

Minutes of the Meeting of
the TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND
RESCUE AUTHORITY held in the
Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Barmston Mere on
THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2013
at 10.30am.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Haley, McAtominey, Mortimer, Harrison, Padgett, Price, Renton and Stephenson.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Burdis, M Forbes, N Forbes, Mole, Ord and Stockdale.

Announcements

The Chairman advised that the New Control Centre would go live on Monday 25 November and Members would be able to have a visit to the centre in the New Year.

There would be a question and answer session for Members after the formal part of the meeting and the Chief Fire Officer highlighted that this would be an opportunity for members to ask questions on the IRMP consultation to date and flag up any issues raised by constituents.

The Chairman reported that he had attended the Fire Management Committee as an observer and a large part of the meeting had focused on discussions about cuts, reductions and industrial action. Other authorities were complimentary about Tyne and Wear and felt that the Authority was getting things right.

Members were reminded that the Fire Authority carol service would take place on Thursday 12 December 2013 and all were encouraged to attend.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

34. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the minutes of the Authority, Part I held on 16 September 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Committee, Part I held on 14 October 2013 be noted for information; and
- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Authority, Part I held on 21 October 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

LGA Fire Conference

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report informing Members that the Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Fire Conference was scheduled to be held in Cardiff on 11 and 12 March 2014 and proposing Authority representation at the conference.

The LGA Annual Fire Conference was the key conference of the year for fire and rescue authorities as it deals with issues of direct concern to the fire and rescue service as a whole. The theme for the conference in March 2014 would be designed to address the issues and key challenges facing the service in the coming months and years.

The cost of the conference was £360 per person for LGA member authorities and this had been held at the same price since 2008. The costs could be met from within the existing budget.

The Chief Fire Officer proposed that the Chairman and one other member of the Authority be nominated to attend. It was noted that Councillor Burdis was the next member on the rota for conference attendance and she would be approached in the first instance.

35. RESOLVED that attendance of the Chairman and one Member at the LGA Fire Conference be approved.

Revenue Budget 2013/2014 – Second Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising Members of issues relating to the 2013/2014 Revenue Budget position at the half

way stage of the financial year and providing an updated Statement of Balances as a consequence of the second quarterly review.

The Finance Officer's representative advised that the Revenue Budget was regularly monitored and variances had been identified which projected a net underspend of £876,000 for the year. The projected underspend was made up primarily of savings of £810,000 on the employees budget due to higher than expected levels of staff turnover.

Investment in health awareness and interventions had also resulted in a reduction in ill health retirements, leading to an underspend on this budget heading.

There was an estimated net underspend of £78,000 on the premises budget and this was mainly due to the purchase of a property at Rainton Bridge which had saved on the annual lease charge payable. Rates on other properties had proved to be lower than expected at the time of setting the budget and cheaper fuel costs had also resulted in an underspend of £53,000 on the transport budget.

The Finance Officer's representative highlighted that there was a projected under achievement of income of £77,000 and this was largely due to less income being received from training courses.

The report also outlined the movement of balances within 2013/2014 and the estimated level of balances as at 31 March 2014, including the savings projected at the point of the Revenue Budget second review.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Officer's representative for her presentation and queried the reduction of income in respect of fees and charges. The Finance Officer confirmed that this was in relation to the overall reduction in income from training courses and the Chief Fire Officer stated that this was linked to changes in back office staffing, as with the availability of staff being reduced, the ability to generate income had decreased.

Having considered the report, it was: -

36. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2013/2014 and the updated Statement of Balances be noted.

Capital Budget 2013/2014 – Second Review

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report reviewing the current year's Capital Programme and reflecting further changes to those presented to the Authority as a consequence of the First Capital Programme Review on 10 June 2013.

The Finance Officer's representative reported that there had been a net reduction in the programme of £218,000 and the value of the programme was now £4,286,778 in total. Savings had been made through hiring, rather than purchasing and there had been some slippage in the ICT programme as a result of re-prioritisation of work.

Members' attention was drawn to additional projects being carried out within the Capital Programme including a dehumidifier replacement programme and the purchase of a replacement small fire boat at estimated costs of £28,000 and £10,000 respectively.

The replacement of the fire boat would be accommodated within the Vehicle Replacement Programme which had been reduced from £196,000 to £135,000 in this financial year due to the light vehicle review causing the capital budget for cars and vans to slip into 2014/2015.

The Finance Officer's representative also highlighted that the Prudential Indicators for the financial year 2013/2014 had been approved by the Authority in February 2013 and these were regularly reviewed to ensure that the Authority stayed within its Authorised Limit for External Debt; that treasury management decisions were taken in accordance with professional good practice; and that the capital expenditure control framework operated locally was consistent with, and supportive of, local strategic planning, local asset management planning and proper option appraisal. It was confirmed that there were no areas of concern or any issues which required any review of the indicators as originally approved.

Accordingly, the Authority: -

37. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2013/2014 be approved.

Appointment of Governance Committee Independent Member

The Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report asking the Authority to consider the appointment of an Independent Member to the Authority's Governance Committee.

The Governance Committee of the Tyne and Wear Fire Authority includes three independent members and a recruitment process had recently been undertaken to appoint a suitably experienced person to replace the independent member who had recently retired from the Committee.

Three candidates were interviewed for the position on 15 November 2013 and the Authority were recommended to approve the appointment of Mr Martin Knowles to the post of independent member for a period of three years with the option for the Authority to renew annually thereafter.

The Authority were informed that Mr Knowles had worked at CEO level, had held Director of Finance roles and was currently serving on the Audit Committees of New College Durham and Two Castles Housing Association. Mr Knowles had a vast range of experience which would be relevant to the Governance Committee.

Councillor Haley asked about the nature of the interview process and the Deputy Clerk to the Authority advised that the Chair of the Governance Committee interviewed candidates alongside the Deputy Leader of Sunderland City Council, as

the recruitment process had been for an Independent Member to sit on both the Fire Authority and Sunderland Council's Audit and Governance Committees.

Having considered the recommendation, it was: -

38. RESOLVED that the appointment of Mr Martin Knowles to the post of Independent Member of the Governance Committee for a period of three years with the option for the Authority to renew annually thereafter, be approved

Appointment of Finance Officer

The Clerk to the Authority submitted a report advising Members of the departure of Malcolm Page, the Finance Officer to the Authority and making recommendations for the appointment of an Interim Finance Officer.

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority reported that the current Finance Officer, Malcolm Page, was due to leave Sunderland City Council on 29 November 2013. To ensure that appropriate interim arrangements were in place, the City Council would be recommended to agree that the Deputy Section 151 Officer, Mrs Sonia Tognarelli, Head of Financial Resources, takes on the Section 151 responsibilities for the Council on an interim basis until a permanent appointment is made.

It was also necessary to make interim arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Authority and it was confirmed that Mrs Tognarelli had the required qualifications and experience to carry out this role.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

39. RESOLVED that Mrs Sonia Tognarelli be designated the Authority's Finance Officer and the responsible officer under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, with effect from 30 November 2013, on an interim basis until a permanent appointment is made.

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

40. 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 an individual, which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual, 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, Paragraph 1, 2, 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.