

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY

26 JUNE 2024

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr Les T. Byrom CBE (Chair)** Brian Kenny, Edna Finneran, Jan Grace, Dave Hanratty, Barbara Murray, Doreen Knight, Lynn O'Keeffe, James Roberts, Linda Maloney, Gill Wood, Jeanie Bell, Sam Gorst, Lynne Thompson, Andrew Makinson, Ed Lamb, Lesley Rennie and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside Emily Spurrell

Also Present:	Chief Fire Officer	Phil Garrigan
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Dave Mottram
	Director of Finance and Procurement	Mike Rea
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves

16. Apologies

Apologies received from Councillor Paul Tweed and Mr Anthony Boyle.

17. Declarations of Interest

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

18. Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 13th June 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

19. Corporate Risk Register 2023-24 Oct-Mar Update

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the Corporate Risk Register update for the period October 2023 to March 2024.

Members were advised of the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register, the status of the risks and associated control measures. The report included both corporate and operational risks, and it was noted that the Monitoring Officer had been asked to review the format of the Corporate Risk Register to ensure that the information was salient.

RESOLVED that the updated Corporate Risk Register for 2023/24 which incorporates the current status of those risks to March 2024 be approved.

Councillor Thompson arrived at 13.05, prior to the commencement of item 5.

20. Service Delivery Plan 2023-24 End of Year Report

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the Service Delivery Plan end of year report for 2023-24, detailing the Authority's performance to date against its targets and objectives.

The Chief Fire Officer drew Member's attention to page 89 of the agenda, which emphasised the exceptional performance of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to date. The Chief Fire Officer noted a significant decrease in incidents attended, showcasing the best performance in his 34 years at the Authority. It was noted that this success was attributed to the Authority's excellent Protection, Prevention, and Response work.

It was noted that the total number of emergency calls received had decreased by 19%, totalling 4745 fewer calls when compared to the previous year. The total number of incidents attended by the service had decreased from 18,736 to 17,345, which was a 7.5% reduction in incidents since 2022/23.

The Members directed their focus to page 92, which detailed the total number of fire incidents responded to in Merseyside. It was observed that there were 5,360 incidents attended, which was below the target of 7,169. It was emphasised that this reduction was predicated on MFRA's Arson Prevention, Protection, Community Safety and Youth Engagement efforts.

Members were advised that the number of primary fires attended by the Authority was also below the target of 1983, currently recorded as 1653, indicating a decrease of 208 incidents compared to the year 2022/23.

The Chief Fire Officer advised it was the ambition of the service three to four years ago to break a 1000 for the number of accidental fires attended, this had never been achieved previously. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed the current number achieved was 669 showing a significant decrease. The importance of preventative measures was emphasised in terms of reducing accidental dwelling fires, and the Authority was focusing on vulnerability factors and communities that were socially and economically disadvantaged. As a result of this approach the Service only suffered one fatality during this period.

Members were advised of the Authority's exceptional prevention efforts as demonstrated by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Rescue Services (HMICFRS) "Outstanding" grade. With regards to prevention, it was explained that a targeted approach to home safety had been applied to communities and youth engagement work.

The Chief Fire Officer explained the comparable decreases in deliberate fires and fires within vacant properties, both noting showing green with no reported fatalities.

Members were directed to page 96, which detailed the number of secondary fires attended by MFRS due to anti-social behaviour. It was noted that there had been 1545 fewer incidents compared to previous records, resulting in a 29.4% decrease.

The Chief Fire Officer credited the Community Safety and Arson Reduction teams, along with partner agencies, for the decrease in incidents. It was noted that the Authority aimed to work with communities and schools to reduce anti-social behaviour during the bonfire period.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority's proactive approach to unwanted fire signals and false fire alarm calls.

Members were advised of the importance of promptly calling 999 upon hearing fire alarms, to ensure that crews were alerted to potential incidents, and the Service did not want to deter people from calling if they thought there was danger.

