

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 2015

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Leslie T. Byrom CBE (Chair) Councillors
Denise Roberts, Jean Stapleton, Sharon Sullivan,
Lesley Rennie, Robbie Ayres, Mike Kearns and Paul Tweed

Also Present: Linda Maloney

Apologies of absence were received from:
Peter Brennan, Roy Gladden and Ray Halpin

8. CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENT

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chair checked that all in attendance had copies of the following documents:

- Urgent Item 8 – Liverpool City Region Combined Authority – Governance Arrangements
- Appendix B – “Letter of Representation” to Agenda Item 4, to which an additional paragraph was added at the request of the External Auditors, Grant Thornton.

Information regarding general housekeeping and confirmation of the recording of proceedings was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair then declared the meeting open and recording of the proceedings commenced.

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) The following declarations of interest were made by Members in relation to items of business on the Agenda:

- Cllrs Lesley Rennie, Jean Stapleton and Denise Roberts declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item 7 – Wirral Youth Zone, due to being Wirral Councillors
 - Cllr Jean Stapleton also declared an interest in the item, due to being a member of the Wirral Youth Zone Steering Group, since its inception.
 - Cllr Lesley Rennie, also declared an interest in the Item as it makes reference to a John Syvret of Cammell Lairds being involved in the project, who Cllr Rennie knows personally as they both sit on the Mersey Maritime Board.
- b) The following additional item of business was determined by the Chair to be considered as a matter of urgency;
- Agenda Item 8 – Liverpool City Region Combined Authority – Governance Arrangements
- 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.

However it was noted that Appendix A to Agenda Item 7 – Wirral Youth Zone, contained EXEMPT information by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and should discussion around this Appendix be required, members of the press and public would need to be excluded before discussion commenced.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 26th March 2015, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Audit Findings 2014-15

Representatives from the Authority's external auditors – Grant Thornton, were in attendance to present their Audit Findings Report for 2014/15.

Mike Thomas – Director at Grant Thornton, presented a summary of their findings, stating that they anticipate providing an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements and an unqualified value for money conclusion.

Furthermore the overview emphasised that given the substantial financial savings already delivered by MFRA; the Authority will face a significant challenge moving forward, to continue to address the budget gap whilst continuing to meet its statutory responsibilities.

Members thanked the Auditors for their attendance.

Members resolved that:

The content of the report be noted.

4. Statement of Accounts 2014/15 - authorisation for issue

(CFO/075/15 Appendix A)

Members considered report CFO/075/15 of the Treasurer, concerning the audited 2014/15 Statement of Accounts.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which emphasised that there have been no changes to the accounts from the 2014/15 year end outturn position reported and approved in June.

Members were informed that Appendix B to the report – “Letter of Representation”, had been amended at the request of the auditors, to include reference to a contingent liability in relation to additional backdated commutation payments which may be due to some retired members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme, for which a reliable estimate cannot be provided at present as figures have not been provided to date.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The audited Statement of Accounts 2014/15, be approved.
- b) The Statement of Accounts 2014/15, be authorised for issue.
- c) The amended Letter of Representation in relation to the 2014/15 accounts, be approved.

5. Financial Review 2015/16 - April to June

(CFO/074/15)

Members considered Report CFO/074/15 of the Treasurer, concerning a review of the financial position, revenue and capital, for the Authority for 2015/16 for the period April to June 2015.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted progress in relation to the delivery of saving options, changes to the approved capital programme and the drawdown of reserves to fund schemes.

Questions were raised regarding the Authority’s Treasury Management process and the financial rating of those institutions in which the Authority has funds invested.

Members were advised that the Authority's treasury management continues to be provided by Liverpool City Council, who constantly monitor investments on the Authority's behalf.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) The Treasurer be instructed to continue working with budget managers to maximise savings in 2015/16.

6. Purchase of Prime Movers

(CFO/077/15)

Members considered report CFO/077/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the recent procurement exercise for two replacement prime mover vehicles.

Members were provided with information regarding the function of; and age profile of the Authority's prime movers.

Members were also informed that the vast majority of the Authority's fleet are now Scania models. As such, it would be more efficient and would ensure greater continuity and interoperability if the replacement prime movers were also Scania models. However, as the cost of replacing these vehicles would exceed European thresholds, the vehicles need to be purchased using a framework agreement to ensure compliance with Contract Standing Orders and other relevant legislation.

Members Resolved that:

The purchase of two prime mover vehicles as proposed, be approved.

7. Wirral Youth Zone

(CFO/078/15)

Before consideration of this item, the Chair of the Committee informed Members that the item would be considered in open session, unless there was a requirement for discussion around the Exempt Appendix A.

Members considered Report CFO/078/15 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning confirmation of their previous in principle decision (CFO/048/14), to transfer the land released during the building of Birkenhead Community Fire and Rescue Station, to support the creation of the Hive Youth Zone.

Members were provided with an overview of the report and some contextual information concerning the development of a Youth Zone on land adjacent to Birkenhead Community Fire & Rescue Station.

Members were informed that a company has been established for the Youth Zone and a Business Plan has been drawn up. It is intended that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer will be a member of the company board.

The principles of the Youth Zone reflect those of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service; the 'Hive' will seek to engage young people from across Wirral.

Members were provided with an overview of the legal implications of the report, which highlighted that as the value of the land is less than £2m, the land can be disposed of under General Disposal Consent; and that necessary provisions have been put in place to protect the Authority and ensure the land is only used for the purpose it was provided for.

Discussion took place around the report with Members commenting that the facility will make a huge difference to young people within the area, raising their aspirations and reducing anti-social behaviour in the area.

Members resolved that:

- a) The land adjacent to Birkenhead Community Fire and Rescue Station, be transferred to Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council for the purposes of building a state of the art Youth Zone for the improvement of the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.
- b) The transfer of the land be at nominal consideration.
- c) The creation of a designated Youth Engagement facility within the Youth Zone be approved, from which Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) can deliver its youth programmes.

8. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority - Governance Arrangements

Members considered Report CFO/081/15 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning a response from the Authority to David Parr (Chief Executive Halton Council) on the options under consideration by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority over future governance arrangements for Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, which could involve Halton falling under the operational responsibility of the Service.

Members were provided with an summary of the report, which advised of correspondence received from David Parr (Chief Executive of Halton Council), concerning discussions with DCLG and the Home Office around implications of

the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and an overview of that correspondence.

Members were informed that there are currently 3 options under consideration; and were provided with an overview of the Authority's proposed response to each of those options.

It was agreed that option 3 would be the Authority's preferred way forward, however it was acknowledged that this option would be an advantage to Merseyside but a disadvantage to Cheshire; and ultimately, any decision would be for Halton and the five constituent local authorities to determine.

Furthermore, it was noted that the primary focus of devolution is to drive economic growth, increasing economic prosperity and reducing deprivation. As the Authority's overriding concern is public safety, they would support any decision of the Combined Authority which achieves that outcome.

Members resolved that:

The response as set out within the report, be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 24 March 2016

Signed: _____

Date: _____