

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

21 MAY 2020

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr Leslie T. Byrom CBE (Chair)** Councillors
Lynne Thompson, Janet Grace, Brian Kenny, Lesley Rennie,
James Roberts, Jean Stapleton, Paul Tweed,
Andrew Makinson, Steff O'Keeffe, Lisa Preston, Del Arnall,
Barrington, Bruce Berry, Anthony Boyle, Angela Coleman,
Doreen Knight, Linda Maloney and Emily Spurrell

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from:

10. Chair's Announcements:

At the start of the meeting, the Chair of the Authority thanked everyone for attending and welcomed any members of the press or public who were observing the proceedings.

The Chair of the Authority asked all present to join him in a few minutes of reflection for those who have tragically lost their lives; and those working on the front line in essential public services, for putting the safety of the public first, taking daily risks and continuing to support our communities.

He placed on record his thanks on behalf of the Authority, to all MFRA staff working through this crisis, at the centre of the National effort, continuing to make the Authority proud and keeping the communities of Merseyside safe.

The Chair of the Authority commented that the danger of fire is ever present, as demonstrated by the major fire in St. Helens the previous day; and is no respecter of the other pressures on MFRA at this current time.

The Chair of the Authority then introduced the meeting and provided all present with an overview of how this remote meeting would work and some housekeeping.

A roll call was then taken of all Members present, to confirm that they could hear and be heard; and that they could see and be seen.

1. Preliminary Matters

The Authority considered the identification of any declarations of interest, matters of urgency or items that would require the exclusion of the press and public due to the disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved that:

- a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda
- b) no additional items of business were determined by the Chair to be considered as matters of urgency; and
- c) no items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the authority, held on 27th February 2020 were approved as a correct record and for signature by the Chair.

3. Amendments to Standing Orders - Remote Meetings

Members considered Report CFO/022/20 of the Acting Monitoring Officer, concerning proposed Amendments to Standing Orders attached as Appendix A, which have been drafted in response to *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*, which provide for remote meetings of local authorities.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the introduction of the new Regulations which came into force on 4th April 2020, enabling local authorities to hold meetings remotely. Members were advised that the Regulations apply to any meetings held before 7th May 2021; and are applicable to Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority.

Members were informed that this means that Members are not required to be in the same physical location; and will be determined as being in attendance at a meeting held remotely, in a virtual location, so long as, as a minimum, they can hear and can be heard.

Members were advised that the Regulations provide flexibility for the Authority regarding altering the frequency of meetings, or moving and cancelling meetings without the requirement for further notice, which may also have an impact for the AGM, which may be held at a later date, or rolled over to next year.

Members were informed that the Regulations automatically override any existing procedures or Standing Orders within the Constitution. However, it is considered good practice, for Standing Orders to be amended to reflect the impact of the new Regulations, with the amended Standing Orders attached at Appendix A.

It was highlighted to Members that the amended Standing Orders reference where meetings can be held, including remotely, how meetings remain quorate, how voting will be conducted, as well as dealing with declarations of interest; and how the public can attend and participate.

The Chair of the Authority commented that the 11th June 2020, was being held as a potential date for an AGM; and that dependent on decisions within the District Councils, there may be consultation with the political groups as to whether an AGM would be required, or whether the status quo would be maintained, with appointments being rolled over into 2020/21.

Members Resolved that:

- (a) The implications of *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*, be noted.
- (b) The Amendments to Standing Orders and Procedure Rules contained within Appendix A, be approved.

4. Local Government Association Subscription 2020/21

Members considered Report CFO/021/20 of the Acting Monitoring Officer, concerning Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority's continued membership of the Local Government Association (LGA) for 2020/21.

The Chair of the Authority advised that Officers had circulated information to Members previously, regarding this, however the decision needs to be captured formally, hence this report.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which confirmed that the Authority has been a long standing member of the LGA. Members were advised that correspondence had been received requesting continuation of membership for 2020/21, with a 2.5% loyalty discount applied and a further 2.5% discount offered for authorities opting to pay via direct debit, with a deadline of 24th April 2020. Members were advised that this is why the decision was made by the Chair of the Authority to continue with subscription, under the provision of Standing Orders within the Constitution. Members were made aware of the proposals, with a deadline provided for making any objections, with none being received.

