



CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2006

PRESENT: **CHAIRMAN**
Councillor R Payne – Hartlepool Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL:
Councillors Cambridge, Flintoff, Waller
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL:-
Councillors Biswas, Mawston, Pearson, Porley
REDCAR AND CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL:-
Councillors Blott, Cooney, Dunning, Forster, Jackson, Walker
STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL:-
Councillors Leonard, O'Donnell, Roberts, Salt, Woodhead
PROPER OFFICERS:-
Clerk, Deputy Legal Adviser, Treasurer
FIRE BRIGADE OFFICERS:-
Chief Fire Officer, Executive Director

APOLOGIES
FOR Councillor Clark, Jones - Middlesbrough
ABSENCE

102. **REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER** **FIRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP**

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the outline programme of work to be undertaken whilst visiting Chicago, Phoenix and Scottsdale Fire Departments and the intention to develop international partnerships which would enable Members and officers to learn first hand how excellent organisations operate. The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the flights for the visit had been booked as agreed at reasonable rates and referred to his recent attendance at "Baggers 06" where he had been able to establish a draft programme for the trip in April 2006. He reported that during his visit he attended a conference in Phoenix in relation to the development of Emergency Medical Services and informed Members that defibrillators are kept on fire appliances in America which take over the provision of Co-responder and that firefighters also undertake primary care on patients.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the following areas to be explored during the visit, Community Fire Safety, Domestic Sprinklers, Fire Investigation and Arson, Community Safety for the Elderly, Development of Community Fire Safety, Equality and Diversity, Experience of the private sector in the delivery of fire and rescue services and Partnership working.

The Chief Fire Officer also drew Members attention and sought their comments on a draft Press Release entitled, "Fire Chiefs forge international partnerships in quest to deliver excellence". He stated that Paul Joyce, Director - Business Development had described the trip's purpose, as to "cross Atlantic alliances". Members were also informed that following the Authority's invitation, Brian Gibson an FBU Official would be taking part in the visit.

**102. REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
FIRE IMPROVEMENT GROUP**

A list of attendees had been distributed to Members and the Chief Fire Officer reported that it was essential that Paul Joyce, Director - Business Development attend the visit due to his links with the United States and referred to minute no. 59.1 (iii) from the Cleveland Authority Meeting of 25 November 2005, where members stated that only one Brigade Manager attend the visit and that one Brigade Manager remain in the Brigade. The Chief Fire Officer also felt it was not a matter for Members of the Authority to decide which Managers should attend the visit or which or how many Managers were in the Brigade at any one time.

Councillor Waller reported that it would be beneficial to stay overnight in Manchester at an airport hotel although the Chief Fire Officer felt this would incur additional expense but agreed to do a cost analysis for Members. Councillor Waller moved the resolutions to agree the list of attendees to America and the draft press release.

RESOLVED:-

- i) **that the report be noted.**
- ii) **that Members agreed the list of attendees as Chairman, Vice Chair, Leader of the Conservative Group, Independent Executive Member, FBU Representative, Clerk to the Authority, Chief Fire Officer, Executive Director, Director of Business Development, Support Officer.**
- iii) **that Members agree to publish the press release, entitled “Fire Chiefs Forge International Partnerships in quest to Deliver Excellence”.**
- iv) **The Chief Fire Officer to prepare a cost analysis for Members regarding the America visit to incorporate the cost of staying overnight at an airport hotel in Manchester on Friday 21 April 2006.**

**103. JOINT REPORT OF THE TREASURER AND CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
BUDGET STRATEGY 2006/2007 TO 2007/2008 AND 2006/2007 COUNCIL TAX LEVEL**

The Treasurer sought Members consideration and approval of recommendations (point 11.1, page 13 of report) made by the Policy Committee with regard to the 2006/2007 Budget and Council Tax proposals, and the 2007/2008 indicative Council Tax. He summarised the report covering the following areas: Background, Forecast Outturn 2005/2006, Capital Budget, Prudential Code and Treasury Management Strategy, Revised Funding Arrangements for Firefighter’s Pension Scheme, 2006/2007 Local Government Finance Settlement, revenue Budget Strategy and Council Tax Levels 2006/2007 and 2007/2008, Robustness of Budget Forecasts and Reserves and also drew Members attention to the attached Appendices labelled ‘A-G’. He referred Members to the Forecast Outturn 2005/2006 where an underspend at the year-end of £0.786m was anticipated. A significant part of this arose from the fact that Transitional Grant no longer needed to be repaid in the current year even though provision had been made for the expected repayment. This provision would be required to be transferred into the Authority’s reserves at the end of this year and carried forward to offset the reductions in grants over the next two years.

The Treasurer referred to the Revised Funding arrangements for Firefighter’s Pension Scheme where as from 1 April 2006 Fire Authorities will be required to establish a specific “pensions account” to meet the cost of paying pensions to retired firefighters. The Treasurer advised that where Authorities have already made provision to set aside reserves re: volatility, authorities would be able to keep those reserves. Such uncommitted resources are estimated to be £0.855m at 31 March 2006. It was suggested that this amount be transferred to the Authority’s general reserve and used to support the budget over the next three or four years. He also referred Members to the 2006/2007 Local Government Finance Settlement – new Funding System and advised Members that the new grant distribution system had been referred to as the “four block” model because it is built upon four elements: Relative Needs Block, Relative Resource Amount, Central Allocation and Floor Damping Block. At paragraph 6.2 of his report, Local Position, he stated that for 2006/2007 the Cleveland Fire Authority will receive a total formula grant allocation of £21.363m. This equated to an increase on 2005/2006 restated allocation of 1.5%, which was the floor increase for Fire Authorities. Whilst the grant increases were relatively low compared to other authorities the new system continued to provide additional financial support in addressing Cleveland Fire Authority’s unique circumstances. The Treasurer referred to ‘Revenue and Budget Strategy and Council Tax Levels 2006/2007 to 2007/2008’ that if Members approved the Council Tax increases the Cleveland Fire Authority would need to use £632,000 of its reserves to balance the 2006/2007 budget.

