

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

BUDGET AUTHORITY

29 FEBRUARY 2024

MINUTES

Present: **Councillors** Les Byrom (Chair), Barbara Murray, Brian Kenny, Dave Hanratty, Doreen Knight, Ed Lamb, Edna Finneran, Gill Wood, James Roberts, Jan Grace, Lesley Rennie, Linda Maloney, Lynne Thompson, Pat Moloney, Paul Tweed, Sam Gorst, Sue Murphy, Terry Byron and Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside Emily Spurrell.

In attendance:	Chief Fire Officer	Phil Garrigan
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Dave Mottram
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Director of Finance & Procurement	Mike Rea

1. Apologies

There were no apologies received.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no items of interest declared for this meeting.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 12th October 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Budget and Financial Plan 2024/2025 - 2028/2029

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, introduced the report which presented the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Budget and Financial Plan for 2024/2025 – 2028/2029.

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea, presented a summary of the report, which included the necessary financial information for setting and approving the Financial Strategy and to set a balanced 2024 Revenue Budget based on a 2.98% increase in the council tax precept.

Mike Rea explained that the report considered a 5-year capital programme and potential borrowing requirements, with a capital programme of £35.871 million, of which £29.631 million would be funded through prudential borrowings.

Members were advised that the programme had increased by £9.340 million including £4.041 million for the additional year 2028/2029 of the programme. The £9.340 million also included £1.428 million increase due to inflation and a supply shortages. Mike Rea drew Members' attention to pages 31-33 which detailed areas of capital spend.

Mike Rea outlined that pages 35-36 summarised the minimum revenue provision which is the sum set aside each year to repay the debt associated with capital borrowing. The recommendation is for the Authority to adopt a similar strategy to the current MRP determination and use the asset life method for all unsupported borrowing.

Mike Rea drew Members' attention to pages 38-41 of the report which detailed the impact of the proposed capital borrowing over a number of prudential indicators.

Mike Rea advised Members that the Authority was required to prepare a Treasury Management Strategy, and this was covered in Section F of the report. He explained that the proposed investment strategy was consistent with the current strategy, with institutional limits and credit ratings outlined on page 46 of the report.

Paragraphs 119-132 outlined the revised assumptions, costs, and available funding for the 2024/2025 budget and the updated medium-term financial Plan. This, included an increase in the annual pay award from 2.5% to 3% in 2024/2025, followed by 2.5% per annum thereafter.

Mike Rea explained that there was an increase in the Firefighter Pension Scheme employers' contribution from 28.8% to 37.6% from 2024/2025 onwards, following the 2020 Actuarial Review wherein the Authority will receive a grant in 2024/2025. Mike Rea highlighted that there was an increase in Government funding for 2024/2025, including a Business Rates Compensation Grant and a Firefighter's Pension Grant, with an increase of £4.599 million above the current plan's assumption.

The table on page 63 summarised the impact of the changes to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and the forecast position for 2024/2025, indicating a balanced position subject to the key assumptions remaining consistent throughout the year.

Mike Rea outlined the Authority's reserves and how they were proposed to be managed for 2024/2025.

It was noted that £35.571 million needed to be raised through the council tax precept to balance the revenue budget for 2024/2025, with a proposed increase in the charge for Band D of 2.98% from £88.61 to £91.25. However, Members were advised that most people in Merseyside paid Band A, and that change equated to an increase of just over 3p a week.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance and his team for efficiently producing the budget and expressed gratitude to the staff and the whole organisation for their work in keeping Merseyside's communities safe. He commended the Authority's community leadership and history of great administration.

He noted that this was the 49th budget meeting of the Authority, during which time the Authority had saved thousands of lives and billions of pounds in property through its prudent use of resources.

Members attention was drawn to the recommendations starting on page 9 of the agenda.

The Chair expressed his ambitions of the future and that he had been lobbying the shadow Fire Minister on a range of issues he would like to see addressed to better support Fire and Rescue Services across the country. It was suggested that a new Fire Safety Act was needed to consider the new risks such as alternative fuels, and the need for an Independent Fire Service College. It was suggested that there were a wide range of issues for which new legislation was crucial.

