

# **MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22 JULY 2025**

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** **Councillors** Edna Finneran (Chair), Jeanette Banks, Sam Gorst, Doreen Knight, Andrew Makinson, Kieran Murphy, Mike Sullivan and Heather Westhead

<b>Also Present:</b>	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Ged Sheridan
	Head of Finance	James Campbell
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Dave Hanratty and Co-opted Member, Anthony Boyle.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

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

#### **3. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

#### **4. Pathway to Net Zero – Fleet**

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan, drew Members' attention to the report in the agenda and welcomed Area Manager, Dave Watson to provide a presentation to Members regarding the wider contribution to Net Zero.

Area Manager, Dave Watson explained to Members that as part of the Government's 'Reducing emissions from road transport: Road to Zero Strategy' the plan was to move to a system whereby all tailpipe emissions from vehicles would be removed. It was noted that from 2030, new petrol and diesel cars would no longer be available to purchase in the UK and from 2035, new hybrid vehicles would cease to be sold.

In addition, 2035 would see an end to the sale of new non-zero emission HGVs (Heavy Good Vehicle) weighing 26-tonne and under and from 2040, all new HGVs sold would have to be zero emission. Dave Watson explained that the vast majority of operational fleets came under the 26-tonne threshold and it was

only a minor number of appliances such as the aerial appliance that came above that. It was noted that the long-term aim was for the Authority fleet to move to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles in a practical and financially stable way.

Members acknowledged that the Authority had 92 small fleet cars in total which included blue light response vehicles and departmental vehicles. The fleet contained six 48v Mild Hybrid vehicles and 15 self-charging hybrid blue light response vehicles. Dave Watson explained that the Authority had been moving towards all blue light response vehicles used for Senior Officer's response to incidents to the hybrid system in incremented steps to get the Authority to achieve a zero-emission position in the future. Members were advised that the small car fleet at present had 23% low emission vehicles within it which was a significant milestone.

It was reported that there would be a further seven self-charging blue light response vehicles introduced to the fleet as part of the vehicle capital replacement programme. With the introduction of the seven self-charging vehicles, seven hybrid vehicles would be moved from blue light response and reallocated as station vehicles, replacing current diesel vehicles on stations.

Councillor Mike Sullivan queried why the Authority was changing to hybrids and not full electric vehicles. Dave Watson explained that the infrastructure was not in place yet for the Authority to move to full electric vehicles as there wasn't sufficient charging points in every location. Members were advised that due to the blue light response, there was a greater chance that an electric vehicle would run out of energy and would not have the opportunity to immediately recharge the battery. He reassured Members that this was part of the long-term plan which was why the new Training and Development Academy was built with charging points. It was also explained that there was an intention to add charging points to Service Headquarters in the future and to buy full electric vehicles at a future point. Dave Watson noted that incremental changes were taking place to not exhaust the Authority when the infrastructure was not yet in place.

Transport Manager, Dave Seasman added that due to the operational use of blue lights and the fact that some Officers take their vehicles home whilst on duty, some residences may lack the necessary charging points.

It was queried by Councillor Mike Sullivan whether the Authority was confident that they would be able to provide charging points where needed. Dave Watson noted that this would not be introduced until the infrastructure plan had been approved and put in place, however, that was part of the estate's improvement.

Councillor Kieran Murphy raised concerns around the lack of charging points to enable the Authority to go fully electric and queried whether these vehicles were those that Members approved the purchase of at the AGM on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025. Dave Watson noted that those approved were 12 diesel appliances.

Councillor Sam Gorst asked whether the Authority would pay for electric charging points in staff members own homes and it was confirmed that there was no current plan in place for blue light vehicles to become fully electric, so

this would need to be considered in the future. This would be at the back end of the vehicle replacement programme, towards 2035.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan, added that another reason why Senior Officer vehicles had not been changed to fully electric was due to the fact that petrol hybrid vehicles gave a significant amount of resilience. In terms of emergency fuel provisions and responsibilities under the Contingencies Act, there was a need for Senior Officers to be able to respond and having a fully electric fleet, did not offer that resilience at the present time.

It was queried by Councillor Mike Sullivan how long the medium-term and long-term plans were. Dave Seasman advised that he was responsible for producing the Transport Asset Management Plan and explained that this had a five-year Capital Replacement Programme which was based on different life cycles depending on the vehicle use. It was noted that Officer response cars were kept under five years old due to the nature of the job and departmental cars were on a ten-year replacement programme. Members were reassured that the Transport Asset Management Plan was refreshed each year.

