

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

13 AUGUST 2026

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Jan Grace, James Roberts, Kieran Murphy, Jerry Williams, Lynne Thompson, Matt Kent, and Heather Westhead

Also Present:	Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Head of Finance	James Campbell

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Chris Page, Sam Gorst, Les Byrom, Lena McCormick, Tony Murphy, and Aimee Wright (Councillors James Roberts, Heather Westhead, Jerry Williams and Lynne Thompson attended as alternatives).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any item on the agenda.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 30th April 2026 be agreed as an accurate record.

4. ND2 Procurement: Wildfire Unimogs

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the ND2 Procurement; Wildfire Unimog's report. Members were advised that a procurement process had been undertaken to purchase four specialist Unimog wildfire response vehicles at a total cost of £656,000 as part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded National Resilience Wildfire Pilot.

Members noted that the report sought approval to replace the previously intended lease arrangements for the remaining four vehicles with a direct purchase option. It was highlighted that this approach would maintain operational capability whilst delivering an estimated saving of £115,793 when compared to continuing with the lease arrangements.

Councillor Kieran Murphy sought clarification on whether the estimated saving of £115,793 was an annual saving or related to the lifespan of the vehicles.

Members were advised that the estimated saving related to the lifespan costs of the ND2 vehicle programme.

Councillor James Roberts sought clarification regarding the vehicle arrangements and asked whether the proposal involved the outright purchase of four additional Unimog vehicles alongside the previously leased Isuzu and Unimog vehicles. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, advised that the original arrangement had been to lease six Unimog vehicles. However, lease agreements had already been completed for two Unimog vehicles and the proposal therefore related only to the remaining four vehicles, which would now be purchased outright rather than leased.

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, provided further clarification that the Authority had previously entered into an overarching agreement to lease six Unimog vehicles through a broker, with individual Fire and Rescue Services subsequently required to enter into separate lease agreements with the supplier. It was highlighted that two of these individual lease agreements had already been signed, while the remaining four had not. Following the extension of the wildfire pilot and a review requested by MHCLG, Procurement Officers had determined that purchasing the remaining four vehicles represented the most cost-effective option. Members noted that a decision was required at this stage as the vehicles were nearing delivery.

Members were also advised that enquiries had been made regarding the possibility of converting the existing leased vehicles to purchased assets. However, this option would have resulted in additional costs, including lease charges and interest payments, and was therefore not considered financially beneficial. It was anticipated that options regarding the two leased vehicles could be reviewed at the end of the 12 month lease term.

Councillor James Roberts welcomed the proposal noting the increasing frequency and severity of wildfire incidents and emphasised the importance of specialist equipment and future investment to support the Fire and Rescue Service's response to such incidents. He expressed his support for the recommendations contained within the report.

Councillor Thompson sought clarification on whether vehicle maintenance, repair and upkeep costs had been considered within the projected savings arising from the proposed purchase. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, advised that ongoing maintenance would be managed through established long-term capability management arrangements, with funding provided through National Resilience agreements supported by MHCLG.

Category Manager, Martin Roberts confirmed that the lease agreement for the vehicles includes servicing and maintenance provisions, including the initial service requirements and as a result, there was no material difference in cost under the lease arrangement.

Councillor Kieran Murphy requested for examples of occasions where Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service had been deployed outside the county recently. In response, the Chief Fire Officer advised that crews had recently

been deployed to Derbyshire for a period of ten days, to assist with the wildfires, and that an appliance had also been deployed to Cambridgeshire that morning, with the deployment expected to continue until at least the end of the week.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted;
- b) the procurement of four Unimog wildfire response vehicles at a total cost of £656,000 be approved; and
- c) the estimated saving of approximately £115,793 compared with the lease option be noted

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 3 September 2026