The Chair thanked the staff again for the work they did in Merseyside and internationally as well as those colleagues present and past who had served over the last 50 years, noting that MFRA was the best performing Fire Authority in the country.

The Chair of the Authority moved the proposed Budget Resolution. The Resolution was seconded by Councillor Byron.

Councillor Kenny expressed support for the budget and wanted to place on record the Authority's thanks to all staff that had participated in creating the budget. Councillor Kenny also acknowledged the challenges faced by the Authority over the past 10 years, with the Service facing drastic cuts and he recognised the positive progress made by the Authority in recent years. Increasing the number of firefighters, fire control operators and appliances were all highlighted as positive decisions made by the Authority. He placed on record his thanks to the Chief Fire Officer, Director of Finance and all staff involved in drawing up the budget. He also thanked all staff for the fantastic work they do all year round on behalf of the Members and their communities.

Councillor Grace asked for further detail on the firefighter's pension issue outlined on page 55 and Mike Rea explained that the Authority had been receiving a Pension Grant for the past 4 years following the 2016 Actuarial Pension Review for firefighter pensions, this grant had now formed part of the Revenue Support Grant for this financial year. The outcome of the 2020 Actuarial Review resulted in an increase in the employers' pension contribution from 28.8% to 37.6% for firefighters. The Authority will receive a further grant to cover the increase in employers' pension contribution from the government. The government have advised that this Grant was for one year only and therefore the Authority had assumed it would only receive a proportion of the grant from the next financial year until further information from Government was provided.

Councillor Hanratty expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Finance for dealing with the challenges over the years, noting the negative effect of austerity during that time. He commended the Authority on its transparency and consulting with the Trade Unions when making decisions and felt that spirit of cooperation benefited the people of Merseyside. Concerns about planning for the future were highlighted due to the one-year settlement issued by Government and it was hoped that this would change.

Councillor Roberts agreed with Councillor Hanratty and highlighted the impact of austerity and the pandemic on the residents of Merseyside. He noted that inflation had also been a concern in recent times and despite of that, the Authority had delivered an ambitious and progressive budget which Members should be proud of. He noted the inclusion of enhanced mobilisation in the budget which could improve response times and in turn save lives.

The Chair asked for a vote on the budget and the recommendations listed on pages 9 and 10 of the report through a show of hands. Members approved the budget and all recommendations unanimously. .

It was mentioned that the auditors regarded the Authority's work highly and was an exemplar of best practices.

RESOLVED that;

1. the 2024/2025 service budget set out in the report was noted;
2. the Director of Finance and Procurement's recommendation on maintaining the current general fund balance at £3.000m and maintaining the reserves as outlined in paragraphs 148 to 156 of this report be endorsed;
3. the current plan to increase the precept by just under 3% (2.98%) for 2024/2025, raising the Band D Council Tax from £88.61 to £91.25 and confirm the strategy for future precept rises be endorsed (the plan assumes further increases of 2% in each year after that);
4. the assumptions in developing a five-year financial plan outlined in the report and approve the 2024/2025 budget estimate of £74.191m be endorsed;
5. the 2024/2025 – 2028/2029 updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) outlined in the report and summarised in Appendix C be approved;
6. the Capital Programme as summarised in Appendix B be approved;
7. the discretionary fees and charges uplift outlined in the report and summarised in Appendix E be approved;
8. the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) strategy for 2024/2025, as this report outlines in paragraphs 87 to 96 be approved;

9. the prudential indicators relating to the proposed capital programme, outlined in paragraphs 100 to 101 of this report be noted;

- a) the Treasury Management Strategy outlined in Section F and the Treasury Management indicators set out in the section for External Debt
- b) Operational Boundary for Debt
- c) Upper limits on fixed interest rate exposure
- d) Upper limits on variable rate exposure
- e) Limits on the maturity structure of debt
- f) Limits on investments for more than 364 days

be approved

10. that the recommendations above provide an approved framework within which officers undertake the day-to-day capital and treasury management activities be noted.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Resolution 2024/2025 – 2028/2029

1. *The Authority has a proven track record in managing its financial affairs well and making tough choices to balance the budget. Over the 2010/2011 – 2019/2020 period, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) suffered one of the most significant cuts in Government funding of any Fire and Rescue Service in the country. The Authority faced up to the Government funding cuts and had no choice over that period but to approve an unavoidable reduction in the operational front line, with reductions in: -*

