

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE

4 SEPTEMBER 2025

MINUTES

Present: **Councillor** Jan Grace (Chair), Jeanette Banks, Edna Finneran, Doreen Knight, Chris Page, Mike Sullivan, Lynne Thompson, Kieran Murphy and Lesley Rennie.

In Attendance:	Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Ged Sheridan
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Director of Finance and Procurement	Mike Rea

1. Apologies

No apologies of absence were received.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on Thursday 3rd April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Financial Review 2025/26 - April to June

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea, presented the report reviewing the Authority's revenue, capital and reserves financial position for 2025/26, covering the period April to June 2025.

Members were informed that the total Budget requirement remained at £77.934 million. The Firefighter pay award had been settled at 3.2%, which was above the 2.5% budget assumption, and the Local Government staff pay award had also been agreed at 3.2%. Members noted that where additional costs could not be contained within budgets, the Inflation Reserve would be used.

Mike Rea advised that the Capital programme changes included a net increase of £13.9 million due to rephasing of capital schemes from 2024/25 into 2025/26 expenditure, largely relating to National Resilience £11.900 million. An additional £282,000 increase was agreed by the Authority for the procurement of fire appliances. It was also noted that the use of £2.000 million from the Capital Investment Reserve to fund capital expenditure and reduce borrowing would be recommended and the General Reserve would remain at £3.900 million.

With regards to the Treasury Management, Members acknowledged that the performance was consistent with the approved strategy for 2025/26. Highlighting that at the end of June 2025, the Authority held £45.9 million in investments, all within approved limits, and Mike Rea confirmed that no new loans had been taken out.

Councillor Chris Page queried the investment strategy on page 17 of the report, highlighting that the approach appeared retrospective, and asked whether there was scope to soften that process in the future. In response, Mike Rea explained that investment terms and returns were currently high, particularly with current investments and that it would not be appropriate to soften the strategy, at this time.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the contents of the report be noted;
- b) the use of £2.000m from the Capital Investment Reserve to fund capital expenditure and reduce the level of borrowing be approved;
- c) the proposed revenue and capital budget alignments be approved;
- d) the use of the Inflation Reserve required to cover pay awards above the 2.5% MTFP assumption be approved; and
- e) 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.

5. CRMP Mid-Term Consultation 2025

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, presented the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) mid-term consultation 2025 report, which set out the Authority's plans to carry out a mid-term consultation on the 2024–27 CRMP with stakeholders. Members were advised that the consultation would run from August 2025.

Members noted that ahead of the approval of the current CRMP in 2024, the Authority had undertaken extensive engagement and consultation with staff, stakeholders and communities, whilst highlighting the 2023 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection report had identified ongoing engagement as good practice.

Members were informed that to support the mid-term review, a community engagement breakfast meeting had taken place at Service Headquarters on 29th August 2025, attended by the Chief Fire Officer. Two public focus groups were scheduled for 1st September 2025, with one being held without Service staff present in order to assess whether the absence of officers influenced the nature of feedback received. Members acknowledged that Stakeholders and

staff would also be provided with an update on progress against CRMP actions, together with a QR code link to an online survey held on the Authority's website.

Councillor Kieran Murphy asked whether there had been a public consultation, and the Chief Fire Officer explained that both stages prior to the approval of the CRMP had involved public consultation. As this was the first mid-term consultation, it was explained that it had been opened to focus groups who had contributed to the past, alongside the opportunity for the public to comment online at any time.

Councillor Jeanette Banks queried about the possibility of producing and distributing paper copies to reach the public who might not be able to access the website, and how such distribution would be decided. The Chief Fire Officer advised that while this could be considered, distributing to every property within Merseyside would involve significant cost and that the primary route for access would remain through the Authority's website however paper copies were provided to those who request it.

Councillor Chris Page referred to page 48 of the report and requested further information on the different roles and duties of Station and Watch Managers at incidents. The Chief Fire Officer explained that while Watch Managers had traditionally been in charge of pumps, around 80% of incidents could be managed by a Crew Manager. The Service was trialling a model where Crew Managers led appliances from neighbouring stations, with a Watch Manager responding separately in a car to oversee both. Members noted that this freed Watch Managers for wider responsibilities and provided experience closer to Station Manager roles, a model already in use in other services such as West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Councillor Mike Sullivan welcomed the report and proposals, commenting that it would provide an excellent progression route for officers on the career ladder, and asked that Members be kept updated.

Councillor Jeanette Banks expressed appreciation to officers for producing a clear, detailed and well-prepared report.

RESOLVED that the CRMP mid-term stakeholder consultation taking place from August 2025 be noted.

6. Service Delivery Plan 2025-26 April to June Update

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the Service Delivery Plan 2025-26 April to June update to Members and provided an overview of the Authority's performance.

