

# **MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**18 OCTOBER 2018**

## **MINUTES**

**Present:** Cllr Leslie T. Byrom CBE (Chair) Councillors  
Lynne Thompson, Denise Allen, Sharon Connor,  
Joe De'Asha, Janet Grace, Chris Meaden, Peter Brennan,  
Lesley Rennie, James Roberts, Jean Stapleton,  
Sharon Sullivan, Paul Tweed and Andrew Makinson

**Also Present:**

**Apologies of absence were received from:**  
Jane Kennedy (PCC), Cllr Brian Kenny, Cllr Steff O'Keeffe,  
Cllr Lisa Preston and Cllr Roy Gladden

### **12. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chair of the Authority read out the general housekeeping sheet; and confirmed to all in attendance that the proceedings of the meeting would not be recorded.

The Chair, on behalf of the Authority, congratulated Nick Searle on his recent appointment as Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

The Chair of the Authority also welcomed some visitors to the meeting, including David Dryburgh – MFRA's lead for HMICFRS; and 2 Knowsley Borough Councillors, who were in attendance as part of their development.

### **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 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

It was noted that since the previous meeting of the Authority on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018, there have been some changes in Committee Membership, as follows:

- Cllr Denise Allen has been appointed to the Audit Committee in place of Cllr Sharon Connor (who was previously appointed to three Committees)
- Cllr Roy Gladden, who has now been appointed to MFRA by Liverpool City Council, be appointed to the Community Safety & Protection Committee (previously stated as New Liverpool Cllr)
- Cllr Les Byrom, be appointed to the Policy & Resources Committee (previously stated as Cllr T.B.C)

## **3. Amendments to the Authority's Constitution**

Members considered Report CFO/061/18 of the Monitoring Officer, informing Members that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside (PCC) has asked to withdraw her membership of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) and has instead asked that Members approve the reconstitution of the Fire and Police Collaboration Committee through which the collaboration between both services can continue to be scrutinised.

Members were informed that the PCC for Merseyside has been a voting Member of MFRA for some time. Although she has advised that she is now unable to continue with this membership, she is still very interested in ensuring that collaboration between Merseyside Police and MFRA continues. Therefore, she has requested that the Fire & Police Collaboration Committee, be re-instated.

Members were advised that Draft Terms of Reference for the Fire & Police Collaboration Committee were attached to the report for their consideration.

The Chair of the Authority thanked the PCC for her contribution to MFRA during her appointment.

Members Resolved that;

- a) The withdrawal of the PCC from full voting membership of MFRA, be approved.
- b) The reconstitution of the Fire and Police Collaboration Committee, be approved; and

- c) The draft Terms of Reference for the Fire and Police Committee as attached in Appendix A to this report, be approved.

**4. Revised Protocol - Reporting at Authority Meetings**

Members considered Report CFO/054/18 of the Monitoring Officer, concerning a revised Protocol on Reporting at Authority Meetings, for implementation and publication on the Authority's Website.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted that a Protocol for Reporting at Authority Meetings has been in place since the Openness in Local Government Bodies Regulations came into force, which allows for the recording of meetings.

However, Members were informed that at the time when the Regulations came into force and the initial Protocol was produced, there were significant building works underway within MFRA's Headquarters building. These works have since been completed, resulting in significantly enhanced building security and a requirement for the Protocol to be revised.

Members were advised that should the revised Protocol be approved for implementation, a copy will be retained on Reception for reference. They were also informed that the Protocol will be applied reasonably, taking account of adverse weather conditions and such.

Members Resolved that:

The attached revised Protocol on Reporting at Authority Meetings, be approved for implementation and publication on the Authority's Website.

**5. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Report April 2017 to March 18**

Members considered Report CFO/057/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning an update on the progress made against the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) Action Plan 2017-2020 and our ED&I objectives for 2017-2020.

Members were provided with a detailed overview of the report, which demonstrates MFRA's compliance with the Equality Act 2010 general duty.

Members were informed that Appendix A details the work being undertaken in relation to the delivery of the Action Plan; and analysis of workforce data and information regarding MFRA's Gender Pay Gap.

Members were advised that Equality Objective 1 relates to ensuring that we have the right people in place, who reflect the communities we serve. Members were informed of some of the key headlines from this objective.

Members were informed that the focus of Equality Objective 2 is around the delivery of HFSC's whilst Equality Objective 3 is related to information around

accidental dwelling fires; and it was highlighted that for 2017/18, there were 915 across Merseyside, which is the lowest number of incidents recorded. However, they were also informed that the majority of those incidents were within the most deprived areas.

Objective 5, which is around benchmarking MFRA against equality standards, Members were advised that we are striving to achieve a standard of excellence again in the new Inspection regime; and some of the work undertaken was highlighted, specifically in relation to the health and wellbeing of our staff.

