MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

25 APRIL 2023

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Paul Tweed (Chair), Edna Finneran, Dave Hanratty, Lesley Rennie, Gillian Wood and Mr Anthony Boyle

Also Present: Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, Head of Finance, Mike Rea, Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves

Apologies of absence were received from: Councillors Sharon Connor and Andrew Makinson

1. Preliminary Matters

The Chair welcomed Councillor Gorst to his first meeting of the Authority.

The Authority considered the identification of any declarations of interest, matters of urgency or items that would require the exclusion of the press and public due to the disclosure of exempt information.

RESOLVED that:

a) Councillor Wood declared an interest in respect of item 4 specifically in regard to the Growth Platform.

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

c) no items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 12th January 2023 be approved as an accurate record.

3. Access Audit

Members were advised that an Access Audit had taken place to ensure that the buildings across the Mersey Fire Rescue Service (MFRS) estate were accessible to the public, visitors and employees.

It was explained that the audit had resulted in 1741 recommendations with 392 classed as priorities. MFRS considered factors such as fire safety, gender facilities, station closures and the capital programme when reviewing the recommendations.

The proposed work schedule for making the estate more accessible was five years, with the audit recommendations being considered in all future capital build projects. For stations due to close, only urgent actions were being undertaken and it was envisioned that any recommendations for Privately Finance Initiative (PFI) buildings would form part of the lifecycle maintenance work. MFRA would need to liaise with Local Authorities about any improvements to Local Authority owned assets such as the approach to stations and signage as these may require planning permission.

Councillor Maloney asked if PFI buildings would be repainted to accommodate for partially sighted people and she acknowledged how successful that initiative had been at Service HQ. Stewart Woods advised that this would be taken into consideration as part of the maintenance of the building.

Members discussed public use of Community Fire Stations and it was asked how frequently community rooms were in use, what would happen if a room was not fully accessible and how that was being monitored. Members were advised that as part of the 'Hire and Use Instruction' there was a form to complete to be able to use the space and that included insurance details . Members were assured that in each district, there was a fully accessible site that could be offered as an alternative for any groups with accessibility requirements.

RESOLVED that :

a) the contents of the report and the accompanying presentation be noted; and

b) the proposed process to implement the actions arising from the access audit be noted.

4. Scrutiny of Outside Bodies

Members reviewed the current appointments and affiliations to outside bodies and organisations.

Councillor Byrom gave an overview of the Authority's involvement with the Local Government Association (LGA) and he advised Members that he thought it worked well as a coordinating body for the 46 Fire Authorities in the UK. It was noted that Councillor Rennie was also a Member and meetings had been held online since Covid.

Director of People and Organisational Development, Nick Mernock, briefed Members on the North West Employers Organisation (NWEO), which was a well-respected and well-utilised body in the region. Members were advised that although Councillor Roberts had been appointed at the Annual General Meeting

(AGM), there had been no Member involvement with the forum so this was being investigated with an update to be circulated to Members in due course.

With regards to the North West Fire and Rescue Advisory Forum and the Association of Fire and Rescue Authorities, Members were advised that there had not been any meetings in recent times. Councillor Byrom explained that since Greater Manchester had changed its governance, these forums were less necessary, especially as the agenda for the North West had diminished with the focus moving to national funding. It was suggested that these forums could be reactivated if they were needed, but for the time being, they be kept in abeyance.

Members considered the Authority's involvement with the Growth Platform, noting that membership cost the Authority £4,700 per year. Area Manager, Kevin Longshaw provided Members with further information, explaining that there was a role for Protection to be involved in providing support and guidance to the business community. It also provided the Authority with the ability to communicate with businesses on potential issues before engaging in the prosecution process.

Members discussed the Merseyside Community Safety Partnership (MCSP) and the Safer Merseyside Partnership (SMP) noting that the format of these bodies had evolved in recent time. MCSP sought to address serious violence in England and Wales by working collaboratively across public bodies and Members received an overview of the Authority's role within the Violence Reduction Unit. It was explained that each Local Authority had its own Community Safety Partnership and the Chair of that forum varied was decided by the membership.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Dave Mottram explained that before Covid, the Police and Crime Commissioner had introduced the Safer Merseyside Partnership but since the pandemic there had been some changes. Historically the Chief Fire Officer would attend on behalf of the Authority and it was noted that the PCC had since joined the Authority as a co-opted Member.

Members discussed the Authority's relationship with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and it was noted that MFRA would be invited to any meeting that was relevant for the fire service, though it was envisioned this would be a rarity given the scope and remit of the LCRCA.

It was agreed that an update be provided to the Members at the Annual General Meeting.

Councillor Les Byrom left the meeting at 13:53

RESOLVED that:

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

b) the current Membership and appointment to Outside Bodies be noted; and

c) updates on the Growth Platform, North West Employers Organisation and Safer Merseyside Partnership be provided at the Annual General Meeting on the 8th June.

5. Standing Item: Scrutiny Forward Work Plan

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves presented the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan and advised Members that a Scrutiny Workshop was planned for the new municipal year.

Fleet vehicles and alternative fuels would be carried over to the 2023/24 Work Plan and Members were asked to advise if there were any additional items they wished to consider.

Councillor Hanratty noted that there had been a HMICFRS report on Culture in the Fire Service and he asked whether this should form part of Scrutiny's purview moving forward. It was also suggested that the Staff Survey and Net Zero for buildings and carbon reduction be considered for 2023/24.

Close 2:30pm

Date of next meeting Thursday, 14 September 2023

Dated: _____ Signed: _____