MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

27 JULY 2023

MINUTES

Present:	Councillors **Roberts (Chair), Byrom, Hanratty, Wood, Murray, Murphy, Byron, Moloney**	
Also Present:	Chief Fire Officer	Phil Garrigan
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Director of Finance and Procurement	Ian Cummins

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Councillors Byron and Rennie.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest for this meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on the 23rd March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. New Training and Development Academy and Fire and Rescue Station Long Lane – Progress Report

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves advised Members that there was a typographical error in the report on page 18 of the agenda, paragraph 40. Members were asked to consider the report with a clarification to the percentage figure to read 2.5%.

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented report CFO/032/23 which detailed the ongoing progress of the new Training and Development Academy and Fire & Rescue Station at Long Lane, Aintree.

Members reviewed drone footage of the site which showed that construction was well underway and Members were advised that the project was halfway through it's 80 week life cycle.

The Committee were advised that there had been some increase in costs due to an increase in the amount of spoil that had to be removed from the site to attain the finished ground level specified by Liverpool City Council during the planning process.

The Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan reported that the Authority was exploring providing national and international training at the Academy to help cover some of the running costs of the training facility. Members were advised that the plans formed part of the continual progressive improvement plan for Merseyside with the merging of Croxteth and Aintree Stations resulting in a quicker response time and better facilities for the firefighters. Utilising the site to provide a secondary control room as a fall back position for fire control was also highlighted as a benefit of the proposal.

It was explained that of the 12 acres, three remained latent so that the site could adapt to future risks, The recommendations sought to include classrooms adjacent to training zones to maximise the amount of training time available.

Councillor Barbara Murray enquired as to the number of students each classroom could accommodate and asked how the Authority was ensuring it utilised all of its spaces effectively. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the current site did not meet the needs of the service and as a result, some training had not been able to be provided by MFRA. Therefore, the service was confident that there would be the demand to necessitate additional classrooms when taking into consideration the national training needs as well as the potential international training that could take place.

Head of Estates, Stewart Woods advised Members that each classroom was designed to accommodate 12 individuals with an option to remove a partition wall and increase the capacity to 40. It was noted that the Road Traffic Collison classroom would include an external canopy so crews could continue to train regardless of the weather.

Councillor Pat Moloney enquired as to the length of the lease with Scottish Power referenced in paragraph 39 of the report and it was explained that the finer details of the lease were still in discussion with Liverpool City Council who currently owned the land.

Stewart Woods was asked about the quality of the soil at the site and Members were assured that any soil that could be reused had been incorporated into the construction of the site.

With regards to marine rescue training, the Chief Fire Officer explained that this could be included in future phases of the Academy as part of the work around future risks. Members were assured that currently there were multiple sites that the Authority could use for training marine rescue and the Authority had good working relationships with the ports in the county.

The Members discussed whether an Income Generating Officer would form part of the team for the new development with a scope to consider income generating opportunities with external trainers. The Chief Fire Officer said that this would be a consideration and explained that through national and international training, some of the costs of the project could be offset and any additional revenue could be reinvested back into the communities of Merseyside. Therefore, the project would not generate income but could seek to cover its own costs.

The current plan was to focus on the Authority's core training needs and specialist training linked to the Integrated Risk Management Plan and MFRA's specialist capabilities. Future National and International training would be considered as part of the Authority's future Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

RESOLVED that:

a) the contents of the report and progress made to date be noted; and

b) the increase in the overall project capital budget by £1m as detailed in the financial section, to be funded by a drawdown from the capital reserve be approved.

5. Long term Capability Management Contract Extension

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle, presented to Members a request to extend the current Long Term Capability Management Contract, noting that MFRA had been the lead Authority for National Resilience since 2017.

Members heard that due to a lack of funding through the Comprehensive Spending Review there was a gap between the current contract and the projected equipment refresh target for New Dimensions. It was noted that all funding for the contract extension would be met by the Home Office and not the Authority.

Councillor Les Byrom noted that the Authority performed a particular role nationally through its management of National Resilience and it was hoped that in the next Comprehensive Spending Review, there would be some funding for New Dimensions. It was suggested that Members needed to lobby government to ensure that the refreshed programme of this essential capital equipment was achieved.

RESOLVED that the four-year extension to the LTCM contract with Babcock Critical Services Limited from 1st October 2024 to 30th September 2028 be approved.

6. Operational Response Structural Changes

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented report CFO/036/23 relating to the Authority's revised operational structure, noting that Members had previously approved an allocation of budget to support this proposal.

