

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

30 JANUARY 2025

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Brian Kenny (Chair), Edna Finneran, Jan Grace, Lynn O’Keeffe, Chris Page, Lynne Thompson, Ed Lamb, Les Byrom and Lesley Rennie

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| Also Present: | Chief Fire Officer | Phil Garrigan |
| | Head of Finance | James Campbell |
| | Monitoring Officer | Ria Groves |

8. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Doreen Knight (Councillor Byrom attended as Councillor Knight’s alternate).

9. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest for this meeting.

10. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the public and private minutes of the last meeting held on the 5th September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

11. Change of Appointment to the Authority

Ria Groves, Monitoring Officer presented the report which related to a change of appointment to the Authority from St Helens Council. Members were aware of the sad passing of Councillor Linda Maloney, and Ria Groves reported that St Helens Council had subsequently appointed Councillor Tracy Dickinson to the Authority

It was proposed that Councillor Tracy Dickinson would replace Councillor Linda Maloney on the same Committees.

RESOLVED that;

- a) following the sad passing of Councillor Linda Maloney, the subsequent requirement for St Helens Council to nominate a replacement Member to appoint to the Authority be noted;

- b) the appointment of Councillor Tracy Dickinson as one of St Helens' nominated representatives to the Authority be noted; and
- c) the appointment of Councillor Tracy Dickinson to the following Committees vacated by Councillor Linda Maloney be noted and approved:
 - Policy and Resources Committee
 - Scrutiny Committee

12. Financial Review 2024-25 October to December

James Campbell, Head of Finance, presented a financial review of 2024-25 covering the period of October to December. The report provided Members with assurances that the budget remained robust and that the forecasted expenditure could be contained within the Authority's available resources. Members considered the Authority's revenue, capital budget, reserves and treasury management position.

With regards to revenue, Members were advised that there had been a planned use of reserves and some drawdown from inflation reserves to cover green and red book pay awards as well as some additional internal budget virements. James Campbell noted that the budget remained self-balancing and there was no impact on the overall net budget at this juncture.

It was reported that there had been some savings identified on page 24 and 25 of the report, from non-firefighter employee budget lines, utility cost savings, an increase in investment income and a saving on pay and inflation. This resulted in £800,000 of savings and it was recommended that these savings be used to increase the capital investment reserve to reduce the level of future borrowing.

The capital budget was outlined in the report with a summary of the proposed scheme additions and changes found on page 27. It was noted that officers had reviewed the capital programme with an aim of scoping out start and completion dates for the capital schemes. This had resulted in £2.8million of funds being rephased into 2025/26.

With regards to reserves. James Campbell outlined the movements during October – December as summarised in paragraphs 20 and 21 of the report.

In terms of treasury management, it was reported that the Authority's performance had remained consistent with the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25. Members were made aware that the Bank of England had voted on the 18th December 2024 to maintain interest at 4.75%.

Councillor Jan Grace thanked James Campbell for the report and noted that the significance of putting savings into reserves had been explained to Members at the recent Budget Strategy Day and as such she was in agreement with the recommendations.

Chair of the Authority, Councillor Les Byrom, explained that the Fire Authority did not receive any capital grants from central government and as such it was important how underspend was allocated.

It was noted that the report identified the American elections as having impacted the interest rate, and James Campbell explained that significant global events such as the war in Ukraine or the Oil Crisis could impact the interest rate in the UK due to their effect on economic conditions.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- b) the use of the forecast £0.800m savings to fund an increase in the Capital Investment Reserve and reduce the level of future borrowing be approved; and
- c) the Director of Finance and Procurement be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2024/25 and use any savings to reduce the level of capital borrowing.

13. IRMP 2021-24 Final Update

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the report which provided Members with a final update on the IRMP 2021-2024.

Members were provided an update on specific proposals within the IRMP that were showing as amber/red.

Members were advised that the introduction of a Scorpion appliance into St Helens Station had formed part of the IRMP proposals and further work was underway on the vehicle to ensure it had the right kit and equipment on board before being made available for use. It was noted that the procurement process for this appliance had been delayed by factors outside of the Authority's control and it was believed that the introduction of this appliance would be achieved before the end of March.

