

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

16 DECEMBER 2021

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr James Roberts (Chair)** Councillors Elizabeth Hayden, Sharon Connor, Hugh Malone, Lisa Preston, Lesley Rennie, Andrew Makinson and Les Byrom

Also Present: Ria Groves, Phil Garrigan, Ian Cummins

Apologies of absence were received from:
Gillian Wood

1. Preliminary Matters

Members considered the identification of declarations of interest, any urgent additional items, and any business that may require the exclusion of the press and public.

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 to be considered as matters of urgency were determined by the Chair; and
- c) the appendices for item 12 were exempt and as such if they were to be discussed this would require 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 and Chair's Update

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 29 July 2021, were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Byrom commented on the results of the recent HM Fire Inspectorate noting that the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) had received three outstanding judgements. The Authority Members thanked the staff working to keep Merseyside safe and for helping to achieve these accolades.

Furthermore, it was noted that the Chair was lobbying to seek for future meetings to be held online where possible within the confines of the legislation on remote meetings.

3. BONFIRE REPORT 2021

Members received a presentation from Group Manager, Paul Kay which provided an overview of the Bonfire period and the measures taken to reduce incidents this year.

It was reported that this year there had been an 18.7% reduction in fires purposely set and a record amount of rubbish was lifted off the streets in tipper trucks. Apart from St Helens (which saw a slight increase), each district had seen a reduction in incidents across the Bonfire period.

Members asked for further information on the type of incidents at work that were recorded over the period and it was explained that these included objects thrown at engines and at Arson Advocates. There was an emphasis within the service on reporting incidents at work to ensure that they could be investigated effectively.

Councillor Hayden enquired as to reasons for such a significant reduction of incidents in Sefton and asked whether there were any lessons to be learnt from that success. Paul Kay explained that the same approach had been used across the districts and having more data meant a more targeted approach. In St Helens there had been an increase in incidents and this was attributed to a sporadic geographical spread that had made it difficult to formulate a targeted approach.

Members were advised that following the incident at the Liverpool Women's Hospital, engines had taken part in reassurance campaigns in Toxteth and Kensington to increase visibility within communities.

The Committee discussed the clean-up process and it was explained that a sweep was undertaken on the morning after Bonfire Night to dampen down any bonfires before debris was removed by Local Authorities.

It was hoped that next year the Local Authorities would be in a position to hold distraction events and the Members were still cognisant of the impact of the pandemic on the statistics.

When asked about improvements for 2022, it was advised that planning would begin earlier in the year to ensure that the right type of tipper trucks could be booked. Further engagement with communities about large bonfires and firework displays to ensure they were risk assessed and safe was also part of the plan for next year.

RESOLVED that the content of the report and the impact that MF&RS staff have had on the delivery of the Bonfire Plan 2021 be noted.

4. PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY OF SMOKE ALARMS– REVISED FRAMEWORK

The Chief Fire Officer presented a revised framework for the procurement and supply of smoke alarms.

Members were advised that the provision of smoke alarms to vulnerable parts of the community formed a significant part of fire prevention and MFRS were looking to extend this service to areas of heightened deprivation.

It was explained that MFRS delivered more home fire safety interventions than any other Fire Service with 60,000 planned each year over the next four years. It was estimated that 35,000 smoke alarms would be fitted during those visits.

RESOLVED that the award of a call-off contract for the next 4 years for the supply of smoke alarms with Fire Blitz be approved.

5. SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN 2021/22 APRIL - SEPTEMBER UPDATE

The Chief Fire Officer presented the Service Delivery Plan Update for April – September.

Members were advised that the target for percentage of available shifts lost due to sickness absence had been impacted by the pandemic, particularly due to staff self-isolating.

The Chief Fire Officer also commented that all of the resultant actions from the 2018 inspection had been discharged with three outstanding determinations recorded in the most recent inspection.

RESOLVED that following scrutiny, the attached reports be approved for publication on the website.

6. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER 2021/22 APRIL - SEPTEMBER UPDATE

Members received an update on the Corporate Risk Register from the Chief Fire Officer.

The report detailed the current risks, their status and the control measures in place. It was explained that the approach was being revised for 2022/23 to draw out key risks for scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the updated Corporate Risk Register for 2021/22 which incorporates the current status of identified Service risk to September 2021 be approved.

7. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2020/21

The Chief Fire Officer presented the Statement of Assurance for 2020/21 which was a requirement as stipulated by the National Framework to provide assurance to the community and Government on operational and financial matters.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the information contained within this report be considered and the Authority's draft Statement of Assurance 2020-21 be approved.
- b) if approved, the Statement of Assurance 2020-21, be signed by the Chair of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.

8. FINANCIAL REVIEW 2021/22 - JULY - SEPTEMBER

Members were presented with the Financial Review 2021/22 for July – September which included the revenue and capital budgets, reserves and treasury management updates to the 30th September 2021.

The report provided information on the budget movements in the quarter and a forecast financial position for the year, with a net revenue saving of £0.826m expected by the year-end.

