

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 20 JANUARY 2014 at
10.00am.

Present:

Councillor T Wright in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Burdis, M Forbes, N Forbes, Haley, Harrison, Mole, Mortimer, Ord, Padgett, Price, Renton and Stephenson.

Part I

The Authority observed a minute's silence in memory of former member Councillor Bob Watters.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors McAtominey and Stockdale.

Announcements

The Chairman informed Authority Members that Councillor McAtominey was ill in hospital and undertook to send best wishes for his recovery on behalf of the Authority.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had been named as eighth in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Human Resources Committee and Fire Officers whose work had led to this fantastic achievement.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

52. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Authority, Part I, held on 16 December 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record;

Revenue Budget 2013/2014 – Third 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 third quarterly stage.

The Finance Officer reported that it was estimated that there would be an estimated underspend of £842,000 at the end of the year. This compared with a predicted underspend of £876,000 at the time of the Revenue Budget second review. Any savings generated would be required to fund one off spending pressures and additional costs associated with implementing budget proposals as part of a prudent and robust approach to budget setting.

The majority of the underspend was related to a projected net underspend on the employees budget of £787,000. The Authority had already achieved the annual turnover built into the budget and continued to make savings as part of the Authority's policy on vacancy management in line with recent staffing reviews.

There was a projected underspend on the premises element of the budget of £78,000 largely due to savings made on the annual lease at Rainton Bridge following the purchase of the site. Underspends of £42,000 and £78,000 were projected in relation to transport and supplies and services respectively.

Members had been informed at the second review that income would be less than anticipated when the budget was set. It was now projected that there would be less income from community safety activities due to reduced take up of the courses. Having considered the report, the Authority: -

53. RESOLVED that the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2013/2014 as set out in the report and at Appendix A, and the updated Statement of Balances be noted.

Capital Programme 2013/2014 – 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 that were presented to the Authority as a consequence of the Second Capital Programme Review on 21 November 2013.

The Finance Officer advised that the Capital Programme was showing a net reduction of £214,039 from £4,286,778 to £4,072,739 due to slippage in spending to date. There were various valid reasons for this slippage including the relocation of the Control rooms at West Denton which had led to a balance of £145,840 slipping into the next financial year while the options for the site were considered by the Senior Management Team.

A further £16,033 relating to the GIS ICT project would slip into 2014/2015 and following delays to the Miquet project due to staff shortages, £26,166 would also slip into next year's capital programme. There was a possibility that some of the work on the LED lighting project would slip into 2014/2015 due to supplier delays and the Authority would continue to be updated on this in future monitoring reports.

Minor variations in the vehicle replacement programme had led to its value being reduced by £27,500 from £135,000 to £107,500 in 2013/14, and a review of the of light vehicle replacement programme was to be carried out in 2014/15 to re-assess requirements.

All Capital prudential indicators were regularly monitored and were within their expected tolerances.

54. RESOLVED that the revised Capital Programme for 2013/2014 as set out at Appendix A to report be approved.

Provisional Grant Settlement 2014/2015 and Draft Revenue Budget

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Officer submitted a joint report which updated Members on the Draft Revenue Budget taking into account the implications of the Provisional Grant settlement for 2014/2015 and setting out comments made on the Authority's behalf by the Chief Fire Officer and Finance Officer in response to the Government's consultation on the Provisional Grant Settlement for 2014/2015.

The Finance Officer reported that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2014/2015 and indicative Settlement for 2015/2016 had been announced on 18 December 2013. The impact of reductions in grant funding had been assessed as marginally worse than those forecast in the Budget Planning Framework 2014/2015, reported in October 2013.

With regard to revenue spending power, which takes into account all available funding sources, the reductions of 3.8% for the Tyne and Wear Fire Authority in 2014/2015 and a further 4.5% in 2015/2016 were disproportionately greater than most other fire authorities and were also significantly higher the average reductions

for England. Revenue spending power included an Authority's, Settlement Funding Allocation (SFA), which made up a large part of the Revenue Spending Power, and this showed that this element of funding (which took into account needs and resources) was being cut more deeply than the overall funding settlement implied.