Members' attention was drawn to accidental dwelling fires, with the Chief Fire Officer highlighting a recent increase, influenced by periods of warm, dry weather, which had resulted in more outdoor living activities, including cooking, drinking and smoking in gardens. Members noted that the majority of these fires had originated outside of properties, for example, from barbecues or garden fires, and had spread to homes. It was emphasised that, despite the increase,

this year represented the fourth lowest number of accidental dwelling fires in the past eight years. Members acknowledged that the Authority would use this information to target areas of high risk in the future.

With regards to secondary fire incidents, the Chief Fire Officer noted a further rise which had been influenced by a significant reduction in annual rainfall between February and May 2025. Members acknowledged that figures had been 65.4% lower, compared to the previous year, combined with unseasonably high temperatures. It was reported that a decrease in secondary fires had been observed in June, coinciding with increased rainfall. It was highlighted that deliberate secondary fires and antisocial behaviour-related incidents had also increased due to these conditions, particularly during school holidays, and that organised crime groups had contributed to some serious arson incidents. The Chief Fire Officer outlined the preventative measures implemented in response, including target hardening, multi-agency interventions, targeted arson reduction campaigns, and the reallocation of Street Intervention Teams.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted sickness absence figures, noting that they remained high, particularly amongst grey book staff. It was reported that performance was monitored and managed by the Performance Management Group and Strategic Boards, and that absences identified were often related to mental health issues, including stress linked to the wellbeing of family members.

With regards to the CRMP 2024–27, Members noted an update on the HMICFRS 2023 Action Plan, which detailed progress on recommendations and actions for improvement. Members' attention was also drawn to the individual functional plans.

The Chair, Councillor Jan Grace referred to page 147 of the report, regarding the rebranding of the Kings Trust and praised officers that it was an excellent piece of work, noting that it was a positive and necessary step forward.

With regards to page 174, Councillor Jan Grace enquired about the impact of reverse mentoring and how this was working in practice. The Chief Fire Officer advised that reverse mentoring had been in place for some time and was working well, also highlighting it had been incorporated into the High Potential Development Programme.

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

7. Staff Survey 2024 Action Plan

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the Staff Survey 2024 Action Plan report to Members, highlighting key findings from the Staff Engagement Survey 2024 and the proposed actions for improvement.

It was reported that 41% of staff (422 individuals) completed the survey, an increase of 9% from 2022 with an overall engagement score of 88%.

Members noted that key drivers of engagement included pride in the organisation, confidence in MFRS's (Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service) future, feeling valued, recognition of improvements in the workplace over three years, senior leaders listening to staff, and a clear vision provided by the Chief Fire Officer and Strategic Leadership Team (SLT).

With regards to areas to maintain and areas for focus, Members noted that SLT had reviewed the results, and feedback had been cascaded to individual functions, which informed the actions within the report. It was highlighted that these actions would be integrated into future planning and functional plans.

Councillor Mike Sullivan welcomed the report, noting the value of the clear direction given to staff by SLT and the assurance this provided to Members in looking ahead.

Councillor Lynne Thompson welcomed the strong internal leadership and clear vision for staff and praised the high 83% response rate. The results showed that the CFO and SLT were viewed positively for setting the overall direction of MFRS, with staff engagement continuing to increase.

Councillor Jeanette Banks queried how areas of concern would be reviewed going forward. The Chief Fire Officer explained that they would be incorporated into the functional plans on a quarterly basis, allowing the Authority to keep a close track on developments.

Councillor Jan Grace referenced page 213 and queried if the engagement between staff and the Authority would be reviewed further. Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves, confirmed that it was currently included within the Legal and Democratic Services functional plan and noted it was also discussed at a recent Member Development and Engagement group.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the content of this report be noted; and
- b) the action plan attached at appendix A be approved.

8. People Plan 2024-27 Update

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle provided an update to Members on progress against the actions outlined within the People Plan 2024-27. It was reported that positive progress had been made against the actions within the plan. It was noted that the People Plan received approval during an Authority meeting held on 17th June 2024.

Members acknowledged that the People Plan, CRMP and the Medium-Term Financial Plan complimented each other, together providing a strategic building block for the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer drew Members' attention to pages 249 to 254 of the report, highlighting that all actions were either completed or in progress.

RESOLVED that the positive progress made against the actions outlined within the plan be noted.

9. National Fire Standards Annual Update April 2025

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle provided an update to Members on the Authority's efforts in achieving compliance with the National Fire Standards. It was outlined that, internally, when a new fire standard was released, the consultation would be incorporated to a dedicated portal page wherein the relevant officers would be alerted. Highlighting the process in which officers submitted comments on the consultation documents, a responsibility would be allocated to the relevant functions to complete a gap analysis. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the implementation tool and updates were also included within the report.

Councillor Chris Page expressed that it was reassuring to see mostly Green ratings and thanked officers for the report update. He noted the importance of focusing on the key points and asked if there was anything the Members could do to provide support or assist in addressing any outstanding issues.

