

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Chair's Report of the Meeting held on 14 December 2011

Fatal Fires

The Fire Authority has considered a report, providing an overview of the circumstances of the six fire deaths in dwellings and two fire deaths in vehicles, which occurred between April and December 2011 in Shropshire.

The dwelling fires were caused either by electrical items or cooking. This is consistent with the Service's education and prevention campaigns, which focus on reducing the number of fires involving cooking or electrical apparatus.

Analysis of the circumstances surrounding the deaths indicates that the dwelling deaths might have been prevented, if the individuals had had **working** smoke alarms in their homes. Officers also anticipated, from this analysis and circumstances of previous fire fatalities, that the profile of the next fire victim was likely to be:

- An elderly woman
- Living alone
- In a house with a smoke alarm that is probably not working
- Cause of death is likely to be suffocation from toxic gas
- The person will be dead before the Fire Service is alerted
- The person will be known by other public sector groups, e.g. local healthcare agencies

With the benefit of this insight the Fire Service can tailor its future fire prevention activities and work closely with partner agencies with the aim of preventing further fatalities. In particular, the Chief Fire Officer urged Members to emphasise within their constituent authorities the importance of including home fire safety visits as part of care packages and to encourage more data sharing arrangements, which will allow the most effective targeting of resources for those most at risk from fire.

2012/13 Budget

Having considered the recommendations of its Strategy and Resources Committee, the Fire Authority agreed the following as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision at the Authority's meeting on 13 February 2012:

- To base its revenue expenditure planning and consultation on a budget of £21,088k for 2012/13, with the assumption that the balance on the collection fund attributable to the Fire Authority continues to be a surplus of £30,000

Committee Clerk's Note

Since this decision was made the Strategy and Resources Committee has met again and recommended a budget of £21,412k to the Fire Authority. Furthermore, it has now been advised that the Authority's share of collection fund balances totals £158,771.

- Its outline capital programme, subject to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by the Strategy and Resources Committee
- Its Reserves and Provisions and to review the level of the General Reserve as the current budget position becomes clearer
- To base its planning and consultation on an expectation of a precept increase
- That it is minded not to accept the offer of a one-off council tax freeze grant

Public Value and Cost Reductions

Due to unprecedented central government grant reductions, coupled with continual inflation rises, the Fire Authority is exploring every opportunity to reduce its annual £21 million running costs by up to £4 million by 2015/16. To achieve this, whilst still endeavouring to protect front-line services, the Authority implemented a Public Value process, which used the ideas of staff and members of the public to identify what the Service could stop doing or do differently to reduce its budget. The outcome of the exercise is a four-year Public Value plan, setting out areas of financial savings, amounting to approximately £2.8m.

During 2011 the Service has held 43 Member-led consultation sessions to raise awareness amongst employees of the economic situation and the impact of decreasing grant allocations and precept increases. These sessions have also provided an update on the Public Value measures implemented during 2011 and those scheduled to take place in 2012. In addition, the sessions have reviewed the actions set out within the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2009/10 and have enabled staff to brief Members and senior management on local initiatives to support delivery of the IRMP and the Fire Authority's Service Plan 2011/12.

The consultation exercise has been extremely well attended and received positively by staff. As the Fire Authority embarks upon further cost-saving measures it does so with the support of staff, who will continue to seek innovative solutions to address the budget deficit.

The Chair and Vice-Chair asked that officers convey the Fire Authority's thanks to all staff within the Service for their participation and for being instrumental in taking the Public Value process forward.

Annual Audit Letter

The Fire Authority has received and formally approved the Annual Audit Letter 2010/11 of the Audit Commission. The Letter provided an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements and an unqualified value for money conclusion on the Authority's arrangements to secure value for money.

Fire and Rescue Service National Framework Consultation

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England consultation document places 18 'must do' requirements on all English fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) and sets out three priorities, which are:

- To identify and assess the full range of fire and rescue related risks, which their areas face, make provision for prevention and protection activities and respond to incidents appropriately;
- To work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service; and
- To be accountable to their communities for the service they provide.

The Fire Authority has tasked its officers to prepare a draft response to the consultation document for consideration at the February 2012 meeting of the Authority.

New Dimension Assets Transfer

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has procured a large number and range of vehicles and equipment as part of a national capability to respond to major disruptive events involving chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials, collapsed or unstable structures, and to move large volumes of water. DCLG has allocated the vehicles and equipment to fire and rescue authorities, including Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority, on the basis that they will staff those vehicles and keep them ready for use in the event of an incident, whether within or outside their own area.

Despite concerns relating to the increased financial burden of doing so, the Fire Authority has now entered into an agreement with DCLG for the legal title in those assets to be transferred to the Authority. Failure to enter into such an agreement would have resulted in the assets being allocated elsewhere, in which case they would not have been readily available to the public of Shropshire.

Information and Communications Technology Update

Following the recent move to the Service's new Headquarters, implementation of a new Local Area Network (LAN) has been completed, offering improved working and real-time resilience with remote data storage at Telford Central. The Wide Area Network (WAN), provided by Shropshire Council, is nearing completion, with two remaining fire stations to be linked to the WAN. Once the WAN is completed, the Service will adopt its use as the primary mobilising bearer for the recently deployed command and control system.

Fire Control

The Fire Authority, in partnership with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, has made a formal submission for central Government funding to support the development and implementation of a shared Control Room infrastructure. Although the Government's decision is still awaited, early indications are favourable that both authorities will receive some form of funding in the near future.

Standards Committee

The Fire Authority has re-appointed Mr Tebbutt and Mr Brereton as Independent Members of its Standards Committee for an indefinite period, pending developments relating to the provisions of the Localism Act.

Upon the recommendation of the Standards Committee the Fire Authority has adopted a simplified Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality, which is very similar to that of Shropshire Council. The Protocol includes a requirement that Members declare gifts or hospitality refused.

Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure

Following recommendations from its Human Resources Committee the Fire Authority has agreed a minor amendment to its Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure, which reflects the consolidation of the Appeals Committee into the Human Resources Committee. This amendment remains in line with the requirements of The Pension Act 1995, and subsequent amendments, and is in accordance with the recommendations contained within Fire Service Pensions Scheme Circular 1/2009.

The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2012/13

During 2011/12 the Fire Authority's Remuneration Panel was due to carry out a review to inform the Fire Authority's decisions regarding its 2012/13 Scheme. In view of the worsening economic environment the Fire Authority felt, however, that the Remuneration Panel's review should be postponed and Members allowances remain as they were in the 2011/12 Scheme. Accordingly, the Fire Authority has agreed its 2012/13 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances, in which the allowances payable are the same as those for 2011/12.

Meeting Schedule 2012

The Fire Authority has agreed the schedule of dates for its 2012 meetings and those of its committees. Future meetings of the full Fire Authority will commence at 3.00 pm, rather than 2.00 pm, in an attempt to avoid any clashes with meetings of Shropshire Council.



Stuart West
Chair

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
December 2011

Background Papers

Agenda Papers for the meeting of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority held on 14 December 2011

The agendas and reports (with the exception of exempt or confidential items) for all Fire Authority meetings and those of its Committees appear on the Brigade's website:

www.shropshirefire.gov.uk

To access reports go to the Authority's website. Click on Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority on the right hand side of the screen, then Meetings, then Fire and Rescue Authority, then 14 December 2011 and the various reports and appendices will be listed.

If you have any difficulty with the website, please contact Lynn Ince, Management Support Officer, on 01743 260225.