MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

28 JULY 2016

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr Leslie T. Byrom CBE (Chair)** Councillors Lesley Rennie, James Roberts, Jean Stapleton, Sharon Sullivan, Peter Brennan, Dave Hanratty and Chris Meaden

Also Present: Linda Maloney

Apologies of absence were received from:
Joe De'Asha, Veronica McNeill and Barbara Murray

9. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

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

The Chair confirmed that proceedings of the meeting would not be filmed on this occasion and opened the meeting.

1. 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 contained EXEMPT information:

- Item 3 – Part 2 EXEMPT Minutes of the previous meeting 24th March 2016.

However, as Members confirmed that this item did not require discussion, it was not necessary to exclude members of the press and public during consideration thereof.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 24th March 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Part 2 EXEMPT Minutes

The Part 2 EXEMPT minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 24th March 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. Grant Thornton - Audit Findings 2015-16

Michael Thomas representing the Authority's External Auditors – Grant Thornton, presented the Audit Findings report for 2015/16.

He informed Members that the report for last year was presented in September, however as the process for reporting is due to be brought forward, it was decided to bring this report earlier in preparation. He thanked the Finance Team for their work in ensuring this occurred.

Members were advised that Grant Thornton had, that morning, received a query on the Authority's Statement of Accounts from a member of the public, which will need to be dealt with. However, Grant Thornton are confident that the matter can be resolved soon and the accounts be signed.

Members were then provided with an overview of the Audit Findings for 2015/16, including an explanation on the statutory basis of the audit and the responsibilities of Grant Thornton; and areas currently being finalised.

The overview outlined the key findings within the report and explained that the accounts have been produced to a good standard with no significant amendments required.

In terms of value for money, the report highlights that the Authority are experiencing a period of significant change and financial challenge, however the arrangements in place to meet this challenge are sufficient.

Furthermore, in terms of material, significant and other risks, and estimates and judgements, no issues where identified.

Questions were raised regarding the format of the report and whether future reports could be produced in a more accessible format; and around how the anomalies identified occurred.

A full explanation was provided regarding the anomalies; and Members were informed that the format would be considered for future reports.

A further question was raised regarding the Annual Governance Statement; and whether a comment can be included from the external auditors in response to comments from Government that the Annual Governance Statement does not include any comments regarding the consequences of the cuts.

Members were informed that within the Annual Governance Statement, Grant Thornton do try to reflect the challenges facing the Authority, as far as they are able to do so within the Code of Practice.

The Chair thanked Grant Thornton and all officers involved in the production of the reports.

Members Resolved that

The content of the report be noted.

5. REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2015/16

Members considered report CFO/061/16 of the Treasurer, concerning the Authority's year-end financial position for 2015/16.

Members were informed that the outturn position identifies a 2% favourable variance in revenue; and it is proposed to use this to increase the Capital Investment reserve.

A summary of the report was provided, which included some background to the budget, information regarding the revenue outturn, details on where savings have been achieved, a summary of the year end reserves; and information concerning the capital outturn position.

Questions were raised around the plans for development of the Training and Development Academy and how much has been set aside.

Members were advised that the Strategic Management Group are currently identifying requirements and a report regarding this will be brought back to Members at a later stage.

Members Resolved that:

a) The actual financial performance against the approved budget and the achievement of a net revenue saving in 2015/16 of £2.362m, be noted.
b) The £2.362m saving be utilised to:

    i) Fund the creation of £0.791m year-end earmarked reserves in order to finance approved 2015/16 spend that has been re-phased into 2016/17. And

ii) Fund an increase in the Capital Investment Reserve of £1.571m to support the planned investment in the Training and Development Academy.

6. Statement of accounts 2015/16 - authorisation for issue

Members considered report CFO/062/16 of the Treasurer, concerning the audited 2015/16 Statement of Accounts.

Members were advised that current requirements are that the Statement of Accounts be approved before the end of September, however this requirement will be moving to the end of July for future years. Therefore, the Statement of Accounts are being brought to Members for approval earlier this year, in preparation for future deadlines.

