

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

29 JANUARY 2015

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Dave Hanratty (Chair) Councillors Les Byrom, Linda Maloney, Robbie Ayres, Peter Brennan, Roy Gladden, Ted Grannell, Ray Halpin, John Kelly, Jimmy Mahon, Barbara Murray, Steve Niblock, Lesley Rennie, Denise Roberts, James Roberts, Tony Robertson, Jean Stapleton and Sharon Sullivan

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from:

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prior to the start of the meeting, information regarding general housekeeping was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair requested that any members of the press or public present, with the intention of recording proceedings of the meeting, make themselves known to the Chair.

The Chair confirmed to all present that Mr and Mrs Brace would be filming the proceedings.

The Authority were informed that Cllr Tony Newman had requested that his thanks be conveyed to the Authority for the gifts he received following his retirement from the Authority.

The Chair then explained that the previous meeting of the Authority on 16th December 2014 had been adjourned, to enable the Authority to reconvene should a further meeting be required to deal with issues surrounding the ongoing Firefighters pension dispute.

The meeting was then declared open and the recording of proceedings commenced.

1. Preliminary Matters

The Authority considered the identification of any declarations of interest, matters of urgency or items that would require the exclusion of the press and public due to the disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved that:

- a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda
- b) no additional items of business were determined by the Chair to be considered as matters of urgency; and
- c) The following items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof, due to the possible disclosure of exempt information:
 - **Appendix F to Agenda Item 5 – “West Wirral Operational Response Considerations (Post Consultation)”**
 - **Agenda Item 6 – “Review of Remuneration for LLAR Firefighters”**

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Authority, held on 16 December 2014, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Corporate Risk Register Update

Members considered Report CFO/004/15 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register, the status of the risks and associated control measures – including reference to any new risks introduced or any risks that no longer apply and can be removed.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided Members with an overview of the report, highlighting some of the key risks contained within it.

Members Resolved that:

The updated Corporate Risk Register, be approved.

4. Wirral Fire Cover Consultation Outcomes

Members considered Report CFO/001/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation process regarding the draft proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Frankby Road, Greasby as an alternative to an outright closure of West Kirby Fire Station.

Members were provided with a comprehensive overview of the report by the Chief Fire Officer, who highlighted the consultation process that was previously agreed by Members at the meeting of the Authority on 2nd October 2014. The Chief Fire Officer also highlighted the various consultation meetings which took place and provided a summary of the responses received and views raised throughout the consultation process.

The Chief Fire Officer described the significant public opposition to the Greasby site, expressed during the public meetings; and explained that in the opinion of Officers, most respondents focused on issues relating to the location of the site rather than considering the reasonableness of the station merger proposal from an operational response perspective.

It was explained that at other consultation events opinion was broadly supportive of a merger, with the majority of respondents agreeing that the principle of a merger was reasonable in the context of the financial situation.

The Chief Fire Officer further explained that once the Frankby Road site had been withdrawn as an option by Wirral MBC, the majority of responses received to the consultation, were supportive of a merger. Also, there was no significant opposition to the closure of West Kirby or Upton fire stations expressed by West Kirby or Upton residents during consultation events in these areas.

The Chief Fire Officer then highlighted the costs associated with the consultation process, explaining that the figure quoted within the report does not account for costs in officer time, which have been significant.

Discussion took place around the need to ensure that changes are made in a timely manner to enable the savings required to be achieved.

The Chair informed all present that the correspondence received during the consultation period was available to view, should anyone present wish to do so.

Members expressed their thanks to the Chief Fire Officer and all Officers involved in facilitating the Consultation process.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The outcomes of the comprehensive and informative Wirral public consultation, be noted.
- b) The outcomes of the Wirral public consultation be carefully and fully taken into account when considering report CFO/003/15, relating to the possible future options for fire cover in Wirral.

5. West Wirral Operational Response Considerations (Post Consultation)

Members considered Report CFO/003/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the options for structural savings to the operational response model for West Wirral in order to deliver the necessary savings to meet the budget assumptions

for 2015/16, following the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation regarding the proposed station merger in Wirral.

