

## Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Chair's Report of the Meeting held on 11 December 2013

### 1 Proposed Merger of Standards and Human Resources Committee

Having considered recommendations from its Standards and Human Resources Committees, the Fire Authority agreed that the two Committees be merged into one and that the new Committee be known as the Standards and Human Resources Committee. The Fire Authority also agreed terms of reference for the new Committee and that the implementation date for these decisions be 1 April 2014.

### 2 Meeting Schedule 2014

The Fire Authority agreed the dates for its 2014 meetings and those of its committees. A schedule showing the dates of those meetings can be accessed via the following link.

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/fra/membershandbook/section-2-v1.1-february-2014.pdf>

### 3 2014/15 and Later Years Budget Summary

The Fire Authority considered the budgets proposed by its Strategy and Resources Committee, which were put forward for approval as the basis for consultation, leading to a final decision by the Fire Authority in February 2014.

The budget position in December 2013 showed that there was a predicted deficit of approximately £1.5 million by 2019/20. In addition, National Insurance contributions for employers were likely to increase, following the proposed pension reforms in 2016, although it was possible that this additional cost could be covered by a realignment of the pay and prices reserve.

When considering the Government's offer of council tax freeze grant, the Fire Authority noted that accepting the grant would mean that the expected deficit in its budget would be £500,000 larger by 2019/20. It also took into account the fact that, during recent consultations, the public appeared to be prepared to pay an increased precept. As a result, the Fire Authority agreed that the council tax freeze grant should be declined.

The Fire Authority then agreed the basis of its revenue budget planning and consultation and its capital programme, subject to consideration of the prudential guidelines and minimum revenue provision policy by its Strategy and Resources Committee in February 2014.

Having confirmed the current position of reserves and provisions and the level of the General Reserve, the Authority agreed to continue to base its planning

and consultation on a precept increase of 2% in 2014/15, and the years following.

Finally, it requested its Strategy and Resources Committee to prepare a final budget package in February 2014, for decision by the Fire Authority later that same month.

## **4 Meeting with Fire Minister**

In early December the Chair of the Fire Authority (Councillor West), Councillor Carter and the Chief Fire Officer attended a meeting in the Houses of Parliament with all of the Shropshire Conservative MPs, Fire Minister Brandon Lewis, Neil O Connor, the Head of Fire and Emergency Planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and a number of civil servants.

During the meeting the Chief Fire Officer outlined the Fire Authority's funding position going forward, and the likely consequences of implementing proposals to reduce the budget, together with three proposals, which would alleviate the funding pressures on the Authority. The MPs were all supportive of the Fire Authority's approach. The Minister responded that, although he was sympathetic to the Fire Authority's position as a rural fire service, he thought that meeting its proposals would be difficult.

The Minister responded to each of the three key proposals as follows:

### **Review of the funding formula**

The DCLG had no plans to review the formula. He understood the inequality in funding between fire services but had no plans to address it via a review of the formula at present.

### **A flat rate increase in precept**

This had been introduced last year as a one off but would not happen again this year, because it was outside government policy.

### **Sparsity**

When asked if he could look at removing the damping mechanism to allow funding to flow from the urban areas to the rural areas, he agreed to do so. What this meant was unclear.

The Minister gave no indication of any planned changes to the funding mechanism or to any other policy that would give the Authority some optimism, apart from a recognition of the need to look again at sparsity. The meeting was useful in that it was an opportunity to state the Fire Authority's case and at the same time support the wider rural / urban funding lobby.

## 5 2020 Strategic Planning Process

Phase 2 of the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) 2020 process was continuing with Members of the Fire Authority attending numerous meetings with staff, local councillors and MPs to discuss the various options being explored as part of the Impact Appraisal process. The results from Phase 2 would be considered and recommendations would be brought to the February 2014 meeting of the Fire Authority.

Implementation of Phase 3 of IRMP would run from April to June 2014, with a view to publishing the Fire Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-20 and implementation starting in January 2015 onwards.

## 6 The Scheme for Payment of Members' Allowances 2014/15

The Fire Authority agreed its 2014/15 Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances to take effect from 1 April 2014, including that no increases would be applied to basic, special responsibility, travel or subsistence allowances.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair wished all Members and officers a Happy Christmas and New Year and thanked them for their support during 2013.



Stuart West  
Chair  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
December 2013

### Background Papers

Agenda Papers for the meeting of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority held on 11 December 2013

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 Service's website:

[www.shropshirefire.gov.uk](http://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 11 December 2013 and the various reports and appendices will be listed.