

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

14 DECEMBER 2023

MINUTES

Present: **Councillors** James Roberts (Chair), Barbara Murray, Dave Hanratty, Terry Byron, Les Byrom, Pat Moloney and Lesley Rennie

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

8. Apologies for Absence

Apologies from Councillors Wood and Murphy were received.

9. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members at this meeting.

10. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on the 27th July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

11. HMICFRS Inspection Report 2023

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the HMICFRS Inspection Report for 2023, noting that the Authority had been graded as 'outstanding' in 3 areas; preventing fires, responding to major incidents, and utilising its resources to deliver services.

Members were advised that this inspection highlighted that the Authority was one of, if not, the best Fire and Rescue Service in the country.

The Chief explained that he aimed to continue making improvements based on the findings. It was noted that there was more action to be taken on cultural improvement, which would be delivered through the Authority's 'Cultural Improvement Plan'.

Chair of the Authority, Councillor Byrom, noted that the Authority had been marked the highest in the country and that the Authority was doing an excellent job of keeping the people of Merseyside safe.

Councillor Byrom asked the Authority spokespeople to report back to their councils on this achievement. Members were advised that the Authority had offered to share its learning with other Fire and Rescue Services across the country.

Councillor Hanratty thanked every member of the Fire and Rescue Service, noting that they had 'achieved this standard together'. He raised concerns over enforcement and highlighted the importance of identifying problem locations or repeated issues.

Another area of concern for Councillor Hanratty was culture and he suggested that further work needed to be undertaken to ensure staff felt comfortable raising any concerns. Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, explained that the Authority had introduced independent reporting lines and anonymous reporting for that purpose. He assured Members that any unacceptable behaviour would be challenged and such behaviour as that described was not tolerated at MFRS.

With regards to enforcement, the Committee discussed the balance between providing support to growing businesses and ensuring that the premises were safe. Barriers to achieving compliance for small and medium sized enterprises were being considered and the Authority was working to educate owners on the risks of not complying. However, it was made clear that failure to comply would result in enforcement action.

Councillor Rennie asked for clarity around the term 'right people right skills' and it was explained that it was the inspectorate's terminology and it referred to ensuring the right person had the requisite skills to undertake a task. The Authority would continue to ensure that its staff were equipped with the right skills and training to undertake their roles and that the Authority have robust succession plans in place to ensure that remained a focus.

The Committee discussed working practices noting that high standards were expected especially from new recruits entering the service. Members were advised that following instructions was crucial and not working as a team could have catastrophic consequences in terms of people's safety.

RESOLVED that the outcome of the 2023 HMICFRS inspection be noted.

12. Community Risk Management Planning Public Engagement 2023

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Public Engagement 2023 report for 2023.

The Members were provided with an update on the CRMP planning process noting that there had recently been some public engagement to ensure that the Authority's ambitions were in line with the public's needs. It was noted that through this consultation, the public had not included 'avoiding compulsory redundancy' as a key area of focus and it was felt that this was because the service was in a place of investment and growth. Instead, the public emphasised the importance of 'staff wellbeing', and this would be considered moving forward.

The Chief Fire Officer discussed increasing the number of fire engines from 32 to 34, noting the public support for that increase. The public had also been positive about the

reintroduction of a Small Fires Unit to tackle small incidents and utilise resources that would otherwise be 'off the run' due to staff absence.

The CRMP sought to enhance water rescue capability after the recent fatalities in Merseyside and it was hoped that utilisation of enhanced mobilisation could prove beneficial in this area.

Members were advised that a further iteration of the CRMP would be submitted to a future meeting once consultation had been undertaken with stakeholders.

Councillor Hanratty asked if a session on the CRMP could be arranged for Members, and it was agreed this would be beneficial.

RESOLVED that the outcomes of the public engagement which will be considered as the draft CRMP be noted.

13. Treasury Management Interim Report

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea presented the Treasury Management Interim Report to the Members, providing an overview of the Authority's activity and performance to date.

It was explained that the Authority had undertaken no new borrowing since the last report but that it may need to borrow £12m before the end of the financial year to fulfil the capital programme. Members were advised that the Bank of England base rate had increased to 5.25% and Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) long-term borrowing rates had increased by 1.01% from 4.60% at the start of the year to 5.61% at 29th September.

Councillor Byron enquired as to why the Authority would need to borrow £12m and it was explained that it formed part of the Training and Development Academy expenditure.

With regards to the investments in local authorities, Councillor Moloney asked how an investment could be recouped if a Section 114 notice was enforced. Mike Rea advised that all nonessential spending would be halted, and the local authority would be required to pay back the investment from MFRA.