It was explained to Members that the remainder of the report highlights some of the progress made in the delivery of the Equality & Diversity Action Plan.

Questions were raised by Members regarding the number of female employees for 2016/17; and what we are doing to try to increase the number of female and BAME employees and were advised that the number is likely to be somewhere between those for 2015/16 and those for 2017/18, as since MFRA has started to recruit again, there has been a steady increase in the number of female operational staff.

Members were further advised that we are going into communities with a higher level of BAME representation to promote MFRA as an employer of choice. The firefighter recruitment is a very stringent process and individuals drop out at various stages of that process. However, we are now working with those individuals to encourage and support them; and we are trying to reach out and access all of the protected characteristics in some form.

Although previous objectives have been around achieving quotas and targets, now the Authority is focused on encouraging individuals from underrepresented groups to apply for positions within MFRA, whilst still maintaining a rigorous process that ensures that the right people are ultimately selected.

Members were advised that extensive work has been undertaken to increase the appeal of the FRS, for example work with the Princes Trust and Fire Cadets. These programmes can provide progression pathways for young people, therefore the more diverse those teams can be, the better, as they can act as a launch pad for further careers within MFRA.

Further questions were raised by Members in relation to volunteers; and how more young people and those from underrepresented groups can be recruited into the volunteer cohort; and how their input is recognised.

Members were provided with information on volunteer participation in community safety campaigns, operational exercises and events such as Older Persons Day. Some are seeking employment within MFRA whilst others are seeking alternative outcomes..

In addition, Members were informed that volunteers are treated the same as our employees, with access to the same benefits, which are an added incentive to be part of MFRA.

Further comments were made by Members in relation to cadets, with particular mention given to the Archbishop Blanch unit, which is the only all-female unit in the Country; and one which has a high percentage of BAME participants. It was noted that there is a waiting list for young women to join this particular cadet unit; and that several of the young women involved have stated that they wish to be firefighters.

Members also raised questions regarding the lack of operational staff from Asian backgrounds; and whether other FRS's have had more success in recruiting such individuals into operational roles.

Members were advised that there is a clear benefit in looking at other FRS's and through the NFCC, MFRA have a very good relationship with the Asian Fire & Rescue Services Association (AFSA).

Work to break down barriers and build relationships with communities, is starting to change people's views; and as MFRA is recruiting again after an extended period of no recruitment, it is hoped that we will start to see some changes in the staff profile over the forthcoming five years.

Members Resolved that:

The report be approved for publication on the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service website.

**6. Equality Analysis of Workforce and Employment Data as at 31.03.18**

Members considered Report CFO/064/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning a breakdown of the Authority's workforce (people) data produced in order to meet the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and in order to allow scrutiny of the service in relation to the PSED.

Some specific aspects of the report were highlighted to Members, such as the recognition that there is still some work to do around progression for BAME and females.

Questions were raised by Members in relation to the gender pay gap; and specifically around progression opportunities for females in non-operational roles, as the report suggests that there are more females in lower grade non-operational roles.

Members were advised that the figures are skewed somewhat by the fact that there are predominantly males in the higher paid operational roles; and there are more females in non-operational roles – which are often paid less.

Members were informed that there are career progression pathways for both operational and non-operational employees; and that in terms of the makeup of the Strategic Leadership Team, although there are a large number of male

operational leaders, there are also a couple of female non-operational leaders who are part of that Team.

The Chair of the Authority commented that within the sector, there are now several females in very senior positions, who will act as role models. He advised that MFRA have recently advertised two senior operational positions, however there were no female applicants for either role. Therefore, the Authority can only appoint from those who apply.

Further comments were made regarding the percentage of female operational staff being above the national average, which is promising; and the make-up of the Fire Authority, which now consists of a good balance of male and female Members.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The publication of the Equality Analysis of Workforce and Employment Data Report on the Authority website, in order to demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and to meet our Public Sector Equality Duties, be noted and approved.
- b) The strategic approaches to addressing the key areas of the Workforce data, be endorsed.
- c) The provision of further updates through the future scrutiny of the recently endorsed People Strategy, be noted.

**7. Results of the Employees Engagement Survey 2018**

Members considered Report CFO/065/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the results of the MFRA staff engagement survey 2018.

Members were advised that the purpose of this report was to provide the headlines from the 2018 Staff Survey; and that a link to the full reports would be provided following the meeting.

Members were provided with an overview of the report and background information, highlighting that significant progress has been made since the initial staff survey in 2014, despite the 2018 survey being conducted during a period of significant change.

It was stated that a focus has been around ensuring that staff are accessed and communicated with effectively; and feel able to contribute and make suggestions.