- *The firefighter establishment reduced from 1,000 full-time equivalents (FTE) to 620 FTEs, 38% lower,*
- *The number of fire stations reduced from 26 full-time stations to 22 maintained by a variety of demand-led duty cover systems,*
- *The number of appliances available reduced from 42 wholetime fire appliances immediately available and 1 retained (43 appliances in total) to 26.*

2. *Between 2019/2020 and 2023/2024, the Authority's new Chair, Vice Chairs, and the new Principal Officer team looked to reverse some of the Operational Response and Protection services cuts. Introducing demand led duty systems and prudent financial management the Authority has subsequently: -*

- *Increased the firefighter numbers on Merseyside by an additional 22 posts to 642,*

- *Increased the fire control operators from 32 to 35 including, new senior management and training officer posts.*
 - *Increased the number of retained (on-call) contract holders,*
 - *Introduced new duty systems which avoided the proposed closure of Liverpool City and Wallasey overnight*
 - *Increased fire engine/appliance availability from 26 to 32,*
 - *Introduced a new fire engineer post to work with partners to ensure residents' safety in high-rise buildings.*
 - *Introduced specialist teams to deal with all foreseeable risks,*
 - *Increased investment in specialist appliances and other operational equipment,*
 - *Approved a new Training and Development Academy and Hybrid Station with rescue capability – **on target to go live on 29th April 2024,***
 - *Increased the supervisory management provision through the creation of a further 20 new Crew Manager roles,*
 - *Established several retained contracts to underpin the Hybrid/DCWTR Duty system (reflecting the IRMP 2021/2024 goal of having 32 fire engines available),*
 - *Set aside a specific allocation of budget to deal with the risks posed by alternative fuels (Lithium Batteries) and the risks posed by contaminants to firefighters.*
3. *These bold plans were in response to emergent and foreseeable risks from fire and other emergencies, particularly the service's ability to respond to large and/or protracted incidents, as well as the need to enhance protection functions in the light of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Manchester terror attack, and other major incidents.*
4. *The 2024/2025 Budget continues to build on that foundation with further investment in the frontline being proposed, leading to;*
- *Increase fire engine/appliance availability from 32 to 34, enhancing the Authority's resilience and response to foreseeable risk (specialist response).*

- *Enhanced Mobilisation, making crews quicker to respond to emergencies through a pre-alert system, which will deliver additional functions within the Fire Control that provide early notification of a potential incident,*
 - *Learning Management System for the administration, automation and delivery of educational courses, training programs and the development of e-learning courses. Including a new Learning and Development Advisor role and a new E-learning Developer role,*
 - *Increased investment in specialist clothing, training, and equipment,*
 - *A designated Station Manager to focus on contaminants and the associated risk to firefighters,*
 - *Investment in areas directly related to the achievement of the serious violence duty,*
 - *A diverse and culturally competent workforce.*
5. *The investment the Authority has made in the Service since 2019/2020 has ensured Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service continues to deliver its vision to be the best fire and rescue service in the UK.*
 6. *In the last HMICFRS inspection, the Service was congratulated on its performance in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) graded Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service's performance across 11 areas and found the service was 'outstanding' in three areas, 'good' in five areas, and 'adequate' in three areas. The Service were not 'required to improve' in any areas.*
 7. ***The service secured three 'Outstanding' judgments for its work preventing fires and risk, its response to significant incidents, and for making the best use of its resources.***
 8. *That said the Authority remains concerned that the impact of the previous service reductions due to Government funding cuts went too far, and they are steadfast in their ambition to build back into the Service. The permanent investment it has managed to put into the Service since 2019/20 only delivers some of the additional resources it believes are required. The Authority also calls upon the Government to make the temporary 2020/2021 – 2024/2025 Protection Services grants that allowed a short-term investment in these services permanent.*