It was noted that the response time for appliances arriving at life-threatening incidents was 10 minutes, to be met 90% of the time. Currently, for 95.9% of incidents MFRS met this response target.

Members were directed to page 100, which outlined sickness absences and shift loss across the service, noting a target set for staff absence of 4%. Sickness was currently above that target at 4.34% across the Service however the Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the ongoing efforts to proactively reduce sickness absence. It was highlighted that some staff members were experiencing longer wait times in the NHS and that this was impacting on the Authority's sickness absence performance. Although NHS wait times were out of the Authority's control, it was noted that internally the Authority's Occupational Health department and wellbeing support was exceptional for staff.

Councillor Kenny welcomed the report, and he extended his thanks to staff for their professionalism in protecting the public of Merseyside.

Councillor Lamb also commended the Authority's on its performance, and he highlighted page 98 of the agenda which displayed a decrease in Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs). Attention was drawn to the number of fatalities, noting that there had been eight during this period. Councillor Lamb queried why there was no target set for reducing this incident type.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the report included a shared indicator as different organisations worked collaboratively to reduce the number of RTCs and as such had different areas of focus. He emphasised that the Authority's focus remained on education through utilising the MFRA "Stay Wise" campaign. A commitment to educating young and new drivers was discussed, noting the importance of early intervention, and it was emphasised that road safety was a crucial element of MFRA's IRMP.

Councillor Hanratty echoed Councillor Kenny and Lambs' comments, praising the Chief Fire Officer's efforts to reduced incidents and the dedication of all staff involved.

Councillor Hanratty raised concerns over the cost of responding to false alarms, and it was noted that some alarms were not directly alerting alarm receiving centres and instead were alerting the service to respond. He asked for more information to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee to identify if there was a way to reduce the number of calls. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the Authority's ambition to continually improve, and as such it was agreed that unwanted fire signals would be considered by Members at a future Learning Lunch or alternatively by the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Rennie queried the Authority's involvement in collaborating with other local authorities around cycle lanes, 20mph zones and other speed reduction initiatives. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised that the Service's focus was on education and engagement with the community.

Councillor Rennie raised concerns from residents around appliance access in recently enforced 20mph zones and cycle lanes across the Wirral. The new measures were reportedly preventing fire appliances from accessing certain premises. Councillor Rennie requested for the Members to be informed of any restricted access complaints that the Authority receives.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that during busy times and hot weather, an influx of visitors to West Kirby or Formby, could pose a challenge for access for fire appliances. However, it noted that MFRA was working with local authorities to address these concerns and Members would continue to be updated.

Members were directed to page 103, which contained the draft HMCIFRS report for 2023 which focused on MFRS's action plan and highlighted areas for improvement, which would be incorporated into the next functional plan.

RESOLVED that the attached Service Delivery Plan update reports (Appendices 1-10) for publication on the website be approved.

21. CRMP 2024-27 Post-Consultation Report

The Chair of the Authority, Councillor Byrom, proposed that item 6 would not be heard at this meeting. It was recommended to extend the current CRMP until the next meeting of the Authority, in which the draft CRMP would be considered. This proposal was agreed by Members. As a result, it was noted that no further discussion would take place as the item no longer remained on the agenda.

RESOLVED that the current CRMP be extended until a future meeting of the Authority.

22. People Plan

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the People Plan, which included MFRA's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) actions. It was noted that the report focused on assessing the diversity of the service to ensure that the Authority was effectively meeting equality objectives and considering how it reached its communities.

The Members were made aware of the development of a Cultural Action Plan that would include a cultural dashboard, the metrics of which would be presented to the Authority for consideration and scrutinised for performance.

Members were advised that the ED&I Action Plan, the Cultural Action Plan, and the Medium-Term Financial Plan had been developed to complement each other as key strategic documents.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the People Plan featured five key themes as detailed below.

'Attract and Retain the Best People'; It was noted that the Authority's recruitment efforts for operational roles were strong, but the challenge for the Authority was in recruitment and retaining non-operational positions.

