



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 19 JANUARY 2015 at  
10.30am.

**Present:**

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Burdis, N Forbes, Haley, Harrison, Lauchlan, Mortimer, Ord, Perry, Price, Renton and Stockdale.

**Part I**

**Chairman's Announcements**

Members were informed that there would be an FBU rally on 7 February 2015 and full details would be circulated by email.

The Chairman advised that Councillors Burdis, N Forbes, Mole, Haley, Wright, Price, Harrison and Stockdale had expressed an interest in attending the LGA Annual Fire Conference on 10 and 11 March 2015. Any other interested Members were asked to contact the Chief Fire Officer.

The Tyne and Wear Fire Service had been rated at 37 in the 100 top employers for Workplace Equality by Stonewall for 2015. Although it was disappointing that this position was not as high as in 2014, the system of assessment had changed and the Authority could now start to work towards improving its rating for 2016.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors M Forbes, Mole and Stephenson.

## **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **Minutes**

49. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the minutes of the Authority, Part I, held on 15 December 2014, be confirmed and signed as a correct record; and
- (ii) the minutes of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 10 November 2014 be noted for information.

## **Revenue Budget 2014/2015 – Third Review**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report advising Members of issues relating to the 2014/2015 Revenue Budget position at the third quarterly review stage.

The Finance Officer advised that the Revenue Budget Second Review had outlined a potential underspend of £1.3m, however ongoing monitoring had shown that the likely underspend at the final outturn would be £1.495m. This meant that the planned use of £1.133m of reserves to support the budget would not be required due to the savings and efficiencies achieved during the year and that a potential budget surplus was also in prospect of around £0.360m

The main reason for the variation in the Revenue Budget was the implementation of the Response Model and lower than anticipated employee related costs being incurred due to the continuing impact of the changes from the IRMP actions and the fact that more firefighters were retiring than anticipated because of the impact of the current strike action, this changing the leavers profile The Authority had also received additional income through the National Road Safety Initiative's support of Safetyworks!, which had helped to reduce the expected overall shortfall in income for the year.

The main variances to the budget position were set out as follows: -

- Employee costs - £1.414m net underspend
- Premises - £0.011m underspend
- Supplies and Services - £0.023m net overspend
- Contingencies - £0.152m net underspend
- Income – shortfall estimated as £0.059m

Having noted the positive position at the year end, it was

50. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2014/2015 as set out in the report and summarised at Appendix A be noted.

## **Capital Programme 2014/2015 – Third 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 Second Capital Programme Review on 17 November 2014.

The Finance Officer reported that the Capital Programme was showing a net reduction of £911,938 as result of projects slipping into 2015/2016. Contracts had been awarded for the new development at Marley Park and Rainton Bridge but due to the tender processes being delayed, there would be slippage of £882,938 from 2014/2015 into the following year.

The boiler replacement programme had achieved an underspend of £54,221 and the value of the Vehicle Replacement Programme had been reduced by £29,000 as the vehicle could not be delivered in year and would slip into 2015/2016 instead.

The Authority was informed that internal monitoring procedures had been established to track performance against various prudential indicators agreed by the Authority. The Authority was operating within its Authorised Borrowing Limit and there were no areas for concern or any issues which required review of the indicators as originally approved.

Having considered the report, it was

51. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2014/2015 as set out at Appendix A be approved.

## **Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2015/2016**

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report providing Members with information on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2015/2016 announced on 18 December 2014.

The Finance Officer advised that the outcome of the settlement was more or less as expected and the main details were set out in Appendix 1a to the report. The Revenue Spending power allocations continued to show that Government funding was being distributed unfairly and that the analysis at Appendix 1b showed that the more deprived areas of the country had once again seen the highest level of overall funding cuts.

Revenue Spending Power, which was the Government's measure of total income available for Fire Authorities to meet their service cost commitments, had been reduced nationally on average by 1.85%. The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority would see a higher reduction of 4.72%, equating to £2.487m in cash terms and which also presumed take up of the Freeze Grant. The Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) allocation which made up a large part of the Revenue Spending Power measure had been reduced by 8.8% (£2.498m) in 2015/2016 which was in line with the national position. However for those most reliant on Government

funding, the cut in this funding element in cash terms was much higher than those of other more affluent authorities where the government grant was a much lower proportion of their total income. For example, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Authority's SFA had been reduced by 8.44% but their Revenue Spending Power had only decreased by 2.13% as a result in comparison to the 4.72% reduction faced by the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

The Finance Officer advised that the Council Tax Freeze Grant had been confirmed in the Settlement for 2015/2016 and that capping of a precept increase of below 2% had been announced. Members of the Authority would be asked to decide whether to take up the freeze grant or to consider an increase in the precept, given that an increase in line with the 2% cap would generate approximately £392,000 of additional income, £149,000 more than the 1% freeze grant available for 2015/2016.

Final information was required from local authorities on their council tax and business rates to allow final calculations to be made and £1.4m would be contributed from balances in accordance with the Authority's strategy at this stage in the budget process. This position could change as the budget was still being developed

Referring to the reduction of 4.72% in Revenue Spending Power, Councillor Stockdale asked if this could be put in context in terms of the overall reduction since 2010. The Finance Officer stated that generally the Government's public sector funding reductions had been reduced by about 40% of their target and that it was anticipated that further Government funding reductions would be the region of 60% over the term of the next parliament. It was also pointed out that the Authority had in fact made significantly higher budget cuts to those indicated by the funding reductions as it also had to accommodate spending pressures and inflation in addition to the funding reductions achieved. Full details of the overall reduction in Revenue Spending Power since 2010 however would be provided to the next Authority meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer commented on the disparity which existed between authorities in terms of the reduction in Revenue Spending Power and highlighted that the Authority had voiced this concern through DCLG and Members of Parliament for a number of years. The SFA had minimal impact on some authorities but hugely affected authorities such as Tyne and Wear, which was more reliant on Government funding.