The Letter at Appendix A, from the Chief Executive of the LGA to the Chief Fire Officer, was highlighted to Members, which details some of the substantial work that has already taken place to assist Fire and Rescue Services, as part of their subscription.

Comments were made by Members regarding excellent training events and the Equality and Diversity National Group through the LGA, which Members are keen to continue their involvement with, as the group are undertaking some fantastic work which MFRA will benefit from.

The Chair of the Authority stated that MFRA's subscription to the LGA used to be the same as for every other Council, which was around £60k, but it has now

been reduced significantly for FRA's. He commented that there is still the Fire Commission and Fire Services Management Committee, and a lot of work has been undertaken through the LGA in relation to Grenfell and high rise buildings. He also made reference to all the support that they offer to Officers, including the NJC; and advised that this work is all funded by the subscription.

The Chair of the Authority advised that it had been suggested and agreed that the Authority's membership of the LGA and other outside bodies, be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Members Resolved that:

- a. The Authority's continued membership of the LGA, for 2020/21, be noted;
- b. The 2.5% loyalty discount is applied to all Fire and Rescue Authorities not on notice, be noted;
- c. The decision for the Authority to be signed up to the LGA's direct debit payment scheme for 2020/21, in order to receive an additional 2.5% discount, be noted.
- d. The content of the report, be noted.

5. Service Delivery Plan 2020/21

Members considered Report CFO/015/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning approval of the Service Delivery Plan 2020/21, including Station Plans.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted that the Service Delivery Plan includes references to the IRMP action plan, Functional Plan, Station Plans, Equality Objectives and Performance Indicators.

Members were informed that this report utilises estimates in relation to year end performance against the benchmark performance indicators.

Members attention was drawn to the Station Plans, contained within the Service Delivery Plan, with it highlighted that this year is the first year that each station has been provided with a Community Impact fund of £1000, generated through the external utilisation of our stations by private partners; and some corporate sponsorship. Members were informed that the purpose of this fund is to enable staff to utilise it to assist in the delivery of their Station Plans, to better assist the communities they serve. However, it was noted that this has been restricted somewhat at present, due to Covid -19.

Members were advised that performance to date is very strong; and on target to achieve the targets set in all but a few areas.

Members were informed that it is looking likely that MFRA will miss the target set in relation to the number of RTC's and the number of fatalities on the road. Members were advised that MFRA's focus has been particularly on young drivers, between the ages of 16 to 25, were some of MFRA's educational material has been really focused. However, the missing of the target relates to all RTC's and fatalities on the road, which means that some of the impact is within MFRA's gift to influence; and some of it less so. As such, Members were advised that for next year, they are likely to be asked to consider changed targets that will reflect the work which is being undertaken in that area.

Members were advised that another area where the target is likely to be missed, is in relation to sickness absence, which self-evidently includes data in relation to Covid-19. However, Members were reassured that based on most recent figures, it is likely that the target will only just be missed; and without the issues related to Covid-19, it is likely that the target would have been achieved.

Members were advised that the report also details the IRMP actions and Equality and Diversity Objectives and action taken; and concludes with the Service Delivery Plan and Station Plans, which are bespoke to each individual Station area, focusing on specific risks and vulnerabilities.

The Chair of the Authority commented on the quality of the documents and expressed thanks on behalf of the Authority, to everyone involved in the delivery of the plans.

Questions were raised by Members regarding the IRMP and whether anything had changed within the IRMP as a result of Covid-19 response, in particular around the tri-partite agreement and added work streams; and whether the usual negotiation processes had been followed.

Members were advised that nothing had changed with regards to the IRMP. They were informed that at this moment in time, there were 12 additional activities being delivered across the UK, at different stages and at different levels, with potentially an additional couple of activities to be included over the next few days. Members were advised that those activities include things such as firefighters delivering food parcels and dropping off prescriptions. They were also informed that some of MFRA's volunteers, which include prevention staff and other support staff who have made themselves available, have been delivering face fit testing for NWAS, so they can wear the correct fitting PPE. Members were advised that this has been expanded across the rest of the region.

A further question was raised around whether recruitment and other planned activity around station builds, was continuing in the current situation.

Members were assured that such activity is contained within the IRMP; and was continuing. Members were advised that with regards to the recruitment strategy, it has been planned to recruit 60 individuals per year over the next 3 to 5 years. It was confirmed that this recruitment is continuing, albeit with social distancing measures in places, which can prove a bit difficult in regards to some stages of the recruitment process. However, Members were advised that should

recruitment not continue, this would likely create more issues further down the line.

