

Report of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 1st February 2007

Present: Councillors: R Butcher, C Carter, G Harper, G Heathcock,
L W McGuire, G Murphy, L Oliver and D Raines

This report contains items considered by the Committee which are submitted to the Fire Authority for information. The following matters were also considered by the Committee and separate reports are included on the Fire Authority's agenda for decision:

- **Fire Authority Budget 2007/08**
- **Medium Term Fire Authority Plan**
- **Service Improvement Plan 2007/08**
- **Appointments Committee**
- **Revised Statement of Delegated Responsibilities**

1. FIREBUY CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The Committee has considered the Authority's response to a consultation paper issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the future funding arrangements for Firebuy Limited.

Firebuy was established to drive the National Procurement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue service and was designed to achieve significant efficiencies and savings along with improved standards and interoperability of equipment. Initial funding for Firebuy until 31st March 2008 was from the DCLG and that thereafter an alternative funding mechanism would need to be established.

The DCLG has issued a consultation paper on future funding arrangements, listing various options, along with possible advantages and disadvantages.

The Committee has considered a draft response to the consultation which was drafted after consultation with the regional procurement and finance officer groups and the national Fire Finance Network.

From the options suggested, the Committee felt that the most appropriate funding mechanism for the future is that of a management overhead. By

adopting this method, if Firebuy delivers the anticipated best value, authorities will buy from the arrangement and the project will be a success. A copy of the Authority's response to the questions asked through the consultation process are attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME 2006 -08

The Committee has approved the Authority's Disability Equality Scheme and action plan covering the period 2006-08 setting out how the Fire and Rescue Service will meet its statutory duty in relation to disability equality.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 introduced a duty to publish a Disability Equality Scheme and an action plan, similar to the Race Equality Scheme, from December 2006.

The Authority is committed to improving the safety of everyone in the community. To do this effectively, the policy recognises that the Authority needs to:

- acknowledge that different people have different needs from our services
- involve people in developing services and ways of working that are appropriate for them
- plan services and activities that meet a variety of needs
- gather information about how our services impact on people
- use this information to review and measure how effectively we are performing
- learn from the past so we can change in the future.

The Disability Equality Scheme sets out how the Authority intends to meet these needs in the context of its corporate plans and priorities, focusing particularly on meeting the needs of disabled people. It is intended that the Scheme will bring positive outcomes for disabled people; improve services and increase safety for them and contribute to the creation of an inclusive and supportive culture for our employees. A key element of this scheme is the growing awareness of the importance of listening to disabled people about their needs and how we can meet them.

As with race equality, publishing the Scheme and action plan is only the first step. To achieve the Local Government Equality Standard, the Authority needs to integrate this work into the workplans of every District and Group through corporate planning and performance management processes.

3. RANK TO ROLE - UPDATE

The Committee has received an update on progress with the Rank to Role project.

An agreement was reached as part of the 2003 industrial dispute to move away from rank to a set number of roles. Guidance was eventually issued in August 2005 by the National Joint Council (NJC) explaining how this should be done.

It was implicit within this agreement, when assimilation was carried out that posts of Watch Manager and above should be allocated a "job size" and be designated either an "A" or "B" within the role.

A regional working group was established to look at how best to allocate a job size in order to maintain some consistency within the region. A framework for this was agreed but it was acknowledged by the Services involved that there would need to be some flexibility in line with local agreement and negotiated implementation. As such all services were left in a position to agree individually the approach with their respective trade union bodies.

A CFRS working group was established in March 2006 comprising representatives from HR, District Managers, Training, Fire Control, and the FBU. The Retained Fire-fighters Union (RFU) were kept apprised of progress throughout. This group met approximately every three weeks to establish options and to debate each of the issues that the Service would need to deal with, including the process, decision, results and logistics. Since March 2006 a large number of options have been assessed by the working group and looking at everything from not doing rank to role to moving everyone up to a B, or down to an A, within roles.

The assimilation from rank to role for individuals has been relatively straight forward due to the approach adopted by the team which required individuals to complete paperwork with their line manager to advise what functions they were carrying out within their role and to identify just how much outside of their role map they were working.