The Authority's SFA had been cut by £2.577m (7.5%) in cash terms in 2014/2015 and by a further £2.676m (8.5%) in 2015/2016. The figures included a new grant to compensate for the Government capping business rates at 2% but once this and spending pressures assessed at approximately £1.193m were added, then the estimated budget gap for the next two years would amount to £6.152m, rising to a projected total of £8.8m at the end of 2016/2017, which had led the Authority to further review its IRMP actions which unavoidably included frontline service reviews..

The Finance Officer informed Members that the financing of the Authority's Capital Programme would be considered at the February meeting. Depending on the outcome of discussions on the IRMP, the capital and revenue budgets would be revisited.

The Authority was reliant on business rate income from all of its district councils and would not know this income position until February, once all councils had determined their estimated business rate income for 2014/2015. Any variations to the projected income could have a significant effect on the Authority's budget.

Members were directed to Appendix 2 of the report which outlined the Authority's draft response to the Government's consultation on the settlement, setting out concerns about the unfairness of the settlement and the disproportionate impacts being felt particularly by the Metropolitan Fire Authorities who were considered some of the most deprived areas of the country.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that Members had observed the disappointingly disproportionate treatment which the Authority had received in relation to its revenue spending power in recent years and which was continuing in the next two year settlement. A great deal of time and effort had been spent in lobbying the Department for Communities and Local Government and Ministers on this issue but the overall impact had been the same as during the first two years of Parliament. The main problem for the Authority was related to the fact that it received 60% of its funding from Government and the rest from council tax, which meant the flat rate reduction in grant was considerably more than in those more affluent areas of the country least reliant on government grant. The Chairman stated that, with the consent of Members, lobbying would continue.

Councillor Haley made reference to the comparative table at Appendix 1B and asked if this meant that shire counties were seeing an increase in funding in 2015/2016 and also sought clarification on the difference in the predicted budget position from a few months ago.

The Finance Officer stated that as a result of the redistribution of the grant, shire counties would see an increase in spending power of 0.9% in 2015/2016. She confirmed that the reduction had increased in comparison to the figures from the spending review and money that had previously been allocated on a needs basis

taking into account resource equalisation, which was not being protected in the new system, meant resources were being redistributed in a disproportionate way.

Councillor Price registered his disgust at the continued reduction in funding for fire authorities across the country and Councillor N Forbes expressed his concern that spending formulae were being changed so that authorities could not raise adequate amounts through council tax. Tyne and Wear had always had a greater number of properties in bands A and B so could not generate as much income as some authorities, the formula through resource equalisation had previously taken this into account but this was no longer the case.

Councillor N Forbes went on to highlight that in the case of business rate appeals, it was now the Authority which had to bear half of the costs of current and backdated appeals rather than the Government having to fully fund them which had been the case before the new system was introduced. There was also a greater financial risk to authorities in respect of relying on money coming in through council tax, especially from those on reduced benefits. The table within the report summarising the overall resource position showed the funding gap rising to almost £9m and presented the Authority with a crisis. Councillor N Forbes suggested that the simple answer would be for the Government to recognise the inequalities in their funding approach but all lobbying had fallen on deaf ears.

Councillor M Forbes commented that she was happy to support lobbying, that the funding allocation did seem to be disproportionate with regard to metropolitan authorities and that the business rates issue was a valid one. She highlighted that in the past, the Authority had made huge savings and the workforce had responded magnificently. Whatever the views of individual Authority members, it was up to the Authority as a whole to deal with the challenges ahead.