It was recommended that the favourable variance be used to:

- create an inflation reserve of £526m to offset any future inflationary costs above those assumed in the current financial plan, and;
- Increase the pension reserve to fund an expected increase in administrative and compensation costs associated with the implementation of the firefighter pension scheme Immediate Detriment Framework.

Members enquired as to whether £0.526m was sufficient to cover an increase in inflation. It was advised that CPI was at 5.1% currently and there was pressure on employers to increase pay awards as a result of a planned rise in National Insurance payments in April 2022. Forecasting the pay award was difficult but the current financial plan included an assumption of a 2.5% annual pay award increase over the next four years. Anything above that figure would be funded through the £0.526m inflation reserve and then be picked-up in the following year's budget process.

Members enquired as to whether an increase in borrowing rates from the Bank of England would impact on MFRA. It was explained that it may affect the interest rate associated with any Public Works Loan Board borrowing, but there were no plans to borrow in the next financial year.

The report explained that there had been a reduction in Princes Trust Funding and Members asked if this had impacted delivery. The reduction in funding and demand had impacted on the numbers of pupils being put through Prince's Trust courses. A review of the current Price's Trust activity was being undertaken. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the importance of programme for young people and equality of opportunity, adding that MFRS was passionate about working with young people across Merseyside and this work was recognised as outstanding during the recent HMICFRS inspection

RESOLVED that:

- a) the contents of the report be noted;
- b) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- c) the reserve adjustments as outlined in the report, and use the £0.826m forecast favourable revenue variance to fund be approved; and
 - i. the creation of a £0.526m inflation reserve;
 - ii. the existing pension reserve by £0.300m to cover expected additional pension administration costs be increased.
- d) the Director of Finance and Procurement be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2021/22.

9. TREASURY MANAGEMENT INTERIM REPORT 2021/22

Members considered the Treasury Management Interim Report for 2020/21 which identified key activities undertaken in the first half of the financial year.

Members were advised that Treasury Management activity had been carried out in compliance with the relevant codes and within the borrowing and treasury management limits set by the Authority.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

10. WITHDRAWAL OF HOME OFFICE IMMEDIATE DETRIMENT GUIDANCE

The Director of Finance and Procurement presented a report to the Committee on the issues surrounding the withdrawal by the Home Office of their 'Immediate Detriment Guidance' with immediate effect.

Members were advised that the Home Office had withdrawn its guidance on processing FPS members under their legacy pension scheme ahead of the required legislative changes. The report explained that Treasury and HMRC had understated the technical challenge related to treatment of tax and other issues, and therefore with immediate effect the Home Office had withdrawn its 'Immediate Detriment Guidance'. The Home Office and Treasury had advised FPS scheme administrators not to process immediate detriment cases before the required legislation and regulation changes were in place.

As a result, the report considered the impact this has had on the Authority's decision to adopt the LGA/FBU's MOU for an Immediate Detriment Framework (IDF) for processing FPS members under their legacy scheme in advance of the required regulation changes.

Members were advised that the LGA and NFCC were seeking a legal opinion on the position and further advice would be issued in due course. The report

recommended that no applications for processing FPS members under their legacy scheme be actioned prior to further direction and advice being received.

Members agreed that a pause pending further legal guidance was the most appropriate approach.

With regards to a timeframe, Members heard that there could be various stages required before any clear decisions could be made. Members were reminded that financially, staff would not be impacted and rather it was a question of when the payment could be made.

Members queried if there had been discussion with Unions on a local level and they were reassured that conversations were ongoing.

RESOLVED that:

- a) Members temporarily pause the IDF framework and therefore the processing of eligible FPS members pension benefits under their legacy scheme whilst the LGA await legal opinion; and
- b) request that officers report back to the Authority on the outcome of any further guidance from the LGA / NFCC Pension Lead on this matter that will allow the reactivation of the IDF.

11. CONTRACT AWARD FOR TEXTILE FIRE GLOVES

Members considered a report of the Director of Finance and Procurement for the contract award for textile fire gloves.

RESOLVED that the award of a framework agreement on behalf of North West Fire and Rescue Authorities with FlamePro Global Limited for the supply of wholly textile fire gloves be approved.

12. ESN READY AND DISPATCH COMMUNICATIONS SERVER INSTALLATION

The Chief Fire Officer presented a report on ESN and dispatch communications server installation.

Members were advised that airwave was the current communication platform and this was to be replaced by ESN. There had been delays in progress but it was expected that the technology would go live for MFRS in 2023 and be rolled out across all Fire Rescue Services by 2026.

It was explained that this technology provided an element of enhanced security and reliability for the service compared to mobile phones, allowing it to occupy a prioritised section of the network.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Business Case to make MFRS ESN Ready be noted and that the Home Office will provide funding for some aspects of the associated Capita ESN Technically Ready Activities also be noted;
- b) an ESN Ready Capital Scheme for £661,600 in 2021/2022, of which £195,658 will require MFRS funding be approved and that this may reduce if the Home Office commits to funding a greater amount of the Telent expenditure be noted;
- c) MFRS in working with the Home Office as an Assurance Partner on this important national programme continue to be supported; and
- d) a MFRS ICT Capital budget growth of £108k in 2022/2023 to install DCS be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting: 24th March 2022

Signed: _____ Dated: _____