Councillor Haley noted that, in reference to the comparison of revenue spending power reductions in Appendix 1b, there were only 30 authorities listed. Dennis Napier advised that the Revenue Spending Power for the fire service element of shire counties with fire could not be separated from the figures for the county council as a whole and would provide a written response setting out all those Fire Authorities not included in the Appendix.

In relation to issues of fairness, Councillor Harrison felt the Authority needed to emphasise what the cuts had meant for the service over recent years. The IRMP had enabled the Authority to work through reductions in the budget but this was now impacting on front line services. The Authority needed to continue to press the

Government about what they intended to do to address inequalities and to communicate the risk that this was posing to people in Tyne and Wear.

The Chairman stated that the Authority had lobbied everywhere possible on the issue of fairness but no one had an answer for this. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that a meeting was taking place with the North East's MPs on 16 February 2015 to continue that lobbying process.

Following due consideration of the report, it was: -

52. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the implications of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2015/2016 be noted;
- (ii) the comments made on the Authority's behalf to the Government's consultation on the Provisional Grant Settlement be noted;
- (iii) it be noted that the Precept position for 2015/2016 was yet to be agreed; and
- (iv) it be noted that the final Revenue Budget for 2015/2016 would be presented to the Authority at its meeting in February together with an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### **Schedule of Precept Instalments 2015/2016**

The Finance Officer submitted a report outlining the schedule of precept instalments for 2015/2016.

Notifications would be received from each of the Billing Authorities, upon which the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority would precept, that they have determined schedules of instalments for the payments of precepts. Billing Authorities require that payments should be made in twelve equal monthly instalments, commencing in April, payable on the last working day of each month, in line with legal requirements.

Having considered the report, the Authority: -

53. RESOLVED that, under paragraph 4(4) of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) Regulation 1992, the schedule of precept instalments proposed be approved.

### **Risk Based Attendance Policy for Automatic Fire Alarm Calls in Non Residential Premises**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report proposing the adoption of a revised, risk based attendance policy to calls for assistance from Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) in non-residential premises.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Lowther stated that the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service supported businesses and properties in having effective automated systems but it was recognised that the majority of the AFA calls attended by the Service were false alarms. Attendance at these false alarms prevented appliances being immediately available for life risk calls, crews carrying out prevention activities in the community and undertaking risk critical firefighter training. Additionally, this was also a waste of time for the businesses involved.

In the period 2009/2010 to 2013/2014 there were 13,504 AFA calls from non-residential premises and of these 31,214 (97.9%) were false alarms. This represented 16% of all incidents attended by the Service. Of the 249 calls which were actually fires, only 35 resulted in the use of a hose reel or greater and 18 were between the hours of 0800 and 1800. This equated to four incidents a year.

The Service had worked hard to reduce the number of false alarms and following a number of benchmarking visits and the sharing of learning with the Metropolitan family group, a proposed policy had been developed.

It was proposed that the Service would attend AFA calls to non-residential premises between the hours of 0800 and 1800 only when a back up call was received confirming that a fire or a physical sign of fire existed. A number of exemptions had been built into the policy and hospitals, education premises, COMAH sites, specific high risk premises and premises protected by approved/accredited systems would still receive the full pre-determined attendance to AFA only calls.

ACFO Lowther highlighted that the benefits of the proposed policy would be the increase in appliance availability and the reduction of road risk to the public and firefighters. It would also enable more time to be spent on risk critical training, prevention and Fire Safety duties as well as gathering risk critical operational information and reducing the environmental impact of the Service.

Members were informed that there was no legal requirement to respond to calls from automatic alarms and the Fire Risk Assessment at a premises should include the process to be followed when the AFA system was activated.

An implementation plan for the proposed risk based attendance policy had been developed and it was intended that this would go live on 1 June 2015.

Councillor Haley asked if all businesses would be contacted about the change in the policy, whether they were affected or not and ACFO Lowther confirmed that all businesses who were potentially impacted by the policy would receive communication, including those on the exemption list.

Councillor Harrison asked about the cost benefits of the proposed policy, as the cost of the implementation process would be £15,000, and there had to be a value associated with this.

ACFO Lowther said that the physical cash value would be realised through a reduction in wear and tear on appliances and fuel. A cash assessment of this could be carried out if required. Councillor Harrison commented that there may be a

business opportunity around training and maintenance to demonstrate the value which the Service was getting out of the policy.

Councillor Bell referred to problems which had been experienced a few years ago with regard to false alarms in hospitals and the work that had been planned to reduce these.

ACFO Lowther stated that there had been a ten year period of increased call outs to hospitals but this had now reduced significantly. The increase had coincided with large scale regeneration and building work in hospitals but it was felt that the peak in call outs had been reached and the Service was receiving fewer and fewer calls. The Chief Fire Officer added that the number of call outs to hospitals would never be zero but the Service would always work with staff to address issues. He also advised that Control would get on touch with the hospital, whilst an appliance was on its way, to get more information about the nature of the alarm.

The list of exemptions to the policy would be kept under review, but due to their vast size, hospitals would always fall into that category. It was also highlighted that the vulnerability of people in hospitals had to be taken into account.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

54. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the introduction of the Risk Based Attendance Policy be approved;
- (ii) the implementation plan with a go live date of June 2015 be approved;  
and
- (iii) further reports be received as appropriate.

### **Correspondence List**

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a list of correspondence that had been received since the last meeting of the Authority, and was not subject to a separate report.

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

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

56. 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.