Councillor Stephenson noted that, in reality, the Authority was faced with a formula where the needs basis had been removed and shire authorities were receiving more funding when their needs were not as great. It appeared that Tyne and Wear were being penalised for doing well in making savings in previous years and the Government needed to recognise the needs in this area.

Councillor Harrison added that as an area of high risk and high deprivation, Tyne and Wear needed investment but was facing criminal reductions in funding. He commented that if some regions could have a special minister, then Tyne and Wear deserved the same and that these reductions were being imposed by a Government that did not understand the reality of the position in the area.

Following detailed consideration of the report, the Authority: -

55. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report, including the updated Draft Revenue Budget position for 2014/2015 taking into account the implications of the provisional local government finance settlement for 2014/2015 and the indicative 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 for 2014/2015 be noted; and
- (iii) the final Revenue Budget and Precept for 2014/2015 be presented to the Authority at its meeting in February, together with an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Schedule of Precept Instalments 2014/2015

The Finance Officer submitted a report outlining the schedule of precept instalments for 2014/2015.

Notifications would be received from each of the Billing Authorities, upon which the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority would precept, that they had 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.

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

IRMP Review of the Operational Response Model

The Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Officer and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report presenting the findings of public, partner and staff consultation on the options set out for changes to the Authority's operational response. Member direction was sought on the options which should be adopted.

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority reported that the following representations had been submitted to the meeting: -

- Petition from local residents objecting to the closure of Sunderland Central Fire Station;
- Correspondence from the Sunderland City Centre Traders' Association expressing concern about the proposed closure of Sunderland Central Fire Station and urging the Fire Authority to reconsider option 3;
- Statements from FBU branches to say they cannot support the IRMP and have no confidence in the proposals or the consultation process;
- Petition from the public, handed to the FBU, stating 'The Fire Service is ours – no cuts. We must save the Fire Service. Cuts an attack on our lives'; and
- FBU Briefing note which was circulated to all Fire Authority members.

The Deputy Clerk informed Members that these documents had been received outside of the consultation period but the Authority could agree to have regard to them as part of their consideration. Councillor Mole suggested that details of the

number of signatories to the petitions should be collated so that the information could form part of the lobbying process.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process had been used for a number of years and was the vehicle used to make significant changes to the shape of the service, ensuring that services were planned in a way that balances efficiency and community risk.

The level of cuts which were being experienced had already been well documented and in February 2011, the Authority had made a commitment to managing these reductions in a way which would minimise the impact on frontline services as far as possible. However, in October 2012, five new IRMP actions were added, including Response and Diversionary reviews as this was now deemed unavoidable due to the extent of the reduction in funding. These reviews were carried out during 2013 and in October 2013, the Authority considered the findings of the review of Operational Response and gave approval to the consultation on three proposed options for changes to operational response. The options had been arrived at following a detailed, evidence based review including assessing the impact of different options on community and firefighter risk. The options which were consulted on were as follows: -

Option 1

- Crew appliances at stations with one fire appliance with four staff
- Remove six main fire appliances across the service (a reduction from 30 to 24)
- Introduce two Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) for lower risk incidents 24/7
- Introduce two additional TRVs to be Dual Staffed at night and as required
- Remove two fire appliances for up to 12 hours at night
- Reduce Aerial Ladder Platforms (ALPs) from three to two
- Invest in new firefighting technologies to enhance performance and firefighter safety

Option 2

- Implement Option1 plus:
- Close two stations (Gosforth and Wallsend) and replace with one more centrally placed, based on risk and incident intelligence (Benton Area)

Option 3

- Implement Options 1 and 2 plus:
- Close Sunderland Central station

It was made clear than any reduction in frontline appliances would increase the average time of attendance, however the strategy employed within the design of the proposals was to protect as far as possible the average time to life and significant property risk incidents and allow a planned increase in the average attendance time to lower risk incidents.

The consultation process was launched on 22 October 2013 and ran for ten weeks to 1 January 2014. The process was based around a consultation document and was promoted in a number of ways which were outlined within the report. There had been ten public meetings, 13 staff briefings and 42 stakeholders and partners were contacted with seven providing formal responses.