The Chief Fire Officer provided a detailed overview of the report and the various options considered therein.

Members were provided with a summary of the financial situation and the requirement to make savings through structural changes to the emergency response model.

The Chief Fire Officer re-iterated that when the number of Firefighters and therefore fire appliances have to reduce as a result of the continued cuts to the Authority budget, there is nothing which can be done to improve performance, meaning that the proposals are those considered to be “least impactful”. In the interest of completeness, the report includes all of the options for savings considered, with an explanation as to why these options were not put forward as proposals. The Chief Fire Officer stated that in his professional opinion, he would recommend that Option 3a be approved.

The operational logic behind the station merger option was detailed to Members. This highlighted the rationale for merging two stations at a central location; and using wholtime firefighters on retained contracts to maintain the availability of the second appliance when required. It also detailed the potential impact upon response times as a result of the proposals.

The Chief Fire Officer then informed Members that following the withdrawal of the Frankby Road site in Greasby, Wirral MBC has made Officers aware of another potential site on Saughall Massie Road. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the new proposed site represents a more optimum location than the Greasby site, however as this site is on Green Belt land, the Authority would need to demonstrate special circumstances in order to obtain planning permission.

The Chief Fire Officer proceeded to show the Authority maps detailing the proposed site; and explained that a report concerning the interim measures during the consultation process will be submitted to the next meeting of the Authority.

Discussion took place around the report with Members from each political party expressing support for recommendation 3a.

Members Resolved that:

- 1) In respect of all the available options, due to the Authority seeking to avoid firefighter redundancy using natural turnover; and as a result of current absence and other duties rates, it be noted that there are insufficient available operational personnel to maintain all 28 fire appliances in advance of any structural changes through strategic mergers and station closures being implemented. This will mean that the West Kirby fire appliance will be only be available on a wholtime

retained basis for significant periods during the consultation process and will only be staffed on a wholetime basis should sufficient personnel be available.

- 2) The Chief Fire Officer be instructed to provide a further report to the Authority dealing with the operational implications of recommendation 1 (above).

A decision on the closure of West Kirby Fire Station, be deferred and twelve weeks' public consultation (to commence on 2nd March) be approved, which will consider the alternative option of:

- 3) the closure of West Kirby and Upton fire stations, the building of a new station on Saughall Massie Road and the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30 minute recall), whilst also inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options
- 4) The requirement for Wirral Borough Council (WMBC) to agree to transfer the land on Saughall Massie Road into Authority ownership, prior to any new build on the site, be noted.
- 5) In order to establish whether there is potential for the Saughall Massie Road site to be utilised as a location for a new fire station, it be noted that officers have already approached Wirral MBC to request a decision on land transfer. Officers will also need to engage with Wirral planning officers as the proposal relates to building a new community fire station on green belt land.
- 6) Should Wirral MBC agree to transfer the land, it be noted that this would allow the Authority to fully consider the feasibility of the proposal. It also be noted that the approach will ensure that Members are fully informed in relation to the views of the public and the feasibility of building a fire station at that location prior to making any decision.

6. **Review of Remuneration for LLAR Firefighters**

This Minute contains EXEMPT information by virtue of Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

INFORMATION

- At the end of business, the Chair reminded Members of the Station Visits scheduled to take place on 18th February 2015, covering Wirral Stations. The Chair requested that the opportunity be taken to show Members the proposed site for the new station on Saughall Massie Road; and encouraged Members to attend the visits and familiarise themselves with the proposed new site.
- The Chair informed Members that he would be meeting with the various Representative Bodies to discuss some of the difficult decisions that will need to be made at the Budget Authority Meeting on 26th February 2015.

- On behalf of the Authority, the Chair presented a gift to Helen Peek– Democratic Services Manager, following her decision to leave the Authority after 22 years of service. Helen was thanked for all her support and assistance; and Members wished her well for the future.

Meeting closed.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday 26 February 2015

Signed: _____

Date: _____