

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

12 OCTOBER 2023

MINUTES

Present: Councillors **Les Byrom (Chair), Brian Kenny, James Roberts, Pat Moloney, Linda Maloney, Edna Finneran, Jan Grace, Paul Tweed, Doreen Knight, Lynne Thompson, Sam Gorst, Ed Lamb, Barbara Murray, Sue Murphy, Dave Hanratty, Terry Byron, Leslie Rennie, Mr Anthony Boyle**

Also Present: Deputy Chief Fire Officer Nick Searle
Monitoring Officer Ria Groves
Director of Finance and Ian Cummins
Procurement

17. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Wood and the Members wished her a speedy recovery. Apologies were also received from Police and Crime Commissioner Emily Spurrell.

18. Chairs Update

The Chair noted that this was Director of Finance, Ian Cummins last meeting before retirement. Members noted the exemplary work and dedication Ian had shown during his sixteen years at MFRA and thanked him, wishing him a happy retirement.

Members also placed on record their well wishes for Paul Blanchard-Flett who had also recently left the Authority, noting all of the good work he had done for the service.

19. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pat Moloney declared an interest relating to the Audit Committee due to take place at the end of this meeting. It was noted that the declaration would need to be made at the relevant meeting

20. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the authority, held on the 8th June 2023 were agreed as an accurate record

21. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2022/23

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the 2022/23 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Annual Report 2022/23, providing Members with an update on the progress that had been made on the Authority's ED&I objectives for 2021-2024.

Councillor Pat Moloney commended Officers on an excellent report which was very clear and easy to read. It was acknowledged that women in the workplace can suffer discrimination relating to time off for maternity and it was suggested that more detailed information be captured to identify how that could affect a woman's career. It was agreed that more data would be beneficial, and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that although there were more females in lower paid roles amongst the uniformed staff, it was projected that this would lessen as they progressed in their careers.

With regards to the data captured around religion, Councillor James Roberts asked how frequently this was updated as a person's religious beliefs could change over the course of their life. It was explained that the system allowed for staff to change their settings at any point and the Authority had raised awareness of registering any protective characteristics periodically.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted and;
- b) the ED&I Annual Report for publication on the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service (MFRS) website in order to demonstrate MFRA's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and how it has met its Public Sector Equality Duty be approved.

22. Adopting, Embedding and Reporting on the Socio-economic duty - update report

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the Adopting, Embedding and Reporting on the Socio-economic Duty report.

The Authority's ongoing progress was noted, and Councillor Pat Moloney asked for further detail on how the LCRCA had compiled its cost of living index.

RESOLVED that the progress that has been made since the first report to Authority in October 2022 be noted.

23. Fatal Fire Analysis

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the report which the Chair referred to as an essential tool for monitoring trends and risks.

It was explained that fatalities tended to be in areas of deprivation with a total of 10 in 2022-2023, an increase of six on previous years.

Members were provided with a breakdown of the causes of fire for each victim and it was noted that half were related to mobility issues. It was acknowledged that although this was a tragic loss of life, the number of accidental dwelling fires had been reducing for some years.

Councillor Brian Kenny noted that he had expected there to be an increase in fires relating to fuel poverty, but this report suggested that was not the case. It was asked whether this was still a risk and if it would become more apparent in the winter. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that there had been a lot of prevention work undertaken so it was hoped that there would not be an increase in fires related to fuel poverty.

The Chair acknowledged that this report focused on fatalities and as such did not give a full picture of whether fuel poverty was causing more fires. It was expressed that the Authority would remain cognisant of this risk.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report and appendices attached be noted.

24. Realigned ICT Capital Budget

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the realigned ICT capital budget report which outlined three large infrastructure projects for 2023-24 with a drawdown of £247.5k from the capital reserve.

Members were advised that when obtaining quotes from suppliers, a marked increase was apparent due to exchange rates and inflation. In order to deliver the project, this had resulted in a request for further drawdown from the capital reserve as outlined in the recommendations.

Members discussed the upgrades within the plan noting that the Authority aimed to bring its current software up to date.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the increase in the current ICT capital budget of £312.6k in order for the completion of a project to deliver an enhanced Local Area Network (LAN) project, at a cost of £925k was approved;
- b) the increase in the current capital budget of £6.8k in order for the completion of a project to deliver enhanced audio-visual services in the Service Headquarters (SHQ) conference facilities, at a cost of £100k was approved;
- c) the completion of a project to deliver further ICT Server virtualisation with an upgrade to SQL 2019, at a cost of £450k, a reduction in planned capital spend of £71.9k was approved;
- d) the required re-phasing of £0.573m of planned spend in future years into 2023/24, as outlined in the financial section of this report was approved; and

- e) the drawdown of £247.5k from the Capital Reserve to fund the required increase in the ICT capital budget was approved.

25. Scrutiny Forward Work Plan 2023-25

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, presented the Scrutiny Forward Plan which covered two years and a range of topics as suggested by the Members at the last scrutiny workshop.

It was explained that some of the larger topics would be split into smaller items and may incur multiple sessions to ensure they could be adequately reviewed e.g. MFRA and the environment could be broken down into sessions on wildfires, pathway to net zero and alternative fuels.

Members were advised that the document could be added to throughout the year and had been amended to include the term 'behaviour' in the culture and inclusivity session as requested by the Scrutiny Committee on the 14th September.

RESOLVED that the proposed Scrutiny Forward Work Plan for 2023-2025 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 29 February 2024