

# Dorset Fire Authority

Minutes of meeting held at Dorset Fire and Rescue Service  
Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 4 December 2015.

## **Present:**

Mrs Rebecca Knox (Chairman)

Mrs Ann Stribley (Vice-Chairman)

Mr Les Burden, Mr Mike Byatt, Mr Malcolm Davies, Mrs Beverley Dunlop, Mr Philip Eades, Mr Spencer Flower, Mrs Susan Jefferies, Mr Trevor Jones and Mr John Wilson.

## Officers present:

Mr Colin Chapman (Assistant 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 Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services) and Mr Mick Stead (Area Manager).

(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 **25 February 2016**.)

## **Apologies for Absence**

86.1 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Mark Anderson, Mr Ronald Coatsworth, Mr Colin Jamieson and Mr Christopher Rochester.

86.2 Apologies were also received from Darran Gunter (Chief Fire Officer) who was attending an Service Award ceremony in connection with the Authority's combination work.

## **Code of Conduct**

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

## **Minutes**

88. The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2015 were confirmed and signed.

## **Matters Arising**

### Minute 84 - Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment

89. The Authority noted that the recent recruitment process had gone well with 500-600 responses to the advertisement. Of these approximately 220 people would be invited for the practical testing to be held in January 2016, resulting in potentially 8 new appointments. Members welcomed this.

## **Audit and Scrutiny Committee**

90.1 The Authority received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 September 2015.

### Minute 48 – Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board – Reducing the Harms from Road Traffic Collisions in Dorset

90.2 The Chairman reported that she was meeting with representatives from the County Council's Highways and the Police regarding this matter and had discuss it with the Policy and Crime Commissioner.

90.3 Attention was drawn to the positive effect on sixth formers of the Safe Drive Stay Alive production and concern expressed about its roll out across Dorset and future

funding for it. It was explained that roll out was more advanced in Wiltshire and would be extended across Dorset, and would form a key part of the Strategy for the Combined Authority.

90.4 As many Dorset secondary schools had not yet seen the Safe Drive Stay Alive production, it was suggested that it be brought to the attention of Dorset Secondary Headteachers, that any lessons learned from its roll out in Wiltshire be identified and that sponsorship opportunities be explored to secure future funding. Members asked that an update be provided for their next meeting.

90.5 No further meetings of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee were scheduled.

#### **Resolved**

91.1 That the minutes be received.

91.2 That the Safe Drive Stay Alive production be brought to the attention of Dorset Secondary Headteachers, that lessons learned from its roll out in Wiltshire be identified and sponsorship opportunities be explored to secure future finance.

91.3 That an update be provided at their next meeting.

#### **Annual Audit Letter 2014/15**

92.1 The Authority considered the External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter for 2014/15.

92.2 Members noted that the External Auditors had issued an unqualified audit opinion and that the audit fee had increased because of work they had undertaken to provide assurance about the combination process. Members agreed that this was money well spent.

#### **Noted**

#### **Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2014/15**

93. The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer which summarised the work of the Internal Audit Service for 2014/15 and provided a positive opinion on the framework of risk management, governance and internal control based on the internal work undertaken during the year.

#### **Noted**

#### **Progress Report of the South West Audit Partnership Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16**

94.1 The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer which summarised the work of the Internal Audit Service for the 2015/16 Audit Plan and provided a schedule summarising the audits completed since the last update.

94.2 It was noted that three audits had been completed and four were expected to be completed by the end of the financial year.

94.3 With regard to the recommendation which suggested that members should be provided with enhanced information to give a clearer context for areas being reported on, a member asked for an indication of what this would include. The Treasurer agreed to pursue this with the Internal Auditor.

#### **Noted**

#### **Combination Progress Update**

95.1 The Authority considered a report by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer which provided an overview of progress towards establishing the new Authority and Service on 1 April 2016.

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95.2 Members noted that the External Auditors' review of the combined authority governance arrangements had concluded that "strong" arrangements were in place; that the six workstreams were progressing well; and that consultation with staff was underway on the proposed new organisational structure.

95.3 The Authority was reminded that the Shadow Authority had authority to set the precept for 2016/17 and that the ANA was expected to be at the Dorset level. A member asked that all District and Borough Councils be notified of the change of authority so that Council Tax bills would reflect this. Members were also reminded that there would be a seminar on the Medium Term Financial Plan following the next meeting of the Shadow Policy and Resources Committee on 14 January 2016.

