MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

21 SEPTEMBER 2017

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr James Roberts (Chair)** Councillors Sharon Connor, Joe De'Asha and Lynne Clarke

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Lesley Rennie

1. Chairs Announcement

Prior to the start of the meeting, information regarding general housekeeping was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair confirmed to all present that the proceedings of the meeting would not be recorded.

The Chair informed all present that the following items would be considered prior to Agenda Item 3, due to the Presenting Officer being required to attend an external meeting:

- Agenda Item 6 – *"Equality Analysis of Workforce and Employment Data at 31st March 2017"*

- Agenda Item 7 – *"Fire Control Road Map 2017"* ***This report contains EXEMPT information by virtue of Paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972*** and therefore required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof.

Members were also provided with an updated version of Agenda Item 5 - '*2017/18 Internal Audit Plan'*, containing additional appendices.

The meeting was then declared open.

2. Preliminary Matters

Members considered the identification of declarations of interest, any urgent additional items, and any business that may require the exclusion of the press and public.

Resolved that:

a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda

b) no additional items of business to be considered as matters of urgency were determined by the Chair; and

c) the following item of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information:

- **Agenda Item 7 – *"Fire Control Road Map 2017"***

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous Audit and Scrutiny Sub Committee, held on 31st January 2017, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. 2016/17 ANNUAL YEAR-END INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Members considered report CFO/066/17 of the Treasurer, concerning the Annual Year End Internal Audit report for 2016/17.

A brief overview of the report was provided to Members summarising the audit review & findings.

Questions were raised regarding Ethical Governance, as the assurance level provided was "acceptable". Members were reassured that "acceptable" in audit terms was still positive.
The Authority's Internal Auditor commented that the assurance level around Ethical Governance was considered and discussed at the last meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Sub-Committee; and the only slight issue in this regard was around completed Members declarations to abide by the Code of Conduct.

It was confirmed that the Internal Audit reviews found a high level of assurance in the current systems of control and governance and that any potential corporate risk to the Authority was negligible.

Members resolved that:

the contents of the report, be noted.

5. Financial Review 2017/18 - April to June

Members considered report CFO/054/17 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the financial position, revenue and capital, for the Authority for 2017/18. The Authority receives regular comprehensive financial reviews during the year which provide a full health check on the Authority's finances. This report covers the period April to June 2017.

An update on the budget savings implementation was provided, advising Members that savings of £25.597m are on target to be delivered as expected by the end of the calendar year. The Authority approved 2016/17 and 2017/18 Budget savings of £11.597m to be delivered in full by 2021/22.

Members were informed that in terms of the capital programme, planned spend has increased by £7.9m, most of which is attributable to the re-phasing of schemes from 2016/17. The remaining amount of £0.011m, relates to approved amendments in current schemes for ICT hardware.

Questions were raised concerning whether value for money is achieved through the current provision for Internal Audit services. Members were reassured that the service provided does represent value for money and is of a high standard.

Members resolved that:

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

b) the Treasurer be instructed to continue to work with budget managers to maximise savings in 2017/18.

6. Equality Analysis of Workforce and Employment Data at 31st March 2017

Members considered report CFO/064/17 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning a breakdown of the Authority's workforce (people) data produced in order to meet the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duties and in order to allow scrutiny of the Service in the discharge of the said duty.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted that staff numbers have reduced, mainly as a result of operational male staff retirements. Although the percentage of female firefighters employed by MFRA is above the national average, the number of females in posts above watch manager level are low, therefore MFRA are encouraging female firefighters to consider opportunities to develop further.
It was highlighted that 60% of operational staff are aged between 46-55. However, as we are in the process of recruiting; and will continue to recruit for the next few years, this figure is likely to reduce in the longer term.

It was confirmed that all career break requests were granted (50% male and 50% female) meeting the needs of individuals. 73% of flexible working requests were accepted, 80% of which were from females. With regards to the 4 requests that were rejected, all were from females, however they were declined due to the requirement to fulfil statutory responsibilities.

It was highlighted that there are currently gaps in the recording of religion, belief, sexual orientation and disability on our self-disclosure database system, however actions are being considered to improve completion.

Questions were raised regarding future initiatives to encourage BME individuals to apply for roles within the organisation. Members were informed that there are a plethora of positive action initiatives undertaken to encourage applications

from BAME individuals and females and with regards to the Authority's new recruits, 30% are female and 5% are BAME. Members were further informed that the number of BAME applicants for firefighter roles are high, however many fall out of the process, often at the application form stage. Therefore, issues with BAME applicants progressing through the process are being addressed, for example HR staff are providing additional guidance on the completion of application forms.

Further questions were raised regarding the promotion of our recruitment process, and Members were informed of the range of media used to promote the recruitment process. Members were also informed of the 'have a go' sessions held, whereby previous applicants who were unsuccessful are contacted and invited to have a go at the physical tests, along with applicants who may be considering applying in the future.

Members resolved that:

(a) The report for publishing on the Authority website in order to demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity and to meet its Public Sector Equality Duties, be noted and approved.

(b) A further report be brought back to a future meeting, regarding a breakdown of application data for each stage of the firefighter recruitment process.

7. Fire Control Road Map 2017

This minute contains EXEMPT information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 8 February 2018