

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 APRIL 2025

MINUTES

Present: **Councillors Edna Finneran (Chair)**, Tracy Dickinson, Gillian Wood, Dave Hanratty, Jan Grace (substitute) and Andrew Makinson.

In Attendance:	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Dave Mottram
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Head of Finance	James Campbell

34. Apologies

Apologies received from Councillors Sam Gorst, Ed Lamb, Jeanie Bell, Doreen Knight and Co-opted Member, Mr Anthony Boyle. Councillor Jan Grace attended as a substitute for Councillor Jeanie Bell.

35. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any item on the agenda.

36. Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 25th February 2025 be agreed as an accurate record.

37. MFRS' Operational Response To Flood

Group Manager, Chris Barrett, delivered a presentation on Flood Rescue, explaining that flooding could be categorised into different events including fluvial, pluvial and coastal. It was advised that fluvial flooding happened when rivers overflowed due to heavy rainfall or snowmelt and Merseyside wasn't affected by this. Pluvial flooding was a sudden and intense flood cause by heavy rainfall in a short period, often in urban areas or near dry riverbeds. Members were advised that this was something Merseyside could suffer from in the future. Merseyside had been affected by coastal flooding in the past and it was likely to happen again in the future. This was when ocean water surged onto land due to storms or high tides.

It was noted that global warming could lead to flooding due to melting ice and rising sea levels, more extreme weather such as storms, changing rainfall patterns and warming oceans.

Members were shown some images of recent flooding events in 2024/25 that affected the country which were mainly due to rivers bursting. This wasn't an area of great concern for Merseyside, however, it could affect the area in the

future so being aware was vital. A video was also shown to Members to demonstrate how quickly flooding could occur, along with pictures from local floods that MFRS attended.

Councillor Jan Grace commented on how dirty the water was during a flood. Chris explained that the overflowing drainage resulted in raw sewage entering people's homes and businesses. It usually took around six months for residents to return to their homes.

Members were reassured that all MFRS staff were trained to a minimum standard of still water rescue to give them the skills to respond to water and flood incidents with appropriate PPE. Furthermore, the Search and Rescue Team (SRT) provided a specialist response and could work in and around moving water using specialist rescue equipment and techniques. It was noted that there were 80 trained SRT staff at Aintree and Kirkdale Fire Stations. Councillor Dave Hanratty queried how a national emergency, with some staff being deployed, would affect the Service's local team. Chris Barrett reassured Members that this would not be an issue, as the retained recall to duty system allowed for the deployment of 15 additional staff to provide coverage.

Chris advised Members that the UK Fire Service played a crucial role in responding to flooding nationally, working alongside other emergency services such as the police, ambulance and local authorities. It was acknowledged that the Service had two 'Type B' flood teams registered on the Flood Rescue National Asset Register which were made up from specialist trained SRT staff. The 'Type B' team was a powered boat where all team members were trained Swift Water Technicians and Rescue Boat Operators. It was noted that the Service had been deployed nationally to a number of areas.

It was explained that the Service also helped with flood response internationally, with six staff members being deployed to Malawi in 2023, with 358 rescues taking place. Chris noted that relief aid was also delivered during this time and two of the Service's boats were donated to Malawi.

Councillor Andrew Makinson raised concerns about the incident in 2024 that lead to two fatalities and noted that this area had been a problem for many years with flooding. He queried whether there was a way of feeding back any recommendations to prevent any further fatalities. Members were advised that the Merseyside Resilience Forum was where foreseeable risk was reviewed, with flooding being a major future risk. The Authority's Operational Preparedness Team held the responsibility for looking at foreseeable risk which was where those recommendations were reviewed and agreed. Chris added that work would also be done with Local Authorities if flooding incidents were to happen in the same area on a regular basis to see what issues could be resolved. It was noted that since the tragic incident took place, a level crossing had been put in place to stop entry.

Councillor Dave Hanratty mentioned the need to look into the patterns of the locations where similar incidents had arisen over the last five years. From this, he commented that it was crucial to collaborate with partners to identify the issues and determine potential solutions. Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Dave

Mottram, advised that the Local Resilience Forum operated under the Civil Contingencies Act. When a risk affected more than one partner in Merseyside, there was a requirement for category one responders and blue light responders to collaborate to train and prepare for the situation.

It was raised by Councillor Dave Hanratty whether the Authority could influence the work done with the National Fire Chiefs Council, expressing concerns about unclear legislation regarding the responsibilities of Fire and Rescue Services. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that there was no statutory obligation to respond to floods, which had been an ongoing discussion with Fire and the NFCC. He also emphasised that staff would continue to respond to flooding incidents, addressing the risks in Merseyside and beyond to assist the public.

Councillor Dave Hanratty asked if the Service was confident that all equipment was efficient and up to date. Chris Barrett confirmed that he was satisfied, highlighting that four new boats and engines were purchased last year – two were immediately available, and two were used for training.

Councillor Jan Grace observed that it was the first time she had seen Seaforth or Litherland flooded and asked how much notice the Met Office could provide for such events. Chris Barrett explained that the Met Office provided excellent warning, identifying areas at risk of flooding and predicting when it could occur. This information was then shared with Senior Officers and stations to help them prepare for the timing and locations of potential floods.

It was asked by Councillor Gill Wood whether the Fire and Rescue Service was involved in planning discussions about the potential impact of new housing developments on flooding in green spaces. She also inquired if the Fire Service could help to keep residents informed about safety measures. Chris responded that the Service was notified from a protection perspective, , however, the Authority as a whole was not consulted about the potential flooding risks of new housing projects. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer added that as part of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), prevention advice would extend beyond home fire safety, including guidance for residents in flood-prone areas on what actions to take.

