

Dorset Fire Authority

Minutes of meeting held at Dorset Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 24 September 2014.

Present:

Mrs Rebecca Knox (Chairman)

Mrs Ann Stribley (Vice-Chairman)

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

Officers present:

Mr Darran Gunter (Chief Fire Officer), Mr Richard Bates (Treasurer), Mr Jonathan Mair (Clerk) and Mrs Helen Whitby (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

Officers attending for items as appropriate:

Mr Colin Chapman (Assistant Chief Officer Service Support), Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services), Mrs Stephanie Clifton (Communications and Performance Officer, Dorset County Council), Mr Rob Horton (Community Responder Manager, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust), Mr Simon Legg (Pensions Team Leader, Dorset County Council), Ms Jane Staffiere (Temporary Director of Human Resources) and Mr Steve Waller (Deputy Area Commander - Dorset).

(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 **4 November 2014**)

Apologies for Absence

67. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Spencer Flower and Mr Christopher Rochester.

Code of Conduct

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

Minutes

69. The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising

Minute 53.1 - Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2015 – Consultation

70.1 The Chief Fire Officer updated the Authority on the position with regard to industrial action. Currently there was a national ban on overtime which, combined with the current level of firefighter vacancies, had an impact on crewing. There were refreshed discussions with the Fire Brigade Union and the implementation of changes to Pension legislation had been delayed until October 2014.

70.2 One member commented that the current level of firefighter vacancies meant that the service was running on overtime. As vacancies had been budgeted for he thought more firefighters should be recruited. The Chief Fire Officer shared this concern but did not want to make any decision on recruitment until the Authority's strategic direction was clear. There was the potential to offer redeployment to staff affected by forthcoming changes if this was appropriate.

70.3 With regard to the length of time needed for any recruitment process, the Chief Fire Officer explained that this could take up to 6-8 months because of the necessary physical

and medical checks. The recent apprentice recruitment had shown that the process could be accelerated. This was to be considered later in the meeting.

Minute 59 – Prince's Trust Franchise

70.4 The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that at their last meeting they had agreed to retain staff and seek additional funding. He explained that steps had been taken to secure additional funding with no success until the previous day when he had been contacted by an organisation who were willing to provide some funding for the Franchise. This would mean that 8-10 individuals could be employed early in the New Year and provide space to seek additional funding. The Chairman asked members to use their contacts to identify any potential funding in order to sustain the Franchise in future.

Minute 64.2 – Establishment of Civil Contingencies Unit

70.5 The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service Level Agreement between partners had been developed and was in the process of being finalised and interviews for the Head of the Civic Contingencies Unit were to be held the following day. This was only the second shared service in the Country to be hosted by a Fire Authority. In response to the suggestion that Chief Executives and Leaders be informed of this, the Chief Fire Officer agreed to draft a letter for the Chief Constable to sign and send.

Noted

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

71.1 The Authority received the minutes of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 July 2014.

71.2 With reference to minute 55.1, the Chairman of the Committee explained that a letter had been sent to the Chairman of the Dorset Road Safety Partnership and that the response had been encouraging. The Police were concerned about the increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured on Dorset's roads and were increasing efforts to address this.

71.3 One member asked whether there were identifiable roads where deaths or serious injuries were more likely to occur and what measures were taken in relation to this. The Chairman explained that this was a matter for the Dorset Road Safety Partnership. Further information would be provided within the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report later on the agenda.

Noted

Quarterly Performance Reports

First Quarter Financial Performance Report

72.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an analysis of the financial position as at 31 July 2014 based upon profiled projections and actual data to date. The report also highlighted a potential underspend of £371k on the revenue budget and gave details of the updated total capital programme cost of £1.712m and spending for the current year of £1.486m.

72.2 The Head of Financial Services summarised the report. He drew attention to the potential underspend of £371k due largely to staff vacancies, the overall cost centre balance figure of £885k, the revised capital programme of £1.712m and slippage in the replacement of firefighter helmets due to delayed expenditure. The Authority had not had any additional borrowing requirement.

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72.3 In response to a question about the replacement of firefighter helmets, the Chief Fire Officer explained that the helmets were being evaluated to ensure they met the Service's needs.

