

## **CUSTOMER, COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 17 July 2017 at 6.00pm in Meeting Rooms G3/4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford**

**Present:** Councillors G C W Reynolds (Chair), J C Ashford, C N Mason, L A Murray, J M Seymour and B D Tillotson

**Also Present:** Councillors E J Carter (Chair – Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority) and K S Sahota (Main Opposition Group Leader – Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority)

**In Attendance:** J Champion (West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner), E Hall (Office of the PCC), and D Moseley (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader)

#### **CCPSC-1 Apologies for Absence**

Councillor K R Guy and Mrs P Doherty (co-optee)

#### **CCPSC-2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor L A Murray declared an interest in minute number CCPSC-4 due to his appointment to the Fire Authority. He retained an open mind regarding the proposals and would not withdraw from the discussion.

Councillor C N Mason declared an interest in minute number CCPSC-4 due to his grandson's role as a Special Constable. This was not a pecuniary interest and he would not withdraw from the meeting.

#### **CCPSC-3 Minutes**

**Resolved** – that the minutes of the meetings of the Customer, Community & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 5 December 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chair subject to the reference to WHA on page 2 of the minutes being amended to WLA.

*Cllr J M Seymour queried as to why there were no minutes in relation to the meeting held on 23 January 2017 which comprised a verbal briefing on Selective Licensing. When informed that, as this was an informal working group meeting, there would be no formal minutes and the response made following the meeting served as a record of the meeting. She then requested that, as that meeting had been used to indicate the Scrutiny Committee's endorsement of the business case for Selective Licensing both in the Cabinet papers and the Annual Scrutiny Report, her support of that endorsement, if any had been inferred, be withdrawn.*

## **CCPSC-4    West Mercia Fire and Rescue Governance Consultation Proposal**

The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting. She noted that the consultation document had been circulated in advance and invited the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) to present the proposals.

The PCC explained that he had made a conscious decision to air the subject following legislative changes and to have a discussion with communities on the topic. The report presented to Members considered all available options and suggested that a move to single governance of fire and police be explored. The report proposed the creation of a Fire Alliance which would realise significant savings by working together to deliver efficiencies of £4m. A forensic examination of the figures was not possible at this stage due to the limited nature of the business case and the fact that the PCC was not the employer of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) staff so it was inappropriate for him to comment on their employment at this stage. The detail would be built if change was accepted, in conjunction with the Chief Fire Officer and driven by staff groups to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services. The consultation sought to gauge public and local authority opinions.

The PCC recognised that some FRAs were failing and that was not the driver behind this proposal, rather to give choices for the future and clearly articulate the savings that could be made through a change of governance. It was not a slight on the current management or leadership which had worked hard to lead the Service to the position it was now in and of which they could be proud. However, the PCC wanted to see if there was an opportunity for a new trajectory of government to work. He anticipated that the FRAs would make their own response.

The PCC had drawn together the business case for consultation over a three month period and was seeking feedback from local authorities, FRAs and the community. He would consider all views at the close of the consultation before deciding whether to progress the business case or not.

Telford & Wrekin was the first local authority to invite the PCC to present his proposals and he was very welcoming of the approach, and was pleased to acquiesce to the request to extend the consultation slightly to enable all the facts to be considered. He reiterated that the business case was about the service that was provided and focusing on that to get a solution that people supported.

The Chair invited comments from the Chair and Main Opposition Group Leader at Shropshire & Wrekin FRA.

Councillor Carter commented that he had been to a special meeting held by Shropshire Association of Local Councils that afternoon when the PCC had engaged in a two hour question session. It was clear that more detail was required than currently available. The FRA had commissioned its own independent review which was due with the FRA on 27 July 2017 and it may be that there would be some common ground to be found.

However, the current governance model consisted of two FRAs with 17 and 25 elected members and the PCC was consulting on disbanding this model and

governance being handed to the PCC. Councillor Carter did not consider this to be acceptable. There was a very different situation with the Police and he felt the proposed model should be looked at more deeply. When Councillor Carter had recently had cause to meet Nick Hurd MP it had been made clear that governance proposals required local acceptance wherever possible. He pointed to the Sussex case where the PCC was seeking closer collaboration with the FRAs before presenting a governance model to Government. In Councillor Carter's opinion, the current suggestion that the West Mercia PCC would present a governance model to Government in April was too rushed.