In relation to the build programme, Members were informed that the one outstanding build, being St. Helens, had been delayed slightly due to Covid-19 and the difficulties of having individuals on site. However, it was anticipated that the build at St. Helens would be concluded in the latter part of this year.

A question was raised around the Community Impact Fund introduced; and whether staff and officers were encouraged to consult and work with local Councillors and community groups to ensure that the funds were targeted most effectively. Members were advised that this is exactly what the fund is for; and that staff on stations are encouraged to engage with the community, in regards to meeting what are potentially challenges within that community, in terms of specific vulnerabilities and risks. Members were advised that staff are encouraged to engage partners in that process, which is a fundamental driver in the provision of the fund.

With regards to Performance Indicators, a question was raised by Members around how targets are set, as some targets are set higher than what has previously been achieved. Members were advised that the targets are set going back over the previous 5 years, to track performance. This process means that should, for example, there have been a particularly wet summer period, there could be a particularly low figure at a particular point, when the previous 4 summer periods had not been so wet and therefore had higher figures. Therefore, the target needs to be smart, striving to improve year on year, whilst being cognisant of particular spikes in performance. Members were advised that work has been conducted around this, which can be circulated, which will inform Members how targets are reached in the first place.

A further question was raised by Members regarding the possibility of providing performance comparisons with other similar FRS's, albeit Members appreciate that Merseyside has some unique challenges, as will other FRS's. Members were advised that MFRA do benchmark against other FRS's; and it was suggested that through the Scrutiny Committee, Members could look in detail at how we as a Metropolitan FRS, compare with other Metropolitan FRS's, as a similar group; and also, how is that reflective of the challenges that MFRS faces, in relation to other services. For example, high levels of deprivation, result in a higher level of incidents, including ASB fires and accidental dwelling fires.

A further question was raised around the measures of lockdown and if there had been an increase in accidental dwelling fires observed as a result of people spending more time at home. Members were advised that it is possibly a little too early to tell. They were informed that information is being drawn in nationally at this moment in time, with the CFO being directly involved in this work, to try to determine if lockdown has had an adverse effect on people's fire safety, however there is still some work to be done. Members were advised that as numbers are small, it is difficult to determine if fire deaths are the result of lockdown. However, they were informed that there had been 3 fire deaths between the 1st of April up to present; compared with previous years where there have been 4 deaths for the whole year. Therefore, to have 3 deaths within such

a short period of time, does give some cause for concern; and the situation is being monitored against the implications of lockdown. Members were informed that the same is not being observed around the rest of the UK, hence there is some trepidation in linking the two things at present. However, when you look at the number of accidental dwelling fires, the numbers are fairly consistent with last year's figures, which is probably a better indicator as to whether lockdown is having an adverse effect.

The Chair of the Authority suggested that it would be useful to have an event later in the year, to receive further information from Officers; and to consider any lessons learnt.

A question was raised regarding the number of emergency calls received, which has seen quite a dramatic reduction; and whether this was part of a long-term trend. It was commented that on the face of the figures, it suggested that this was a positive, however it could be that people are becoming less inclined to call.

Members were informed that the reduction in emergency calls is likely to be two fold. They were advised that lockdown, may have been a contributor in terms of reducing the number of incidents, as people's activity has been restricted.

However, they were informed that the reduction is mainly due to a concerted effort to prevent incidents occurring in the first place. Members were informed that there has only been a slight increase in the number of automatic fire alarms during the period of lockdown, with the vast majority of incident types reducing. The figures showing the reduction in the number of deliberate secondary fires over recent years, was highlighted to Members, which is the direct result of work undertaken around preventing those fires occurring.

Members were also advised that 2018/19 was when we had particularly hot weather, therefore we are comparing a hot, difficult year, with one in which we performed better.

A further question was raised around mental health, in particular related to the current pandemic. It was commented that there are a lot of people now working from home, who are isolated, with the added anxiety of productivity whilst working from home; and Members requested some additional information in terms of what the Authority are doing with regards to supporting staff with their mental health; and how we can improve our support to those individuals during this time. Members also asked if there was information available regarding how many people are accessing external support at this time.