The consultation document was published on the website and intranet and 281 surveys were returned with the responses outlined within the report. The Chief Fire Officer presented the main themes from the responses to the consultation in detail. These were fully set out within section 5 of the report and separated into internal and external responses, however it was highlighted that some staff had responded via the external website.

The report also detailed the questions and comments raised at the series of public and staff meetings which were held in each council area within Tyne and Wear during the consultation period and these reflected a large amount of what had been found in the analysis of consultation responses.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted to Members that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had provided a detailed response to the proposals and this was attached as an appendix to the report. The FBU stated that it could not agree with the proposals set out in the IRMP Review of Operational Response and had formally objected to them.

Section 7 of the report detailed the responses which had been received from stakeholders including Gateshead and Newcastle Councils, the Safe Newcastle Partnership and local MPs. These were set out in full in an appendix to the report.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that he had fully expected that the concerns expressed during the consultation period would be raised. The IRMP process had sought to develop options which would have the least impact on the service the public had come to expect and workload modelling had been carried out with the objective of reducing costs whilst having the least impact on the management of risk. Over the years, the Fire Service had introduced a number of changes which had initially caused concern but through cautious implementation, response times had been maintained so that they were now the fastest in the country.

The Authority remained committed to community safety and the work that had helped Tyne and Wear record a total of zero accidental fire deaths in 2012, would continue to be a priority.

With regard to modelling risk and questions about use of data, the Chief Fire Officer informed Members that ten year incident (not just fire) data was used and that using retrospective data was standard within emergency services. The review used the Government's Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) modelling tool as part of assessing the outcome of different options.

The Authority had noted on a number of occasions that incidents and community risk were not the same thing and that community risk was inherent in the community through its demographic and economic profile. The review took into account wider social trends and projections in Tyne and Wear and this approach had been used for

many years within the service to ensure that appliances and stations were located where they could best respond to the risks within the area.

Response was a balance between the speed of response and weight of attack. The response differed depending on the proximity of the local fire station and since 2004, the average response time nationally has increased by more than two minutes. Tyne and Wear remained the fastest responding service in England.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the modelling for fatalities and stated that the FSEC toolkit was more up to date than the ENTEC reports which had been highlighted by the FBU. The current projected fatalities through FSEC were higher than the actual number within Tyne and Wear, and within England, despite response times slowing by more than two minutes since 2004 fatalities from dwelling fires had reduced by 40% during the same period.

Weight of attack or how many resources were deployed to an incident within a given time, had been raised as a concern, particularly at one pump stations. It was explained that standby cover with a crew of four was a feature of how the service worked day to day and in the three years 2010 to 2013 with 2,806 hours of standby, there were no reports of near misses or concerns as a result of available staff or resources. In 2007/2008, the average number of incidents attended by each appliance was 832. This had dropped to 507 by 2012/2013 and reducing the number of appliances by six would mean that appliances had to attend, on average, 642 incidents, still significantly less than in 2007/2008.

The recommendations were not ignorant of the fact that there was a moral pressure on staff to act on arrival at an incident but it was not believed that any of the options would change this beyond the existing situation.

There had been concern about reducing the cover at some stations at night and the Chief Fire Officer directed Members to data which showed that incidents occurring between 2100 and 0900 hours made up 34.8% of the total number attended.

The training requirements for all firefighters would not change, but the timing of training would be adjusted to take into account changes in number of firefighters and appliances. This would have a knock on affect on pre-arranged standbys which would need to be controlled and balanced against the level of response to the public.

National resilience and specialisms had been examined and the contribution made by the service would not be adversely affected. The Authority would need to know what the future looked like in order to identify the best place for future specialisms to be located.

