

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

28 JULY 2022

MINUTES

Present: Cllr James Roberts (chair)
Cllr Les Byrom
Cllr Sharon Connor
Cllr Tracy Dickinson
Cllr Dave Hanratty
Cllr Andrew Makinson
Cllr Hugh Malone

Also Present: DCFO Nick Searle, Ria Groves, Ian Cummins

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Harry Gorman, Cllr Gillian Wood, CFO Phil Garrigan

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) 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 Policy and Resources Committee, held on 24th March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Structure of the Authority

Ria Groves took the committee through the Structure of the Authority.

Cllr Hanratty questioned who the main opposition spokesperson would be. Ria Groves stated that it is currently Cllr Makinson as the leader of the Liberal Democrats Party and it has been agreed it will transition midway through the year which reflects the same situation as last year..

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4. Service Delivery Plan 2021-22 End of Year Update

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented an update on the 2021 to 2022 Service Delivery Plan.

Cllr Byrom highlighted the importance of members understanding the main information to be taken from the report. He then credited the continuation of high-quality attendance/speed within the county and the statistically low fire deaths currently. However, highlighted the importance of key areas not being red such as sickness absence and the importance of drawing out key management statistics. Nick Searle reassured members that key areas are monitored constantly and if any key aspects are highlighted red it is monitored constantly.

Following this Cllr Malone questioned what the sickness figures were like compared to other authorities. Deb Appleton stated that not all Fire and Rescue Services use the same databases as MFRS to monitor sickness absence figures therefore, national statistics would have to be gathered from the People and Organisational Development team. Nick Searle also highlighted that due to Covid the sickness absence figures have been affected however the service has received good help from the occupational health team. Cllr Hanratty agreed that it is now difficult to compare sickness absence figures each year due to Covid however, Cllr Hanratty stated that the response time within the service is still excellent and this is a credit to everyone involved.

In relation to industrial waste fires, Members queried what we can do to stop this with the help of the environmental health service and added his concern for the impact the current waste fires are having in Kirkdale and questioned what actions we can take to reduce this. Nick Searle explained the prevention team have been attending areas recently that have been effected to highlight the issues that are leading to the fires.

Members queried how many drones the Service can have and the importance of having a number of employees trained to use them effectively as they can change the approach to fires. Nick Searle explained that there is a lot of data protection legislation that comes with the use of drones however the protection department have been trained up on the use of drones and they have been used at large scale incidents recently. .. The DCFO confirmed the use of drones in Heswall and Formby has been signed off at the Ops Board on 28/07/2022 to tackle wildfire issues in the county and each drone cost £300 each and £95 to train a pilot.

Members were also advised that in regard to environmental issues the Fire Authority can only take action within its legislative powers however officers from the protection team liaise with local authorities in every way they can.

Cllr Connor raised attention to page 26 of the report and questioned if the target for high risk visits by the protection team is 2000 annually. Nick Searle stated that post Grenfell Fire Services are reviewing what a high risk review is and what warrants a high risk review. However the annual target is 2000.

RESOLVED that the report be approved for publication.

5. REVENUE & CAPITAL OUTTURN 2021/22

Ian Cummins, Director of Finance took the committee through the Revenue and Capital outturn report.

Following the report Cllr Makinson questioned that previously it was discussed that there would be a 1 million pound spend on electricity however, page 90 refers to a 1.2 million spend on electricity contracts. Ian Cummins explained that there was no fixed price on the cost, during April, May and June and while the Authority was with Scottish Power. However it was agreed at the last Urgency Committee, the Authority would enter a new contract with a fixed rate under the Crown commercial services framework, with an estimated cost of around 1.5 million pounds.

Cllr Byrom queried how the authority can tolerate an underspend on 2 million pounds. He then emphasised the importance of building up a budget and storing away some capital to afford projects such as the TDA as delivering a project of this scale with capital money alone is a challenge. Therefore the authority needs to set aside a reserve for revenue costs. Cllr Byrom then stated that by January the authority needs to have a better idea of the power bills to look at re trimming the current budget.

RESOLVED that:

- a) actual revenue spend compared to the approved budget delivered a net underspend of £2.203m before the creation of year-end reserves be noted.
- b) this underspend be used to:
 - a. create the required year-end reserves of £0.250m to fund projects that have slipped from 2021/22 into 2022/23 be approved.
 - b. increase in the inflation reserve by £1.953m in order to meet the expected higher energy costs and potential pay awards in 2022/23 be approved.
- c) the re-phasing of planned capital spend from 2021/22 into future years of £4.012m, as outlined in Appendix B, be approved.
- d) the committed reserves of £30.499m and a general reserve of £3.0m as outlined in Appendix A4 be approved.

6. Pay Policy

Nick Searle, Deputy Chief Fire Officer took the committee through the current Pay Policy report.

The Committee approved the publication of the Authority's Pay Policy with Cllr Byrom adding it's the right thing to do.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The publication of the Authority's Pay Policy be approved.
- b) The potential challenges that predicted changes to national Living Wage will have on the existing grade structure be noted.
- c) Officers be instructed to develop and report back on options to be considered alongside ongoing national work at the NJC.

Close Time:

Date of next meeting Thursday, 15 December 2022

Signed: _____

Date: _____