Members were informed that the response rate for the 2018 survey was 56%, with the engagement level being 75%. It was highlighted to Members that in terms of responses, significant differences have been observed between

uniformed staff and non-uniformed staff; and also between long-standing staff and newer staff.

Members were advised that there is still work to be done around improving communication with staff; and as such, the current round of Principle Officer Talks to staff have seen a shift in communication style, from being a briefing format, to a conversation.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the outcomes of the survey will be used to formulate an Action Plan, which will be brought back to Members.

Members were also advised that all Representative Bodies were engaged throughout the process; and all were supportive, encouraging their members to complete the survey.

The Chair of the Authority stated that the results of the 2018 Staff Survey will be a key source in informing the future agenda of MFRA.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The content of the report be noted.
- b) Once devised, the Action Plan be brought back to Members for consideration.

**8. 2017/18 FATAL FIRES REPORT/ TEN YEAR FATAL FIRES REPORT**

Members considered Report CFO/063/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning insight in relation to the fatal fires which have occurred in Merseyside over the last year 2017/18, and the trends established in relation to fatal fires which have occurred over the previous 10 years.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the key findings.

They were informed that for 2017/18, there were 4 fire fatalities, which although absolutely devastating for the families involved, is the most significant reduction that MFRA have ever had.

Members were also advised that there has been a significant reduction in the number of Accidental Dwelling Fires, with there being under 1000 for 2017/18.

Of the 4 fire fatalities during 2017/18, Members were informed that 3 of those individuals lived alone; and 3 were linked to smoking, which follows the trend observed in previous years. In terms of smoking, Members were advised that this is one area addressed during Safe & Well visits, with information and signposting provided around smoking cessation.

In terms of the 10 year analysis, Members were informed that the information supports our Home Safety Strategy; and confirms that individuals over the age of 65, and those that live alone, are more likely to die in fires.

Members commented that it would also be useful to have information regarding housing tenure.

Members were informed that it is now a requirement for landlords to ensure that working smoke alarms are fitted in their properties, which is a positive step forward.

It was agreed that capturing information regarding the type of property would provide useful insight.

Questions were raised about the loneliness agenda; and how MFRA is engaging with other agencies.

Members were advised that when operational crews identify such individuals, they will refer to the Prevention Teams, who have a better understanding of the support available and have links into other agencies.

Members were also informed that as a result of austerity, adult social care provision is not what it was previously, with vulnerable people receiving just basic welfare checks. Often the time our staff spend with individuals is the only interaction they may have had in weeks. Prevention Teams may provide them with details of Silver line, or a befriending line for vulnerable people, to help create networks.

Members were advised that it is recognised that there are probably an equal number of isolated young people as there are older people; and there is some work to do in this regard.

#### Members Resolved that

The content of the reports be noted.

### **9. Home Safety Strategy 2018-2021**

Members considered Report CFO/050/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the progress made in relation to the Home Safety Strategy 2015-2018 and the contents of the Home Safety Strategy (HSS) for 2018-2021).

Members were advised of the work undertaken to ensure the safety of vulnerable people, which starts with a HFSC being undertaken by operational crews.

Data is shared, subject to consent in some circumstances with partners, which enables better targeting of resources.

Members requested that their thanks be passed on to staff for the fantastic preventative work they do in the communities of Merseyside.

The Chief Fire Officer also thanked Members for their involvement in “Older Persons Day”.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The progress made during the implementation of the Home Safety Strategy 2015-2018, be noted.
- b) The contents and direction that are set out in the Home Safety Strategy for 2018-2021 which is attached as Appendix A to this report, be approved.

**10. Bonfire Plan 2018**

Members considered Report CFO/069/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the key elements contained within the 2018 Bonfire plan aimed to limit the number of deliberate fires and instances of anti-social behaviour across Merseyside.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which detailed the 3 phases of the Bonfire Plan. Phase 1, which is concerned with the planning work alongside partners. Phase 2, which is the implementation phase for during the Halloween and Bonfire Period; and Phase 3, which is concerned with the post period de-brief and bonfire sweep.

Members were advised of some of the activity taking place throughout the Bonfire Period, which includes the delivery of presentations within schools, significant work with local businesses around the storage and sale of fireworks, the referral and removal of bonfire material; and the assertive engagement by the Street Intervention Team.

Members were also informed of Operation Banger and the work undertaken with Merseyside Police, which includes the use of a Trojan Fire Appliance, which has proven to be successful in previous years when operational crews have come under attack.

The Chair of the Authority commented that MFRA are very pro-active and the Bonfire Plans have been particularly successful to date. He also stated that MFRA utterly condemn any attacks on our staff.