'Developing Exceptional People and their Leaders'; Members were reminded of the role of the Authority's vision, leadership message, and behaviours in supporting and developing exceptional leaders.

'Promote Holistic approach to Health and Wellbeing'; The Chief Fire Officer praised the Authority's holistic approach to staff wellbeing, including mental and physical support.

'Deliver Sector Leading Organisational Performance'; Members were informed that achieving top-tier performance would be monitored through the Service Delivery Plan (SDP). The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the importance of training to optimise productivity and efficiency.

'Embedding ED&I'; The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the Authority's commitment to ED&I and addressed disparities across Merseyside as part of its adoption of the socio-economic duty.

Members were informed that as part of the plan a list of contrary behaviours was currently being developed.

Councillor Grace praised the Authority for their role in promoting ED&I in the sector and for the positive report. It was noted that encouraging people to challenge inappropriate behaviour was a commendable endeavour for the Authority.

Members were advised of positive feedback from external stakeholders, who often commented on the positive culture which was noticeable throughout the organisation.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the actions contained within the People Plan 2024-27 have been subject to consultation with stakeholders, including our staff networks and our representative bodies, be noted; and
- b) the publication of the People Plan 2024-27 be approved.

23. Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 - 2028/29

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan introduced the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 and 2028/29.

Members were advised that the plan had been reformatted to ensure that members of the public could easily access the information in a user-friendly document.

Director of Finance and Procurement, Mike Rea, summarised the Medium-Term Financial Plan which was previously agreed by Members at the Budget meeting on the 29th February 2024, wherein a balanced budget of £74.191m was agreed.

It was explained that the plan would complement other key documents, and it was confirmed that no data had been altered since it was originally approved by Members.

Councillor Bell thanked the finance team for providing her with support as a new Member. She acknowledged that the Authority had lost a significant amount of grant funding from central government and commended the Authority on managing its limited funding resources so effectively.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that during austerity, the Authority had 26 fire engines in operation, compared to the current 32 fire engines. The increase in firefighters and operational staff was highlighted as an example of the Authority's effective allocation of funding to its frontline services. The Chief Fire Officer thanked Councillor Bell for her support in the matter.

RESOLVED that the summary version of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2028/29 (attached as appendix A) be noted.

24. Associate Membership of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Monitoring Officer Ria Groves presented the 'Associate Membership of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA)' report.

Members were advised that the LCRCA had invited the Authority to join as an associate member. It was noted that the Authority would not possess any voting rights with this membership, and the arrangements for both parties would be outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The Monitoring Officer mentioned that there would be no additional cost to become an associate member, and that any potential future collaborations would be subject to separate terms and agreements.

Councillor Roberts expressed his support for collaborating with other local government bodies and questioned whether Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service were also an associate Member of the LCRCA.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that she would liaise with the LCRCA regarding its membership and whether Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to identify were also an associate member of the LCRCA.

Councillor Byrom, Chair of the Authority noted that due to a boundary review some parts of Southport extended beyond Merseyside and the Authority had a legal obligation to collaborate with other partner agencies and authorities. It was noted that the Authority and the LCRCA shared an ambition to work collaboratively for the benefit of the people living in the Liverpool City Region.

Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside, Emily Spurrell, explained that when the LCRCA did undertake cross boundary work it sought to engage with and involve other Authorities.

Councillor Hanratty welcomed the report, and it was noted that the membership would be a significant advantage for the Authority.

Regarding the MOU, Councillor Hanratty requested that a recommendation be added to reflect that the governance of the Authority would remain entirely independent of the Combined Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the MOU would relate to the collaborative endeavours between the LCRCA and the Authority and not governmental arrangements, so it would not be the correct forum for that stipulation.

Councillor Lamb explained that he had recently attended an induction event at the LCRCA wherein different stakeholders engaged with Members, and he suggested it may be beneficial for the Authority to be involved in that event going forward. He stressed the need for the Authority to stay informed about new significant infrastructure projects across the city region and to be aware of any potential emerging risks.

RESOLVED that the invitation to become an Associate Member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 17 October 2024