A final proposal for the assimilation exercise was made in mid December 2006 which was aimed at using a points system to differentiate between job sizes with the agreement of all sections of the FBU. With some alteration of the numbers the proposal at Appendix 2 was accepted by the Service on 11th January 2007. All staff affected will receive details of their assimilation in the week commencing 5th February.

An appeals process has been agreed involving the opportunity to speak with the panel which has allocated individuals to roles and sizes. There will then be an opportunity to formally appeal the decision. It has been agreed that staff will not

contact individual members of the Authority regarding the outcome of individual assimilations.

A start date of 1st April 2007 has been agreed for the new roles and the Committee has agreed that this will complete the assimilation side of the project and that no further progress reports need to be made. The remaining issues are now logistical and will be dealt with by officers of the Service.

A review will be scheduled in April 2008 to evaluate the any further issues that arise as a result of the rank to role projects work.

The Committee was appreciative of the progress made and has recorded its thanks to all involved in this challenging and sensitive project. Recent progress has also seen a welcome improvement in the Authority's relationship with the FBU.

4. ORGANISATION REVIEW UPDATE

In May 2003 the Fire Authority endorsed a restructure of the Service, in order to more effectively develop and deliver community services at local level, in alignment with the district authorities within the County. District Managers were appointed within the six District areas, with the responsibility for managing Community Safety and Operational Response.

Overall it is acknowledged that the District structure supports the vision of the Authority and Service. Good progress has been made in achieving key performance indicators and there is a greater degree of connection, knowledge and information, with the Service much closer to the communities it serves.

Underpinning the district formation was the support services, which were in some part reduced in order to re-allocate the centrally based resources into the districts. In the intervening period, the Fire Service Act 2004 has been enacted, national frameworks have been established, and greater emphasis is now placed on regional working and partnerships.

A full Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection was completed in June 2005 resulting in a 'good' rating and an improvement plan.

In October 2005 the Fire Authority agreed that a review be undertaken to examine the success or otherwise of the structure and processes the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) had adopted in the organisational restructure of 2003. The focus for the review was the effectiveness of the current structure and in particular the Support Services and the Corporate and Democratic function. As a result, an Organisational Review Project Board together with a Project Team was established to take the review forward.

The Corporate and Democratic Services Group had a broad remit, which resulted in insufficient focus and inadequate service to Members of the Fire Authority. The review considered the Corporate and Democratic Services provision to the Service and Fire Authority. Finally, it was considered appropriate that the Senior Management Team be also reviewed, including whether the number of Directors continued to be appropriate and whether the current distribution of responsibilities between Directors met service needs.

The final results of the review were presented to the Fire Authority in May 2006. The new structure agreed by the Authority was implemented in November 2006 ahead of the scheduled date of 2009. This has resulted in 3 Directorates and now comprises Community Safety (headed by DCFO Lawrie Booth), Operational Support (headed by ACFO Graham Stagg) and Resources (headed by Mr Martin Scott). The functions of the former People and Performance Directorate (Human Resources, Planning & Performance, Occupational Health, Personal Organisational Development, Health and Safety) have been split between the Operational Support and Resources Directorates.

The Committee has received information on various other changes in the structure of the Directorates and on actions to implement and embed the new structure. Overall the review has been well received and there is a general acceptance and buy in to the proposals.

The Committee has thanked the project board and project team for their work on the project.

5. RETAINED REVIEW UPDATE

The retained duty system is a valued, vital element of the modern fire and rescue service. This was recognised by Professor Sir George Bain in his report "*The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives*", and by the Government in its White Paper "*Our Fire and Rescue Service*". Both pointed to the key contribution of firefighters who work the retained duty system in meeting public expectations of the fire and rescue service. The modernisation programme, with community fire safety and Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) at its centre, presents significant new challenges to the fire and rescue service, including those employed on the retained duty system.