9. *The 2024/2025 Government funding settlement is another one-year settlement; the Authority urges the Government to reinstate the multi-year approach for 2025/2026 and beyond.*
10. *The 2024/2025 Government Funding settlement and grant increase to cover the business freeze will see the Authority receive approximately a 6% increase on its 2023/2024 settlement. While a 6% increase in Government funding would generally be welcomed, the Authority and Country have and continue to face a period of significant inflationary pressure, particularly around energy, fuel, and pay, which has meant a large part of the Settlement increase will have to be used to cover inflationary pressures rather than for improving services.*
11. *The Authority welcomes the Government's intention to address the engrained challenges that underpin regional inequality, which is essential for the success of the "levelling-up" agenda. The most fundamental intervention is for the Government to reassess the quantum of funding available in the longer-term, and to ensure that critical services are funded based on local levels of need and deprivation. Failure to do this will put the rights of the most vulnerable in society at risk. There is a direct correlation between levels of deprivation and fire deaths. The Authority's adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty, as detailed in the Equalities Act 2010, reinforces this commitment.*
12. *The Authority has consistently opposed the application of council tax referendum principles as they are bureaucratic, undemocratic, and have no reference to underlying inflation or demand for local services. The Authority would prefer to see the referendum principles abolished, allowing individual authorities to set their own council tax levels.*
13. *The Authority is concerned that reliance upon considerable council tax rises and the inclusion of council tax in Core Spending Power means that the burden of paying for local services is being progressively passed on to local council taxpayers. This means that funding increasingly fails to be matched to local needs. This is not "levelling up" and is inherently unfair – as local authorities with a small council tax base only benefit financially in a very limited way.*
14. *The Authority understands that the Government is looking at reforms to the local government funding formula and to determine an up-to-date assessment of the needs of each local / fire authority. The outcome of the fair funding review will feed into the future Government funding assessment for the Authority. The Authority would ask that the Government provide sufficient permanent funding based on a fair funding system that adequately reflects local levels of need and deprivation.*
15. *To protect the investment the Authority has made and plans to make in the Service, the Authority proposes a council tax increase of just under 3%.*

16. *The effect of the budget on the council tax will be a **Band D Council Tax of £91.25, which equates to an increase of £2.64 or 5p per week on the 2023/2024 figure.***
17. *Most people in Merseyside will pay **Band A Council Tax of £60.83, which equates to an increase of £1.76 or 3p per week on the 2023/2024 figure.***
18. *The Authority recognises that the Fire and Rescue Service must provide resources based on risk, demand and vulnerability. However, Merseyside faces more demands than most other services due to the high levels of deprivation that our communities experience. Fire deaths and injuries are the highest in areas of deprivation, equally higher demand is placed in areas and communities where inequality and poverty is prevalent.*
19. *We urge this Government to reflect on the impact the last 10+ years of cuts are having on the Fire and Rescue Service and properly review all risks facing the country in the light of emerging risks (for example, a heightened terrorist threat or responding to increased flooding events or wildfires through climate change). We hope that resources are allocated in a way that allows Merseyside to continue to respond effectively to local and national threats.*
20. *Future government funding cuts may force the Authority to reduce frontline services further. Therefore, the Authority will continue to lobby the Government against the level of cuts in funding made since 2010/2011 and highlight the consequences that further cuts will have on the effective delivery of vital emergency services.*
21. *The Authority has undertaken lobbying more extensively than any other Authority in the Country. We believe this may have avoided further and deeper cuts, and our views on future funding have been heard at the highest levels of Government. The Authority has said it will not allow these unsafe levels of cuts to just roll over us; we will use every political device we can to improve funding to maintain the highest levels of public and staff safety here on Merseyside. As delivery lead partner with the Home Office (HO), our position has made us a super authority; we will develop this relationship as positively as possible.*

The Financial Plan

22. *To balance the financial plan, the Authority will adopt the following strategy*