Members were informed that MFRA are excellent at supporting the mental wellbeing of its staff. They were advised that there are a number of staff who are self-isolating given that they fall into the at risk categories, however line managers have been maintaining regular contact with those individuals.

Members were advised that even when considering our normal provision for staff, there is significant support in place, which does extend to employee assistance outside of the service, where individuals and their families, can access support and advice, if it is affecting their ability to come in to work, or their wellbeing. They were informed that this does extend to counselling; and that there is also an in-house provision, within the Occupational Health Team.

Members were also advised that the HMICFRS Inspection for MFRS in relation to where it was felt we were outstanding, was focused around the wellbeing of our staff.

It was highlighted to Members that there have been a number of staff who had unfortunately lost loved ones over the past few weeks; and the Chief Fire Officer has spoken to those individuals personally, demonstrating that we have an organisation and individuals within it, working at every level, who care passionately about its people; and has the most robust welfare arrangements in place of any FRS.

Members were informed that Officers are always keen to learn and improve in this area, therefore if anyone has any thoughts or ideas as to how we can do that, Officers are more than happy to explore those suggestions.

A follow up comment was made by Members, that we are in unchartered waters at the moment and although it was accepted that our current provision is fantastic, they just wanted to be assured that there isn't more that could be done to support our staff, as they are aware of an increase in individuals accessing emergency mental health assistance during this pandemic. Therefore, they would like to look at how many staff are accessing the support available; and commented that they were happy to be involved in this work as much as possible.

Members were informed that their input would be welcomed in this regard. They were also advised that a survey had been issued to staff recently, which asked questions around support; and if there was anything else that could be done to assist them, which may be useful information for any next steps. They were also advised that information could be provided with regards to the number of people accessing the employee assistance provision, which again, can be used to inform any next steps.

The Chair of the Authority commented that discussions have taken place around more agile working and working in a different way, rather than individuals simply working from home and being isolated. He also commented that some time ago, the Authority made a commitment to give the mental wellbeing of its staff, very high priority; and in discussions with the FBU at a national level, it is recognised that there are few organisations doing as much as we are in this area.

Members commented positively around the social media messages being put out by MFRA, which have been fantastic; and felt that other organisations could learn a lot from us in this regard.

Members Resolved that:

The attached Service Delivery Plan (Appendix 1) and Station Plans (Appendix 2) for 2020/21, be approved for publication on the Authority's website (in a designed format).

6. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER 2019-20 OCT TO MAR UPDATE

Members considered Report CFO/019/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register, the status of the risks and associated control measures, including any updates for the period October to March 2020.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted a number of key points.

They were informed that the previous risk which referenced the build of the new station at Saughall Massie, has now been removed as that build is now complete and the Station is operational. Members were advised that the new station has been well received by not only operational staff based at the station, but also by the community of Saughall Massie.

Members were advised that a new risk has been added around the potential implications of the McCloud pension's judgement, which may result in a financial risk to the Authority.

Members were also advised that there are a number of risks identified more broadly, which have been updated and refreshed with specific reference to Covid-19.

A question was raised by Members regarding the only risk contained within the register, which has remained red following mitigation, which is around the impact of Brexit on the procurement of supplies; and whether any information could be provided around the national discussion and whether any assurances had been provided by Government around the provision of supplies once we do leave the EU.

Members were advised that it is an ongoing challenge. They were advised that over the last 12 weeks, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been required to secure a significant amount of PPE, not only for Merseyside, but for the rest of the UK FRS. Members were advised that that demand has actually changed over the last few weeks, as some of the PPE obtained has not been utilised, but some of the tasks that FRS's have been undertaking, have required us to look at PPE a little differently.

Members were informed that MFRA have been working significantly with Kent FRS and the Procurement Hub, which have opened up additional supply chains. The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that he was confident that MFRA would continue to be able to secure all of the kit, equipment and PPE in regards to additional supply chains and working collaboratively as a sector, albeit there are still likely to be challenges around the implications of Brexit.

Members were advised that what those challenges may be, are not known at this time, however Members were reassured that the positive relationship developed with Kent and the Procurement Hub recently, will continue to be developed post Covid-19, to ensure that it is embedded across our work and practice; and we remain as resilient as possible.