With regards to the proposal for joint working with NWAS, it was explained that national discussions were underway with regard to the role of Fire and Rescue Services more broadly and the role of a firefighter remained part of those discussions. The Authority was committed to continue working with other emergency services and it awaited the outcome of those national discussions as to how emergency medical response would be envisioned.

Members were advised that the rest of the IRMP proposals were green (complete) and the Chief Fire Officer pointed out some highlights of the IRMP including the introduction of the hybrid duty system at Kirkdale, combining Aintree and Croxteth fire stations and the creation of the new Training and Development Academy and National Resilience Centre of Excellence.

With regards to specialist capabilities, Members were advised of the relocation of the Combined Platform Ladder appliance from Kirkdale to Liverpool City Centre to better align with the number of high rise buildings in that locality.

Finally, Members were advised that the Authority's process for IRMP planning had been very positively evaluated externally by Liverpool John Moores University.

Members commended the Authority on its proactive approach and the Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the impactful work of Deb Appleton and her team in managing the IRMP.

Councillor Page noted the positive impact of targeting the most vulnerable parts of the community and commented that achieving those results for the people of Merseyside was pleasing to see.

Councillor Thompson noted that the Authority had attained these significant achievements at a time when complex pressures outside of the Authority's control were in place, and that should be recognised.

RESOLVED that the outcomes from the IRMP 2021/24 be noted.

14. Bonfire 2024

Area Manager, Mark Thomas, provided the Members with a presentation on the Bonfire period for 2024.

The presentation outlined the planning process for Operation Banger which included discussion with partners, consideration of risks and liaising with communities. During the bonfire period, the Service removed 59 tonnes of material using 6 tipper trucks as well as utilising a trojan appliance in areas of anti-social behaviour.

The Members were shown images from bonfires which showed the risk for the community of such large scale bonfires in residential areas. The heat from the bonfires was significant and if the wind had blown in a different direction, there could have been disastrous consequences for those communities. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised that this kind of activity was not acceptable.

It was noted that community events that met safety requirements were not an issue, but those without adequate safeguards in place posed a serious risk.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that there had been a decline in the number of incidents during the pandemic but now the number of incidents had risen and there were significant concerns about the large scale bonfires being developed and encouraged by some local businesses and social media content creators. There had been a decline in the number of bonfire displays organised by local authorities and as such community groups were not managing risk at these events with the same rigour.

Members were advised that content creators on social media were encouraging competitive bonfire building to a dangerous level and that risk needed to be addressed. It had been reported that there were also businesses dropping off pallets at these events to add to the bonfire which further increased the risk of someone in the community being hurt by an out of control bonfire.

With these concerns in mind, the Chief Fire Officer explained that only events approved by the Safety Advisory Group would be supported moving forward as they would be safer and more regulated.

Officers were developing an unambiguous statement on this issue that would clearly outline what was and was not acceptable.

Councillor Brian Kenny noted the importance of this issue and urged Members to support the Authority's message. Two of the bonfires highlighted in the presentation were within Councillor Kenny's ward and he commented that although it brought the community together, there were many residents who were also afraid of the scale of the fire. The Chair reinforced the Members role was to make decisions that protected the people of Merseyside, and he hoped all Members would support this message.

Councillor Finneran noted the size of the fire and suggested that the local authority should have stepped in to say that the bonfires were too high to be safe. The Chief Fire Officer agreed that there were clear lessons to take away from the last Bonfire period and the expectations of the Authority in terms of what was acceptable, how these events should be managed and the assurances required to hold these events needed to be communicated with the community.

Councillor Lamb thanked officers for the work undertaken during this period which reassured Members that the Authority was taking this issue seriously. He asked if the Authority would liaise with local authorities about the proposed guidelines before the next bonfire period. The Chief Fire Officer explained that local authority colleagues had been supportive given the challenges they faced with unregulated events and it was expected that they would welcome an unambiguous position from the Authority.

Councillor O'Keeffe asked how the Authority worked with these community event organisers to help them understand what was unacceptable in terms of the scale of these bonfires. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority sought to work with organisers and hoped they would liaise with the local authority for assistance with matters such as safety requirements.

Councillor Rennie commended Councillor Kenny and his colleagues for their hard work during the bonfire period. She emphasised the importance of embedding parameters in the community to ensure that these events were safe.