The Chief Fire Officer responded that progress against the standards was going very well. He noted the importance of keeping Authority Members engaged and confirmed that, where necessary, support could be provided to assist with the implementation of future standards.

RESOLVED that the progress against achieving compliance with the National Fire Standards (Appendix A and B) and the work being undertaken within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service ('MFRS') to implement and ensure compliance with the National Fire Standards be noted.

10. Extension to the Food Contract for Grocery, Frozen and Chilled Products

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the report to Members, noting the option of a two-year extension to the food contract for grocery, frozen, and chilled products, which would cover both the Service Headquarters and the Training and Development Academy sites.

Members were advised that a procurement exercise had been undertaken in 2023 using the TUCO Limited framework.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that the current contract was awarded to Trevor's Warehouse Limited for a two-year period, with an estimated value of £240,000. Members acknowledged that the actual spend against the contract from commencement on 13th October 2023 was £252,000, with the £12,000 overspend attributed to the opening of the new Training and Development Academy site and the extensive use of on-site catering there. Members were advised that should the option to extend the contract by an additional two years be approved by Members the value of the contract would exceed £300,000.

Councillor Mike Sullivan welcomed the contract extension report and praised the excellent catering facilities available at Service Headquarters.

RESOLVED that the two-year extension to the call off contract MFRS 2324-19 between MFRA and Trevor's Warehouse Ltd for an estimated additional £300k be approved.

11. Award of Contract for the Procurement and supply of smoke alarms

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, presented the report to Members which outlined the procurement process for the supply of smoke alarms and to award the contract to Fire Blitz Extinguisher Limited.

Members were informed that the previous arrangement for the provision of smoke alarms was procured utilising a call-off contract under a framework led by West Midlands Fire Service, and that the ability to award a call-off contract under the framework expired in May 2025.

Following a new procurement exercise, Members noted that Fire Blitz Extinguisher Limited was selected as the preferred provider, having achieved the highest overall ranking, allowing the call-off contract to be awarded under the successor framework.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that awarding the four-year contract would allow the Authority to plan its smoke alarm provisions as part of its prevention strategy, using a proven and reliable product. It was acknowledged that Members and staff were already familiar with the installation, information and maintenance of Fire Blitz units, as the supplier had been used previously by the Authority. The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the estimated value of the four-year contract was £752,500, which would be contained within the Authority's existing budget.

RESOLVED that Members;

- a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- b) the award of the supply of smoke alarms contract to Fireblitz Extinguisher Ltd for a duration of 4 years with an estimated value of £752,500 be approved.

12. ICT Managed Service Award

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the ICT Managed Service Award report to Members. Members noted that the current ICT Managed Services contract had an initial term of five years, with an option to extend for up to a further five years. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that the Authority had executed the contract extension in September 2018 for three years, and again in March 2023 for a further two years. It was explained that the contract was

therefore due to expire on 31st March 2026, with no further option to extend beyond that date.

Following an extensive period of internal planning with relevant departments, Members acknowledged the procurement process which commenced in June 2024. Members were advised that the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) Technology Services 3 Framework Agreement (RM6100) Lot 4, was selected as an appropriate route to market, and therefore was considered suitable for this process.

Members noted that continuing to outsource ICT Managed Services remained the most cost-effective method of delivery for the services for the Authority. It was highlighted that the technical evaluation and moderation of the tender response took place between 14th February and 18th March 2025.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the recommended contract was reported to bring additional benefits to the Fire Rescue Authority compared with the current contract, including improved service level agreements with faster response and fix times, priority out-of-hours incident support, enhanced cybersecurity services, and additional support for National Resilience and the UK International Search and Rescue team (UKISAR).

RESOLVED that the award of the contract for the provision of ICT Managed Service Provision to Telent Technology Services Ltd for a period of 5 years with effect from 1st March 2026 (with the option to extend the term for a further 2-year period) for the 5-year contract price of £13.740m be approved.

13. Procurement of Power Tools and Lighting

Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle presented the Procurement of Power Tools and Lighting report to Members. The report outlined the outcome of the procurement exercise for the supply of battery-operated power tools and lighting for each first responder vehicle, together with an additional training set, as part of the New Dimensions 2 (ND2) programme supporting UK National Resilience.

Members were advised that under ND2, all power tools and lighting were required to be battery operated, providing both practical and environmental benefits. It was highlighted that a direct award under the ESPO Framework for Tools and Ironmongery was utilised as the compliant route to market, with quotations obtained from two framework suppliers. Southern Power Tools and Abrasives Limited was identified as the preferred bidder, with a total cost of £592,737.80.

Members acknowledged that funding was provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) via a grant agreement as part of the ND2 Programme.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the contents of the report be noted, and

- b) the award of the contract for power tools and lighting to Southern Power Tools & Abrasives Ltd at a total cost of £592,737.80 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 5 February 2026