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BUDGET STRATEGY 2006/2007 TO 2007/2008 AND 2006/2007 COUNCIL TAX LEVEL**

The Treasurer concluded by advising Members that by utilising reserves the budget would be sustainable until 2009/2010 and the Authority would be able to reduce the Budget over the next four year period to achieve the planned efficiency savings illustrated in the report.

Councillor Waller moved the resolutions but stated he was worried about emergency cover if a strike goes ahead and was also worried that a reduction in funding over next three or four years would particularly affect an area such as Cleveland. He suggested approaching the LGA in relation to making representation regarding the funding.

The Executive Director reported that he had received from Unison, their notice of intention to Ballot for strike action in relation to the change in the pension scheme and a report would be provided to the Fire Authority to document changes in the local government scheme. If there is any action following the FBU National Conference on 16 February 2006 this would also be reported back to Members.

It was agreed to write to the Minister regarding Members concerns regarding the changes to pension scheme.

RESOLVED –

- (i) **that Members approved 2006/2007 Capital Programme as detailed at Appendix A of the report.**
- (ii) **that Members approved the detailed Prudential Indicators identified at Appendix B.**
- (iii) **that Members approved the phased use of balances over the four years commencing 2006/2007, including the use of the backdated population grant and collection fund surplus, as detailed at paragraph 7.15.**
- (iv) **that Members approved a Band D Council Tax Level for 2006/2007 of £53.55 (a 4.9% increase on 2005/2006) and supporting statutory calculations as detailed at Appendix G and the detailed revenue budget set out at Appendix E.**
- (v) **that Members approved an indicative band D Council Tax level for 2007/2008 of £56.23 (a 5% increase on the proposed 2006/2007 Council Tax).**
- (vi) **that a letter be written from the Chair of the Authority to the Minister with copies to the MPs with regard to the Fire Authorities view on Government changes to the Pension Scheme.**

**104. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION**

The Executive Director advised Members that the 12 week public consultation period for the Safety Improvement Plan had ended on 2 February 2006 and that comments received to date, would be formulated and presented to the Joint Consultative Committee and Policy Committee on 24 February 2006 and brought back to the Cleveland Fire Authority meeting on the 24 March 2006. To fully meet the Government expectations on consultation, the Authority had consulted with varying different organisations and stakeholders as outlined in paragraph 4.2 of the report during the statutory 12 week period.

The Executive Director advised Members that correspondence had been received from various stakeholders requesting the Fire Authority to consider extending the statutory twelve week consultation period beyond the closing date of 2 February 2006 to allow the local MPs the chance to respond properly to the proposals. Copies of the correspondence and subsequent responses were attached at Appendix 1 of the report. Representations for extending the duration of the Safety Improvement Plan consultation period had also been received from the Mayor of Hartlepool, the Headland Parish Council and the Fire Brigades Union. The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that he had responded to the Mayor and had recently met with some MPs.

Approximately two weeks ago it came to the Authority's attention that some local MPs may not have seen our Plans and Proposals and, therefore, the appropriate information was re-sent to both the Houses of Parliament and to the Constituency Office addresses on 18 January 2006. For the Fire Authority to avail itself of the viewpoints and opinions of its local Members of Parliament and other key political stakeholders, the Chief Fire Officer took the opportunity to invite the MPs and the Mayor to meet and discuss any concerns that they may have directly with the Authority. Frank Cook, MP had agreed to meet with Members and Brigade Management following this meeting. The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that he had not received any representation from Iain Wright MP and Stuart Bell MP. He referred Members considerations to paragraph 5.1 of the report and recommended that the Consultation period not be extended.

**104. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION**

After a lengthy discussion a vote was taken on whether to extend the consultation period, 17 Members voted against extending the Consultation period and 2 for the extension.

The Clerk advised Members that a Special Meeting of Cleveland Fire Authority had been scheduled to take place on 17 March 2006 to consider the recommendations of the Safety Improvement Plan following the Joint Consultative Committee and Policy Committee meetings and that a full Cleveland Fire Authority meeting was scheduled for 31st March 2006. He sought Members views whether they wished to combine the two meetings to the 24 March 2006.

RESOLVED –

- (i) that the report be noted.
- (ii) that the Safety Improvement Plan public consultation period not be extended beyond the statutory period of twelve weeks.
- (iii) that Members agreed that the Special Cleveland Fire Meeting on 17 March 2006 be cancelled.
- (iv) that Members agreed that the Cleveland Fire Authority meeting scheduled for 31st March 2006 be cancelled and brought forward to the 24th March 2006.

105. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Members are requested to pass the following resolution:-

“That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 11 of Schedule 12A to the Act relating to information relating to any consultations or negotiations or contemplated consultations, negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holder under, the Authority.”

**106. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FIRE BRIGADES NATIONAL EMPLOYERS CIRCULAR – EMP/01/06**

The Executive Director sought Members views regarding the National Joint Council Employers Circular EMP/01/06.

**COUNCILLOR ROBBIE PAYNE
CHAIRMAN**