

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

7 SEPTEMBER 2023

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Brian Kenny (Chair) Councillors Paul Tweed,
Janet Grace, Lynne Thompson, Ed Lamb, Linda Maloney,
Dorren Knight and Les Byrom CBE

Also Present: Phil Garrigan Chief Fire Officer
Ria Groves Monitoring Officer
Ian Cummins Director of Finance and Procurement

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Finneran and Gorst.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest declared for this meeting.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on the 6th April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Service Delivery Plan 2023 - 24 April to June Update

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the Service Delivery Plan for 2023/24 with an update covering the period of April to June 2023.

Members were advised that the Service had adopted a new process for monitoring performance (blue, red, amber, green or grey) and this was visible in the report.

It was acknowledged that the number of fires attended over this period had reduced, with 144 fewer fires than in 2022. This was attributed to the proactive preventative work that was being undertaken and the Service's high visibility and engagement within the community.

The number of fires in primary dwellings had also reduced by 71 compared to 2022/23 and it was believed that this was a result of work undertaken by Prevention, Response and Protection in regards to engagement.

It was noted that there had been a slight increase in deliberate fires in unoccupied properties (up 1 from the previous year) but that performance in relation to accidental fires has been good, with a year on year reduction.

The report outlined each department's Functional Plan and Members were advised that the delivery of the Training and Development Academy was on schedule and that there would be an opportunity for a walk around of the site.

The Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the recent Fire Cadet Games noting that it had been a brilliant event attended by 18 Fire and Rescue Services at the Albert Dock, Liverpool. The Authority placed on record its thanks to the staff who did an exceptional job in delivering that event.

The Chair thanked the Chief Fire Officer for a comprehensive and positive report which covered a wide range of areas. He also commended the Service on the Fire Cadet Games which he had attended, noting that it had been an engaging and positive event for young people.

Councillor Thompson questioned the number of deliberate fires in unoccupied areas and asked if there was any extra pressure that the Authority could exert on the owners of these derelict buildings to ensure that they were adequately secured. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Arson Team were tackling anti-social behaviour and working with other agencies where there are repeat issues.

Councillor Maloney noted that there had been a fatality at Car Mill Damn in St Helens and wanted to thank the Service for its response that day. Furthermore, she raised concerns over wild swimming and whether the dangers were being communicated to young people. The Chief Fire Officer noted that he had attended that incident and had seen first-hand the impact that loss had on the community. The Authority had officers who focused on water safety and there was a multiagency response to raise awareness and educate people on the dangers of wild swimming. Members were advised that the Marine Rescue Unit were active on the River Mersey. The Chief Fire Officer passed on his deepest condolences to the family involved and thanked the crews who responded so effectively and with absolute compassion.

With regards to the Authority's youth education programme, Councillor Grace noted that the last Princes Trust Pass Out at Bootle had gone from strength to strength and the development of the young people involved has been inspirational. Members queried if there was still sufficient funding to continue running the project and the Chief acknowledged that supporting young people was important to the Authority. When asked how to tackle serious organised crime, Andy Cooke had responded 'tackle inequality and create opportunity' and the Authority agreed with that mantra, focusing on areas of heightened deprivation to create opportunities for young people. It was explained that funding for projects like Beacon and the Princes Trust were available as part of the Authority's Serious Violence Duty and the Authority would continue to make this work a priority.

Members noted that the Authority's relationship with the Police was very visible and the Chief Fire Officer explained that this relationship enabled the emergency services to deliver collaborative work that could really help people in Merseyside.

Councillor Les Byrom commented that the Police were changing how they respond to mental health incidents and this could impact on Fire and Rescue Services.

With regards to road traffic collisions, Councillor Lamb advised that he had been working with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Emily Spurrell, on the region's Vision to Zero, Road Safety Strategy for 2040. He asked how the Authority worked with the Police and if there were any areas of concern for the Service. The CFO advised that the Authority worked with its partners to reduce road traffic collisions and it specifically focused on educating drivers on the dangers of driving carelessly.

Councillor Knight noted the number of suicide and suicide attempts related to mental health and asked what the Authority did to try to combat this. It was explained that the Authority was a Member of the Suicide Partnership to tackle mental health issues for young people and the Authority's youth engagement work added to this. Support was provided to the Authority's own staff to ensure that their wellbeing was safeguarded.

RESOLVED that the attached Service Delivery Plan reports (Appendices 1-9) for publication on the website be approved.

5. Financial Review 2023/24 - April to June

Ian Cummins, Director of Finance and Procurement presented the Financial Review for 2023/24 with an update covering the period of April to June 2023/24.

Councillor Kenny asked for assurance around the key budget assumptions and it was explained that the biggest risk was around pay as the 'green book' pay award was still being negotiated with the Unions. However, it was felt that underspend from the level of vacancies in the organisation could mitigate that risk.

With regard to inflation, Members were advised that prices were being monitored and reviewed against the current assumptions.

RESOLVED that

- a) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- b) the use of the increase in investment income, £02.78m, to fund capital expenditure and reduce the level of borrowing be approved;
- c) the realignment of reserves and the use of £3.722m of available capital reserve to fund capital expenditure and reduce the level of capital borrowing be approved; and
- d) the Director of Finance and Procurement be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2023/24 and use any savings to reduce the level of capital borrowing.

6. Fire Control Investment in New Technologies and Room Re-Design

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the Fire Control Investment in New Technologies and Room Re-design report that outlined the request to upgrade the Fire Control suite.

Members were reminded that at the Budget Strategy Day on the 19th January 2023, they had discussed investing in technological advancements to assist the Authority in responding quicker to incidents. The proposal before Members sought to introduce a media wall to the Control Room and software that would allow Fire Control to utilise mobile phones to get actual live footage of an incident that can affect the Authority's response.

It was noted that all existing furniture would be relocated into a secondary control room in the Training and Development Academy.

Councillor Maloney asked about the use of body cameras for firefighters and it was explained that their use would be predicated on command roles to safeguard officers making decisions. It was suggested that they could also be utilised in protection during fire safety inspections to identify potential offenses.

RESOLVED that

- a) a new capital scheme for the re-design of the Fire Control Suite at a cost of £95k be approved; and
- b) the request to draw- down £89k from the Capital Reserve to fund those elements of the upgrade top Fire Control that cannot be covered from existing budgets as detailed in paragraphs 16 and 17 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 30 January 2024