

## **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Chair's Report of the Meeting held on 17 June 2015**

### **Election of Chair and Appointment of Vice-Chair**

The Fire Authority has re-elected Councillor Stuart West as its Chair and appointed Councillor Eric Carter as its Vice-Chair until June 2016.

### **Vote of Thanks and Welcome**

The Fire Authority has given a vote of thanks for Councillors Austin, Mrs Bould, Miss Reynolds and Thompson, who left the Fire Authority in May. The Chair presented Councillor Austin with a Shropshire fire mark in recognition of his contribution to the Fire Authority during the seventeen years since its inception.

The Fire Authority also welcomed new Members Councillors Reynolds and Turley and welcomed Councillors Mason and Fletcher back to the Authority.

### **Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy**

In April 2005, the Fire Authority adopted an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy (since amended to include references to bribery), which is designed to:

- Encourage prevention;
- Promote detection; and
- Identify a clear pathway for investigation.

The Fire Authority has, on the recommendation of its Audit and Performance Management Committee, agreed amendments to the Strategy, which ensure that it aligns to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) code of practice on managing the risks of fraud and corruption (produced in October 2014).

The Strategy will be brought to the attention of all employees on the Service's weekly newsletter.

### **Fire Industry Association Complaint**

In February 2014 the Fire Industry Association (FIA) submitted a complaint to the European Commission, alleging that the UK Government is in breach of European Union state aid rules. FIA contends that the use of the fire service 'brand' by fire and rescue service trading companies constitutes state aid. FIA included Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's company in the list of companies, which, it alleged, were receiving such state aid.

In a letter sent to the European Commission in February 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government continued to maintain that state aid has not been granted. There is, however, still some debate as to whether any level of state aid, which may have been granted, falls below the de minimis threshold; or whether fire and rescue authorities wish to submit any further information to support the view that there could be no aid because the activities of the trading subsidiaries are purely ancillary to their non-economic activity.

A number of the fire authorities / companies included in the FIA's complaint have agreed jointly to seek, and pay for, counsel's opinion on the matter. Officers of this Authority have not, however, participated, primarily because they are of the view that this Authority has not provided any subsidy to Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd. The company pays for all facilities and services provided to it by the Fire Authority. On the recommendation of its Audit and Performance Management Committee the Fire Authority has endorsed this approach adopted by officers.

## **Committee Composition and Allocation of Seats to Political Groups**

The Fire Authority has agreed the composition of its Committees and the allocations of seats on its committees to political groups.

## **Committee Membership and Constitution**

The Fire Authority has confirmed appointments to its committees and appointed its Chair, Councillor Stuart West, to the Local Government Association Fire Services Commission. It has also reviewed and agreed the constitution of its committees.

## **Pension Board**

The Independent Public Service Pensions Commission, known as the Hutton Review, reported in March 2011 and made a number of recommendations relating to public sector pensions. Included was a recommendation that "every public service pension scheme should have a properly constituted, trained and competent pension board, with member nominees, responsible for meeting good standards of governance, including effective and efficient administration" (Hutton Review recommendation 17). The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 was enacted in April 2013 to give effect to such arrangements from 1 April 2015.

The Fire Authority has agreed the composition and draft terms of reference of its Pension Board and allocated an initial budget to the Board. Two representatives for each side (employer and employee) have agreed to take on the roles and have been advised they are required to attend the national training, which officers understand is currently being scheduled. The Pensions Regulator was advised of the current constitution and membership of the Board by the required deadline.

## Review of Member Role Descriptions

The Fire Authority has reviewed and agreed the following Member Role Descriptions:

- Member
- Chair of the Authority
- Vice-Chair of the Authority
- Leaders of the Main Opposition Groups
- Equality and Diversity Champion
- Independent Person, including Skills and Competencies

## Statement of Accounts 2014/15

The Fire Authority has received a report, setting out the key revenue issues, which have arisen from work on the Statement of Accounts 2014/15, and has approved how the General Fund balance will be used in 2015/16.

## Wide Area Network

As a result of unforeseen events in early 2014, the Fire Authority had to work quickly to establish an alternative Wide Area Network (WAN) to that previously supplied by Shropshire Council. The implementation date for the new network was 5 January 2015. Following the successful completion of that work the Service is considering possible options for the enhanced capacity that this brings.

The Service now has a primary and secondary connection to each of its locations and to partner Fire and Rescue Services, providing the mechanism and resilience to mobilise resources to incidents, to cope in sparse conditions and to minimise network downtime.

The Service has the potential to increase the capacity of the new network easily. This helps with 'future proofing', at least in the medium term, by giving the capability to utilise advances in technology in support of operational response. This could, for example, involve the use of live video footage from incidents, in addition to the existing voice traffic assisting with incident command and resolution.

