

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

30 JUNE 2015

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Les Byrom, Linda Maloney, Peter Brennan, Roy Gladden, Ray Halpin, Jimmy Mahon, Barbara Murray, Lesley Rennie, Denise Roberts, James Roberts and Sharon Sullivan

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Dave Hanratty (Chair), Cllr Robbie Ayres, Cllr Steve Niblock and Cllr Jean Stapleton

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 confirmed to all present that the proceedings of the meeting would be filmed and requested that any members of the public present who objected to being filmed, make themselves known.

No members of the public voiced any objection therefore the meeting was declared open and recording commenced.

One member of the public present asked that Authority Members introduce themselves for the benefit of those in attendance.

The Chair of the meeting informed those present that this was not part of the Authority's Procedural Rules contained within its Constitution and that the meeting would therefore proceed.

At the opening of the meeting, those present were informed that the Chair of the Authority – Councillor Dave Hanratty, had submitted apologies for the meeting as he was attending the LGA Conference on behalf of the Authority.

The meeting would therefore be chaired by Councillor Les Byrom – Vice-Chair of the Authority.

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.

However, Councillor Lesley Rennie requested that items 7 and 8 be considered prior to items 5 and 6, to allow members of the public in attendance specifically in relation to those items, to leave following their consideration.

The Chair stated that it would be useful for those present to hear items 5 and 6, as those items would provide some useful background information concerning the financial context within which structural changes are being proposed; and the similar structural changes being proposed within other areas across Merseyside.

Therefore, the Chair of the meeting stated that the Agenda would be considered in the order in which it is printed.

- c) The following items contained EXEMPT information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:
 - **Appendix M to Agenda Item 6 – *Proposals For Eccleston and St.Helens Fire Stations***
 - **Appendix B to Agenda Item 8 – *Operational Response Options for West Wirral***

However, as there was no requirement to discuss these documents; members of the press and public were not required to leave during consideration of these items.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Authority, held on 11th June 2015, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Petition concerning the merger of Upton and West Kirby Fire Stations

The Chair invited the member of the public who submitted the petition entitled – “*Stop the building of the Fire Station in Saughall Massie and the destruction of precious green belt land*”, to present the petition to the Authority.

The individual, who had been invited by officers of the Authority to attend the meeting and present their petition, was not in attendance.

Therefore, the Authority noted the petition and the comments contained within.

4. Deputation in relation to the merger of Upton and West Kirby Fire Stations

Prior to consideration of this item, the Clerk to the Authority outlined the procedure for receiving deputations, as detailed in the Procedural Rules contained within the Authority's Constitution.

A spokesperson for the deputation was then invited to address the Authority for up to 5 minutes.

Mr Les Spencer – Chairman of the Saughall Massie Village Area Conservation Society, proceeded to address the Authority on behalf of the deputation, outlining the views and concerns of the residents of Saughall Massie in relation to the proposals to merge West Kirby and Upton Fire Stations at a new site on Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie.

Mr Spencer's address raised a number of points:

- The significant opposition from residents within the Saughall Massie area to the plans.
- How the Chief Fire Officer states that the merger is necessary to maintain public safety, however it is acceptable to have West Kirby Fire Station closed on a regular basis. Therefore, it is felt by residents that the issue of public safety may have been exaggerated in an effort to demonstrate the special circumstances required to obtain planning permission on green belt land.
- The use of an Emergency Response Vehicle as an alternative means of providing fire cover to the West Kirby area - questioning why the Authority don't use such vehicles when they are widely used by other Fire & Rescue Authorities.
- The potential conflict of interest in the planning process, with Wirral Councillors making the decision over the granting of planning permission, on land currently owned by Wirral Borough Council, which may result in the Council receiving a commercial price for an otherwise worthless piece of land. Therefore, it was suggested that the main driver for the merger was financial rather public safety.

Mr Spencer also suggested that the Authority were trying to involve Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service, in an attempt to bolster their proposals.

After 5 minutes, Mr Spencer was requested by the Chair of the meeting, to conclude his address.

The Chair then asked if any other parties present had an alternative view that they wished to express.

Mr Tommy Hughes stated that he wished to address the Authority to express the view of the Fire Brigades Union on Merseyside and its members.

The Chair informed Mr Hughes that he had 5 minutes to make his address.

Mr Hughes stated that on this occasion, the FBU support the recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer and agree that full appliances available on a wholetime basis provide the safest system of work for firefighters, with safe effective crewing levels; and provide the best emergency response to communities.

Mr Hughes stated that the FBU are fundamentally opposed to the use of Small Fires Units, or Emergency Response Vehicles, as they divert funding away from fully equipped fire appliances. In emergency situations, every second counts; and having such vehicles responding, with limited equipment and resources, severely limits the response that can be provided in such emergency situations.

