

# **MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**11 DECEMBER 2025**

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor James Roberts (Chair), Councillor Leslie T. Byrom CBE, Councillor Dave Hanratty, Councillor Heather Westhead, Councillor Andrew Makinson, Councillor Jeanette Banks, Councillor Edna Finneran and Councillor Janet Grace

<b>Also present:</b>	Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Dave Mottram
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Ged Sheridan
	Director of Finance and Procurement	Mike Rea
	Mointoring Officer	Ria Groves

#### **8. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Jeanie Bell (Councillor Jeanette Banks attended as an alternate), Grahame McManus (Councillor Edna Finneran attended as an alternate), Lynn O'Keeffe (Councillor Jan Grace attended as alternate) and Lesley Rennie.

#### **9. Declarations of Interest**

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

#### **10. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 2 October 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

#### **11. Financial Review 2025-26 July to September**

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea presented the report and provided Members with assurance that the approved budget remained robust and that the current expenditure forecast could be contained within the available resources whilst providing updates on the Revenue Budget, Capital Budget, Reserves, and Treasury Management, covering the period from April to September 2025.

Members were advised that budget movements in the second quarter related to the planned use of reserves; adjustments to external funding, for the delivery of specific projects; and self-balancing virements. As all adjustments were self-balancing, they did not affect the approved net budget requirement, which remained at £77.934 million.

As a result of one-off savings, a total saving of £1.35m had been identified and Members were asked to approve allocating this amount to increase the Clothing Reserve by £850,000 and the Capital Investment Reserve by £500,000 to support future expenditure on fire kit and equipment replacement and to fund capital projects to reduce borrowing levels.

Paragraph 18 of the report outlined the changes to the capital programme since the last review and that during this quarter the £1.58m increase was funded through specific grants and revenue. During the quarter, the level of capital borrowing for 2025/26 decreased from £41.982m to £40.380m, primarily due to the £2.0m drawdown from Capital Reserves agreed at the Q1 financial review.

This reduction also reflected a net adjustment of £448,000 following changes in capital receipts: the removal of the planned sale of Vesty 5A (required for ICT Managed Services provision), an anticipated increase from the sale of Richie Avenue stores, and a £0.050m reduction in the capital programme relating to ICT software.

Members' attention was drawn to the table on page 25 outlining reserve movements during the quarter and advised that the General Reserve remained unchanged at £3.9m.

Paragraphs 26 to 31 on pages 16 to 18 of the report outlined Treasury Management Performance which was consistent with the approved treasury management strategy for 2025/26.

Councillor Les Byrom confirmed that the report showed the Authority's financial position backward and forward looking which allowed Members to understand the level of reserves and how much was capital. This reflected how matters have been managed and controlled and provided confidence to Members.

Councillor Dave Hanratty queried whether the debt of £33.7m was what was anticipated at end of year and if it was on target. Mike Rea confirmed that this would not change and was on target.

It was noted that there was a number of loans with a fixed interest rate.

Councillor Dave Hanratty asked about Write-offs and if there was any idea what these might be. It was confirmed that the above £33.7m debt related to the Authority's borrowing and Write-off of outstanding debtors would be confirmed within future reports.

Councillor James Roberts said he felt it was useful to have £1.350m underspend which was a relatively small sum of money however he queried whether the monies resulted from vacancies which you would want filled and that the vacancies were only short term based. Mike Rea advised that some of the vacancies were due to retirement and others resulted from external funding.

Councillor Jeanette Banks stated that she felt it was important that the money was used for what the Authority needed and passed on her thanks for the content of the report

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted;
- b) the use of the forecast £1.350m savings to fund an increase in the Clothing Reserve £0.850m and Capital Investment Reserve £0.500m to enable future service expenditure relating to the replacement of fire kit and equipment and to fund capital expenditure to reduce the level of capital borrowing be approved;
- c) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved and;
- d) the Director of Finance and Procurement be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2025/26 and use any savings to reduce the level of capital borrowing.

## **12. Treasury Management Interim Report 2025/26**

Mike Rea, Director of Finance and Procurement, presented the report updating Members on the Authority's requirements to meet the CIPFA code of practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and its performance. It was explained that these codes required the Authority to review its Treasury Management activities during the year to ensure they were consistent with its approved Treasury Management Strategy and that they had remained within the approved Prudential Indicators.

Mike Rea advised that the report met the requirement, and it outlined the treasury management activities and performance for the first half of the financial year. The executive summary on page 48 paragraph 7 summarised the key points on performance so far. Members were informed that the Authority had envisaged that new long-term borrowing of £5.000m may be required in 2025/26 and that no new borrowing had been arranged in the first half of 2025/26. Financial Investments as of 30th September 2025 stood at £66.2m, with associated income of £1.252m earned in the first half of the year. The Bank of England (BOE) base rate had decreased from 4.25% at the start of the financial year, to its current level announced on 6th August 2025 of 4.00%. Longer term Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) had increased during the first half of the year by 0.35% from 5.62% at the start of the year to 5.97% as of 30th September 2025.