72.4 One member asked whether the Authority provided the same level of immediately available fire engines during strike action. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that a similar level of service was provided but to do so incurred additional costs.

72.5 With regard to whether detailed information about strike costs was identified in order to inform future budgets, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that costs were monitored but costs relating to individuals varied considerably. Costs on a gross basis and per day were available.

Noted**Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report**

73.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which identified specific areas in the quarterly monitoring of the Authority's Community Safety Plan 2014-19 where performance issues had been identified or good practice exhibited. The report covered the period 1 April to 30 June 2014.

73.2 The Assistant Chief Officer - Service Support explained performance against the strategic aims of prevention; protection; response; and people. The report's graphs illustrated fire related injuries, accidental dwelling fires, deliberate fires and the number of fires in non-domestic properties with all of these showing a downward trend over a five year period.

73.3 The Authority noted the increases in serious injuries (from 50 to 73) and children seriously injured (from 4 to 8). In view of this and the question raised at minute 71.3 above, the Authority were informed of measures to address these statistics including an initiative called The Honest Truth which aimed to convey road safety messages to young people through their driving instructors and the Road Safety Collision Strategy Action Plan. They noted that the next meeting of the Road Death Overview Panel would review motorcycle deaths and injuries.

73.4 The Assistant Chief Officer highlighted many areas where performance had improved, outlined new initiatives and areas where improved performance was necessary. Particular attention was paid to response times for first and second appliances and members noted that steps were being taken to improve current performance. They also noted that sickness absence rates were increasing and the year-end target was unlikely to be met. Absences were monitored by the Strategic Management Team and the Occupational Health Team and were regularly reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

73.5 In summary, there were a number of key performance indicators which required improvement and these were sent out in paragraph 6.4 of the report.

73.6 With regard to sickness absence levels, the Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee asked that a member of the Occupational Health Team attend the January 2015 meeting when sickness absence was considered.

73.7 There was some discussion about the increase in road related deaths and serious injuries and the need for information to be as up to date as possible. It was suggested that the increases could be as a result of the winter storms but this would not be

evident until the end of 2014. The fact that the success of the Dorset No Excuse Campaign had resulted in less funding for it was noted.

73.8 It was suggested that the Dorset Road Safety Partnership was best placed to review the current road safety trends and funding allocations. The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that the Authority had no statutory duty with regard to road safety but he would use his influence where he could. The Chairman reminded members that the Authority had a representative on the Dorset Road Safety Partnership and that other members sat on Community Safety Partnerships and other bodies and that they could all play a part in highlighting the Authority's concerns.

73.9 With regard to the future, the Chief Fire Officer was unsure whether steps being taken would actually lead to a reduction of the current trends but he advocated the need for a clear strategy and funding allocation.

73.10 One member asked whether as part of the business education of landlords, managing agents and residents any sessions had been held in Weymouth. The Assistant Chief Officer would establish the current position.

73.11 With regard to discussions with the supplier of faulty smoke alarms, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this was on-going about the percentage of alarms found to be faulty after fitting. Although the fire alarms had no cost, the Authority was having to bear the cost of reinstallation when an alarm had to be replaced. One member asked that local members be kept informed of any activity in their divisions.

73.12 The Vice-Chairman stated that although the Authority had no responsibility for Road Traffic Collisions, they had influence over their partners and should use this in order to address the current trend. She also suggested that on roads where there were frequent accidents improved road markings might help reduce occurrences.

73.13 With regard what work was being undertaken with those who regularly raised false alarms, it was explained that this involved Fire Safety Officers visiting the individual to explain the effect of their actions. Individuals were referred to other agencies where this was appropriate.

Resolved

74. That the report be noted.

Co-Responder Scheme

75.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an assessment of the financial liability of adopting the new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) proposed by South West Ambulance Services NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST).

75.2 The Chief Fire Officer stated that the two co-responder schemes in Lyme Regis and Beaminster provided a valued and efficient means of saving lives. A further rollout of the scheme on a location by location basis was proposed but could not be progressed without an updated MoU.