The Chair, Councillor Roberts asked if the change in interest rates meant that the Authority had suffered a net loss in its purchasing power. Members heard that the Authority's ability to pay for things had reduced but that this was not a concern.

Mike Rea was asked if there were any other institutions that the Authority could invest in to ensure the best possible return. It was explained that the Authority ensured that its funds were protected and that was the main consideration when identifying different options for investment.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

14. Financial Review 2023-24 July To Sept

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea presented the Financial Review 2023-24 July-Sept report for 2023-24. The report covered the period of April to September and provided Members with assurance that the budget was robust through a review of revenue, capital, reserves and treasury management.

Members were advised that the revenue remained at £67.9m which was consistent with the original budget, with a review of expenditure and income identifying savings as summarised on page 113 of the agenda.

With regards to reserves, Members were made aware that there had been a drawdown of £1.5m which had been used mainly for the Training and Development Academy to fund new additions as previously reported to the Authority.

Members noted that there had been no new loans during this time and the current market conditions were unfavourable for debt scheduling.

Councillor Byrom wanted to remind Members that the Authority did not receive any specific capital grant allocation from central government and Members were lobbying to address that. The Chief Fire Officer explained that extensive lobbying had taken place with the Fire Minister to try and secure a CPI uplift in grant. It was reported that the 5% flex in Council Tax income may not be available moving forward and that this would have ramifications for the budget setting process.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- b) the use of the forecast £0.500m employee saving to fund capital expenditure and reduce the level of borrowing be approved; and
- c) 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.

15. Statement of Assurance 2022-23

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the Statement of Assurance to the Members noting that it provided a reflective view of 2022-23 and was to be published on the Authority website as required.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the information contained within this report be noted;

- b) the Authority draft Statement of Assurance 2022-23 be approved, and
- c) the statement of Assurance 2022-23, be approved and signed by the Chair of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.

16. Service Delivery Plan 2023-24 Q2 July - September 2023 Update

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the Service Delivery Plan Update report for quarter two, providing an overview of performance to date and delivery against the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and Functional Plan.

It was reported that the total number of incidents had been reduced and that this highlighted the excellent prevention work being undertaken across Merseyside. The total number of primary fires had also reduced from 1020 to 842 and accidental dwelling fires had dropped to 316 from 413 in the previous year.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that targeting intervention to highly deprived areas had directly impacted the number of incidents. It was explained that the prevention strategy sought to ensure that crews visited premises most at risk with an estimated 20% reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires in 2023.

There had also been a reduction in the number of secondary fires attended and it was agreed that this was in part due to the work undertaken in the community to engage with young people.

Members were advised that the Authority was currently just above its target of 4% of shifts lost due to sickness (achieving 4.35% at this time) and that the Scrutiny Committee were already due to review the Authority's approach to absence management at their January meeting.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the attached Service Delivery Plan reports (Appendices A-J) for publication on the website be approved; and
- b) two additional key objectives which have been added to the Protection Functional Plan 2023-24 (Appendix F) be noted:

5.7 Implement protocols for Building Regulations consultations with the Building Safety Regulator, under the new Gateway processes.

5.8 Update/develop procedures in line with legislative changes.

17. Corporate Risk Register 2023-24 April - Sept Update

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the Corporate Risk Register report for 2023-24 April to September and gave an overview of the current status of risks to the Authority.

It was noted that the format of the report was due to change so that it could be reviewed in more depth by the Members.

RESOLVED that the updated Corporate Risk Register for 2023/24 which incorporates the current status of those risks to September 2023 be approved.

18. Enhanced Mobilisation

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the report which sought approval for budget growth for the operational deployment of enhanced mobilisation.

It was explained that the Enhanced Mobilisation would alert firefighters to an operational incident quicker thus improving response time. When a call was made, it would allow control to identify where the call was coming from, and which appliance was nearest. Alerting the crew earlier would allow them to pause any training they were undertaking and ensure all the necessary kit was back on the engine whilst information was being gathered.

Members were advised that similar technology had improved response time by 30 - 60 seconds in another Fire and Rescue Service, an improvement that would take circa 10 additional fire engines to achieve otherwise.

The Members discussed security, coverage and signal and it was explained that the arrangements in place were robust. Members noted that if a phone could call the control room, then this technology could be used.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the Added Advantages of Enhanced Mobilisation be noted;
- b) the success of Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) in using Enhanced Mobilisation be noted;
- c) the Proposed Project Governance and Timescales be noted; and
- d) an increase of £140k in the ICT Capital Budget along with Revenue new Growth of £20k from the financial year 2024/25 be noted.

19. Sale of Aintree Community Fire Station

This minute contains exempt information by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

20. Finance, Procurement, Payroll & Human Resources ICT Application Contract

This minute contains exempt information by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 21 March 2024