The ODPM initiated a review of aspects of the retained duty system and published a report in 2005 on "*The Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System - A Review of the Recruitment and Retention Challenges*". The report covers, topic by topic, the many strands that impact on recruitment and retention. It also highlights examples of good – and not so good – practice that stakeholders have identified during the course of the review, some of which are generic and some specific to particular circumstances or localities. This has

allowed the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) sponsored review team to identify the scope for developing effective partnerships and to suggest how to make change happen. It also identifies a need to tackle perceptions and misconceptions about the role of the firefighters on the retained duty system in order to ensure that the retained duty systems is recognized as an integral part of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Authority in 2005 established a project board and project team to consider and implement the report's 51 recommendations. The Committee has received a report summarising the Authority's response to each of the recommendations and detailing progress made with implementation. Good progress has been made in a number of key areas in taking forward the aims of the original ODPM report. The work that has been undertaken on the project is regionally well regarded and considered as best practise.

The Service is awaiting the end date of this project from DCLG but has given a commitment to complete and progress as many of the areas as possible by 31st March 2007. It is envisaged that the project team will remain in existence and continue past this date in order to progress these issues in line with Fire Authority's objectives. The Committee has emphasised the need for the business community to allow staff time off to become retained duty firefighters.

The Committee has asked for a report on the outcome and implications of a Tribunal decision on 7th March 2007 which may result in retained duty personnel being given part time worker status. The report will also address the issue of securing compliance with race equality legislation where whole time firefighters are recruited from retained duty staff, who are predominantly from rural areas of the County where ethnic minorities are under-represented in comparison with the County average.

6. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING 2006/07

The Committee has received a report from the Treasurer to the Authority on revenue and capital spending by the Authority as at 31st December 2006. A summary is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.

The Committee noted:

- Overall the revenue budget was underspent by 6.2% at the end of December. Net controllable expenditure is 7.4% underspent. The net underspend of £1.1m is expected to reduce by the end of the financial year.
- Underspendings to December against full time fire-fighters is a result of crewing numbers being less than that budgeted. The underspend against the Firefighters budget will be utilised to employ above establishment in the medium term. 12 new fire-fighters took up their post in January 2007

as this plan is rolled out and training costs have yet to be reflected in the Budget.

- The Office Expenses Budget is currently underspent but a number of key projects such as the new website are to be implemented later in 2006/07 and early 2007/08 and there will be some carry forward of the budget for these projects.
- The Property Budget although currently underspent is expected to be fully spent by the end of the financial year.
- Underspending on Supplies and Services relating to Fire equipment maintenance, uniforms and community safety expenditure will be closely monitored to ensure that robust spending plans are in place to year-end.
- There is a small underspending on the operational fire budget primarily due to the high volume of activity in July that cost the Authority £87k on top of usual spending
- There is a projected underspending on the capital programme at the year end due to spending on appliances being deferred pending the evaluation and purchase of the dual appliances but that further purchases were planned in 2007/08.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES MONITORING REPORT - APRIL - DECEMBER 2006

The Committee received a report on relevant statistics and trends concerning employees of the service for the period from April to the end of December 2006.

The Committee noted information relating to:

- Workforce strength and establishment, including secondments, career breaks, the use of agency staff, discipline and grievances.
- Best value performance indicators
- Sickness absence and consultation on revised sickness and attendance management policies.

Much of the data and trends are as previously reported. However, the Committee is concerned at the worsening of the position in respect of the number of shifts lost to sickness by wholetime staff, which was 14.56% in December 2006. It is hoped that this figure will reduce as new sickness management policies begin to have effect. The Committee has asked to receive a briefing on the position and the action being taken.

7. REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD – REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRE

The Committee has noted that the Regional Management Board had deferred a decision on the establishment of the Local Authority Company (LAC) responsible for the future running of the Regional Control Centre. This was to allow member authorities time to consider revised legal advice regarding the legality of weighted voting at both Directors' and Shareholders' meetings. Proposals are expected to be brought to the next RMB meeting on 21st March 2007.

CHAIRMAN

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact
Agenda, reports and minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee – 01/02/07	Hinchingsbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon	Michael Brown 01480 444572 michael.brown@cambsfire.gov.uk