75.3 The Community Responder Manager, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, explained that he managed the co-responder service in the South West. This comprised some 726 schemes, 45 of which involved Fire Authorities. Dorset was leading the way in this development. The scheme increased the survival rates of people suffering cardiac arrests.

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75.4 The Deputy Area Commander – Dorset added that the scheme provided community benefits and that numerous letters of thanks had been received from members of the public. He then explained the four recommendations contained in the report.

75.5 With regard to how Wiltshire and other Fire Authorities were performing, the Chief Fire Officer explained that the Fire Brigade Union had advised its members not to take part in the scheme. However, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Devon Fire Authorities were involved in the scheme to varying degrees. The Community Responder Manager confirmed that all Fire Authorities in the area were engaged in the scheme and he provided more detail of individual Authority's involvement.

75.6 Members spoke in support of the scheme, some expressing the view that the assessment process should be quicker. One member suggested that Maiden Newton Station be considered for the scheme as firefighters there had indicated a willingness to be involved.

75.7 One member expressed surprise that SWAST should need co-responder support in Weymouth and Dorchester. The Chief Fire Officer explained that Dorchester crews on stand down could be used as co-responders and that this would not compromise fire coverage. Co-responders would not replace ambulances but would supplement them. With regard to Weymouth, the Community Responder Manager explained that when a person had a cardiac arrest, every minute counted and co-responders responded more quickly and were able to start treatment prior to the ambulance arriving.

75.8 The Chief Fire Officer agreed to provide an update report on the rollout programme for consideration at the Authority's December 2014 and February 2015 meetings.

Resolved

76.1 That the new MoU be signed, allowing the scheme to be introduced initially on a pilot basis in other areas of Dorset.

76.2 That consideration be given to including Maiden Newton in any further roll out.

76.3 That the scheme be closely monitored to promote early intervention if performance deteriorates or costs escalate.

76.4 That new co-responder schemes at DFRS stations should be assessed by both SWAST and DFRS on a case by case basis. Those schemes should then operate on a pilot basis until the operational activity and cost effectiveness can be quantified.

76.5 That a report that outlines a roll out programme be brought to the Fire Authority.

76.6 That a reserve of £10k be established and reviewed on an annual basis to smooth in year operating costs.

Corporate Statement of Assurance

77.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer on the Corporate Statement of Assurance.

77.2 The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that the Authority was required to provide a Corporate Statement of Assurance under the National Framework. The first Statement had been produced the previous year and, although comments from the DCLG had been sought to ensure it met their requirements, no response had been received. The Authority had therefore adopted a comprehensive approach to this year's Statement. The Statement had been considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 19 September 2014 and they had recommended it for approval.

Resolved

78. That the Statement of Assurance be approved.

Annual Accounts 2013/14

79.1 The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer on the Annual Accounts for 2013/14.

79.2 The Treasurer informed the Authority that the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had approved the accounts on 19 September 2014. The External Auditor had attended that meeting and confirmed that an unqualified audit opinion had been issued.

Noted

Annual Report 2013/14

80.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which presented the Annual Report 2013/14. This provided a clear view of the performance achieved for the year and performance against the Community Safety Plan.

80.2 The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that there was a requirement for the Authority to publish an Annual Report. This showed the Authority's progress and performance achieved during 2013/14.

80.3 In response to a question, it was confirmed that under equality and diversity legislation there was a need for residents to be able to request the Annual Report in different languages.

Resolved

81. That the Annual Report 2013/14 be approved.

Treasury Management – Revision of Counterparty Ratings

82.1 The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer which sought approval to remove the support ratings from the current Treasury Management Policy.

82.2 The Treasurer explained that the support ratings were the means by which the financial strength of counterparties was assessed. As these would no longer be produced by the Credit Rating Agencies, a change to the Treasury Management Policy was recommended.

82.3 The Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee confirmed that the Committee had supported this action.

Resolved

84. That the removal of the support ratings as a means of assessing the financial strength of counterparties be approved.

Apprentices

85.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an update on the selection process and initial timetable for the five operational firefighter apprentices.