Dave Watson told Members that 2026-27 would see the introduction of 19 plug-in hybrid or full electric vehicles into the small vehicle fleet. It was also noted that by the end of 2026-27, 51% of the small car fleet would be low emission vehicles, which was a positive for the Authority.

In line with the Long-Term Sustainability Plan, it was noted that the Authority would continue to migrate the small car fleet to low emission vehicles and move the light commercial van fleet towards low emission vehicles also. Members were advised that the Authority would continue to monitor the market for developments and advances in the electrification of fire appliances as the technology for heavy fleet vehicles was currently in its infancy.

It was mentioned that there was an ongoing review of fleet use to reduce or adapt the fleet where possible which would benefit the goal of decarbonisation.

Dave Watson advised Members on the cost analysis, noting that the cost of self-charging petrol hybrid vehicles was comparable to the equivalent diesel vehicle, with plug in hybrids being slightly more expensive. The benefit of a plug-in hybrid was that with a charging point, the vehicle could be charged for the initial journey. The cost of a full electric vehicle was considerably more expensive and Members acknowledged that the market needed to be monitored for the best value for money. The Authority was hopeful that the cost of electric vehicles would lower when they became more widely available on the market.

Members noted that there were two electric fire appliances being used operationally in the UK, which were between 2-3 times more expensive than a conventional fire appliance. Dave Seasman was part of the Transport Officers Group who looked closely at the emerging market and how technology was evolving.

To conclude, Dave Watson advised Members that the Authority invested in specialist advice and guidance to support Pathway to Net Zero. Eunomia

Research and Consulting Limited were appointed to support the Authority in undertaking a detailed review of the Service's existing Greenhouse Gas footprint, including key recommendations for improvement and developing a Pathway to Net Zero which aligned with Liverpool City Region's 2040 Net Zero ambition. Multiple departments were working together to ensure that actions highlighted in the route map could be progressed, such as, Estates, ICT, Operational Planning, Operational Response, People and Organisational Development, Procurement, Finance, Catering, Training and Development Academy, Corporate Communications, Strategy and Performance and Legal Services.

Councillor Kieran Murphy asked how far a fully electric vehicle could travel on a single charge. Dave Seasman confirmed that the appliance London Fire Brigade were using, had a battery life of four hours based on mileage. He confirmed that it was fully electrically operated but still had a six-cylinder internal combustion engine to keep the batteries charged. It was however, not a zero-emission vehicle.

Councillor Heather Westhead felt very reassured by the Authority's approach not to compromise on response times and keeping with hybrid vehicles. She added that new technology was expensive and was hopeful that the price would drop in the future when it was more widely available.

Councillor Andrew Makinson queried what the timescale was for charging points to be installed at Service Headquarters and every location in the Service. It was advised that there was a plan for this, however, the team would confirm the timescale and let Members know at the earliest opportunity.

It was noted by Councillor Jeanette Banks that she thought the Authority was doing the right thing in waiting for the correct infrastructure to be in place before purchasing full electric vehicles.

Councillor Doreen Knight queried what the cost was and whether there was any support being given by the Combined Authority in relation to fleet. It was confirmed that this was funded through the Authority only. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer concluded that until the Authority could offer reassurance that they could still respond in the excellent way they did, they could not move to a full electric fleet. It was acknowledged that careful decisions needed to be made regarding how budget was spent to ensure reliability and resilience.

Councillor Sam Gorst left the room at 13:29.

**RESOLVED** that the progress so far and future intent for fleet vehicles be noted.

## **5. Annual Health, Safety and Welfare Report 2024/25**

Councillor Sam Gorst returned at 13:30.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan, introduced the report and advised Members that this item was a standard item that was discussed on an annual

basis. He welcomed Health and Safety Station Manager, Kevin Hollis to present the Health, Safety and Welfare Report 2024/25.

Kevin Hollis advised Members that there were four workplace Local Performance Indicators (LPI) performances and these were based on operational staff injuries, including injuries on duty, at incidents, at risk critical training and whilst conducting other routine activities. Members were advised that there were two LPI Monitoring's which did not have a service plan target or performance rating, however, every injury was monitored. This included non-operational staff injuries on duty and the reporting of near misses. Near misses were reviewed at the Workplace Review Group for quality assurance. Members acknowledged that this was also scrutinised in the Performance Management Group and measured against targets on a monthly basis.