Councillor Carter was keen to ensure the safety of the service which was well respected across the country. The service was run cross-party and all wanted to look at the case – this reflected the position in Hereford and Worcester – and it was right that they, as community representatives, had a say. Shropshire and Wrekin FRA would make its response for consideration by the PCC after it had received the consultant's report. It was important that all leaders agreed with what was being put forward

Finally, he pointed to Shropshire and Wrekin FRA's good track record on making savings, with a budget that was fixed and safe until 2022, offering a well run authority offering protection for appliances and no redundancies.

Councillor Sahota echoed the sentiments of Councillor Carter, and emphasised the issue of continuing to provide local accountability so that communities had a local representative they could approach. He felt that Police and FRAs were completely different with different purposes and he questioned what the next steps would be towards a merger for all the emergency services. He feared that specialist knowledge would be lost under the proposed model and he keenly awaited the consultant's report. He noted from the consultation document that the PCC was not criticising the current governance and he questioned "if it's not broke, why fix it?" He drew attention to a poll in a recent edition of the Shropshire Star, the outcome of which had not looked favourably upon the PCC running the FRAs.

The Chair then opened the floor to questions.

*Had any other areas been through this process?*

PCC – Essex, the organisation there was deemed to be failing, so it was not a comparable situation. Other areas were out for consultation.

*When would a 'forensic' study of the figures take place and what were the next steps?*

PCC – It was not for the PCC to provide a detailed business case. This must be done by professionals who would shape the operation through engagement with staff and governance for implementation. The model did not suggest an impact on the frontline and the suggested savings were not a target and he had an open mind around the "art of what is possible" and would be led by professionals, in this case the three Chief Fire Officers.

*The Police relationship with Warwickshire was noted. Would this confuse the issue or lead to a further merger?*

PCC - This was a complex situation with West Mercia Police forming a strategic alliance with Warwickshire which had delivered £30m savings. The consultation document proposed a Fire Alliance, which would retain an element of choice. The PCC was happy to say that the FRAs did some things better than the Police and there would be lessons for the Police to learn from best practice (eg around education) but overall the PCC would strive for efficiency and effectiveness. He noted that the Police and FRAs had different precepts and he was not proposing a merger and resources could not be used across the two.

*Where did the idea for the proposals come from?*

PCC – The proposals were enabled by legislation. FRAs would be asked to make efficiencies and there would be difficult choices ahead. The PCC had wanted to put the proposals on the table to see if there was a way to look at governance which would make those efficiencies. He would not want FRAs to have to make cuts to the frontline if other alternatives had not been considered. He wondered whether, under the current arrangements, there was confidence that a high level of savings could be made.

*Why did the PCC want to get involved with the FRA? Shropshire & Wrekin FRA received very little complaint, unlike the Police. Should the PCC look to solve problems in the Police before suggesting changes to the FRA?*

PCC – The PCC did not blame anyone for this view. However, he was also elected to support the community and he was not there to interfere. He was looking at how the FRAs were organised and how the frontline was supported, whether more could be done in terms of efficiencies, he was not planning a merger and respected the differences between FRAs and Police, and he also pointed to communities not understanding why emergency services did not share buildings, ICT and training.

*What was the primary motivation for the proposals?*

PCC – Properly funded local services, including for the rural area. Funding for the FRAs and Police was very different and a slick and compelling argument was required – reassurance was required before arrangements were made for the services.

*Will the proposals make improvements or sustain services?*

PCC – The Fire Brigade Union had pointed to 60 posts lost since 2010. Under the proposed model, as finances got tighter, further unpalatable decisions would be further away. The proposals did not reduce the frontline.

Cllr Carter – Similar changes were being considered across the country but in Sussex and Hertfordshire it was being done as the right thing to do. A motion was being put before Shropshire Council regarding the loss of local accountability. Shropshire & Wrekin FRA was financially sound to 2022 and no compulsory redundancies had been made. It was important to get it right but the main criteria had to be ‘why put one of the best performing fire authorities in the country at risk’?