- *Prepare a five-year financial plan based on the final Local Government Finance Settlement figures announced on 5th February 2024 that;*
 - i. deals with the financial challenge arising from the known Government funding support up to 2024/2025 and*
 - ii. although the financial plan has projected Authority spending and Government funding up to 2028/2029, 2025/2026 and future years' estimates are based on assumptions that are unpredictable as future Government funding for the Fire and Rescue Service is subject to a number of Government reviews and the national economic performance. Therefore, the Authority has agreed to note any financial challenge in future years at this point and will deal with any financial issues in future budget rounds.*
 - *Assumes a 3% pay award for all staff in 2024/2025 (an increase of 0.5% on the 2023/2024 MTFP) and a 2.5% pay award for all staff in 2025/26 and future years.*
 - *Includes a provision of £140k for the 2023/2024 non-firefighter pay award above the amount covered within the 2023/2024 budget.*
 - *Invests in Youth Engagement Activities, including the Prince's Trust and Fire Cadets Programmes.*
 - *Invests in Authority's Net Zero Route Map Implementation.*
 - *Continue to invest in the Service's infrastructure and required operational asset refresh.*
 - *The MTFP includes a budget to support proposals in the draft Community Risk Management Plan 2024 – 2027.*
 - *To set council tax increase in line with its financial plan of just under 3% for 2024/2025 and 2% from 2025/26 and future years (based on anticipated referendum limits).*
 - *The Authority will continue where possible to identify additional efficiencies to re-invest in the front line.*
 - *The Authority will continue to focus its search for efficiencies on collaboration, management, support services costs, and other technical reviews.*
23. *Note that there is risk in the Authority's current plan, particularly around the assumptions over future pay increases and government funding.*

24. *The Authority recognises that the Chief Fire Officer needs sufficient resources to respond to any recommendations on future national fire and rescue practices, Fire and Rescue National Framework guidelines, Fire Standards, and ongoing local challenges – emergent risk. It, therefore, recognises that the Chief Fire Officer will need to continue to manage operational crewing levels and appliance availability on a dynamic basis using various response systems where necessary under his delegated powers as the financial plan proceeds to delivery.*

Council Tax

25. *The Authority had already assumed a council tax increase at the maximum level allowed by the Government before a referendum was required. The Government has confirmed that the threshold for 2024/2025 is an increase of just under 3%.*

26. *Because of the cuts in its frontline services arising from previous Government funding reductions, the Authority must protect and invest in MFRS to maintain the safety and protection of the Merseyside community. Therefore, It has no choice but to maintain its plan and increase council tax to the maximum allowed before a referendum is required. In 2024/2025, the Authority has approved an increase of just under 2.98% to minimise the impact on the services to Merseyside in the future.*

27. *The impact of the budget on the council tax will be a Band D Council Tax of £91.25, an increase of 5p per week on the 2023/2024 figure.*

28. *Most people in Merseyside will pay Band A Council Tax of £60.83, an increase of 3p per week on the 2023/2024 figure.*

Interoperability with Blue Light Partners

29. *This Authority is fully committed to closer collaboration with our emergency service colleagues across the county. Many collaborative successes have been achieved so far, including: -*

- (i) The delivery of the Joint Command and Control Centre with Merseyside Police,*
- (ii) Sharing seven sites with North West Ambulance Service (NWAS),*
- (iii) The creation of a Joint Police and Fire Station in Knowsley,*
- (iv) Extensive joint planning and exercising,*
- (v) Support to Health partners.*

30. *The Authority instructs the Chief Fire Officer to continue to build upon this success and, in particular, to actively seek out opportunities to work with*

NWAS and Merseyside Police around sharing buildings and other assets, demand management, and corporate service functions.

- 31. The Authority instructs the Chief Fire Officer to build upon its National Resilience and UK International Search and Rescue Authority lead roles and, in particular, to actively seek out opportunities to work with government departments, along with national and international stakeholder/fire and rescue services – capitalising on its new training and development academy and its national and international standing.*

Working with other Partners

- 32. The Authority will continue to work in partnership with each District Council to explore opportunities to mutually benefit each Authority in dealing with these and future financial challenges.*
- 33. The Authority will examine the impacts of the devolution agenda and how best we can understand and develop constructive dialogue with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.*