A question was raised regarding the risk of training falling behind schedule; and how much more likely was this to happen in the current situation, should restrictions remain in place for a significant period of time. Members were advised that in the same vein that MFRA have chosen to continue with recruitment, albeit in a slightly different manner, but with the quality of input maintained, training has continued, with a focus on risk critical training. Members were advised that any training deemed as beneficial, rather than risk critical, has been postponed for the time being. They were also informed that greater use of technology, to deliver some training and input, has also been utilised more effectively.

Members were advised that a strategic decision was taken early on that the skills and competencies of firefighters should continue to be maintained, as it would be detrimental for the organisation, should a firefighter be injured as a result of competencies not being maintained.

Members Resolved that:

The updated Corporate Risk Register for 2019/20 which incorporates the current status of those risks to March 2020, be approved.

7. HMICFRS Self-Assessment 2020

Members considered Report CFO/014/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the content of the completed HMICFRS inspection self-assessment template for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (appendix 1).

Members were provided with an overview of the report, and it was highlighted that the self-assessment was completed earlier in the year as a pre-cursor to the intended inspection, prior to the cessation of the inspection programme due to Covid-19.

Members were informed that MFRA are yet to receive an indication as to if and when the inspections programme will recommence.

Members were advised of the intention to re-submit a revised self-assessment, which will include some additional information reflecting the past number of weeks.

Members were also informed that it has been indicated that future inspections may be thematic; and may focus on business continuity arrangements put in place by services, in response to Covid-19. Members were advised that if this was to be the case, MFRA is likely to be in a strong position, however it would result in a revised self-assessment being required.

The Chair of the Authority commented on the information contained within the self-assessment document, which clearly shows how MFRA has developed and moved forward since the last inspection, which is very positive.

Members Resolved that:

1. The 2020 HMICFRS inspection self-assessment prepared by the Chief Fire Officer and submitted to HMICFRS as part of round two of the inspection process, be noted.
2. It also be noted that the self-assessment was produced and submitted earlier in the year as a precursor to the Inspection of the Service and before the cessation of the Inspection process due to COVID19.

8. HR Policies

Members considered Report CFO/016/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the newly developed People & Organisational Policies created to reflect changes in national legislation alongside delivery of the MFRA's People Strategy.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted some of the key aspects of the policies.

With regards to the overarching Wellbeing Policy, Members were informed that this outlines the Authority's commitment to employee wellbeing, with regards to the mechanisms in place to enable our staff to work towards a healthy work life balance.

In relation to the Recruitment Policy, Members were advised that its sets out the Authority's intent to recruit a diverse workforce, reflective of the community it serves.

It was highlighted to Members, that the percentage of female fighters within MFRA, is the second highest of all FRS's in the Country. Members were also informed that when you compare the number of BAME firefighters, as a proportion of the population, MFRA performs the best with regards to the diversity of BAME firefighters out of all the UK FRS's.

Members were advised that this information is based on the Inspection which was undertaken some time ago; and that when you compare the figures now, there have been increases, demonstrating that MFRA have not stood still and have continued to improve the diversity of the workforce, to reflect the community it serves.

Members were informed of the Promotions Policy, which sets out how we would promote; and the succession strategy.

The Bereavement Service Instruction was then highlighted to Members, which has been developed in response to statutory parental bereavement leave regulations, which moves MFRA to providing 2 weeks paid leave following the bereavement of a child under the age of 18.

Members were also advised that Officers have sought to review existing bereavement leave arrangements; and propose as part of the new arrangements, to increase the amount of paid leave for staff who lose a close

family member, from 3 days, to a full week, or full tour of duty. They were advised that these changes will bring the Authority in line with other organisations, but more importantly, will help to support our staff through challenging times.

A question was raised by Members in relation to the work around equality and diversity and a proposed visit from the Asian Fire & Rescue Association; and whether this would still take place given the current uncertainty.

Members were advised that MFRA were due to host an Asian Fire & Rescue Association Conference; and that the Association have approached Officers to ask if this event could be put back. Members were assured that Officers are committed to that event taking place in Merseyside in the future.

The Chair of the Authority commented that Members have a legal responsibility to promote equality and diversity.

Members Resolved that:

- a. The polices attached in Appendix A, B & C, be approved.
- b. The Instruction at Appendix D, which includes a commitment to continue to pay an employee their normal salary rather than the statutory prescribed amount for any period of Parental Bereavement leave, be noted.

