

**HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BOARD
POLICY AND FINANCE WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Policy and Finance Working Group** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on **Friday, 9 January 2009** at **12.00 noon**.

Present:

Representing the Highland Council

Mr R Durham
Mr D Flear

Ms M Smith

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Mr N M Macleod

Representing Orkney Islands Council Mr A Drever

Representing Shetland Islands Council Mr A Cooper

Officials in attendance:

Mr B Murray, Chief Fire Officer
Mr T Wood, Deputy Fire Officer
Mr T Johnson, Area Manager, Community Risk Management, HIFRS
Mr A MacAllister, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS) Head of Corporate Services
Mr M Jenks, HIFRS Finance Manager
Mr S Ross, HIFRS Performance Manager
Mrs M Grigor, Treasurer's Office
Ms M Morris, Clerk
Mrs R Moir, Assistant Clerk
Ms L Lee, Clerk's Office

Mr R Durham in the Chair

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Paterson, Mr J Gray and Mr J Ford of the Highland Council.

2. Revenue Budget 2009/10

There had been circulated for approval Report No. PFWG1/09 by the Treasurer comprising a revised requisition table relating to the revenue budget previously approved by the Board on 14 November 2008.

In speaking to the report, the Treasurer's representative explained that the Scottish Government had provided additional funding to the Constituent Authorities in recognition of the increase in the Board's pension costs arising out of recent legislation, and these sums, having been included in the Board's requisitions, had caused the latter to appear higher than usual. The increase on the previous year, excluding the pensions element, was 2.5%.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given and **APPROVED** the requisitions for 2008/09 as set out in the report, the Revenue Budget having been approved by the Board at its meeting on 14 November 2008.

3. Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service Draft Service Plan – 2009/10-2011/12

There had been circulated Report No. PFWG2/09 dated 18 December 2008 by the Chief Fire Officer on the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS) Draft Service Plan for 2009/10, together with, as an appendix, copy of the draft Plan.

The Head of Corporate Services for the Highlands and Islands Fire Service (HIFRS) drew attention to a number of points which had been taken into consideration in compiling the draft Service Plan, including:

- emphasis on clarity and the avoidance of jargon
- alignment with the Government's National Outcomes
- integration of the HIFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) with the Service Plan

The Service Plan's four strategic aims were unchanged from previous years. The report listed 12 strategic objectives through which these four aims were implemented. A raft of more detailed policies and practices underpinned the 12 objectives, and progress was monitored in detail on a monthly basis. The Service Plan targets were taken very seriously, and a Performance Manager had recently been appointed.

The Chief Fire Officer added that the Service Plan dovetailed well with the Constituent Authorities' Single Outcome Agreements (SOA), and had demonstrated where the HIFRS believed it could contribute to national outcomes. Should Members wish further information on the Service Plan and the way it was implemented and monitored, the Service would be happy to facilitate this.

In answer to a question raised, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the lead officers for HIFRS on SOA were the same officers as had previously represented the Service on Community Planning Partnerships. However, revised arrangements would need to be put in place over the next few months, until the new Deputy Chief Fire Officer was in place and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer had returned from sick leave.

Arising from discussion, the Convener updated the Working Group as to the capital funding position for 2009/10. The previous arrangement, whereby the Scottish Government had provided the Board with a formula allocation of around £1.8m, which was then supplemented through "top slice" funding, was set to change, following the Concordat agreement and a Scottish Government remit to COSLA to develop a new formula allocation. Discussions were ongoing between Department of Justice and COSLA officials and no final decision had yet been made. The uncertainty made capital planning for the coming year difficult, and it was possible that, should agreement between the respective officials not be reached, the Minister could make a decision independently. The Convener

stressed that he and the Chief Fire Officers were doing all they could to take forward the HIFRS position during the negotiations.

The Working Group **AGREED:**

- i. to recommend to the Board that it approve the draft Service Plan for 2009/10 – 2011/12; and
- ii. that the Board be kept informed as to the position with regard to capital funding.

The meeting ended at 12.25 p.m.