A number of specific local areas had been highlighted through the consultation, including Newcastle Airport, the Metro Centre and the A1. These had been looked at carefully and it was felt that none of these would be affected by the three options.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service believed that Targeted Response Vehicles would be of interest to the service and would provide a more flexible range of

response options. They would be crewed by two trained firefighters and could attend some level 3 and 4 risk incidents.

The review of response did not include any changes to current shift patterns and this would be covered in the extant IRMP review of staffing. The review of staffing would look to build on the existing flexibility introduced with the adoption of 'Swap a Shift' and this approach could deliver any of the three options which were consulted upon without a change in the duty system.

There was an understandable amount of concern expressed about the closure of fire stations and the Chief Fire Officer advised that the options had been developed through an analysis of risk data, workload modelling and FSEC. The changes would increase the number of stations with two fire appliances and improve the location of stations according to risk and response. Remodelling the strategic locations for stations now would provide the Authority with a medium to long term strategic delivery plan which was more suitable for managing risk in future years.

A large number of the consultation responses had referred to the Authority's use of reserves and the large proportion being held in allocated reserves. The Finance Officer stated that the Statement of Accounts 2012/2013 had shown reserves of £35.3m taking into account useable capital receipts, a general fund balance of £3.8m and a number of earmarked revenue reserves.

The Finance Officer explained that the useable capital receipts could only be used for capital schemes and debt repayments and that the Authority was required to hold a general fund balance to meet unexpected events which should be between 5% and 10% of the net budget requirement. External auditors reviewed the Authority's balances annually and the earmarked reserves of £28.1m at the end of March 2013 which were fully committed to deal with specific financial liabilities and risks.

Reserves would be reviewed as part of the process, as would the capital and revenue budget and it was projected that £2m would be required in 2014/2015 and £6m over the following three years to take into account the risks associated with IRMP.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that it had always been intended to use some of the allocated reserves and that the £2m would be re-prioritised to support the implementation of organisational changes. The implementation of changes would take place over three years, this was not related to money but the management of risk. £16.8m would be required from allocated reserves to meet the projected gap if no IRMP actions were carried out and this would mean the estimated budget gap of £8.8m would still need to be addressed.

To meet the gap through increases in council tax, then increases of 12.9%, 14.3% and 13.5% would be required in 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 respectively. The Government guidelines for increasing council tax without the need to hold a local referendum was low, up to only 2% and it would cost £1.4m to hold a referendum.

In response to concerns about the consultation process, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the process was designed based on the Government principles which were updated in 2013 and Appendix B of the report showed how each of these had been met. The consultation had initially been agreed for an eight week period and this had been extended to ten weeks with a closing date of 1 January 2014.

The Chief Fire Officer referred Members to section 9 of the report which set out the conclusion and confirmed a number of matters raised within the consultation regarding alternative appliances and dynamic call handling by Control, flexibility of day and night time cover, crewing one pump stations with four staff, reducing the number of pumping appliances and/or fire stations, reducing ALPs from three to two and investing in new firefighting technologies. The recommendations for the Authority were set out in section 13 of the report.

Councillor Haley stated that the options presented were the most difficult he had had to consider during his time as an Authority member. He thanked the FBU and individual firefighters for the engagement he had with them during the consultation and noted that they were all passionate about the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service. He asked what the Authority would look like in three years time if reserves were run down and asked if the lack of a rise in council tax since 2010 had affected this. He also asked for further clarity on what the change in staffing at single pump stations would mean.

The Finance Officer stated that if reserves were to be used to support the position, then £8.8m would have to be found in three years time. At that point the level of reserves to support the change would be depleted and the Authority would have to consider other options including increasing the precept.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that if reserves were reallocated, then the 'cliff edge' to be faced on 2017/2018 would be an important factor. Reserves could only be spent once, this would lead to a deficit in 2017/2018 and it was expected that cuts would continue after this date. It was intended to propose options with the aim of avoiding compulsory redundancies.