Members' attention was drawn to staff accident and injuries. It was noted that the number of operational staff injuries on-duty (LPI WR13) had a reduction for the second year running which was encouraging. Of those 38 staff members who were injured on duty, 24 remained on duty, meaning that the injuries were minor and the reporting culture was positive. It was explained that duty days lost was 234 which was a reduction by 93 on the previous year. Kevin Hollis also noted that operational staff attended nearly 18,000 incidents in the last year.

Kevin Hollis noted that the number of operational staff injuries at risk critical training (LPI WR34) had a slight increase from last year, however, this was still below the predicted annual performance. It was explained that the predicted annual performance was not a static figure and could increase or decrease as workstreams and targets changed. Members also acknowledged that year on year, there had been an increase in training, including more realistic training which was always risk assessed by the Health and Safety Department to ensure safety.

Members were advised that the number of operational staff injuries on duty (LPI WR32) saw a reduction from the previous year and out of the seven injuries, six members of staff remained on duty.

Looking at the reporting of near misses (LPI WR31), Kevin Hollis noted that there was a reduction in comparison to the previous year, however, it was the second highest in four years which showed a trend in the right direction. He explained that the reason why near misses fell under the 'monitoring' category was because it was hard to predict how many near misses had taken place. This is why the Service greatly encouraged reporting near misses. Members were made aware that feedback may be given out after a near miss and an investigation may be completed due to the nature of the near miss.

Kevin Hollis advised Members that the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) was categorised into major and minor. Since the last reporting period, there had been one RIDDOR Major (a fracture) and eight RIDDOR Minors. It was explained that dangerous occurrences had been brought into RIDDOR with the regulations which related to the use of Breathing Apparatus at an operational incident.

Members acknowledged that Road Risk was monitored through the Performance Management Group and the LPIs were regarding Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) involving Fire Service Vehicles. These were broken into further categories such as the number of RTCs where a Fire Appliance or light vehicle hit another vehicle or object whilst responding to an operational incident and whilst engaging in routine activity.

It was noted that overall RTCs involving Fire Service Vehicles (RR23) was at 60, which was 12 less than predicted and 6 less than the previous year, which was the second year that the Authority had seen a reduction in RTCs. Kevin Hollis explained that the appliance collisions across routine activity saw the largest group being slow speed moving forward movements which were less than 10mph. Out of the 56 appliance collisions, 36 of those were at slow speed.

The number of RTCs where a light vehicle hit another vehicle or object whilst responding to an operational incident (RR33) was at 0 and whilst engaged in routine activity (RR34) was at four which was a reduction of three from the previous year. Kevin Hollis reassured Members that every collision was reviewed at the Road Risk Review Group. The group looked at every collision and discussed any investigations to ensure quality assurance. Members noted that drivers were given support if they had been involved in a collision and advice and support to prevent further recurrence.

Members were made aware that every Authority premises received an annual general health and safety audit to ensure compliance with regulations. It was explained that reduction in audits on the previous year was due to changes in sites, for example, the reopening of the TDA and relocation of ISAR and National Resilience into the TDA, meaning that small units were lost. However, it was confirmed that all sites were visited as required. There was also an 100% completion of monthly Station Manager health and safety inspections.

It was confirmed that every station had zoning (red, amber and green stickers on doors) to reduce residual risk of exposure to contaminants and to make staff aware of the correct direction of travel. This was also detailed in Service Instruction 0998: Reducing Exposure to Fire Contaminants. Members were assured that there had been an introduction of monthly 'reducing exposure' station inspections to quality assure that contaminants guidance was being followed.

With regards to welfare, Kevin Hollis advised that there were 1,787 total medical appointments which included health screenings, other duties reviews and general medical appointments. The total amount of Occupational Health referrals was 1,131 which included referrals to physiotherapy, the nutritionist and fitness tests. Members noted that Critical Incident Stress Management activity saw 323 appointments which was an increase on the previous year. There were also 692 total therapy appointments which was over 100 more than the previous year.