Reserves

- 34. The Authority has prudently planned to meet its financial challenges over the medium term. The Authority's plan is based on the key assumptions around grant, pay, and pension cost changes.*
- 35. The Authority recognises that there are substantial risks associated with these assumptions and that, particularly in light of the current economic climate, it is not unreasonable to expect a significant degree of financial uncertainty and risk, which will vary across the life of the financial plan. The Authority will, therefore, set a medium term financial plan based upon these key assumptions, recognising that it may need to vary that plan to cope with changes arising. Specific reserves have been established to mitigate risks, such as the Inflation Reserve £1.2m (pay award and price inflation) and the Smoothing Reserve £1.4m (future Government funding levels) reserves.*
- 36. The Authority seeks to provide its firefighters and other staff with the right equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), vehicles, and training facilities to enable them to fulfil their role safely and at the best standard possible. As the Government does not make any capital funding available, the Authority has a strategy of building up the Capital Reserve of £2.1m to fund a significant proportion of this investment to maintain borrowing at an affordable and sustainable level.*
- 37. The Authority established a £1.8m recruitment reserve to fund the recruitment of new firefighters in advance of the expected firefighter retirements, as it expects large numbers of the current workforce to retire*

over the next five years. This will ensure the Chief Fire Officer has sufficient competent firefighters. The Authority believes that a wholetime (with retained) professionally trained workforce is the most resilient and effective way of delivering a Fire and Rescue Service to its communities. It is fully committed to maintaining this approach.

38. *The reinvestment in frontline provision made in 2019/2020 – 2023/2024 has ensured the services response standard has been met throughout the period.*
39. *In light of the risks within the financial plan, the Authority agrees to maintain the reserves set out in Appendix B to this resolution and maintain a general revenue reserve of £3.0m.*

Capital Programme

40. *The Authority approves the Capital Programme as set out in CFO/13/24, which includes a total investment of £35.871m over 2024/2025 – 2028/2029. The programme for 2024/2025 shall be approved as £10.958m.*
41. *The Authority notes the prudential indicators that this programme produces and recognises that the proposed capital investment programme is prudent, sustainable, and the borrowing is affordable. This programme uses the freedoms available to the Authority under the prudential regime. It proposes 'prudential' borrowing of £6.218m in 2024/2025 as part of a total borrowing of £29.631m across the life of the plan.*
42. *In the light of the capital programme and the prudential indicators, agree on the Treasury Management Strategy and the indicators set out in that strategy for: -*
 - (i) *External Debt*
 - (ii) *Operational Boundary for Debt*
 - (iii) *Upper limits on fixed interest rate exposure*
 - (iv) *Upper limits on variable rate exposure*
 - (v) *Limits on the maturity structure of debt*
 - (vi) *Limits on investments for more than 364 days*

Basic calculations

43. *Following consideration of the report of the Director of Finance and Procurement CFO/13/24 and having taken into account views expressed in consultations and all other relevant matters under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended, (the "Act"), the Authority determines its budget requirement for the financial year 2024/2025 as follows.*

44. Approves the capital expenditure programme for the financial year 2024/2025 for the total of £10.958m as set out in report CFO/13/24 and the five-year programme totalling an investment of £35.871m, and in this respect notes the advice of the Director of Finance and Procurement that the programme is prudent, sustainable and the borrowing affordable.

45. The Authority resolves as follows:

(a) It is noted that on 29th February 2024, the Authority calculated the Council Tax Base 2024/2025 for the whole Authority area as 389,826.08 [Item T in the formula in Section 42B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")].

(b) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/2025 in accordance with sections 40 to 47 of the Act:

The Authority calculates the aggregate of: (A)

- the expenditure which it estimates it will incur in the financial year 2024/2025 in performing its functions and will charge to the revenue account for the year in accordance with proper practices under S42A (2) (a) of the Act as £87.922m,
- the allowance, as the Authority estimates, will be appropriate for contingencies in relation to amounts to be charged or credited to the revenue account for the year 2024/2025 in accordance with proper practices under S42A (2) (b) of the Act as £0.000m,
- the financial reserves which the Authority estimates it will be appropriate to raise in the year for meeting its estimated future expenditure for 2024/2025 under S42A (2) (c) of the Act as £1.031m,
- the financial reserves are sufficient to meet so much of the amount estimated by the Authority to be a revenue account deficit for any earlier financial year as has not been already provided for under S42A (2) (d) of the Act as £0.000m.

The Authority must also calculate the aggregate of (B)

- the income which it estimates will accrue to it in the year 2024/2025 and which it will credit to a revenue account for the year in accordance with proper practices, other than income that it estimates will accrue to it in respect of any precept issued by it under S42A (3) (a) of the Act as £52.783m,
- The amount of the financial reserves that the Authority estimates that it will use to provide for the items mentioned in S42 (2) (a and b) under S42A (3) (a) of the Act as £0.599m.