Members were provided with a summary of the report, which highlighted the four core financial statements and confirmed that the Statement of Accounts have been prepared in line with the relevant codes of practice.

A question was raised around the information contained within the table regarding the Authority's non-financial performance - in particular concerning the number of deliberate fires and how many perpetrators are subsequently caught and prosecuted.

Members were informed that the incident investigation team locate forensic evidence, which can then assist the Police in developing a case. They were advised that this has resulted in a number of successful prosecutions and information on these can be shared with Members.

Members Resolved that:

a) The audited Statement of Accounts 2015/16, attached as Appendix A to this report, be approved.

b) The Statement of Accounts 2015/16 be approved and authorised for issue.

c) The Letter of Representation in relation to the 2015/16 accounts, attached as Appendix B, be approved.

7. IRMP 2017-20 PREPARATION & PLANNING PRINCIPLES

Members considered report CFO/064/16 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the approval of planning principles which have been created in order to inform the development of proposals within the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-20. These principles have been the subject of public consultation.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the public consultation undertaken around the planning principles to be considered when developing the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and proposals to address the £11m financial challenge.

Members were informed that should these planning principles be approved, a Draft IRMP will be prepared and submitted to the Authority Meeting on 20th October 2016 for Members to approve for 12 weeks public consultation. During this period of public consultation, a vast range of stakeholders will also be engaged, including employees and Representative Bodies. Following consultation, the final draft of the IRMP will be brought back to the Budget Authority Meeting in February 2017 for approval.

Discussion took place around plans within Wirral Council to improve public consultation, by producing their own publication and distributing to every Wirral resident; and it was suggested that this publication could be utilised to help promote the work of MFRA.

Comments were made regarding previous consultation events and it was suggested that the language used could be better tailored to the public to aid their understanding of the issues.

Further discussion took place around enabling the public to understand the likely changes in governance arrangements and how the service is likely to look in the future.

Members raised questions around restrictions on who we can consult with and around the use of daily news bulletins to promote what MFRA are doing.

Members were informed that officers are not aware of any limitations on the breadth of consultation, so long as the consultation is considered to be reasonable.
With regards to news bulletins, Members were advised that Control staff are able to update the newsfeed on the Internet with incident information; and significant use is also made of social media.

A further point was raised regarding the weighting of prevention work in our communities during the public consultation.
Members were informed that proposals will reflect the importance of our prevention work.

Members Resolved that:

The planning principles be approved as the basis for development of proposals for the IRMP 2017-20.

8. Contract for Trauma Care Training

Members considered report CFO/065/16 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the approval of expenditure in excess of £250,000 under the contract for

Trauma Care Training and extension of the contract to its maximum term of 5 years.

Members were informed that operational staff often attend incidents were basic life support is required. As such, it is essential that all operational staff are trained to a good standard. The qualification undertaken within MFRA is FPOS (First Person on Scene), which ensures consistency with the standards adopted by NWAS.
Although this training is a requirement for all operational staff, the training would have been phased over a four year period had agreement not been reached with the Fire Brigades Union for all stations to participate in the EMR trial. As a result, all staff have received initial training in year one, meaning refresher training will be required sooner. This will result in expenditure exceeding the threshold and Authority approval being required to increase the level of expenditure with the supplier and to extend the contract to cover the refresher training.

Members were advised that due to national reasons, the FBU now wish to limit the trial to three stations, however dialogue with the FBU regarding this continues.

Discussion took place around comments made by operational staff during recent Station Visits, regarding the maintenance of skills and knowledge.

Members were advised that elements of the FPOS syllabus are included in the ongoing station training programme.

Members Resolved that:

a) The continued use of the current contract for Trauma Care Training for initial and refresher training with a total anticipated expenditure in excess of £250,000, be approved.

b) The extension of the contract for the period 1st February 2018 to 31st January 2020, be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 15 December 2016

Signed:_____ Date:_____