95.4 One member asked for a list of key milestones and timelines to be produced from December 2015 up to and after the establishment of the Combined Authority on 1 April 2016 so that members could measure progress. It was noted that this information was contained in the Combined Authority update and the calendar of meetings going forward. Both documents would be forward to members following the meeting.

95.5 The Clerk clarified that the Dorset and Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authorities would cease to exist after 31 March 2016 when all resources would transfer to the Combined Authority

**Resolved**

96. That a list of key milestones and timelines be produced from December 2015 to after the establishment of the Combine Authority so that members could measure progress.

**Second Quarter Financial Performance Report**

97.1 The Authority considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an analysis of the financial position as at 31 October 2015 based upon profiled projections and actual data to date.

97.2 The Head of Financial Services presented the report highlighting underspends on pay budgets, pensions, borrowing, capital financing costs and the revenue budget and overspends on Combination costs and central budgets. Attention was also drawn to the replacement of two aerial appliances and the purchase of four new fire appliances which would be progressed but which might slip into the following financial year.

97.3 There was some discussion about the difficulty of recruiting RDS firefighters and the successful roll out of the Co-responder Scheme in Dorset and it was noted that Wiltshire had similar difficulty recruiting RDS staff. It was hoped that further roll out of the co-responder scheme might provide an opportunity to increase recruitment. Members suggested that those who were unsuccessful with their wholetime applications might be asked to consider RDS applications. Even though problems with RDS recruitment were experienced, it was noted that 83.4% of pumps were available, with resources being targeted to provide the best coverage. This information would be reported to the Combined Authority in future and members suggested that the experience of other Fire Services be explored.

97.4 Attention was drawn to the underspend on the whole time budget which meant the Authority was still operating with 22 vacancies and, even when the 8 new recruits were in place, the Authority would still have less staff than included in the business case. It was explained that vacancies did not relate to front line services but were being

carried forward until such time as the Combined Authority was established and staffing levels identified.

97.5 A member also highlighted that the level of Council Tax had been set on the business case and the public might be unhappy at the level of underspend. She requested that for clarity some narrative be included in future reports to explain overspends. Officers confirmed that all variances could be explained.

#### **Resolved**

98.1 That the report be noted.

98.2 That £38k from the projected underspend be used to fund additional pension costs as outlined in section 2.2.2 of the report.

#### **Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report**

99.1 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 for the second quarter from 1 July to 30 September 2015.

99.2 Officers set out the performance against the strategic aims of prevention, protection, response and people. The report's graphs illustrated fire injuries, accidental dwelling fires, deliberate fires and the number of fires in non-domestic properties with the majority of these showing a continuing downward trend over a five year period. Other key areas were the continuing improvement in sickness absence levels; the increased number of home safety checks carried out which meant that the year-end target would be met for the first time; and the extension of the co-responder scheme to the Cranborne and Swanage Firestations.

99.3 The Chairman reported on discussions with Bournemouth Borough Council and Public Health officers on the roll out of the Safe and Well Programme and members noted that a pilot scheme would start in January 2016.

99.4 In response to whether anything could be done to reduce the number of false alarm calls received, it was explained that there was a call checking policy but inevitably this did not identify all false alarm calls. A list of the top twenty offenders was held and, where appropriate, false alarm calls were followed up.

#### **Noted**

#### **Treasury Management Mid-Year Update**

100.1 The Authority considered a report by the Treasurer which provided an update on the current position following consideration of a report on 10 February 2015.

100.2 The Treasurer confirmed that the level of borrowing had reduced since the start of the financial year and that borrowing needs were partly being financed by cash balances. This would provide the Combined Authority with additional flexibility when it came into operation on 1 April 2016. Particular attention was drawn to investments and the possibility of 100% returns on previous Icelandic Deposits.

100.3 In response to a question the Treasurer confirmed that no details of any capital controls were known, but more details were expected in the forthcoming Local Government Financial Settlement.

#### **Noted**

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**Questions**

101. No questions were asked by members understand Standing Order 17.

Meeting duration: 10.00am to 11.45am