It was explained that for a period of time the Crew Manager role had been removed from the Authority's structure. During that time, the Authority had received feedback from its staff which stated that the 'jump' from being a Fire Fighter to a Watch Manager was significant and could be preventing people from applying for those positions, especially staff from different ethnicities and women who were statistically less likely to apply for senior positions. As a result, the Authority had reintroduced the Crew Manager role which allows Fire Fighters to act in a supervisory capacity and this had been well received by the staff.

The Chair agreed with the additional route for career progression stating that it gave people who may not be as confident a chance to explore a supervisory position. The Equality Impact Assessment was noted as a positive addition to the report as it highlighted that minority groups who would benefit from this action in line with the Authority's wider aspirations around equality and representation.

RESOLVED that the revised Operational Response Structure, which sees 20 additional supervisory manager roles, established be noted.

7. 22/23 Revenue and Capital Outturn Report

Ian Cummins, Head of Finance presented the Revenue and Capital Outturn Report to the Members.

Councillor Les Byrom noted that the reason that the Authority had reserves was to ensure that there was money available for capital projects as the Authority did not receive a capital grant.

The Chair was comfortable with the use of self-balancing virements and the use of the inflation reserve to cover the pay award but he asked if the inflation reserve was sufficient given the rise in 2023. With regards to pay awards, Ian Cummins explained that the budget anticipated a Local Government Pay Award of 5% and it was noted that the current proposal being discussed with Unions was 6%. The additional 1% equated to approximately £100,000 and the Authority was confident that this could be met through the Inflation Reserve and savings from unfilled vacancies.

Members were advised that when the Medium Term Financial Plan was prepared, the Authority had assessed energy rates, business rates, contracts and inflation provision. It was forecasted that inflation would fall towards the end of the financial year to around 2% but this was not guaranteed.

RESOLVED that ;

a) actual revenue spend compared to the approved budget delivered a net underspend of £4.213m before the creation of year-end reserves, as outlined in Appendix A1 be noted ;

b) this underspend be used to;

- create the required year-end reserves of £0.924m to fund projects that have slipped from 2022/23 into 2023/24, be approved and;
- increase in the inflation reserve by £0.382m to mitigate the risk around high inflationary pressures on pay and prices, be approved
- increase the capital investment reserve by £2.907m in order to offset capital cost inflationary pressures and reduce planned borrowing to free up revenue budget associated with debt servicing cost be approved

c) the re-phasing of planned capital spend from 2022/23 into future years of £6.334m, as outlined in Appendix B be approved and ;

d) committed reserves of £19.789m and a general reserve of £3.000m as outlined in Appendix A4 be approved.

8. Service Delivery Plan 22-23 End of Year Report

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the end of year Service Delivery Plan for 2022-23, detailing Authority's performance against its targets and objectives.

Members considered the functional plans and the Authorities aspirations for this IRMP. Their attention was drawn to the merging of Aintree and Croxteth Stations and the progress of the Training and Development Academy which was on track for delivery. Members were also advised that the Authority was seeking to introduce a Stinger Fire Appliance which can penetrate into buildings and roof spaces to fight fire as part of the current Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Councillor Sue Murphy queried the target for embedding of PORIS and asked why it was reported as 2023 when it would not be finished until March 2024. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the project was phased and the focus had been extended to recognise the full scope of the technology. It was agreed that the reporting date for this project be reported as 2024 as it was deemed more accurate.

Members discussed EBikes with regards to the fatality figures in the report and it was suggested that the Authority campaign to Government to change the legislation around the usage and storage of EBikes to make them safer. Councillor Dave Hanratty noted that there had been seven fire deaths in the UK resulting from EBikes and urged the Authority to support third party verification for the purchase of EBikes. Members discussed the best approach for lobbying Government on this issue.

Councillor Les Byrom noted that there had been a session on emerging technology at the LGA Conference in February and he agreed that lobbying government to increase the regulations on poor quality batteries and raise awareness of the potential dangers.

The Chief Fire Officer assured the Members that this was an issue being considered by the National Fire Chiefs Council and was recognised by Fire and Rescue Services across the country. The Authority noted that £50,000 had been allocated in the current budget for work on alternative fuels and the service was aware of the potential risks around storage and handmade charging/conversions for EBikes.

The Committee discussed the use of drones to identify hotspots and increase visibility of fires at waste recycling plants or to drop survival equipment into the River as part of water rescue.

RESOLVED that:

a) the attached Service Delivery Plan reports (Appendices A-D) for Publication on the website be approved; and

b) the Chief Fire Officer write to Government urging for stronger legislation around the sale and charging of EBikes.

Date of next meeting Thursday, 21 March 2024