9. Fire Safety Bill

Members considered Report CFO/023/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the progress of the Fire Safety Bill, its current objectives, and potential impact as it transitions into law; and the additional Government grant funding to be provided to Fire and Rescue Services to support Protection Work.

It was highlighted to Members that there has been a significant focus on Protection activity, following the Grenfell Tower incident in 2017. Members were advised that as a result of that incident, on 19th March 2020, the Government introduced the Fire Safety Bill, as part of the response and series of changes by Government to both fire safety and building safety, with further primary and secondary legislation to follow.

Members were informed that the Fire Safety Bill amends the Regulatory Reform Order; and aims to deliver greater clarity over responsibility for fire safety in buildings containing more than one home.

They were informed that the second reading of the Bill took place on 29th April 2020.

Members were advised that the Fire Safety Order applies to all non-domestic premises, including communal areas in residential buildings with multiple homes; and the Fire Safety Order designates those in control of those premises as responsible for fire safety; and that they have a duty to manage that risk. Members were advised that that is enforced by the Fire Authority.

Members were also informed that what was self-evident during the enquiry, was the lack of clarity within the existing Fire Safety Order over enforcement responsibility. They were advised that the Government undertook a call for evidence in 2019, that MFRA contributed to, to inform amendments to the Fire Safety Order, as required by the Fire Safety Bill.

Members were advised that a second, Building Safety Bill, proposes a new and enhanced regulatory regime for building safety; and ensures residents have a stronger voice in that process. They were advised that that Bill has yet to be published, but will later on in the year.

Members were also informed that the Government will establish a new national building safety regulator, within the HSE. They were informed that to enable that to take place; and to assist FRS's financially due to additional burden, money was released to FRS's, of which MFRA will receive just over £524k to support that work. They were advised however, that this grant will only be provided for 1 year; and it is focused in on the 11,000 premises that have been identified as being particularly at risk and vulnerable. Members were assured that this grant will be used effectively to support Protection activity.

It was highlighted to Members that this focus on Protection activity is supported by the decision earlier in the year, to separate out Prevention and Protection; and introduce a designated Area Manager role, specifically to look at Protection, the implementation of the Dame Judith Hackett review recommendations; and our response to the Grenfell Tower incident.

Members were also advised that MFRA will be pressing Government for the funding to be continued.

Members commented that although they are pleased that the Bill has been introduced, they did not feel that there was much to the Bill, commenting that they would have liked to see a range of actual proposals within the Bill. They commented that there were a number of very simple proposals from the Grenfell inquiry that could have been included, but were not. It was suggested that these could be included within the second Building Safety Bill, however as the 2 are so intrinsically linked, Members would have liked to see them side by side.

Members also commented that this is an opportunity for the Authority to put forward recommendations; and make suggestions around what they would like to see introduced.

Members were assured that information has been provided to leaders within the region and local MP's, with regards to what we feel are some key recommendations that should be taken forward.

Members Resolved that:

The content of the report be noted.

10. Implications of Covid19 on MFRA

Members considered Report CFO/020/20 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning an update on the actions taken by the Service in response to the COVID -19 (C19) pandemic. The report details the actions taken in response to the pandemic from a national, regional and organisational perspective.

Members were advised that this has been unprecedented, not just for the FRS, but for others, particularly health colleagues; and it was commented that we do not underestimate the challenges that have faced different countries, health professionals, those in social care; and across the partnership, which has been a real focus of the work that has been undertaken, to support them as best we are able.

Members were informed that some clear, strategic objectives were set at the outset, around ensuring that we maintained our operational response provision; and it remained resilient and effective throughout. Members were informed that this could have been impacted by a number of factors, particularly the loss of key staff due to the transition of the virus, which the organisation were keen to ensure did not occur.

Members were informed that the second objective, was around supporting the broader public sector response to the pandemic, particularly around supporting our local authorities, the NHS and Ambulance Trust, which we have done all of over the course of the past few weeks. Members were informed that we have also maintained the highest levels possible in terms of the health, safety and welfare of our staff, which has been a moving feat, as guidance and advice has changed over the course of the pandemic; and it was noted that this has been managed really effectively.

Members were informed that at a National level, the CFO was asked to be the Fire Gold Officer for the UK Fire and Rescue Service; and lead it through this period of pandemic, which has resulted in a number of actions which are captured within the report. However, it was stated that those actions, will not fully capture what it has been like for MFRA over the past few weeks.