Mr Hughes also highlighted that it is not firefighters, the Chief Fire Officer, or indeed the Authority which have caused the current situation; and that it is the Government who have forced the situation that the Authority currently find itself in. It was also highlighted that in light of recent incidents across the world, the cuts to the Fire Service could be seen as being even more severe.

The Chair then stated that Members of the Authority had a further 5 minutes to raise any questions they may have to either party.

Councillor Lesley Rennie asked if the Chief Fire Officer would be provided with opportunity to respond to the questions and comments raised. She was advised that all points raised by both parties were covered within items on the agenda and could be picked up during consideration of those items.

Councillor Gladden asked a question of Mr Hughes regarding the amount of fires and RTC's now attended.

Mr Hughes responded that although the number of fires attended has reduced, given the scale of cuts to the Authority, they no longer have the luxury of having Small Fires Units, as these should only be funded as a supplement to full appliances, never as an alternative.

Members noted the points raised by Mr Spencer on behalf of the Deputation and Mr Hughes on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union.

5. REVENUE & CAPITAL OUTTURN 2014/15

Members considered Report CFO/061/15 of the Deputy Chief Executive, concerning the Authority's year-end financial position for 2014/15.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which highlighted the level of savings the Authority were required to make against its two year financial plan for 2014/15 and 2015/16; and progress against the achievement of those savings.

The update highlighted the requirement for the Authority to make £3.4m of savings from Operational Response, which equates to the deletion of approximately 100 firefighter posts. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of appliances available; and the requirement to make structural changes to facilitate those reductions.

Members were informed that further significant cuts to the Authority's Budget are expected, which will be made increasingly difficult to meet should the required savings for 2015/16 not be made.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The actual financial performance against the approved budget and the achievement of a net revenue saving in 2014/15 of £1.187m, be noted.
- b) The proposal to utilise the one-off saving of £1.187m, to fund an increase in the Capital investment Reserve, in light of the planned station merger and investment strategy, be approved.

6. Proposals For Eccleston and St. Helens Fire Stations

Members considered Report CFO/060/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the proposal to merge Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens; and the re-designation of one of the two existing wholtime appliances as "wholtime retained" (with a 30 minute recall), subject to a 12 week period of public consultation, to commence with effect from 3rd August 2015.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted that although there are other options available to the Authority to deliver the necessary savings, these have not been recommended as the merger option delivers the least impact on operational response.

It was highlighted to Members that mergers are being used by fire and rescue authorities across the Country as a means of delivering savings.

Members were also informed that as a rule, mergers would not improve response times – however, in this case there would be an improvement in response to some locations, due to the close proximity to major road networks of the proposed site. However, Members were informed that there are a few

areas identified, which may not be reached within the ten minute response standard although there is little difference in predicted response times to those areas, from the current arrangements; and the areas not covered are predominately rural, with minimal housing.

Members commented that it is the responsibility of Councillors to ensure that they provide the best operational response to the people of Merseyside; and therefore they fully support the recommendations within report.

Members Resolved that:

- a) A 12 week period of public consultation (to commence with effect from 3rd August 2015) over the proposal to merge Eccleston and St. Helens fire stations at a new station on Canal Street, St. Helens and re-designate one of the two wholetime fire engines at these stations as "wholetime retained", be approved.
- b) Following conclusion of the consultation, a further report be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of the consultation and any operational implications.

7. WIRRAL FIRE COVER CONSULTATION 2 OUTCOMES

Members considered Report CFO/059/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation regarding the draft proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie as an alternative to an outright closure of West Kirby fire station and re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained".

Members were provided with a detailed overview of the report and the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation, which highlighted how the consultation process was publicised, the consultation events which took place and the specific outcomes of each event, outcomes of the online and postal questionnaires; and the outcomes of the public meetings, including a summary of questions raised and responses provided during those meetings.

The overview highlighted the financial implications, which detailed the cost of the consultation process (which is in addition to the cost of the first consultation process over the proposed Greasby site); and highlighted that the costs detailed do not take account of the amount of officer time invested in both consultation processes, which has been significant.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that there has been significant opposition to the merger from residents of Saughall Massie, however it is important that Members also consider the views of people from West Kirby, Hoylake and Meols, as they are the people who would lose out should the merger not proceed. It was highlighted that in general, the residents of these areas supported the merger option; and felt that it was appropriate.

