

Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee

17 September 2013

15 NOTICE OF MOTION – CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that at the meeting of the Council held on 15 July 2013 (minute 21 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor D Roberts and seconded by Councillor J Stapleton was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration.

CUTS TO MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

- (1) Wirral Council recognises the excellent work undertaken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and applauds the commitment of its frontline and support staff. This Council also notes that those individuals' ability to protect the people of Wirral is being jeopardised by the Government cuts to funding as well as undermining staff morale.
- (2) This Council is deeply concerned by the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue services which makes the case for further huge cuts, mergers with other Authorities or Police Crime Commissioners and most worryingly privatisation. The Ken Knight review gives very little recognition of the very difficult decisions taken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to date in managing the deepest cuts inflicted on any Authority in the Country and instead advocates its replacement by a PCC without any evidence whatsoever to prove that this would improve the service delivered to the residents of this city region.
- (3) This Council notes with serious concern the Government's alarming proposals to privatise part if not all functions of the fire and rescue service, along with yet further cuts to their grant funding which will impact on their ability in protecting residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies within the Borough of Wirral.
- (4) This Council is deeply worried that the Government has lost sight of the fire service's main purpose, to protect residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies and their devastating impact on our communities and that it threatens to put private profit ahead of the need to save lives and help people feel safe in their homes and community.
- (5) This Council further notes that the Government's proposals are in the context of a programme of ill-conceived efficiencies to fire and rescue services. The impact this will have on the communities of Merseyside is extremely worrying and places vulnerable residents in danger.
- (6) This Council also notes due to Government cuts which has seen Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service suffer cuts totalling £19.2m over the 4 year spending review with 180 firefighters posts deleted and a reduction in Fire engines from 42 to 28 by 2015.

- (7) The Government's proposal for further huge cuts in 2015 will have devastating effects on operational response and the community safety and prevention work delivered by the Authority to such an excellent standard.
- (8) This Council therefore calls on the Government, in particular the Secretary of State for Local Government and the Chancellor's department to cease their ill conceived and irresponsible cuts to our fire and rescue services and pledge instead to protect the public from further risk of fire by protecting this front line emergency service from further cuts and threats of privatisation.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Roberts had been invited to attend the meeting in order for her to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion. In accordance with Standing Order 7 (5), any recommendation from the Committee in relation to the Notice of Motion would be referred to the Council. Any debate at Council should take place upon the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate upon the motion itself.

Councillor Roberts indicated that the Notice of Motion had been submitted as a result of deep concerns around the findings of the Ken Knight review of fire and rescue services, which made a case for further cuts to grant funding, mergers and privatisation. She stated that such proposals could seriously impact upon the ability of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) to protect Wirral residents from fire, road traffic collisions and other emergencies. She commented that cuts to grant funding to MFRS in recent years were double the national average and that the government proposals would lead to significant cuts in the numbers of firefighters and fire engines.

The Chair commented that he would have preferred to have heard evidence from the Chief Fire Officer to highlight the potential impact on Wirral of the proposals contained within the Ken Knight review. He referred also to the potential impact of a reduction in fire engines on the Council's emergency planning arrangements and upon the ability to respond to flooding, in the light of severe weather in recent years. Members commented that there was clearly a need for local discussion with fire professionals and to examine the link between spend and safety.

The Labour Group spokesperson and other Members expressed the view that the Notice of Motion should be fully supported, so as to support firefighters and send a message to the Government that such proposals were not acceptable. It was also suggested that all Members of the Council would benefit from hearing evidence from the Chief Fire Officer upon the impact on Wirral. The Chair also expressed a view that each of the Constituency Committees should be encouraged to take up this matter.

It was moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

“That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service”

The Motion was carried (8:6)

It was further moved by Councillor Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Sullivan –

- (1) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the next meeting of this Committee to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.
- (2) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.”

The further Motion was carried unanimously.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Council be advised that the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee fully supports the Notice of Motion in relation to Cuts to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.**
- (2) That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to attend the Committee at the earliest opportunity to highlight the potential impact of the Government proposals on the residents of Wirral.**
- (3) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be called, if necessary, and that all Members of the Council be invited to attend.**