Looking forward to 2025-26, Kevin Hollis explain that the team would manage performance for further reductions, increase near miss reporting, use data effectively, review technology such as parking sensors, introduce bespoke Low

Speed Manoeuvre training videos, continued engagement with Representative Bodies, support NFCC regionally and nationally, monitor fire contaminant compliance and deliver against the Functional Delivery Plan.

Councillor Sam Gorst praised the Authority for highlighting the difference between physical and mental health appointments in detail in the report this year. He drew Members' attention to the section called 'other' with regards to medical appointments and wondered if examples could be broken down for further effective scrutiny. He explained that this section saw the largest amount of appointments and therefore, thought this was important to have further information. Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, noted that this would be picked up with Health and Wellbeing Manager, Kelly Patterson and Members would be provided with a further update.

Councillor Mike Sullivan queried how long a member of staff could go off sick for through work and stay on full pay. Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, stated that if the sickness related to an injury on duty, staff would receive 12 months full pay and if this was not an injury on duty, they would receive six months full pay, followed by six months half pay.

It was asked by Councillor Kieran Murphy who undertook the health and safety inspections, and it was confirmed that this would be a member of the Health and Safety Team who was fully qualified to undertake these inspections. Councillor Kieran Murphy queried whether there was any external auditing of the process. Kevin Hollis confirmed that there was no external audit completed, however, the inspections were completed in compliance with relevant regulations. He added that when sites were audited, Fire Risk Assessments were also undertaken which were completed by an external company.

Councillor Sam Gorst asked if there was any health and safety Union Representatives involved in the inspections. Kevin Hollis noted that there was a range of separate health and safety inspections that were in conjunction with Representative Bodies. He explained that the Trade Union Representatives contributed to items discussed at the Health, Safety and Welfare Committee. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that Trade Unions also attended the location of planned exercises to assure themselves that sufficient arrangements were in place, including health and safety.

Councillor Jeanette Banks noted that on Item 4 relating to staff injuries (WR34), it was good to see that the Authority had 28 Apprentice Firefighters. She queried whether there was a breakdown around how many accidents or injuries Apprentice Firefighters had as they would not have as much experience as longer standing Firefighters. It was explained by Kevin Hollis that this was not broken down by experience, rather by age and where the incident took place. He acknowledged that if the incident was at the TDA and during risk critical training, the team would look into subcategories and decipher whether it was during recruit training. If this was the case, the Health and Safety Team would speak to the Recruit Department, look at recommendations and take action. This review of the breakdown of the data can assist in identifying any trends to enable the team to address them.

It was questioned by Councillor Jeanette Banks whether technology within vehicles was helping collision reductions and whether future technology would help further. Members were advised that the next phase of appliances coming through would comply with regulations and have warning systems built into them to advise of cyclists or pedestrians in the danger zone. Kevin Hollis explained that there was currently a parking sensor trial to further reduce collisions, specifically slow speed manoeuvres, however, the data wasn't available at the present time.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that as technology had emerged over recent years, such as lane movement, the Service had seen the benefit of this with reduced collisions and the dangers of road and vehicle use. He thanked Kevin Hollis for the detailed report and reassured Members as to the level of scrutiny by the Service on Health, Safety and Welfare. This could be seen through the reporting to committees, inspections, and Performance Management Groups. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer also remarked on the extremely positive results the Service had achieved. This was particularly stark when benchmarking later in the year across the Sector when considering the vast amount of prevention activity undertaken by the Service. The Service's prevention activity consisted of going into the community and not all services carry this out as part of their prevention engagement. Members were made aware that doing this would increase vehicle movements, therefore, the results achieved when benchmarking across the Sector were particularly noteworthy.

**RESOLVED** that the performance related contents of the report which highlights the positive progress and safety culture within MFRS be noted.

**6. Scrutiny Forward Work Plan 2025-2026**

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, presented the report explaining to Members that the purpose of the report was to review the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan (SFWP) for 2025-26. Members' attention was drawn to the three items that were carried over from the previous SFWP which were Contaminants, Pathway to Net Zero and Enforcement and Prosecution. It was noted that a Scrutiny Workshop took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 with Members of the Scrutiny Committee to discuss other topics previously mentioned by Members and to propose the new SFWP. Members were advised that the draft SFWP was in Appendix A on page 57 of the agenda.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the proposed Scrutiny Forward Work Plan 2025-26 be reviewed; and
- b) the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan in Appendix A be submitted to the Authority (or another Committee as appropriate) for approval be recommended.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 18 September 2025