The Chief Fire Officer said that areas which may have single appliances would be examined based upon risk and if it was found to be of benefit to have five staff at certain stations, this would be brought back to the Authority for consideration. It was also possible that after looking at the stations, it may be considered unnecessary to recommend any change.

Councillor Haley was reassured by this statement and requested that Members receive feedback on the changes in risk status throughout the implementation stage.

Councillor N Forbes thanked the staff and the FBU for their professionalism and for giving Members food for thought. He queried the reference to TRVs responding to car fires and whether this was against national guidance. Councillor N Forbes also asked if a three tier shift system had been ruled out and if it was still the case that the Aerial Ladder Platforms spent a lot of time off the road. He also asked if any of the stations which were proposed for closure had been PFI projects.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that during the initial IRMP review, it had been necessary to look at what TRVs could be used for. Staff were brought in for training and as there had been discussion about TRVs having the use of a single BA wearer and this was something which had been worked through in terms of a car fire. The service had been looking at this pre-emptively prior to guidance which had been released during the previous week, which the FBU was not supporting. At the present time a TRV would not attend a car fire and would only attend incidents where it was believed to be safe for two firefighters to attend.

With regard to the shift system, the Chief Fire Officer stated that the process had reinforced the existing shift system and its flexibility and believed that it could provide any of the three proposals. If this did not prove to be the case, then management would begin discussions with the FBU.

Aerial ladder platforms were complex and had a significant maintenance period and this had been examined closely. A few years ago there had been a major defect on one of the platforms and it had been out of action for a year. During this time the service had managed successfully with only two ALPs and Tyne and Wear had one of the best rates of appliance availability in the country.

No PFI stations had been earmarked for closure. The reason for this being that the same approach adopted for the IRMP had been used when PFI stations were located.

Councillor Bell commented that the Authority found itself in unprecedented times and she thanked the members of staff and FBU for contacting Members both collectively and individually. Councillor Bell was reassured that the Authority was not carrying an excessive reserve but said that she would like monitoring to be carried out to confirm that staff were still able to provide the service after the implementation of options from the IRMP.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that flexibility would be a continuing issue and that staffing changes would be in stages and would be evaluated all the way through the process and risks would continue to be monitored. In respect of reduced staffing, the model had been designed to ensure that it could be staffed appropriately. He highlighted that moving away from the disappointing side of this subject, management felt that the dedication and flexibility of the service would remain.

Councillor Renton thanked the Chief Fire Officer and his staff for the report. He queried whether the proposals in option 2 could be managed within the timeframe as this would rely on identifying a site which would enable the savings to be made during the three year period. Councillor Renton also asked why the proposal was not option 2 and/or option 3.

The Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that option 2 would be challenging to deliver within the timeframe but it was doable within the period and that was one of the reasons why the proposal had been put forward. Ultimately there were two distinct strategies in operation within the options; if all stations were retained then response time was maintained, if options 2 or 3 were selected then response time would

increase but the second appliance would arrive more quickly. Options 2 and 3 were more effective if considered in order.

Councillor M Forbes referred to suggestions within the consultation responses to revisit back office usage and that there was an impression that there was still waste in the organisation. The Sir Ken Knight report had pushed towards mergers and she queried if the combination of support services with Northumberland Fire Authority could be extended further. Councillor M Forbes also raised the possibility of renegotiating PFI agreements.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the most recent back office review had been implemented in January 2013 and had seen a 30% reduction in staff. A management review had also taken place in October 2012 and this would happen again as a reduction in staff and/or stations would lead to a reduction in management and subsequent changes would take place in management and back office over the next three years. The proposals outlined within the report would achieve savings of £5.4m but there were still more savings to be made elsewhere.

With regard to combining services, Members were informed that senior officers did meet with local fire and rescue services to discuss working together. The Authority also worked with local councils and services were provided by Sunderland City Council and other local authorities. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Authority was looking at its PFI contracts alongside English Partnerships to assess if any savings could be made.

