

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15 DECEMBER 2022

MINUTES

Present: Cllr James Roberts (Chair)
Cllr Les Byrom
Cllr Harry Gorman
Cllr Dave Hanratty
Cllr Brian Kenny
Cllr Andrew Makinson
Cllr Gillian Wood
Anthony Boyle

Also Present: Phil Garrigan, Ria Groves, Ian Cummins

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Tracey Dickinson

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.

The Committee wished to place on record their deepest sympathies for the communities affected by the fatal incidents in both Jersey and Solihull

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) 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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 28 July 2022, were approved as an accurate record.

3. Financial Review 2022/23 - July to September

The Director of Finance and Procurement Ian Cummins presented the financial review for 2022/23 which provided an overview of the revenue and capital budget. Members were made aware of the forecast £0.200m favourable revenue position and the budget movements in the period up to 30th September 2022.

Members enquired as to whether a rise in interest rates would affect the Authority's capital programme and it was explained that the current financial plan assumed a 4-5% interest rate, which is currently around the rates on offer. The Director of Finance and Procurement would engage with the Authority's Treasury Management advisors about the right time to borrow, but there were no plans for new borrowing in the next 12 months. It was not perceived that interest rates would cause any issue with the budget for the new Training and Development Academy as the level of borrowing was consistent with that assumed in the budget.

It was noted that the Authority has loaned £3million to Thurrock, and this was queried due to their current position. It was explained that in terms of risk and investment, the Authority set security as a priority and there was no risk that the money could not be recouped.

Members were advised that the Authority determines the level of borrowing that is prudent, affordable and sustainable at the Budget Authority meeting as part of the budget making process.

Members asked if the inflation reserve in the budget was sufficient and it was advised that the current expectation was it was adequate although Members were reminded that the 2022/23 Grey Book pay award was still outstanding.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the contents of the report be noted;
- b) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- c) the use of the £0.200m forecast favourable revenue variation to fund an increase in the smoothing reserve that can be used to allow time to identify and implement any future saving options, if required, be approved; and
- d) the Director of Finance and Procurement be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2022/23.

4. Treasury Management Interim Report 2022/23

The Director of Finance and Procurement Ian Cummins presented the interim Treasury Management Report for 2022/23 which reported on the Authority's

activities during the year to ensure they were consistent with the approved Treasury Management Strategy and the approved prudential indicators.

The Committee discussed the Local Government Settlement, noting that there had initially been a commitment for the provisional settlement to be issued by the first Friday in December, but this had been delayed by a few weeks.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority had been lobbying for better funding for Fire and Rescue Services and recognised the financial challenge that local authorities faced. The funding would be used to protect front line services in Merseyside.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

5. Statement of Assurance 2021-22

Members were asked to consider and approve the Statement of Assurance for 2021/22 as outlined in the National Framework.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the information contained within the report be noted;
- b) the Authority's draft Statement of assurance 2021-22 be approved; and
- c) if approved, the Statement of Assurance 2021-22, be signed by the Chair of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority and the Chief Fire Officer

6. Corporate Risk Register April to Sept 2022 Update

The Committee reviewed the current risk register and the control measures in place from April – September.

Members attention was drawn to the financial and budget risks and it was hoped that access to an uplift in grant funding would help to ameliorate some of the potential risk.

With regards to loss of staff, Members were assured that the Authority had robust business continuity plans in place to cover any staff loss during a period of industrial action. It was noted that there was currently an industrial action ballot that was due to conclude in January.

Members enquired as to whether the risk register took into consideration the risk of not refreshing its equipment. The Chief Fire Officer explained that as the lead for National Resilience, there was a risk for MFRA but that the Authority understood the longevity of its kit and equipment and was in discussion with the Home Office to mitigate those risks.

RESOLVED that the Updated Corporate Risk Register for 2022/23 which incorporates the current status of those risks to September 2022 be approved.

7. Service Delivery Plan 2022-23 July to Sept Update

Members considered the Service Delivery Plan and were asked to scrutinise the Authority's performance against its objectives and targets.

It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of incidents attended in the last year which was partially due to increasing support for the police and ambulance staff in gaining access to commercial buildings and residences.

Members were advised that there had been a drop-in dwelling fires and fatality figures remained low.

It was explained that the effects of Covid were still prevalent in the sickness figures and the Authority was considered how it could support staff and reduce absence levels. It was explained that if a member of staff tested positive then alternative working arrangements could be sought e.g. working from home or in an isolated role if appropriate.

RESOLVED that the attached Service Delivery Plan reports be approved for publication on the Authority website

8. Purchase Of High Reach Extendable Turret Appliance

The Chief Fire Officer presented a request to purchase a 20 metre high reach extendable turret appliance to penetrate steel and enhance Merseyside's fire-fighting capability.

Members enquired as to whether further training would be needed for fire fighters to use the equipment and it was explained that crews had been part of trialling and selecting the appliance. Further training would be provided once the vehicle was purchased to ensure it could be utilised to full effect in any operational incident.

With regards to the procurement process, Members were advised that there had been one supplier for the equipment and the Authority had ensured good value for money by comparing the value with other FRS'.

It was asked if the equipment was to replace an existing vehicle and Members were informed that this purchase was for a new vehicle that would give the Authority more fire-fighting capability. Members were reminded that this formed part of the IRMP as the Authority sought to enhance its aerial capability.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the contents of the report be noted;

- b) the procurement of the 20m HRET Special Appliance at a cost of £547,985 be approved

9. Coaching and Mentoring Policy

Members considered a report on the proposed approach to coaching and mentoring with regards to staff progression, retention and recruitment.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Coaching and Mentoring Policy be approved;
- b) it be noted that a consultation will take place with representative bodies on both the policy with a further report to be brought back if necessary to advise on any significant changes following this process.

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10. Hybrid Working Policy

The Chief Fire Officer presented the Hybrid Working Policy which sought to introduce new ways of working to improve productivity and potentially minimise the cost of living crisis for staff. It was explained that the policy had been compiled with feedback from staff during engagement sessions to capture their views and aspirations around agile working, whilst ensuring that the service remained effective in delivering the best outcomes for the public.

With regards to uptake, it was explained that around 100 members of staff had taken part in the engagement sessions and a variety of opinions had been provided. The approach would not be applicable to all roles e.g. firefighter and some staff had stated they would not wish to work from home. Therefore, requests would be considered on a case by case basis with an aim to facilitate individual requests where appropriate.

It was suggested that the Chief Fire Officer report on the introduction of the policy on a quarterly basis to provide the Members with some assurance of its efficacy.

Members praised the approach noting that it would help with retention of staff, a common issue for local authorities and the public sector. It was suggested that a

travel scheme to support staff who use the Mersey Tunnels could be beneficial and should be explored with the LCRCA.

With regards to a budget for the policy, it was explained that some funding had been allocated for IT costs.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) the Hybrid Working Policy be approved.
- c) that a report is brought back to members via the scrutiny function to ensure the policy is delivering the expected improvements in productivity.

Date of next meeting

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 23 March 2023