

Dorset Fire Authority

Minutes of meeting held at Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 25 September 2013.

Present:

Mrs Rebecca Knox (Chairman)

Mrs Ann Stribley (Vice-Chairman)

Mr Les Burden, Mr Mike Byatt, Mr Ronald Coatsworth, Mrs Beverley Dunlop, Mr Philip Eades, Mr Barry Goldbart, Mrs Susan Jefferies, Mr Trevor Jones, Miss Sue Levell, Mr Christopher Rochester and Mr John Wilson.

Officers present:

Mr Darran Gunter (Chief Fire Officer), Mr Derek James (Assistant Chief Officer), Mr Richard Bates (Treasurer), Mr Jonathan Mair (Clerk), and Mrs Helen Whitby (Committee Officer).

Officers attending for items as appropriate:

Mr Colin Chapman (Assistant Chief Officer Service Support), Mr Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services), Ms Jenny Long (Director of People Services), Mrs Linzi Holt (Head of Prevention Policy) and Mrs Jane Staffiere (Head of Employee Services).

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Authority to be held on **5 December 2013**.)

Apologies for Absence

49. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Spencer Flower and Mr Colin Jamieson.

Code of Conduct

50. No declarations were made by any members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

51. The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2013 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising

Minute 30.1 – DFRS Analysis of “Facing the Future” Report

52.1 The Chief Fire Officer reported that responses to Sir Ken Knight’s report and the Select Committee had been submitted. At the invitation of the Select Committee he had provided evidence on 9 September 2013. The Government’s response to Sir Ken Knight’s report was expected following the forthcoming Party Conference. The Committee noted that the Ministerial visit scheduled for 21 August 2013 was to be rearranged and that local meetings continued with regard to increased joint working.

Minute 36.4 – Quarterly Performance Reports – Final Quarter

52.2 The Clerk confirmed that he had written to District and Borough Councils about fire safety enforcement orders and was awaiting their responses.

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

53.1 The Authority received the minutes of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 July 2013.

53.2 The Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee reported that, at their meeting on Monday, 23 September 2013, the Committee had recommended that the Corporate Statement of Assurance be endorsed and had approved the Annual Accounts for 2012/13.

Noted

Appointments, Complaints and Disputes Committee

54. The Authority received the minutes of the Appointments, Complaints and Disputes Committee meeting held on 16 August 2013.

Noted

Quarterly Performance Reports – First Quarter

(a) First Quarter Financial Performance Report

55.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an analysis of the financial position as at 31 July 2013 based upon profiled projections and actual data to date.

55.2 The Authority noted that at the end of the first quarter there was a projected underspend of £286k principally on the retained duty system salary budget because of the current level of vacancies. Consideration was being given as to how to deliver a sustainable saving for future years whilst at the same time considering a potential performance reward as an aid to recruitment and retention.

55.3 Members expressed concern at the current level of vacancies and the increasing age of staff. They also emphasised the importance of volunteer staff to the Authority and suggested that this be brought to the attention of the public. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Retained Fire Service was less attractive to those seeking employment and levels of pay and a range of financial options were developed to help with retention and recruitment. A blended approach was being pursued and this would also address the increasing age profile of staff. A report would be provided at a future meeting of the Authority.

55.4 Attention was drawn to the payment of £114k to one firefighter who had retired through ill health this year, the repayments from Icelandic Bank investments which had been more than expected, the progress of the sale of the North Quay site, the £140k spare funding which was available for debt financing, the revenue budget surplus of £1.5M, the revised capital programme for 2013/14, the purchase of replacement fire appliances and a financial system. Further reports would be provided later in the year and members noted that slippage with regard to purchases might lead to carry forwards being requested.

55.5 One member asked whether treasury management processes were robust enough, given that the number of investment opportunities available was reducing. The Treasurer confirmed that the number of banks to deposit money in had reduced significantly over the last 5/6 years but the treasury management policy had been amended to reflect this. It was hoped that these steps would help prevent any recurrence.

Resolved

56.1 That the report be noted.

56.3 That the transfer of £100k to the Pension Reserve (as outlined in paragraph 2.2.3 of the Chief Fire Officer's report) be approved.

(b) Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report

57.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer on the quarterly monitoring of areas where performance issues had been identified, or good practice been exhibited, for the first quarter from 1 April to 30 June 2013.

57.2 The Assistant Chief Officer Service Support presented the report in detail. Attention was drawn to the cost of malicious calls and work to prosecute and recover costs from malicious callers and that a seminar on capital bids and the new bidding process would be held on 13 November 2013.