Cllr Rennie raised some queries on behalf of residents and fellow ward Councillors. She stated that many residents have the opinion that there has been some collusion between the Chief Fire Officer and Wirral Borough Council, as they believe that there have been a number of alternative sites which have not been fully considered. She requested that the Chief Fire Officer go through each of the sites that were identified and explain why they were dismissed, in order to allay the fears of residents and dispel rumours.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that he would attempt to provide reassurance and proceeded to provide an overview of the sites considered, highlighting that the Authority cannot force people to sell or compulsory purchase land; and are ultimately beholden to land owners. He explained that once the Greasby site had been withdrawn by Wirral Borough Council, the land being considered in this report was the only suitable land available.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The outcomes of the comprehensive and informative Wirral public consultation, be noted.
- b) Those outcomes be taken into fully and carefully considered account, when considering Report CFO/058/15 relating to the possible future options for fire cover in West Wirral.

8. Operational Response Savings Options For West Wirral

Members considered Report CFO/058/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, subject to agreement from Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) to transfer ownership of the land to the Authority and the granting of planning permission.

The Chief Fire Officer provided Members with a comprehensive overview of the report, highlighting that the proposals were as a direct result of ongoing cuts to the Authority's budget and that doing nothing is not an option for the Authority.

The overview highlighted the operational rationale for the merger, explaining that the merger option was recognised by the majority of participants in the consultation process and across the Country, as being the option which delivers the least impact on operational response.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that the overwhelming majority of concerns raised by residents were in relation to planning issues. He therefore proceeded to provide an explanation of the consideration given to issues raised, which had some bearing on operational response.

With regards to the suggestion raised to utilise Rapid Response Vehicles, as an alternative means of providing operational response cover, the Chief Fire Officer explained that Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority were the first Authority to introduce such vehicles as a means of providing response to small, non life risk incidents. These vehicles were supplementary to the wholetime fire appliance at

some stations. However, as a direct result of the cuts to the Authority's budget, the provision of second appliances at all but two stations has been removed and the budgetary provision for the Small Fires Units was subsumed to retain as many rescue appliances as possible.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that all stations on the Wirral were now single pump stations; and that nowhere in the Country are such vehicles utilised instead of rescue pumps. In addition, National Guidance around breathing apparatus procedures, states that the minimum number of personnel required to deliver a safe response at a house fire is four, meaning that it is not a credible option to replace a full rescue pump with a Rapid Response Vehicle. In addition, to make the required savings, several other rescue pumps would need to be converted to Rapid Response Vehicles.

With regards to concerns raised regarding traffic conditions in the area, the Chief Fire Officer stated that this is strictly speaking a planning issue, however all drivers are fully trained, with the roads in West Wirral presenting no greater challenge than in any other areas across Merseyside. He further highlighted that if the Authority chose to proceed with the outright closure of West Kirby Fire Station, the appliance from Upton would still need to travel along the roads in question to respond to West Kirby.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that neither Merseyside Police nor North West Ambulance Service had committed to be involved in the development at present; and that any new station would not be fully operational until 2016/17.

He explained that it was no longer possible to crew appliances at non key stations at all times, therefore a number of non key stations may not be staffed on occasion, on a rotational basis. However, as an interim measure to maximise appliance availability, the Authority will introduce wholetime retained crewing where possible.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that other options considered were detailed fully within Agenda Item 7, however it must be noted that there are no options available which will improve matters; and the merger option is considered to be the one which will have the least impact on operational response.

Members made a number of comments concerning the recommendation. Members from all political parties recognised that they would not be making such decisions out of choice, but are required to do so as a direct consequent of the cuts to the Authority's budget. They also acknowledged the need for the Authority to consider what is in the best interest of communities across the whole of Merseyside, ensuring that the decisions they make provide the best possible fire cover for all.

Cllr Linda Maloney therefore moved the recommendation to approve the merger proposal, which was seconded by Cllr Denise Roberts.

A vote then took place as follows:

For
14 (unanimous)

Against
Nil

Abstain
Nil

Members Resolved that:

- a) The merger of Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, subject to agreement from Wirral MBC to transfer ownership of the land to the Authority and the granting of planning permission, be approved.
- b) The relocation of the West Kirby fire appliance to Upton to be crewed wholetime retained as an interim measure prior to the construction of the new station, be approved.
- c) The Capital Programme be amended to incorporate the Saughall Massie fire station scheme; and
- d) Delegated authority be granted to the Chief Fire Officer to continue discussions with partners, including Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service, with a view to sharing the new building.

9. Freedom of Information Requests - 2014/15 update

Members considered Report CFO/062/15 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the number and type of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Authority between 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 and 1st April to date.

Members Resolved that the content of the report be noted.

10. MFRA Engagement Principles and Commitments

Members considered Report CFO/057/15 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the progress made in relation to staff engagement following the outcomes of the 2014 Staff Survey and to introduce Members to the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Engagement Principles.

Members resolved that the MFRA Engagement Principles as outlined in Appendix A and the next steps identified within the report, be noted and embraced.

Close

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 14 July 2015

Signed: _____

Date: _____