As part of Service transformation work, officers aim to use the enhanced capacity provided by the new WAN to support a range of internal, technical developments to improve ways of working for staff. As well as incident-related information, there is a live project to deploy video conferencing across all of the Service's locations. This has the potential to improve communication; reduce the need for travel; improve opportunities for remote working; and create new possibilities for the way in which training is delivered.

In terms of benefits beyond the organisation, officers are aware of the ongoing national broadband deployment programme, known as Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), which aims to roll-out superfast broadband to 95% of premises in the UK by 2017. As currently much of rural Shropshire sits outside that 95% of premises, officers have been exploring whether it is possible to use the enhanced capability, generated by having locations and, therefore, network connections across the County, to offer connectivity, where there is no imminent prospect of this occurring.

The Fire and Rescue Service may be able to support the roll-out of superfast broadband across the County of Shropshire, using new technologies, known as Next Generation Access alternatives (e.g. wireless broadband), supported by the WAN. In reality, procurement issues and state aid criteria mean that this is perhaps not appropriate for the Service at this point in time. In light of this the Fire Authority has decided for the time being to await developments and keep a watching brief.

## **Public Value Review Update**

At the outset of 2010 the Fire Authority commissioned a Public Value review of the Service to assess and address the impact of both the recession and the Coalition Government's austerity measures upon the Service. The Member-led review, through a structured process of staff and public engagement, sought the views, opinions and support of staff, to form a collective strategy to meet the projected budget cuts.

The Public Value review identified a range of initiatives, which, if successfully managed and implemented, would result in an incremental and controlled 25% reduction of the Fire Authority's budget over a four-year period (2011 to 2015). These initiatives predominantly took advantage of natural staff turnover to secure savings, whilst maintaining, without significant reduction, frontline services to the community, as detailed within the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Essentially, and in accordance with earlier directions from Members, the proposals allowed for an incremental budget reduction (estimated in 2010 at £2.7m to £2.9m in cash terms), that avoided compulsory redundancies, maintained all fire stations and the ability of Shropshire Fire and Rescue to remain a sustainable entity.

The Fire Authority has received a report, which shows that the Service achieved £2,669,000 worth of reductions to its revenue budget between 2011/12 and 2014/15. This is approximately £84,000 short of the original reduction target, set in 2011.

The reason for this variance relates primarily to the planned reductions in the buildings maintenance budget. Although maintenance activities have been reduced, it has not been possible to keep to a lower, ongoing, annual budget, as buildings were deteriorating. To tackle this problem the Fire Authority introduced a 'Major Works Reserve', to assist in funding expensive one-off maintenance works.

Despite this slight variance, the remaining reductions to the Fire Authority's revenue budget have helped to ensure that the Service continues to have a sound financial base over the coming years. The engaging and consultative way that the changes have been achieved has ensured that the reductions have not impacted on levels of service.

The savings achieved / earmarked through the Public Value review are independent of those additional savings, identified through the more recent IRMP 2020 Strategic Planning Process.

## Corporate Risk Management Annual Report 2014/15

The Fire Authority has received an annual report on corporate risk management work during the last 12 months, produced jointly by officers and the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit.

Councillor Dr Jean Jones is currently the Fire Authority's Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit. She is also Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee and a standing member of the Service's Risk Management Group and Health and Safety Committee, which both meet regularly. The Risk Management Group's primary function is to ensure that the Authority has an effective and efficient risk management process in place.

The Group does this through reviewing the Corporate Risk Register, Departmental Statements of Assurance, Departmental Risk Registers and Internal Audit findings, highlighting, where necessary, issues or areas of concern through to the Service Management Team and/or the appropriate committee. As Champion, Councillor Dr Jones takes an active role in the Risk Management Group, asking challenging questions and bringing a new perspective to that of officers.

### Partnership Working

Partnership working is a key element in the Fire Authority's strategy to meet its vision of "Putting Shropshire's Safety First". It is also a key theme of the Fire Service National Framework. The Fire Authority and the Service are actively involved in a number of partnerships, which are risk assessed for liability and reputation and scrutinised by the Service's Risk Management Group. This Group maintains a partnership register and monitors the outcome and productivity of each of the partnerships.

Over recent years the Service has developed several new partnerships, which primarily support its prevention activities, in particular, providing a means to target some of the most vulnerable people in the community. All partnerships have been risk assessed and measurable objectives set.

The Fire Authority has received a report, giving details of the more significant partnerships, in which the Service is involved.



Stuart West  
Chair  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
June 2015

## Background Papers

Agenda and Papers for the meeting of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority held on 17 June 2015

**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:**

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk>

To access reports go to the Fire Service's website and follow the steps below.

- Click on the 'Managing the Service' icon at the bottom of page
- Click on the 'Fire Authority' icon
- Click on 'Meetings' in the list on the right hand side of the screen
- Click on '17 June 2015' and the various reports and appendices will be listed

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