85.2 The Chief Fire Officer reported that five operational firefighter apprentices had been appointed and would start the following week, with a programme of activities having been identified for them. He hoped that they would acquire operational skills in a number of weeks and looked forward to them gaining experience with the Service. The Chairman added that other Authorities were envious of Dorset's success in appointing the apprentices.

85.3 Members were delighted with the success of the recruitment process and hoped that more apprentices could be recruited in future years. They also welcomed the links with Kingston Maurward College.

Noted

Strengthening Our Fire and Rescue Service

86.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an update on progress in developing the combination final business case.

86.2 The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority would consider the combination business case at their meeting on 4 November 2014, with Wiltshire Fire Authority considering the business case on 6 November 2014 (*Note – this has now been changed to 11 November 2014*). If the business case was approved, then there would be a tight timescale to get the necessary Combination Order approved with any delays having financial implications for the Authorities. It was confirmed that a joint bid of £5.6m had been submitted to the DCLG in line with recommendations made at the Authority's December 2013 meeting. The result was expected in the next few weeks.

86.3 Attention was drawn to the current public consultation exercise being undertaken on three options for the future working arrangements of the Authority. Options were to be discussed at residents' forum meetings across Dorset and the dates were highlighted. Members would receive the results of the consultation exercise at a briefing on 31 October 2014 so that they could fully consider these before any decision was made by the Authority on 4 November 2014.

86.4 With regard to the potential outcomes of Wiltshire Fire Authority's meeting on 6 November 2014 (*Note – this has now been changed to 11 November 2014*), the Chief Fire Officer reported that the Wiltshire Chairman was confident the combination would proceed and that a recent presentation to Swindon Council had received overwhelming support for the combination. The Chairman shared this view. She hoped the Authority would consider the business case in depth on 4 November 2014 and decide how it should go forward. A meeting with Wiltshire and Dorset MPs had been arranged to fully appraise them of the situation in the hope that they might support the Combination Order when it came before Parliament. Members hoped that the MPs would support the combination.

86.5 With regard to why local members had not been informed of Residents Forums held in their areas, it was explained that residents were selected and invited to attend these meetings so as to ensure a fair cross representation of the population. Therefore there was no need for local members to attend. Parish, Town and District Councils had been contacted by letter and given information as to how they could respond.

Noted

Local Government Pension Scheme Discretions 2014

87.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which set out the compulsory and non-compulsory discretions required under the various Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) regulations. The report sought reaffirmation of previously agreed discretions and policy statements and adoption of new discretions and policy statements.

87.2 The Acting Director of Human Resources presented the report in detail. The LGPS had been amended on 1 April 2014 to include support staff with benefits being based on a career average related earnings basis. She explained discretions and policy statements

previously agreed and proposed new discretions and policy statements. The recommendations reflected a prudent approach.

87.3 In response to the comment that the report was difficult to understand and that a smaller, clearer report would have been helpful, the Chairman stated that it was important for members to be provided with all the information. The Chief Fire Officer added that the discretions would give the Authority the ability to consider a request for retirement on an individual basis in future. It was confirmed that the discretions were replicated for the County Council and the Police Authority.

87.4 It was noted that paragraph 3.3.10 of the report should read:

1.1.1 **NEW Regulation 31 (7A) [L]** - Power of employing authority to grant those employees who have opted out early, a pension. Councillor optant outs and pre-1 April 2008 employee optant outs only to get benefits paid from normal retirement date if employer agrees.

2009 Policy Decision - Not applicable, regulation introduced in 2014.

2014 Policy Decision - The DFA to resolve that those who have opted out early will not normally be granted early pension or waive any actuarial reduction except in cases specifically agreed by the Chief Fire Officer (or nominated representative). Each case will be considered on its own merits with each case objectively justified and with potential discrimination issues taken into consideration.

87.5 The Clerk added that it was not possible to predict each and every circumstance and so the report proposed giving the Chief Fire Officer wide discretion and the ability to act on requests from an individual. Decisions would though be referred to members if there was potential for a significant impact for the Authority.

Resolved

88.1 That the Service's current policy statements be adopted

88.2 That the recommendations against the new Regulations of the 2014 Scheme be adopted.

Questions

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

Meeting duration: 10.00am – 12.20pm