Members were assured that Treasury Management activity for 2025/26 had been carried out in compliance with the relevant codes and statutes and within the borrowing and treasury management limits approved by the Authority as part of the budget setting process.

Councillor James Roberts stated that the Monetary Policy Committee were due to meet in December and it had been predicted it may be as low as 3.25%. He queried at what point would it become economical to refinance. Mike Rea

responded advising that fixed rate loan early repayment penalties continued to make it uneconomical at low interest rates.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

**13. Accidental Dwelling Fire Analysis Between 2005/06 and 2024/25**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report advising Members that the report detailed the historical analysis of fatalities in accidental dwelling fires between 2005/06-2024/25 and that it offered an in-depth analysis of all fires including causes. The Chief Fire Officer explained that page 57 of the report underpinned the Services fire safety strategy, and the analysis supported the introduction of other initiatives such as Older Persons Day and Winter Warm initiatives. Members' attention was drawn to Page 65 and it was explained that there had been an increase to seven fatalities for 2024/25 but this was a reduction from 2022-23.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this would enhance a targeted approach and data would be used to identify vulnerable members of the public. It was noted that the Authority would engage with people already known to other professional services to assist in identifying risks within the community.

Councillor Andrew Makinson expressed his thanks for a very detailed report although noted there was no breakdown on housing type and tenure which would have been useful. He queried if it was particularly prevalent in high rise accommodation.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan explained that the annual reports produced by the Strategy and Performance Department contained that data and that this report showed historical data which was being used to anticipate risk and evolve the Authority's strategy.

Councillor Jan Grace noted that page 64 displayed that fire fatalities were a relatively rare occurrence, and fires were a lot less frequent, albeit that there were new challenges ahead like Lithium-Ion batteries.

Councillor Jeanette Banks also commended the report and expressed her thanks for the amount of work completed within communities which helped people to understand where dangers were and stated that this would be imperative for future planning.

Councillor Les Byrom referred to pages 71-72, smoke alarm analysis stating that types of detectors were changing and as the equipment modernised an analysis of the impact on the Service would be helpful.

Councillor Dave Hanratty acknowledged that it had been a massive task to collate this information, and the report had identified the most vulnerable using data and how it was important to use intelligence to target demographics.

Councillor Heather Westhead stated that figures displayed that 57.7% had a disability (hearing impaired) and queried if work was being done for those hard of hearing. Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan confirmed that the Authority had outreach support workers to target the most vulnerable and also used a visual vibration for deaf people.

Councillor Jeanette Banks asked if the Authority had any influence on house builders regarding what they had to put in place, and it was confirmed that the Authority worked closely with them and were consulted. The Protection Teams also gave strategic guidance using new technology.

Councillor James Roberts said it was clear from the data that the Authority were heading in the right direction and only having one death during 2023/24 had been an excellent achievement. It was queried about the rate per head of population as Wirral appeared to be an outlier and asked if there was any reason for this.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Ged Sheridan confirmed the strategy focused on pan-Merseyside in terms of targeted prevention however teams had been asked to review each district's data to see if bespoke targeting could be introduced.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

**14. Corporate Risk Register 2025-26 April-Sept Update**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report which informed Members of the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register including updates for the period April to September 2025. Members were advised that an external review had been sought about how risks would be recorded moving forward and that proposals were being implemented to include a new format for capturing risks from department level upwards and this new approach would be used in the preparation of the 2026/27 risk register.

Councillor Les Byrom said that many organisations were looking at global risks which were outside of the Authority's control, and he stated that there was a need to concentrate on the risks that were able to be controlled.

**RESOLVED** that the updated Corporate Risk Register for 2025/26 which incorporates the status of those risks to September 2025 be approved.

**15. Statement of Assurance 2024/2025**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report highlighting the purpose to request Members to consider and approve the Merseyside Fire Authority Statement of Assurance 2024/25 for publication on the website.

Councillor Les Byrom stated that Members could be proud of the Service and all the hard work delivered by staff who contribute to keep the public safe and that he would sign the Statement of Assurance 2024/25 with great pride.

Councillor Jan Grace added that she felt it was commendable and expressed her thanks.

Councillor James Roberts agreed with Councillor Les Byrom that this was something the Authority could be proud of.

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) the content of the within this report be noted;
- b) the Authority's draft Statement of Assurance 2024/25 be approved; and
- c) the Statement of Assurance 2024/25, be signed by the Chair of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.

**16. Service Delivery Plan 2025-26 Q2 July-Sep Update**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report noting the purpose to scrutinise performance of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service against the objectives, performance targets and outcomes set out in the Service Delivery Plan 2025/26 for the period July to September 2025 (Q2) and approve the document.

Councillor James Roberts queried why the Authority had not recorded false alarms in the total figures. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle responded that the Service did not want to prevent people making calls as false alarms or this to be seen as a negative as the Authority actively encouraged the public to call and request their assistance.