Members were informed that early on, work was undertaken to identify MFRA staff, whose roles were “critical”, which has enabled continuity of service throughout.

Members were advised that MFRA have also supported the national application of PPE; and the requirements around Public Health England Guidance. They were advised that the CFO went on record early on, to state that the health and safety of MFRA staff would not be compromised; and that all staff would be provided with the necessary level of PPE to undertake the tasks that they were being asked to do. They were advised that whilst there have been some challenges elsewhere, MFRA have continued to maintain the levels of PPE required for the role, throughout.

Members were informed that the supply chains are open and supplies available; and that this has been achieved through the production of a national arrangement through a Procurement Hub, which goes beyond the FRS; and has been delivered by Kent FRS.

Members were informed that we have also, in discussions with Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care, established that testing stations would be open to our staff, as critical key workers, which has enabled us to provide some reassurance to staff; and enabled us to get staff back into work quickly, to ensure that they are available to undertake their roles.

Members were advised that in addition to that, MFRA were able to make the case to secure a reasonable amount of funding to support the work that we are undertaking, which in the first instance, enabled us to purchase PPE that we did not have readily available.

A further area highlighted to Members, was around our involvement at a national level in detailed discussions with trade unions in relation to tri-partite agreements, resulting in the breadth of work now undertaken, being significantly wider than it was prior to Covid-19, in recognition of the global challenge that the pandemic has brought. They were informed that this goes back to the strategic decision around providing broader support to the public sector.

Members were advised that as Lead Authority for National Resilience, we have gathered in a significant amount of information, which has provided updates to the Minister, and provides them with reassurance around the arrangements in place.

In terms of Strategic Co-ordination, a list of actions within the report, were highlighted to Members, which shows the support that we have provided to the public sector and our health partners over the course of the last few weeks; and continue to do so.

The arrangements put in place around our own business continuity and staff, was then highlighted to Members, which links into the first strategic objective around maintaining operational response; and details what we have done, how we have done it; and how we have utilised technology to enable us to do so. Members were also advised of the extensive communication in place, which has been consistent.

The financial implications were highlighted to Members, including the release of 2 tranches of Government funding, which on the first allocation, resulted in MFRA receiving £355k; and on the second allocation, £1,640,000, which has been utilised as detailed within the report.

The Chief Fire Officer concluded by stating that the Authority should be rightly proud of the staff within this organisation, which over the course of the past 12 weeks, have gone above and beyond at every level and in every part of the organisation.

The Chair of the Authority echoed the comments of the CFO; and expressed that he hopes the effort is reflected and recognised in the future.

Members expressed their thanks for the report; and to all staff for the fantastic efforts.

Comments were made regarding a sentence within the report around the predicted financial impact of Covid-19, which Members felt may be unhelpful; and it was requested that the report be amended and the sentence be removed.

It was confirmed to Members that the sentence would be removed from the report.

Members also thanked Officers for all the information that they had been provided with, as they felt that had been kept very well informed.

Further clarification was requested by Members around the statement regarding the removal of burdens during the period to allow services to focus on the support they are providing to the public. Members were provided with an example around the IRMP; and Members were informed that what has been agreed is that if services chose to extend their IRMP, then they can do so; and that actions can be carried over, without the expectation that those actions will have been delivered within the original specified timeframe.

Members were advised that other examples included the requirement to produce a Statement of Assurance; and around various Home Office returns, which they have agreed to pause at this current time.

Members also requested that some guidance be provided to them with regards to the weekly information they are provided with; and whether this information could be shared more widely with their political groups on their respective Councils; and where suitable, with community groups that Members may be involved with. It was also suggested that the weekly briefings could include some comments received from members of the public.

Members requested that the thanks of the Authority be taken back to all staff.

Members Resolved that:

- a. The work that has been undertaken nationally in support of the fire & rescue service, be noted.
- b. The work that has been undertaken locally through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) in order to support our communities, be noted.
- c. The work that has been undertaken by the Service in order to maintain business continuity and protect our staff, be noted.
- d. The financial implications related to C19, be noted.

- e. The legal implications related to C19, be noted.
- f. The final sentence within paragraph 61 of the report, be removed.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 11 June 2020

Signed:_____

Date:_____