Area Manager, Mark Thomas noted that this was a significant challenge for the Service and there was a balance to reach between supporting community events and ensuring the community were kept safe.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the content of the report and the commitment and endeavours of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service in the delivery of the Bonfire Plan through Operation Banger 2024 be noted; and
- b) the increase in incidents this year and the intention of Officers to develop a clear and unambiguous position statement in relation to approved community bonfires (which meet clear safety requirements) and others developed without the appropriate safeguards in place to protect the public be noted.

15. Accidental Dwelling Fire Fatality

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented an analysis on accidental dwelling fire fatalities between 2004/05 and 2023/24.

It was explained that there had been one fire fatality in 2023/24 which was the lowest number on record within the Service. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the work done by Prevention and by firefighters going to the most vulnerable parts of Merseyside to provide smoke alarms had been instrumental in this. Deb Appleton's department were commended on analysing the data that determined where to target resources based on who was likely to suffer an accidental dwelling fire.

Prior to 2016/17 there had been an upward trend in fatalities which led the Authority to prioritise prevention work which subsequently saw a decline in fatalities.

The data was analysed on a district level which allowed the Authority to focus on areas of higher risk. Members were also advised that those over 70 were also at a higher risk of fatality so the Authority was pre-emptively targeting over 65's whose lifestyle may be starting to change.

In 97 of the incidents, the victim was a sole occupant which affected people's survival rate if there was a fire in their home, so this had been another area of focus for the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the driving force for the team was for there to be no fire fatalities in Merseyside and they would pursue that goal relentlessly.

Councillor Byrom, Chair of the Authority, thanked the staff for their hard work over the years which had brought the number of fatalities down considerably. Councillor Byrom echoed the Chief Fire Officer's comments that the aim was for zero fatalities from accidental dwelling fires and he suggested that the Service considered how to make car accidents more survivable as well as severe weather incidents, once this goal was met and maintained. He suggested

applying the same approach to other fatal incident types to see if the same success could be achieved. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed this work was already being undertaken.

Councillor Finneran suggested each Member report back to their Local Authority about this prevention work to help spread awareness of the Authority's aims.

Councillor Thompson noted that within the report one of the sources of ignition was candles and it was surprising that candles were still popular given the well documented risk of leaving them unattended in the home.

Councillor Lamb commended the Authority on its rich data and noted that the prevention work being undertaken was endlessly inspiring and he hoped it could provide a blueprint for other areas of work such as road danger reduction. It was requested that moving forward, the Authority consider the terminology it uses for accidental dwelling fires to remove the word 'accidental' to highlight that there was always a reason for these incidents.

The Chief Fire Officer assured the Members that the Authority would not rest on its laurels and noted there were new risks to be mindful of like lithium batteries.

With regards to changing the terminology, it was noted that 'accidental dwelling fires' was a national term which allowed the Authority to benchmark against other services but assured Members it would be taken into consideration.

RESOLVED that the content of this report be noted.

16. Workplace Wellbeing Charter

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the report which highlighted a number of positive outcomes following the Authority's accreditation with the Workplace Wellbeing Charter. It was explained that this was a nationally recognised accreditation which sought to help build healthy and safe workplaces.

It was noted that the accreditation had considered the Authority's approach to culture and inclusion and it was reported that the Authority had 'evidenced a strive for a safe and inclusive structure'. As a result, there were no recommendations for the Authority to consider in regards to improving its approach to culture and inclusion as part of this process.

Councillor Jan Grace commended the Authority on its achievement and reported that she felt that the Service was exceptionally proactive as evidenced through its hard work and leadership.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the incredibly positive outcomes following the Authority's application for accreditation via the Workplace Wellbeing Charter be noted; and

- b) it be noted that Officers will now review and address the very small number of additional recommendations contained within the report.

17. Procurement of Powered Respirator Suits

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, presented the report which recommended that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (as the lead Authority for National Resilience) procured powered respirator suits to replace as part of the refresh of personal protective equipment with regard to chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

RESOLVED that the award of the contract to Respirex Limited for the procurement of Powered Respirator Protective Suits (PRPS) for a value of £3,120,00 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 3 April 2025