

Minutes of the Meeting of the TYNE
AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY held in the Fire and Rescue
Headquarters, Barmston Mere, Sunderland
on MONDAY, 15TH DECEMBER, 2008 at
11.00 a.m.

Present:

Councillor T. Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Boyes, Charlton, Clark, M. Forbes, N. Forbes, Heron, Jordan,
McMillan, Renton, Scaplehorn and Woodwark.

Part I

The Chairman welcomed Joy Brindle – Assistant Chief Fire Officer to her first meeting of the Authority.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bolland, Haley and McIntyre.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

The Deputy Clerk advised the meeting that Dave Smith had recently been appointed as Chief Executive to Sunderland City Council subject to ratification by full Council in January. Due to this he was Clerk to the Authority (Designate) at the present time.

Minutes

72. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 3rd November, 2008 – Part I (circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 27th October 2008 – Part I (Circulated) be received and noted.

Provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2009/2010 and Indicative Settlement for 2010/2011

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) advising the Authority of the Provisional Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 2009/2010 and the Indicative Settlement for 2010/2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Finance Officer advised Councillors that a 1.26% change was expected following the Minister's first three year Local Government Finance Settlement covering the period 2008/2009 to 2010/2011. The cost of Floor–Grant reduction amounting to £530,000. The Authority noted that this would result in a significant challenge.

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

73. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Report on the Outcome of the Value for Money Review of Cleaning Services (Non-PFI Locations)

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) to inform Members of the outcomes and recommendations arising from the Value for Money Review of Cleaning Services (non-PFI locations).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Authority that the current cleaning service was provided by the Authority's Direct Service Organisation (DSO), which was established in August 1995. The DSO cost for a full cleaning service was £211,168 per annum (as at time of review).

The review concluded that the current DSO arrangement for cleaning delivered a high quality service which met customer needs. Further work on specifying service standards would enhance this.

Soft market testing had not identified a strong outline business case for selecting a private sector contractor; all three participants in the exercise produced projected costs higher than the current contract.

It was:-

74. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the findings of the review be noted;
- (ii) the retention of the current DSO contract with the implementation of an improvement plan be approved; and
- (iii) a further review of cleaning contracts linked to the delivery of new builds and the new PFI be agreed within the next two years.

Fireworks and Bonfire Incidents from the 1st – 6th November, 2008

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) to provide Members with information relating to the level of operational activity and associated incidents that occurred across the November 2008 bonfire period.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The ACFO Dave Simpson explained that the statistics presented in the report showed that the work of the Authority together with its partner agencies, across the bonfire period, had been successful in limiting the number of incidents. However, the period in question still remained one of the most resource intensive of the year and the rise in attacks on firefighters was also extremely disappointing and should be condemned. The figures for attacks on firefighters showed an approximate 50% increase on the previous year. Attacks on firefighters peaking on 5th November with 9 attacks being reported.

Powers now existed to prosecute those responsible for attacks on firefighters under the Emergency Workers Obstruction Act 2006. This gave protection to emergency workers, making it a specific offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers whilst they were carrying out their duties. TWFRS were liaising closely with Northumbria Police to identify and prosecute those who had attacked or obstructed firefighters in the process of carrying out their duties.

During their discussion Members of the Authority commented that they were extremely disappointed to hear of the number of attacks on firefighters and commented that this unacceptable behaviour would not be tolerated by the Authority.

Members agreed that a letter should be sent to all staff who were attacked during this period sending best wishes on behalf of the Authority and expressing appreciation for the work these firefighters carry out.

In addition to this, Members proposed that a wider campaign be launched which expressed the views that the Authority would not tolerate any unacceptable behaviour towards firefighters, and that any attacks on its members of staff would lead to prosecution.

At this juncture Councillor Clark suggested that anyone caught attacking a Member of staff should be made to spend time with firefighters performing day to day duties to encourage them to reflect on their actions and the unacceptable behaviour toward emergency service staff.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that this was a valuable point and advised that the Authority do currently run the 'Phoenix project' which is partnership working between the Fire Service and Young Offenders.

Upon detailed discussion, it was:-

75. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) all partners involved in the 'Fireworks and bonfires ruin lives in a flash' campaign be written to, to thank them for their assistance and seek support for similar initiatives in the future;
- (ii) a letter be sent to all staff injured during the bonfire period wishing them well and expressing appreciation for the work they carry out for the Fire Service;
- (iii) a wider campaign be launched to express the views of the Authority that any attack on a firefighters would not be tolerated; and
- (iv) further reports be received as appropriate.