57.3 With regard to response times, it was noted that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee received six monthly reports on figures and statistics which detailed where the targets were missed and by how much. Every incident was investigated and reported back to the Committee and was also considered at meetings of the Community Risk Reduction Group (CRRG). The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that a response time of 10 minutes had been adopted as survival rates deteriorated after this time. The target could be reviewed if this was felt appropriate. It was agreed that the six monthly reports provided for Audit and Scrutiny Committee would be provided for members of the CRRG in future.

57.4 Particular attention was drawn to the key corporate indicators listed at 6.4 in the report, both those that were on track to be met at the year end and for those where improvements were required over the remaining three quarters of 2013/14 in order to meet the targets.

57.5 With regard to why People Priority 3 did not include targets, the Chief Fire Officer explained that these related to targets imposed on the Authority some time ago and which had since been removed. The Chairman and the Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee were asked to review the document to ensure that targets were meaningful. The Chief Fire Officer outlined a forthcoming meeting that was scheduled to discuss a review of the current performance information that was considered by the Authority and the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved

58.1 That the report be noted.

58.2 That the following issues be referred to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee to address:-

- Sickness improvement plan
- Accidental dwelling fires
- Fires in non-domestic properties
- Dorset Emergency Response Standards

Change Programme(a) Special Services Charges and Cost Recovery

59.1 The Authority received a report by the Chief Fire Officer on the review of the current charging regime and benchmarking of rates with other fire and rescue services to ensure that the service to the community and recovery of costs were fair, proportionate, and both legally and morally appropriate. The report proposed an efficient process which was transparent to all concerned and was cognisant of the necessary legal requirements. The appendix included a summary of proposed charges and a breakdown of costs involved.

59.2 The report explained that the Fire Service could only impose charges on a cost recovery basis and could not seek to make a profit. It set out the methodology used to calculate charges, types of incidents regularly attended and, having taken appropriate advice, the recommendations set out within it.

59.3 Members discussed proposed charging for the third attendance at a property to release people trapped in lifts when there was no threat to life. Some members supported the three strike approach as it would act as a deterrent and it provided the ability to remind property managers on each attendance of the charging policy. Others thought that this would not be an efficient use of resources, that it could cause public anxiety and the onus should be on those who maintained lifts to attend such incidents. Members were informed that the Authority did not have a statutory duty to attend such call outs but they recognised that the Authority's reputation was at risk should something go wrong when they did not attend.

59.4 With regard to what happened if someone could not afford the charge, the Clerk explained that the usual approach to debt would be followed in order to recover the sum involved. In some instances the debt might be written off.

59.5 Members were divided about whether charging should be adopted and it was agreed that further information be provided, including comparison to other Authorities, so that a decision could be reached at their meeting on either on 5 December 2013 or 12 February 2014.

59.6 Attention was drawn to the increasing number of requests for the Authority to assist with vehicles in water. One member thought that this should be addressed by Central Government funding and that every opportunity should be taken to exert pressure to achieve this. Again, members were reminded that the Authority did not have a statutory duty to respond to such instances but they recognised the potential damage to the Authority's reputation and the need for greater public awareness.

59.7 Having considered the principles of charging for these two types of actions, members were informed that deferring a decision on these two issues would not prevent implementation in April 2014 if they were to be introduced.

59.8 Having discussed the report at length, the Committee agreed to replace current charges with those set out in Appendix A and adoption of the charging mechanism that included an annual review. They also approved the processes within the report with regard to cost recovery except the recommendations at paragraphs 7.9 and 8.3. Further investigation of these issues was requested, including benchmarking with other Authorities, so that these could be re-considered at a future meeting.

Resolved

60.1 That the current charges be replaced with those recommended within Appendix A and the charging mechanism that includes an annual review to ensure accurate cost recovery and appropriate practices be adopted.

60.2 That further investigation of the recommendations set out in paragraphs 7.9 and 8.3 of the Chief Fire Officer's report be undertaken as set out in minute 59.9 above, for consideration at a future Authority meeting.

(b) **Blue Lights Estates Management**

61.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which highlighted the current focus of the Dorset Blue Lights Estate Liaison Group and outlined draft principles and key areas of focus to explore further opportunities for co-location and co-operation with the aim of maximising financial efficiency and increase operational interoperability and resilience.

61.2 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer Service Support summarised the report and drew attention to a possible bid for Dorset to be considered and funded as a pathfinder for co-location and integration of aspect of blue lights services. The Dorset Blue Lights Estate Liaison Group had now agreed principles of joint working and the report identified seven proposals for further development. The Chief Fire Officer added that more detailed work was being undertaken and proposals would be provided for consideration by the Authority in due course.

61.3 Members supported the approach being taken as a means of reducing public spending. The Chief Fire Officer added closer joint working locally to fund capital changes would provide year on year benefits.