Councillor M Forbes stated that when looking at the individual options, the case had been clearly made for option 1 and assurances given that the actions would be carefully monitored and could be amended or reversed if necessary. Options 2 and 3 could not be reversed and Members had to consider these in a different way.

Councillor M Forbes said that she could not support the closure of Sunderland Central fire station as set out in option 3. She believed that it was the wrong time to do this as the area was scheduled for considerable development over the next ten years. All major buildings were in that area of the city and it was surrounded by highly deprived and high density wards. Councillor M Forbes stated that she could not support anything which would impact on rapid response for this area and she would prefer that the fire station was retained in spite of the delay to a second responder.

Councillor M Forbes went on to say that the same arguments in terms of irreversibility applied to option 2 as this would leave North Tyneside exposed. Building a new station, which she hoped would not be under PFI, would take up capital receipts from other closures and unless there was a specific, identifiable benefit she would not feel able to support it.

As option 1 would take three years to implement, Councillor M Forbes asked if it would be feasible to revisit closure proposals within this time frame. She expressed further concerns about the displacement of staff from Sunderland Central fire station.

Councillor Mortimer commented that she was worried about Wallsend and Gosforth fire stations. She stated that there was a lot of building work planned on the quayside at North Tyneside and that she would like to know more about the what, when, why and wherefore of the plans. Councillor Mortimer was also concerned about Sunderland city centre needing to have a nearby resource.

Councillor N Forbes highlighted that the consultation responses showed the strength of feeling and the sense of injustice which people had about the cuts which had been imposed on the Authority. Sadly, Members had to do the best they could with what they had been given.

As the number of incidents had reduced over recent years, the Authority had to consider whether it needed the same amount of coverage and Councillor N Forbes stated that he would like to see response times targeted for fires which were endangering life and property. Councillor N Forbes noted that clear advice had been given that putting off a decision would create a financial crisis for the Authority in three years which could then lead to compulsory redundancies and he stated his preference for a planned approach to making savings. He reminded Members that even taking into account all proposals on the table, there was still a financial gap to be closed and the situation was grave and precarious.

Councillor N Forbes went on to emphasise the need for the Authority to consider how it would respond to fewer resources and make the most of what it had. Members had to consider all options available and could not take a parochial approach to the issue.

Councillor Price thanked the members of the public who had responded to the consultation and to the organisations who had helped to raise its profile. There were a lot of worried people on the street and the Authority needed to be clear about why it had to make these sorts of decisions. Councillor Price referred to Councillor M Forbes' comments on Sunderland Central fire station but said that she had not mentioned cuts already made by the local authority and the closure of the tax office, the effects of which would only be exacerbated by the closure of the fire station.

Following a full and comprehensive presentation and detailed and thorough consideration of the report, the Authority turned to the recommendations and duly: -

57. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the feedback from consultation on the options for the proposed changes to the Authority's operational response model be noted;
- (ii) the responses to the key concerns raised be noted;
- (iii) having been put to the vote, with nine members voting in favour, two against and three abstentions, it was agreed that option 3 should be adopted as follows;
 - Crew appliances at stations with one fire appliance with four staff

- Remove six main fire appliances across the service (a reduction from 30 to 24)
 - Introduce two Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) for lower risk incidents 24/7
 - Introduce two additional TRVs to be Dual Staffed at night and as required
 - Remove two fire appliances for up to 12 hours at night
 - Reduce Aerial Ladder Platforms (ALPs) from three to two
 - Invest in new firefighting technologies to enhance performance and firefighter safety
 - Close two stations (Gosforth and Wallsend) and replace with one more centrally placed, based on risk and incident intelligence (Benton Area)
 - Close Sunderland Central station
- (iv) the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to begin a process of planning implementation for option 3 over a three year period; and
- (v) further reports be received as required.

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

58. 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.