Remembrance Day 2008 – Menin Gate – Ypres

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report outlining, for the information of Members, the Authority's involvement and representation at this solemn and highly regarded act of remembrance.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

As in previous years, the Chairman of the Authority had the honour and privilege to represent the Authority and members of the United Kingdom Fire and Rescue Service at the Ceremonies this year. The main parade was held at 1100 hours on Tuesday, 11th November 2008 and on parade were well over 400 people including representatives from the United Kingdom Police Forces, Army, Navy and Air Force as well as representatives from the Belgian and other European Armed Forces. This year was particularly poignant as it was the 90th anniversary of the end of World War 1 which was recognised by the increased number of participants.

It was:-

76. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) appreciation be conveyed to the members of the Ceremonial Squad and Pipe Band for their professionalism in representing the Authority at the event.

Chartered Institute of Public Relations Awards 2008

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) to inform Members that, for a second year, the Authority's work to improve communications with staff had been officially recognised by experts in the corporate communications industry.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that for this year's awards the Authority's Staff Communications Strategy was entered in the internal communications category. At the North East CIPR Pride Awards ceremony, which was held on Friday, 14th November, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was awarded the Silver Award in the Internal Communications Category for the work undertaken to improve communications with staff.

The award being external recognition by a professional body for all of the hard work and effort that staff and Members had put into improving the internal communication processes and the Chief Fire Officer believed that everyone involved could be proud of this achievement.

It was:-

77. RESOLVED that the Silver Award from CIPR for the Staff Communications Strategy be noted.

FiReControl Project : Update

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report (circulated) informing Members of the re-scheduling of the FiReControl project and providing information with regard to the status of the FiReControl Gateway 2 activities, which the project team was required to report against to Communities and Local Government (CLG).

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer advised that within the Gateway 2 report there were thirteen areas of reportable work falling to this Fire and Rescue Service. In terms of progress for Gateway 2 the following could be reported:-

- Areas of work completed – 2 – primarily involving the production of management and communication plans;
- Areas of work in progress – 4 – focusing on out of scope activities, risk and transition planning;
- Areas of work awaiting information – 7 – primarily about cut-over activities and implementing new ways of working.

The remaining seven areas of work had not been completed due to delays in the Infrastructure Services Contractor and/or CLG releasing the necessary information to progress these elements of work.

The extension in the timescale for completion of the work announced by the Minister was to be broadly welcomed as it formally acknowledged the outstanding workload which still required to be completed prior to going live. However, even with this extension, the project remained a challenging one which would require significant effort on the part of all concerned to ensure that the new go live date was achieved.

The Gateway 2 sign off staff had been reached and, with the exception of the areas identified above, this Fire and Rescue Service had undertaken the work necessary to enable the appropriate documents to be signed by the Chief Fire Officer.

It was:-

78. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the change in project timescales be noted; and
- (ii) further reports be received as each Checkpoint and Gateway date is reached.

Revised Stretch Targets – National Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report (circulated) setting out, for the information of Members, the stretch targets that had developed in accordance with Fire Service Circular 55/2008 Equality and Diversity Recruitment Targets.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The ACFO John Hindmarch highlighted his report to Members and explained the decisions made in relation to stretch targets at the Human Resources Committee on 27th October, 2008.

However, in formulating the specific stretch targets for this Authority, consideration had been given to a range of dependencies, including workforce composition, staff turnover, previous positive action programmes and budgetary requirements.

In setting the stretch target for minority ethnic groups, consideration had been given to the revised demographic data, which identified that this group represented 7.2% of the local working age population, as defined in FSC 05/08. Additionally, consideration had been given to the CLG stretch target band of “2% to 5% above the local working population”.

With due consideration to the above, it was proposed that the Authority endorse the revised target of 9.2% for the recruitment of new entrants from minority ethnic staff into the Service, which when considered across all employee groups, was a challenging but achievable target, and to confirm 18% for new women entrants.

It was further proposed that the targets remained under review with the consideration that where good progress was being made, the targets were revised accordingly.

It was:-

79. RESOLVED that the adoption of the stretch targets as detailed in the report be endorsed.

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.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

80. RESOLVED that the Correspondence List be received for information.

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

81. 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 information relating to any individual or likely to reveal the identity of an individual, the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) relating to any consultation or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matters (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 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.