Noted

Community Engagement Framework

62.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer on the Community Engagement Framework which set out how the Service would work with partners, business, voluntary and community organisations and individuals within local communities to ensure that services are developed and delivered which were relevant to them. The Framework set out how engagement would be progressed.

62.2 The Framework would be based on a four level approach – informing, consulting, joint decision-making and empowering. If the Framework was approved, more information would be provided at the seminar day on 28 October 2013.

62.3 The Chairman explained she and the Chief Fire Officer would be visiting District and Borough Councils shortly to introduce the Framework and it would be released to other Fire Authorities and Town and Parish Councils. She asked members to report any responses or local groups they were aware of to the Head of Prevention Policy. It would also be circulated to Bournemouth and Poole Unitary Authorities. The need to bring the Framework to the attention of parish councils was emphasised.

Resolved

63. That the framework document be noted as the Service basis for engaging with the community.

Amendments to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 1992 and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006

64.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which explained that, as a result of recent amendments to legislation the Authority was required to agree and communicate a policy/statement on two Firefighters' Pension Scheme discretions.

64.2 The Head of Employee Services highlighted that although a Government consultation on amendments to the Firefighters' Pension Fund had been undertaken in August 2011, the resulting amendment order had only come into force on 1 July 2013. She explained the two discretions being proposed and costs to the Authority. Members were provided with illustrations of the effect of the amendment on payments to staff who retired under the age of 55 with less than 30 years' pensionable service. Members noted that the proposed changes could be used to incentivise staff to take retirement when staff restructures were being undertaken.

64.3 Members discussed the proposals and the potential costs these would incur for the Authority. They were particularly concerned not to take any action which might have implications for future joint working and members suggested that the decision be deferred to

allow discussions to take place with Wiltshire Fire Authority as to how the discretions could be applied.

64.4 The Clerk explained that any cases arising before the Authority made a decision about the discretions, would be referred to them for decision. He also drew attention to the DCLG's guidance which stated that pension packages costing over £100k should be reported to the Fire Authority for decision.

Resolved

65. That a decision on the two proposed discretions be deferred to allow discussions with Wiltshire Fire Authority to take place as set out in minute 64.3 above.

Review of Standing Orders, Financial and Contractual Regulations

66.1 The Authority considered a joint report by the Clerk and Treasurer on proposed revisions to the Authority's Standing Orders, Financial and Contractual Regulations.

66.2 The Clerk briefly explained the need for the proposed revisions. To a large extent the revisions were incidental and flowed from changes introduced by the Localism Act. He drew attention to the fact that the appeals process and terms of reference for the Appeals Committee were to be reviewed; the suggested delegation to the Chief Fire Officer to write off outstanding debts and deficiencies in stores or equipment up to a value of £5,000; and proposed changes to the Contract Procedure Rules.

Resolved

67. That the draft revised standing orders, financial regulations and contract procedure rules and other changes to the governance documents in the member handbook be approved.

Corporate Statement of Assurance

68.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which sought approval of the Corporate Statement of Assurance for publication, as required by the National Framework.

68.2 The Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee confirmed that the Statement of Assurance had been endorsed by the Committee on 23 September 2013.

68.3 With regard to some typographical errors within the Statement, it was explained that this was still in draft form and any comments should be forwarded to the Assistant Chief Officer – Service Support.

Resolved

69. That, following its consideration at the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 23 September 2013, the Statement of Assurance be approved.

Annual Accounts 2012/13

70. The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer which presented the Annual Accounts for 2012/13. The Accounts had been approved by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 23 September 2013.

Noted

Questions

71. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

Exempt Business

Exclusion of the Public

Resolved

72. That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for minute number 73-74 because it was likely that if members of the public were present, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in the paragraph indicated of Part 1 of Schedule 12A and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing that information.

Resourcing and Reform Programme - Change Programme (Paragraph 3)

73.1 The Authority received an exempt report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an update on progress with delivering the change programme as overseen by the Fire Resourcing and Reform Programme Board.

73.2 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report in detail and highlighted the need to reduce the revenue budget by up to £2.5M by 2017/18. He also outlined progress of the five key work streams identified by the Fire Resourcing and Reform Programme Board to deliver the change programme.

73.3 The Committee discussed the work streams and measures that were being explored to provide efficiencies and identify how future savings could be made. They also received an update on joint working with Wiltshire Fire Authority and asked for a more detailed report to be provided at their next meeting.

Resolved

74. That a more detailed report on joint working with Wiltshire Fire Authority be provided for consideration at the Authority's next meeting.

Meeting duration: 9.35am – 12.40pm