Further comments were made by Members regarding skips during the period; and it was requested that a message be put out to all Registered Social Landlords requesting that they restrict the use of skips during the Bonfire Period, as contents can be used as fuel.

Members Resolved that:

The contents of the report for the Halloween and Bonfire Period 2018, be noted.

## 11. **PROPOSED NEW FIRE STATION FOR ST. HELENS**

Members considered Report CFO/055/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning an update on progress on the proposed new community fire station for St. Helens, which advised of key dates and sought approval to proceed with the scheme at the budget figure stated.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the background to the project; and the previous decision of the Authority to approve the merger of St. Helens and Eccleston Fire Stations.

Members were advised that the new location will improve response times, meaning a more effective operational response. Members were made aware that the land will require remedial work, which are reflected in the estimated cost.

Members were informed that both Merseyside Police and North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) were asked if they would like to share the new facility. Merseyside Police declined as the proposal did not fit with their estate strategy. Although NWAS were initially interested in proceeding they have withdrawn from the project as they were unable to meet the timescales required. Members were therefore advised that the build will be for MFRA only, at the present time.

St. Helens Council have been very supportive in the pre planning process.

Due to the improvement in response times; and the facilities at the current St. Helens Community Fire Station no longer being fit for purpose, Members were advised that it is the recommendation of officers that the project continues and approval be granted to continue with the build.

Members commented that it was good to see the project advancing, however it was a pity that our partners were unable to be involved.

Members were informed that NWAS currently share seven of our community fire stations, which operate very effectively; and it may be that NWAS choose to be involved at a later stage.

### Members Resolved that:

- a) progress on the proposed new community fire station for St. Helens be noted;
- b) the timetable required to achieve progress be agreed;
- c) approval to proceed with the new build community fire station at a total estimated cost of £7.700m (inclusive of £2.086m grant from the Transformation and Efficiencies fund), be granted; and

- d) An increase in the current scheme budget by £2.450m, funded by a contribution from the capital investment reserve, be approved.

## 12. MFRA Lobbying Strategy

Members considered Report CFO/068/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning a proposed lobbying strategy, which if adopted by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) can be utilised by Members to influence the Government's funding settlement for 2019/20 and the Comprehensive Spending Review 2019 in order to obtain the best financial settlement possible.

Members were provided with an overview of the report and were informed that the lobbying strategy will aim to secure flexibility regarding Council Tax, highlight the broader role of firefighters and the contribution they make across our communities; and recognise the impact that austerity has had on all of our staff as individuals.

Members were informed that the lobbying strategy has the collective support of the City Region, including all Merseyside District Leaders, the Metro Mayor and MP Frank Field. The timeline for the lobbying process was also highlighted to Members; and it was acknowledged that MFRA need to act quickly. It was also stated that regardless of the outcome, MFRA will continue to lobby and do all we can to protect the communities of Merseyside.

Members were also advised that the lobbying strategy has the full support of all union colleagues.

The recommendations and draft resolution, were highlighted to Members; and those Members with responsibility for answering questions on the discharge of the Authority's functions, within their District Councils, were requested to take the resolution back to their respective councils, to seek their approval and support.

The Chair of the Authority commented that there are several areas where the lobbying strategy will seek to secure improvements for MFRA, including a change to the business rate scheme, as well as around Council Tax. He commented that if they are successful in securing more money for MFRA, it will be spent on more firefighters to make the County safer.

The Chair of the Authority – Cllr Les Byrom, formally moved the following resolution:

*“Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority writes to the Home Office, to formally seek approval to set the 2019/20 annual precept at £5.00 for Council Tax for a Band D property; and pro rata for other bands, in line with the discretion allowed to other fire authorities in previous years.”*

The Vice-Chair of the Authority – Cllr Sharon Sullivan, seconded the resolution.

Members voted on the proposed resolution, which was approved unanimously.

The Chair of the Authority advised that the Districts will be asked to consider a wider resolution.

Members played tribute to all staff for their continued support and dedication during austerity; and stated that the Authority, staff and unions need to continue working together.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The approach and actions in relation to lobbying Government as set out in this report, including the drafting of a lobbying submission to be presented to Government in 2019 in support of fair funding for MFRA, be approved.
- b) The tight timescale for action, be noted.
- c) The Chief Fire Officer be instructed to facilitate all necessary steps to prepare a lobbying submission that enjoys the full supported Merseyside's political leadership.
- c) A draft resolution for submission to the District Councils in support of additional Government funding for MFRA, be approved.
- d) Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority writes to the Home Office, to formally seek approval to set the 2019/20 annual precept at £5.00 for Council Tax for a Band D property; and pro rata for other bands, in line with the discretion allowed to other fire authorities in previous years.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 23 May 2019

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_