If the aggregate calculated under A above exceeds that calculated under B above, the Authority must calculate the amount equal to the difference, and the amount calculated is to be its council tax requirement for the year under S42A (4) (Item R in the formula in S42B of the Act).

The Authority calculates the basic amount of its council tax by dividing the aggregate amount of S42A (4) (item R) divided by the council tax base (item T) above. The council tax requirement for 2024/2025 is £35,571,630, and the council tax base is 389,826.08, equal to a £91.25 precept for a Band D property. This calculation meets the requirements under S42B of the Act.

46. The Authority calculates the council tax sums pursuant to S47 of the Act as follows:

2024/25	Property Band	Increase	
£		£	%
£60.83	For properties in Band A	1.76	2.98
£70.97	For properties in Band B	2.05	2.97
£81.11	For properties in Band C	2.35	2.98
£91.25	For properties in Band D	2.64	2.98
£111.53	For properties in Band E	3.23	2.98
£131.81	For properties in Band F	3.82	2.98
£152.08	For properties in Band G	4.40	2.98
£182.50	For properties in Band H	5.28	2.98

47. The Authority calculates the precept amounts payable by each constituent district council pursuant to S48 of the Act as follows:

PRECEPT		AUTHORITY
£		
3,554,826	Payable by	KNOWSLEY
10,489,667	Payable by	LIVERPOOL
7,889,375	Payable by	SEFTON
4,878,316	Payable by	ST.HELENS
8,759,446	Payable by	WIRRAL
35,571,630		

48. The Authority requests the Director of Finance and Procurement to arrange for precepts to be issued to the constituent district councils pursuant to S40 of the Act before 1st March 2024, such sums to be payable by ten equal instalments on or before the following dates:

Friday	19/04/2024
Wednesday	29/05/2024
Thursday	04/07/2024
Friday	09/08/2024
Tuesday	17/09/2024
Wednesday	23/10/2024
Thursday	28/11/2024
Wednesday	08/01/2025
Thursday	13/02/2025
Monday	17/03/2025

49. The Authority notes that the Director of Finance and Procurement has advised that the 2024/2025 budget is based upon robust estimates.

5. **Asset Management Plans**

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, introduced the Asset Management Plans and explained that it underpinned the aspirations of the Authority, which included an increased number of fire engines and the authority's firefighting capability within the budget-setting process.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority aimed to align its physical assets and systems with its core aims and objectives for 2024/2025-2028/2029. The Chief Fire Officer identified three asset management plans that were in the report: infrastructure as to the estate (property and building), ICT (data and technology) and transport (fleet).

The Chief Fire Officer noted the aspirations of the Authority with regards to its property including those for the new TDA at Long Lane and the existing estate. Members were advised that the Authority sought to provide real investment in infrastructure throughout the service so that the stations were better for the staff and communities that use those spaces. Members were advised that the Authority was seeking to refurbish Bromborough, Kirby and Wallasey station over the next few years.

Members were advised that the ICT provision included a focus on technological advancements for fire control including Enhanced Mobilisation and the applications used by the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer noted the Authority's fleet and transport objectives. Members were advised that as part of the IRMP, a 'Scorpion' vehicle would be introduced to further expand the Authority's capabilities.

The Chair mentioned that the Authority had delivered 50 years of service and the estate had changed dramatically during that time with investments made in new fire stations. The Chair highlighted the importance of the new TDA and investing in fire stations, equipment, and working environments for the future as part of the Authority's legacy.

The Chair also congratulated the Police and Crime Commissioner, Emily Spurrell, on her pregnancy.

Councillor Grace commented on the refurbishment of fire stations and how well they promoted Equality Diversity & Inclusion. Councillor Grace also made positive comments regarding the ability to house the Beacon and Princes Trust teams, which not all fire stations can accommodate. The Chief Fire Officer noted that some of the older stations didn't meet the Authority's aspirations around accessibility for the communities it serves and as such a lot of work had been undertaken on trying to address that.