Councillor Andrew Makinson stated that the Attendance Standards of 96.5% were fantastic, however it would be useful to see figures for those who did not meet the standard. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle responded that the Authority would look to provide further details on that and assured Members that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service attendance rates were outstanding.

**RESOLVED** that the attached Service Delivery Plan reports (Appendices A-K) for publication on the website be approved.

**17. Relocation Assistance Policy**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report highlighting the publication of the relocation assistance policy which supported ongoing external recruitment. It was noted that the People Plan outlined how the Authority intended to explore all avenues for increasing the diversity of the workforce by strengthening existing positive action initiatives to attract a diverse range of talent. Members were advised that this policy would help to remove potential barriers in recruiting operational roles as there was no longer an absolute requirement to reside within Merseyside boundaries as available duty patterns

took into account home addresses. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle explained that this would offer support in recruiting Senior Officer Operational roles transferring into the Service and remove any potential barriers to expand the scope of applicants.

Councillor Andrew Makinson stated that although it would be impossible to predict how much it would cost in any particular year, he would be interested to know how many posts would qualify for this assistance. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle explained that two Officers had been recruited from other Fire and Rescue Services this year, but he was unsure overall how many posts would be covered by this Policy. Director of People and Organisational Development, Nick Mernock confirmed that this Policy would be utilised for posts which were difficult to fill and not for generic posts. The Authority would look at the requirements of the role on a post-by-post basis prior to advertising.

Councillor Jeanette Banks queried whether the Authority sighted better recruitment and if we they were able to attract people from other areas and Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle confirmed that the Authority had numerous enquiries from applicants wanting to transfer who could potentially utilise this policy.

Councillor Les Byrom explained that this Policy would not mean an increase in budget and the objective was to enable the Authority to take on the best staff and improve the gender imbalance and it would be a useful tool to assist in hitting targets.

Councillor James Roberts queried why there was a £7,500 cap and the Director of People and Organisational Development, Nick Mernock confirmed this was based on national consensus across the sector.

Councillor Jeanette Banks queried whether the offer would increase with inflation. Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle advised that the Authority would see how it worked moving forward and monitor it.

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) the Relocation Assistance Policy be approved.

## **18. Pay Policy 2025**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report advising Members of the publication of the annual pay policy in line with section 38 of the Localism Act 2011. It was explained that the pay awards for 2025, which had been agreed and implemented covering Grey and Green Book colleagues' agreement, was yet to be reached for 2025 pay awards for Red Book colleagues.

Members were advised that salary levels were negotiated through the NJC each year and all Fire Authorities then implemented the agreed awards.

Councillor Les Byrom advised that the regionally adjusted National Minimum Wage was looked at and that members of the NJC believed that the Authorities should be remunerating staff for the tremendous job they do.

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) publication of the Authority's Pay Policy be approved; and
- b) the pay awards for 2025 agreed and implemented covering Grey and Green Book colleagues, however agreement has yet to be reached over a 2025 pay award for our Red Book (Craft) colleagues be noted.

**19. New Dimensions 2 Procurement of USAR K9 Vehicles**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report to inform Members of the outcome of the procurement exercise and to seek authorisation to procure 17 x Search Dog Vehicles (K9 Vehicles), as part of the New Dimensions 2 (ND2) Programme that supported National Resilience.

Members were asked to note the contents of the report and approve the award of the contract for 17 x K9 vehicles as part of ND2 programme to Ford Motor Co at a total cost of £1.1m. Members were advised that ND2 was a national capability uplift programme that supported UK National Resilience and that these vehicles would form part of a range of solutions and quotes had been secured for a similar vehicle to one currently in use.

It was advised that this purchase would not impact the Authority budget as all funding came from MHCLG as part of the ND2 USAR project and they would be distributed around the wider UK Fire & Rescue Service once ready.

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) the award of the contract to the Ford Motor Company, for 17 x K9 vehicles at a total purchase cost of approximately £1,100,000 be approved.

**20. New Dimensions 2 Procurement of USAR Power Tools**

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report to inform Members of the outcome of the procurement exercise and to seek authorisation to procure power tools and lighting equipment, as part of the Authority's role as Lead Authority in supporting UK National Resilience and the Urban Search and Rescue capability through the award of the contract to TW Engineering Co. Limited at a total cost of £717,487.81.

Members were advised that this purchase would enhance the search and rescue response capability directly and the procurement procedure was compliant with the Authority's contract standing orders and the public contract regulations.

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle gave assurance that the Deputy Chief Fire Office was overseeing USAR as the strategic lead on New Dimensions and said it was a great privilege for the Service to be able to procure this equipment.

Councillor Jeanette Banks said that this was a massive amount of work for the Authority and felt that the Authority should be applauded as they were taking the strain from a lot of other Authorities.

**RESOLVED** that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) the award of the contract to TW Engineering Co. Ltd for the purchase of the equipment listed at a total cost of £717,487.81 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 20 January 2026