



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Full Authority

Tuesday, 12 December 2023, 10:30

Chairman: Mr C B Taylor

Vice-Chairman: Mr R J Phillips

Minutes

Members Present: Mr D Boatright-Greene, Mr D Boulter, Mr B Brookes, Mrs J Carwardine, Mr D Chambers, Mr B Clayton, Mr D Davies, Mrs E Eyre BEM, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mrs E Marshall, Ms N McVey, Ms J Monk, Mr R J Phillips, Ms L Robinson, Mr C B Taylor, Ms D Toynbee, Mr R M Udall, Mr T Wells

0454 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr A Amos, Cllr D Morehead and Cllr R Morris.

0455 Declarations of Interest (if any)

Cllr R Phillips declared that he was Vice Chair of the Firefighters Scheme Advisory Board (England and Wales), Chair of the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board (England and Wales), and a member of the NJC for Fire Service (Grey Book and Green Book).

0456 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman informed Members of the following:

- On 16 November 2023 the Chairman attended the Worcester Medals and Awards Ceremony at the Guildhall where the first new award for 50 years' service was presented.
- On 30 November 2023 the Vice-Chairman attended the Hereford Medal and Awards Ceremony at the Shire Hall.
- At the end of the meeting there would be a short Equality, Diversity and Inclusion briefing for Members.

0457 Public Participation

There was no public participation.

0458 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 18 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

0459 External Audit Findings Report and Letter of Representation 2021/22

On behalf of the External Auditor, the Treasurer presented the Audit Findings Report for consideration and the Letter of Representation 2021/22 for approval.

Members were reminded that the Audit had been very delayed and getting approval now, rather than wait for the January Audit and Standards Committee meeting, would help with the production of the 2022/23 Accounts. Members noted that the Accounts were the same as the ones presented at the January and April meetings except for the actuarial valuation of the LGPS and therefore approved the Letter of Representation.

RESOLVED:

***i) that the Audit Findings Report be considered before approving the Statement of Accounts; and
ii) the Letter of Representation be approved.***

0460 Statement of Accounts 2021/22

The Treasurer presented the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts for approval.

Due to the delay in completion of the 2021/22 audit of Accounts, year end balances could not be rolled forward which then caused delays to the production (and therefore the Audit) of the 2022/23 Accounts. Due to time constraints, the Authority therefore were asked to approve the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts rather than the Audit and Standards Committee, to allow the Auditor to close the 2021/22 audit and commence the 2022/23 audit.

The External Auditor will now be able to issue an Audit Opinion as soon as it is ready.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 be approved.

0461 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection Report and Improvement Plan 2023/2024

The Chief Fire Officer presented the HMICFRS Inspection Report 2023 and the subsequent Improvement Plan.

Members were gratified to note that the Inspectorate were pleased with the performance of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and the improvements made since the last inspection. The improvement was recognised from the previous inspection with all 11 assessment areas graded as 'adequate' or 'good'.

HMICFRS had identified 11 Areas for Improvement (AFIs) in this year's inspection which was half the number of AFIs compared to the previous report. At least four of the AFIs related to national or wider issues and would be reflected in most English Fire and Rescue Services' HMICFRS reports.

Members noted that 7 of the AFIs highlighted were continuations of previous AFIs which the Service was actively working towards through the existing Improvement Plan and would continue to do so as part of the next Improvement Plan, therefore the reporting on the previous 2021 HMICFRS report would now close.

The Strategic Leadership Board (SLB) would be required to recommend the strategic direction for each AFI and designate leads for the AFIs and the actions that will make up the next Improvement Plan. The draft Improvement Plan will be produced for Members' approval at the next Fire Authority meeting in February 2024.

RESOLVED that the Authority notes the outcomes and findings highlighted in the HMICFRS inspection report 2023. In particular that:

- i) Of the 11 assessment areas, the Service has achieved four ratings of 'good' and seven ratings of 'adequate'.***
- ii) There were no areas rated as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.***
- iii) The report identifies 11 Areas for Improvement.***
- iv) Work is ongoing to produce the next HMICFRS Improvement Plan.***
- v) The findings of the previous report from 2021 are considered closed.***

0462 Resource Review

The Chief Fire Officer presented Members with a review on how the Authority can respond to the challenges around On-Call availability, improve the resilience of the Service overall and ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources.

Members were assured that this review did not propose to close any fire stations or remove or reduce the first available fire engine at any location. These proposals would mean that in some locations the first fire engine would have increased crewing, resilience, and faster response times. This review would ensure that resources were used in a more effective way.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked Members for taking the time to have discussions on this and Members agreed that the presentations were very useful and helped with the understanding of the proposal. Members were informed that there would be focus groups for the public and that parish and town councils would be sent details of the proposals. Should a stakeholder group like more information a presentation can be arranged.

[Cllr E Marshall left the meeting at 11.02am].

Members proposed a task and finish group be set up to look at the consultation responses in more detail and it was agreed that this would consist of Group Leaders.

[Cllr E Marshall returned to the meeting at 11.10am].

[Cllr Udall left the meeting at 11.11am].

It was suggested by a Member that there would be value in responses from staff members being categorised; for example On-Call, Wholetime, Officers. The Chief Fire Officer agreed to look into this and assured Members that all participants would be invited to leave their details.

[Cllr R Udall returned to the meeting at 11.13am].

RESOLVED that:

1. The following proposals be supported for public consultation:

- (i) removal of eight On-Call fire engines (from multi-pump fire stations);**
- (ii) increase Wholetime workforce numbers to provide more on duty firefighters;**
- (iii) develop a new blended staffing model at some locations to**

improve availability;

(iv) change the cover model of one other fire engine to widen the area of potential On-Call staff;

(v) provide alternative, more flexible modes of transport for available firefighters to attend incidents, at some locations; and

(vi) focus on additional prevention activity in some areas.

2. Officers be authorised to go out to public consultation on the proposals.

3. A Task and Finish Group to comprise of Group Leaders to be established to review the responses to the consultation and make any recommendations to the Authority.

[Cllrs T Wells and N McVey voted against the proposal and requested that their votes be noted].

0463 Fire Authority and Committee Dates 2024/25

The Head of Legal Services presented the proposed meeting dates for 2023/24 for approval.

The Chairman of the Audit and Standards Committee queried the meeting on 30 July as it was during the school holidays. It was agreed to take the discussion outside of the meeting. Members also noted that the Fire Authority and Policy and Resources Committee meetings scheduled for June 2025 may need to be moved due to the impact of County Council elections.

Members noted that Committee Services would send electronic meeting calendar invites in due course to assist with diary planning.

RESOLVED that the meeting dates for 2024/25 be agreed.

[Note - the dates as now amended are appended to these minutes].

0464 Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee

The Chairman of the Committee presented the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023 be received and noted.

The Meeting ended at: 11:51

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman