2017 was to be approved. A Briefing Note of the Spending Review 2015 for members was attached at Appendix A, which set out the relevant key points for information.

In addition, Members were asked to note the comments made on the Authority's behalf by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the Finance Officer, with the agreement of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, in respect of the Government's consultation on the Provisional Grant settlement for 2016/2017 as the deadline for responses to the CLG were required by the 15th January 2016.

The Finance Officer explained that on 17th December 2015, the provisional local government finance settlement for 2016/2017 was announced. Key headline figures were set out in Appendices 1a (i) and 1a (ii) which showed the 2016/2017 position and a further 3 year projections up to and including, 2019/2020.

The Finance Officer outlined some key information detailed within the report. Firstly, that there was a 1.88% reduction in Core Spending Power in 2016/2017 increasing to 2.80% by 2019/2020, showing a continuation of the disproportionate cuts for Tyne and Wear and the other Metropolitan Fire Authorities.

The Government had announced that there would be no Council Tax Freeze grant funding from 2016/2017. It had also confirmed that past Council Tax Freeze Grant was protected within the indicative RSG allocations announced. The government also had made assumptions that council tax would increase year on year up to 2019/2020 which meant there had been a major shift in Government policy over the 4 year settlement as previously a council tax freeze had been encouraged.

Members were referred to the table at section 1.25 of the report which detailed the revised resources position for the Authority's projected budgets over the 4 year term, using the Settlement data over the 4 year period according to government. The Government had assumed an annual increase in the Authority's precept of (CPI), based on 1.75% on average over each of the 4 years, together with growth in the tax base of 1.81%, 2.32%, 2.43% and 2.53% in the years 2016/2017 to 2019/2020 respectively. If growth of 1% per annum was applied and no council tax increase was added, then the budget gap shortfall increased from £5.1m to £7.4m. Members were reminded that a decision in relation to any council tax increase would need to be made at the February meeting.

The summary of resources was detailed at section 1.23 of the report. Given the total estimated resources of £48,394m, members were reminded that additional IRMP actions may need to be identified.

Councillor Haley agreed and commented that the uncertainties added more risk into the budget planning stages.

The Vice-Chairman outlined the disadvantages of areas with lower council tax bases and explained that in order to ensure that Tyne and Wear was not further disadvantaged, consideration also needed to be given to the property re-valuation in 2017, which would affect constituent authorities and could have an impact on the Authority.

59. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The implications of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2016/2017 be noted;
- (ii) Retrospective approval be given to the comments made on the Authority's behalf to the government's consultation on the Provisional Grant Settlement for 2016/2017;
- (iii) The Precept position for 2016/2017 be agreed at the February meeting; and
- (iv) The final Revenue Budget for 2016/2017 be presented to the Authority at its meeting in February together with an updated MTFs once provisional resources had been confirmed.

Mind Blue Light Time to Change Pledge

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, the Deputy Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing Members with information regarding the Authority's commitment to the Mind Blue Light Time to Change Pledge.

ACFO Brindle reminded members that the Mind Blue-light Programme was part of the government's commitment to improving the wellbeing of people of the workforce.

Working with local Mind Charities and Time to Change representatives, officers had developed an action plan from TWFRS including committing to sign a pledge to the programme, whilst working towards improved outcomes for staff.

Mind had welcomed this commitment and TWFRS had been accepted onto the programme. Members were advised that the pledge signing event would take place following the meeting, with the launch of the programme on 4th February 2016.

Councillor Stockdale thanked officers, colleagues and the FBU for their commitment to this programme.

60. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) Participation in the Blue-light programme be supported;
- (iii) The pledge signing and launch event be attended; and
- (iv) Further reports be received as appropriate.

Implementation Report and Next Steps for the Risk Based Attendance Policy for Automatic Fire Alarms Calls in Non-Residential Premises

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive submitted a report to update Members on the successful implementation of the Risk Based Attendance Policy and the accompanying improved performance in the attendance of false alarm incidents; although despite this improvement there are still areas of poor performance in this indicator. The report also sought approval from Members for proposals to extend the policy to further improve performance in this indicator.

ACFO Lowther advised members that the number of false alarm calls due to automatic fire alarms from non-domestic premises between June and September had reduced by 372 when compared to the same period of the previous year, with a reduction of 346 between the hours of 0800 to 1800 hours. Education, hospitals and medical care and residential homes were the highest remaining offenders for this indicator with 52% of false alarms.

It was therefore proposed to extend the policy by targeting premises where due to the poor management and/or an inadequate fire alarm system the occupants and confidence in the fire alarm had reduced. Any changes would be applied through working in partnership with premises to improve their performance so that no changes in response were necessary.

ACFO Lowther explained that it was proposed to continue the engagement with the Hospital Fire Safety Officers however change the response to sites with poor performance. Any changes in response would apply between 0800 and 1800 hours and would be applied flexibly.

21% of false alarms were from education premises. Despite attempts to work with poor performing premises to improve the fire alarm system and their management of it, several premises would not engage in this process. It was therefore proposed to change the response to premises which would not engage to improve their performance, between the hours of 0800 and 1800, again, this would be applied flexibly.

The Chairman suggested that this be raised by any Members of the Authority who were on a Governing Body of a school, to raise awareness.

Other non-residential premises, through application of the Risk Based Attendance Policy, were call challenged and only received an emergency response for fire alarms between 0800 to 1800 hours when a back-up call was received. Many premises had used this change in policy to improve their management of the fire alarm system outside of this timescale, however there continued to be several premises who would not engage in this improvement process. As above, any changes in response for these premises would apply between 0800 and 1800 hours, and would be applied flexibly.

Members were advised that false alarms from residential care home premises accounted for 12% of this indicator. As the CFA Code of Practice recommended

that residential homes received a response without call filtering, TWFRS would continue with the current approach to respond immediately.

Members of the Authority commented that it was disappointing to see that some premises were reluctant to engage and requested further information in relation to this, in attempt to communicate this at a local level.

ACFO Lowther highlighted that the cost of the initial implementation was approximately £10,000 against a predicted expenditure of £15,000.

61. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) further work with hospitals, educational premises, and other non-residential premises be approved; and
- (iii) Further reports be received as appropriate.

Transfer of Fire and Rescue Policy to the Home Office

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive submitted a report to inform the Authority of the Government's transfer of policy responsibility for Fire and Rescue from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to the Home Office.

ACFO Brindle advised members that on 5th January 2016, Government issued a written statement and letter to all Chief Fire Officers and Chairs of Fire Authorities from the Home Secretary (Appendix A), to the effect that responsibility for Fire and Rescue policy would transfer from CLG to the Home Office with immediate effect. This change was confirmed on 6th January 2016.

Mike Penning, Minister of State at the Home Office and Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, currently responsible for Policing, Criminal Justice and victims, would also take on responsibility for Fire and Rescue.

As of 1st April 2016, staff working on the national fire policy function would transfer to the Home Office. This included the Fire Policy Division, National Resilience and Fire Programmes Division, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's team and staff working on firefighter pensions.

Melanie Dawes, the CLG Permanent Secretary, would remain Accounting Officer for fire budgets until 1st April 2016 when this function would pass Mark Sedwill, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office.

Members of the Authority discussed the proposals and suggested that it would be appropriate for the Vice-Chairman to raise the issue of an alternative way forward, at the Tyne and Wear Leaders Meeting the following day, given the concerns in relation to outcomes, the logic for the changes and the potential resultant complexities.

62. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the decision by Government be noted; and
- (ii) Further reports be received in future.

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

63. 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.

