

## **RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

21 July 2008

### Present:-

Councillors Fry, Gordon, Healey, B Hughes and Yeomans.

### Apologies:-

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Lewis and Way.

#### **\*RC/1.        Election of Chair**

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Gordon be appointed Chairman of the Committee until its first meeting after the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2009.

#### **\*RC/2.        Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2008 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

#### **\*RC/3.        Declarations of Interest**

Members of the Committee were invited to declare any personal or personal and prejudicial interests they may have in any item(s) to be considered at the current meeting in accordance with the Authority's approved Code of Conduct.

#### **\*RC/4.        Election of Vice Chair**

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Yeomans be appointed Vice Chair of the Committee until its first meeting after the Annual Meeting of the Authority in 2009.

#### **\*RC/5.        Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2008/09**

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer and Head of Financial Management (RC/08/5) that set out projections of income and expenditure for the first three months of the financial year against the approved Revenue Budget for 2008/09 and which detailed any significant variations against individual budget lines. An underspend of £727,000 was projected, equivalent to 1.03% of budget, attributable largely to the savings arising on Wholetime pay costs as a result of staff vacancies (£627,000), together with retained pay costs (£198,000) and non-uniformed pay (£93,000).

The Treasurer emphasised that, whilst this was a good start to the financial year, the figures were based on the first three months and may be subject to variation as a result of changing circumstances such as on retained firefighter pay costs. He added that the Authority had already undertaken a reduction in posts to meet the move to dual crewing of aerial appliances but despite this, there had been a number of vacancies remaining within the service as a result of retirements and natural wastage. A recruitment strategy was to be formulated to bridge the gaps on staff vacancies and it was noted that 5 firefighters were to join the service on transfer shortly with 2 new recruits to follow on the September course.

The report (paragraph 6.1) outlined three areas of spending pressure for the Authority which it was proposed be funded from the underspend at this stage.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) That in compliance with Financial Regulations, which requires that any proposed budget virement in excess of £50,000, be approved by the Resources Committee, approval be granted to the proposed budget virements outlined in paragraph 6.1 of report RC/08/5.
- (b) That, subject to (a) above, the budget monitoring position as outlined in this report be noted.

**\*RC/6.**

#### **Capital Programme Monitoring 2007/08 to 2009/10**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Physical Assets (RC/08/6) setting out the monitoring position for the revised Capital Programme 2008/09 to 2009/10.

The Treasurer reported that a Capital Programme for 2008/09 of £8.368million was proposed now in view of slippage on the spending profile although it was noted that there would not be any additional borrowing requirement as a result. Councillor B Hughes referred to the contracts for major building programmes and commented that he felt that there should be some involvement of Members in this process. The Chief Fire Officer replied that this was a technical process that was carried out by officers with the appropriate skills normally. He undertook to investigate whether there was any involvement of Members in other local authorities in the contract process and to bring back a report to the Committee in due course.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) That the Breathing Apparatus (BA) cylinder replacement programme, introduced into the capital programme, but fully funded from revenue savings from debt charges, as outlined in paragraph 3.19 of this report, be approved.
- (b) That the remainder of the report be noted.

**\*RC/7.**

#### **Draft Response to Circular FRS/25/2008 – Consultation on the Distribution of Fire Capital Grant**

The Committee considered a draft response to Fire and Rescue Service Circular 25/2008 that set out proposals in relation to the basis for the distribution of fire capital grant for 2009/10 and 2010/11 as prepared by the Treasurer in consultation with the Head of Physical Assets. The response was due to be submitted to Communities and Local Government (CLG) by 25 July 2008.

The Treasurer reported that, of the three options set out in the consultation document, the preferred option for CLG was Option C. This would give each Authority £0.5million plus an amount based on the population of the area, giving Devon and Somerset a grant of just over £2 million in total. The Authority's preferred choice was Option B as this was based largely on the number of fire stations in the area, giving Devon and Somerset a grant allocation of £3.5million. Whilst the Committee welcomed the allocation of additional capital grant funding from CLG, the proposed response emphasised that the basis for distribution should be linked to the need to spend on capital assets and not on the population of the area and therefore Option B was the preferred choice.

**RESOLVED** that the draft response to Fire and Rescue Service Circular 25/2008 in respect of the proposals in relation to the basis for the distribution of fire capital grant for 2009/10 and 2010/11 be approved for submission to CLG by 25 July 2008.

**\*RC/8. National Pay and Conditions Negotiations**

The Chief Fire Officer reported upon the position in respect of the national pay and conditions negotiations that were conducted through the National Joint Council (NJC) with representation from both Employers' and Staff. He stated that the Government had set a public sector pay policy for increases of no more than 2% in 2008/09 yet the national pay award for the fire service had been agreed at 2.45%. In view of the pay bill for the Authority, this had a significant effect on the budget and he suggested that a letter should be sent to the Employers' secretariat to state that pay increases should be affordable and against the backdrop of recent budget increases for fire authorities, some of which had only been given a 1% increase in revenue grant settlement. It was suggested that a discussion be held with the Joint Secretary on the Employers' side of the NJC to raise these issues.

Councillor B Hughes referred to discussions on this matter that had been held through the Local Government Association's (LGA) Fire Forum on a number of occasions. He commented that the Fire Authorities were associate members of the LGA and as such did not have voting rights so could not influence the decisions taken. He suggested that a letter be sent to the Chief Executive of the LGA to enquire as to the costs of attaining voting rights and increased status for fire authorities in the first instance.

**RESOLVED**

- (a) that the Chief Fire Officer initiates a discussion with the Joint Secretary on the Employers' side of the NJC to raise these issues; and
- (b) that a letter be sent to the Chief Executive of the LGA seeking information on the costs of attaining voting rights and increased status for fire authorities in the first instance.

**\*DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**