With regards to youth engagement, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Prince's Trust utilised existing fire kit and equipment that was no longer operational as part of its youth engagement work.

Councillor Thompson reported that she couldn't recall ever visiting Heswall Fire Station and emphasised that it was built in 1940 and had been refurbished in the last 18 months.

The Chair noted that some of the older stations needed investment to support a modern work force.

Councillor Maloney mentioned that St Helens Fire Station had a lot of investment and informed the group that there was a fire appliance demonstration in St Helens Town Centre that had been received well by those in attendance.

RESOLVED that the 2024/2025-2028/2029 Asset Management Plans provided as appendices to this report be approved.

6. Draft Community Risk Management Plan 2024/27

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan, introduced the Draft Community Risk Management Plan report for 2024/27.

It was discussed that this report, the People Plan and the MTFP were the key documents for the Authority in order to drive performance and ensure effectiveness. The Chief Fire Officer mentioned that the plan has been renamed from an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and the contents of the plan may change based on the results of the consultation process.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the importance of assessing all foreseeable risks on behalf of communities and the inclusion of prevention and protection measures. Members were advised that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) had been conducted and public and staff engagement was taking place.

Members were made aware that after the consultation process had been finalised, the report would be brought back to the Authority at a future meeting after the consultation process had concluded.

The Chief Fire Officer expressed the intent to build on the achievements of the Authority and increase its capabilities and resources. Since the last IRMP, the Authority had increased its number of firefighters, introduced specialist capabilities, made over 190 visits to people's home and businesses and increased the number of protection officers after Grenfell.

This CRMP included proposals to build on its strong foundation by increasing the number of engines from 32 to 34, potentially reintroducing a small fires unit, enhancing water rescue capabilities, consider alternative fuels, improve control room technology and considering how to best resource stations.

The Chief Fire Officer expressed that the Service will continue to support and assist the Ambulance Service. It was noted that conversations around medical response, were taking place nationally with the support of the Fire Brigades Union.

The Chief Fire Officer discussed Prevention being reinforced this year as the Authority adopted the Socio-Economic duty, and it was highlighted that this action was very much predicated on reinforcing and targeting intervention for the most vulnerable from the inequalities that exist across Merseyside as well as focusing in on sheltered accommodation.

The Chief Fire Officer also discussed the introduction of a new Framework for fire safety around Protection and Enforcement.

It was noted that the Authority would provide national and international training from the new £40-million Training and Development Academy and it would continue to work with the Home Office around National Resilience and UK ISAR alongside.

Members were advised that the Authority will deliver any changes as and when the Authority can.

The Chief Fire Officer focused on the levels of deprivation in Merseyside and the Authority's ambition to address inequality of opportunity. Members noted the ambition to achieve net zero by 2040 but emphasised it would not wait until that date if it could make changes sooner.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside Emily Spurrell, raised the importance of road safety and the importance of the collaboration between the Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service. The Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the importance of road safety and mentioned ongoing efforts to address it as part of its community safety work.

Councillor Wood asked if the introduction of more 20mph zones had reduced the number of road traffic accidents. The Chief Fire Officer advised that it was too soon to assess the impact of those changes, but the Authority supported the introduction of 20mph zones.

The Chair noted the lobbying undertaken by the Authority on sprinklers, suppression systems, retreading tyres, safety methods in vehicles, electric batteries and more. The role of the Authority in managing safety of communities was highlighted through lobbying central government.

Councillor Hanratty discussed the importance of public consultation and the feedback received. The Chief Fire Officer noted that public consultation informs decision-making, and amendments may be made based on the views expressed. It was agreed to present the consultation feedback to the Authority.

The Financial Plan for the next three years was discussed, and the Chief Fire Officer noted the importance of having a 3-year budget to enable the Authority to plan and adapt to financial changes over the next three years.

With regards to lobbying for funding, the Chief Fire Officer emphasised the importance of the matter and highlighted the ongoing efforts by the Authority to secure a better deal for Merseyside.

RESOLVED that the draft Community Risk Management Plan 2024/27 attached at Appendix A to be subject to a period of 12 weeks consultation prior to final approval, publication and implementation be approved (a designed version of the draft Plan will be published for consultation purposes).

Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 16th May 2024.

Close