The Chair thanked Chris Barrett for his presentation and the amazing job that the Fire Service had done.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the Flood capability in MFRS, as contained within Flood presentation be noted; and
- b) the approached adopted be scrutinised.

38. Alternative Fuels and Energy Systems

Officer, John O'Boyle, took the Members through his presentation acknowledging that alternative fuels were energy sources used to power vehicles and machinery that differed from traditional fossil fuels like petrol and diesel, including electricity biofuels, hydrogen and natural gas. Other alternative fuels were propane, methanol, synthetic fuels and ammonia. John explained that the biggest challenge would be determining which technology would prevail – whether it would be lithium-ion batteries in electric vehicles or hybrid vehicles.

Members were informed of the work John had carried out, including a review of current Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), the revision of eLearning modules, the development of a training package for operational crews, and support in creating command assessments for Crew, Watch, and Station Managers.

It was acknowledged that there had been a rise in e-bike and e-scooter-related domestic fires, resulting in three fatalities since 2023. Members were reassured that the Authority was actively engaged in national efforts to educate the public and promote safety.

It was noted that as part of Home Fire Safety Checks, prevention staff were having conversations with the public to raise awareness of this. As part of a national campaign from the NFCC, the prevention team included questions in their checks to identify households with e-bikes or e-scooters, aiming to pinpoint areas of potential risk.

In order to keep firefighters safe, training had taken place at the Training and Development Academy (TDA), including an electric vehicle event in an underground structure and a session plan had been devised. Fire blankets had been made available to operational crews, and EV Battery Isolators were now part of the SRT and Operational Equipment Team. There has been a demonstration of an Ultra High-Pressure Lance to Senior Officers, which showed benefits for dealing with fires. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the system injected small particulates into the water jet and allowed it to act like a drill to pierce through the casing material to reach the battery. This approach aimed to cool the battery and interrupt the chemical reaction; however, it is difficult to identify which individual battery cell, out of possibly thousands, was in thermal runaway.

John O'Boyle highlighted the development of other vehicles across the region including the deployment of hydrogen-powered buses across the Liverpool City Region and hybrid electric buses throughout Merseyside.

John O'Boyle stated the critical need to educate the public about the dangers of discarding lithium-ion batteries in household waste bins. He also informed Members that efforts were underway to advocate for standardised regulations concerning lithium-ion batteries, aiming to enhance safety and ensure consistent practices across the sector.

It was noted that the NFCC were expected to provide a position statement on Fire Safety Risks in Energy Technology on behalf of the sector. This would first be needed to be reviewed by the sector with the aim of achieving an agreed position. Councillor Dave Hanratty advised that he met with the Electrical Safety First Campaign and expressed his support for their campaign. He proposed that the entire Authority support this campaign to advocate for the implementation of appropriate legislation. He also inquired whether the NFCC report could be presented at the next Authority Meeting. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the report could be shared once feedback had been provided to the NFCC and the position statement was finalised, emphasising the urgency of establishing safety requirements promptly.

Councillor Dave Hanratty commented that the government was pushing e-bikes, e-cars and e-scooters to be the future without thinking of the ramifications that the infrastructure and safety measures were not yet in place. He raised concerns around not knowing the impact of exposing firefighters to toxic fumes. It was acknowledged by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer how quick technology and alternative fuels were progressing, which was a new risk moving forward; however, he assured Members that the firefighters' safety remained the Authority's priority. He emphasised that the Authority was taking this very seriously to ensure that the risk firefighters were exposed to was minimal.

It was raised by Councillor Dave Hanratty the concern about the safety of elderly residents in care homes who stored multiple mobility scooters together in rooms whilst charging. He highlighted the risk that if one scooter caught fire, they could all catch fire, endangering residents. He advocated for educating both residents and landlords about this hazard. John responded that as part of the Sheltered Accommodation Programme, advice was provided to the Responsible Person regarding the risks associated with storing mobility scooters.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer noted that the prevention advice given to residents could be shared with Members and the Scrutiny Committee. He highlighted the importance of training staff to assess each incident individually and make informed decisions based on the specific circumstances. Members were reassured that the Authority's firefighters were exceptional and dealt with incidents with the utmost safety and professionalism.

It was queried by Councillor Gill Wood what the life span of batteries was and the subsequent management of these batteries once they were no longer suitable for vehicle use. John advised that the longevity of a car EV battery was around ten years and then they would be repurposed for less demanding applications.

Councillor Dave Hanratty asked that the NFCC report once finalised be brought to the Authority as a recommendation. This was seconded by Councillor Gill Wood.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the contents of the report and accompanying presentation be noted; and

- b) the NFC report be shared with Members at Authority once finalised.

39. Scrutiny Forward Work Plan

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves introduced the report, noting that Members were aware that the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan (SFWP) was a standard item on the Scrutiny Committee, and this was the final meeting of this municipal year. Members noted that the Forward Work Plan was on page 25 of the agenda and all items highlighted in blue had been scrutinised throughout the year. Ria Groves advised that there were three outstanding items yet to cover and she proposed that these be carried forward into the next year. It was acknowledged that Ria had a list of areas that Members had wished to propose for the next Scrutiny Forward Work Plan such as attendance times and staff survey.

It was reported that a Scrutiny Workshop would be arranged for July for Scrutiny Members to discuss items to put forward for the next SFWP. This would then be put forward to the Committee for sign off at the beginning of the next municipal year.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the current progress of the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan 2024-2025 to date be noted; and
- b) the outstanding items on the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan be reviewed.

Close

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 22 July 2025.