PCC – When the PCC took up his post he offered to be held to account by all four authorities’ Full Councils but only two of the four had taken him up on the offer. Under the proposals, it would be up to local nominees to act as a reference group and he hoped that Council would give some opinion as to how this could work.

Cllr Sahota – When the PCC presented his election manifesto this was not part of it.

PCC – The question was raised at hustings. It is not ideologically driven, but the PCC considered collaboration when it was positive for all parties. Part of the Government's manifesto was for PCCs to be given the option to govern local fire authorities but it was down to the business case and the PCC wanted to hear views through the consultation.

*Governing the FRAs would be a time consuming process, could the PCC give due diligence along the other commitments of the post?*

PCC – Fire Authority meeting papers were already read and the meetings attended. The PCC would not set himself up to fail. He wanted to engage with the community and hold the Chief Fire Officers to account: he would be a good custodian of the service. If given the opportunity he would work hard to live up to expectations and believed the capacity was there.

*The proposals were not looking at how services were run but rather how the organisation could run in relation to IT and buildings - there was no comment on how services would be run?*

PCC – The focus was on removing bureaucracy and making the organisation more slick. The proposals looked at the potential for collaboration. Safeguards would not allow a merger, the law protected the authorities as sovereign bodies and an Alliance was therefore suggested.

*Reference paragraph 6.3.4 of the consultation document, some duplication of roles seemed to be identified?*

PCC - An industry standard would be sought for a combined total. With regard to West Mercia Police, the PCC had sought to reverse some of his predecessors' decisions on centralisation and he would be looking to ensure that the right support was where it was needed geographically.

*Concern was expressed that the voice of Telford & Wrekin was already not 'loud enough' and the proposed governance model would diminish this further.*

Cllr Carter – The Shropshire & Wrekin FRA had never been politically run and all elected members worked towards the same aims.

PCC – Local politics did play a part as local allegiances changed (as at the latest Shropshire Council elections which had seen the previous Shropshire and Wrekin FRA Chair removed from his post).

*Would politics play a part in the proposed governance arrangements?*

PCC – The PCC had stood with the Telford & Wrekin Council Leader on issues affecting the vulnerable in our communities: he was for doing the right thing and standing up for the right thing first and he hoped that had been the experience of Telford.

As there were no further questions, the parties left the meeting while the Members continued their deliberations. Members considered that it was difficult to make a recommendation based on the evidence before them and wanted more depth of

detail. It was considered that it would be useful to see the FRA's consultants report. Members expressed concern about:-

- If there were any opportunities for further engagement with the PCC if the business case received approval
- Loss of local accountability/representation – too little detail in the business case to know whether local voices would continue to be heard
- Where would savings genuinely come from, especially if they were not made from governance or sharing ICT/HR systems as suggested.

**RESOLVED –due to the urgency of the matter, that the Committee meet again during early August as an informal working group to:-**

- (a) consider the Shropshire & Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority consultant's report;**
- (b) receive comments from the Chief Fire Officer; and**
- (c) agree the Committee's formal recommendation to Cabinet**

**CCPSC-5 Work Programme 2017/18**

The Chair referred Members to the Terms of Reference for the Committee set out at Appendix 1 to the report, which had been endorsed by Scrutiny Management Board and no changes were recommended. Members accepted the content.

The Chair referred Members to the suggestions shown in Appendix 2 to the report which had been referred to the Committee by Scrutiny Management Board to decide which issues should be included in the Committee's Work Programme. Scrutiny Management Board had recommended that each Committee prioritise two or three suggestions to focus the work programme in light of the reduced resources available.

Members noted that Scrutiny Management Board had also allocated a baseline of four formal meetings to each Scrutiny Committee to carry out the work programme and considered that Grounds cleansing should be considered at the next formal meeting, with Third Party Engagement at the third meeting of the year – this would give time for agreement of any reports to Cabinet and an update on the Community Safety Partnership at the final formal meeting of the year. Scoping of the prioritised topics should take place after an initial briefing.

**RESOLVED – that**

- (a) the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1 to the report be agreed;**
- (b) Grounds and cleansing service contract procurement, Third Party Engagement and Community Safety Partnership be included on the Committee's work programme for 2017/18; and**
- (c) the dates of future meetings as set out in the draft work programme be noted.**

The meeting ended at 7.42pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....