



Minutes of the Meeting of the  
TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND  
RESCUE AUTHORITY held in the  
Fire and Rescue Service  
Headquarters, Barmston Mere on  
MONDAY 22 JANUARY 2024 at  
10.30am.

**Present:**

Councillor Tye in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Dodds, Haley, Hunter, Usher, Keegan, Kilgour, Patterson, Warne, Welsh and Woodwark and also Kim McGuinness (PCC).

**Part I**

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Johnson, Mullen and Wood.

**Announcement**

The Chair with the deepest regret advised the Authority that Councillor Burdis had sadly passed away. He commented that Councillor Burdis would be a huge miss to both the Authority and North Tyneside Council.

As a mark of respect, one minutes silence was held.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**Minutes**

38. RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Authority held on 11 December 2023, Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## **Meritorious Conduct Award**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) submitted a report to award the brave and meritorious conduct to Firefighter (FF) David Bell.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that this award was in recognition of his actions rescuing an individual out of the water and bringing them to safety after they fell from a bridge.

Members heard that FF Bell was driving through the incident area whilst off duty when he was flagged down by a distressed individual who had seen someone fall from a bridge. FF Bell took action and began a search for the victim in the river below. He located the person who had fallen and with little consideration for himself and at great personal risk to himself, crossed the muddy bank created by the low tide and entered the water. On his own he managed to pull the individual from the water and bring them to a place of safety.

FF Bell immediately started emergency care to the individual's significant injuries. He had no first aid equipment so improvised with his own clothing to apply pressure to numerous wounds. FF Bell delivered continuous casualty care to the individual until the North East Ambulance Service and Helicopter Emergency Medical Service arrived on scene.

Due to FF Bell's actions, the individual would be able to recover. FF Bell at great personal risk and disregard for his own safety demonstrated the highest standards of bravery and humanitarian commitment to help save a life. In this respect he demonstrated the best traditions of the Fire and Rescue Service.

39. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Fire Authority Commendation for Meritorious Conduct be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) FF Bell be congratulated and thanked for his actions in saving a life.

## **Appointments to Committee of the Authority**

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority submitted a report to advise Members of vacancies that had arisen on the Governance Committee and Personnel Appeals Committee, and asking Members to consider appointing to these positions.

Members were advised that on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Sunderland City Council gave notice to the Chief Fire Officer of its intention to appoint Cllr Antony Mullen to the Authority, in place of Cllr George Smith. This change in appointment was a consequence of a change to the majority party in opposition at Sunderland City Council.

In accordance with s31(2)(b) of the Local Government Act 1985, Cllr Mullen's appointment to the Fire Authority took effect from 17 December 2023, one month after the date on which notice of the change was served.

As a result of this change to the membership of the Authority, a vacancy had arisen on both the Governance Committee and Personnel Appeals Committee.

40. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) Councillor Woodwark be appointed to the Governance Committee; and
- (ii) Councillor Patterson be appointed to the Personnel Appeals Committee.

### **HMICFRS Thematic Inspection 2023**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) submitted a report to update Members on the outcome of the recent thematic inspection of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS), by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS).

The paper provided Members with an update on the summary feedback from HMICFRS following this inspection. No formal report was provided to any of the participating services by the HMICFRS and TWFRS had been selected as 1 of the 10 of the 44 Fire and Rescue Services to be part of the thematic inspection.

ACFO McVay advised that the terms of reference for the inspection stated that HMICFRS would be examining the following as part of the inspection, with findings reported to the Home Secretary:

- the extent to which services were identifying and investigating misconduct;
- the effectiveness of misconduct processes and how consistently they were applied;
- how confident fire and rescue service staff were in raising concerns and in misconduct processes; and
- the role of fire and rescue authorities and other organisations in handling misconduct.

The last three thematic inspections were currently underway, with a national report due to be published in summer 2024. HMICFRS had confirmed that there would be no graded judgements and/or reports published for individual services inspected, and no FRS would be named in the national report.

ACFO McVay explained that the thematic inspection in TWFRS was undertaken over three weeks, between 4 to 22 December 2023 and that on 4 January 2024, HMICFRS provided a 'hot debrief' to the Principal Officers of TWFRS.

Members were referred to Section 3 of the report which outlined the methodology and were also advised of the findings of the inspection which included positive practice and also areas for consideration as detailed in section 4 of the report.

ACFO McVay explained that HMICFRS acknowledged that the Service was on an improvement trajectory and that that TWFRS' current approach to mentoring and developing staff to become investigating officers was considered innovative practice, and one they would be sharing as a result of the inspection.

TWFRS were due to commence the Round 3 inspection in April 2024 and the Service had been advised that any findings from the most recent thematic inspection may be used in the round 3 inspection in March.

Councillor Haley questioned whether the Inspection Teams felt supported or whether more could be done and was advised that the Service did have an assigned Service Liaison Lead and that the approach had been supportive however there were a few times when the Service did challenge and 'push back' for which they received an apology for.

Councillor Haley commented that staff needed to be supported for any negative comments received.

Kim McGuinness commented that this was a cultural piece of work and that the Service was doing everything that it could.

41. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report and the associated background reports be noted; and
- (ii) Further progress reports relating to HMICFRS be received as appropriate.

### **Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024-2025**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to update members on the implications of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024/25, which was announced by the government on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

The Head of Financial Services advised that Appendix E set out for members' information the agreed and submitted response to the consultation on the Provisional Finance Settlement for 2024/25. This response was agreed by members of the Emergency Committee because of the timings involved as this had to be submitted to government by 11:45am on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

Members were then referred to all of the national financial information included in the published one-year Provisional Settlement for 2024/25 as detailed within Section 2.2 of the report.

The Head of Financial Services explained that the Provisional Settlement for 2024/25 for the Authority as detailed in Appendix A showed that the Authority's Core Spending Power (CSP) had increased by 4.26% in 2024/25 compared to the adjusted 2023/24 level, which continued to be below the national average increase for all standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) of 4.6%.

Members were advised that the Settlement stated that Fire and Pensions grant totalling £115m had been consolidated into the Revenue Support Grant although it would retain its existing distribution for 2024/25.

The amount of Revenue Support grant to be received by the Authority was £13.471m. This included core revenue grant funding allocations of Formula Grant and previous Council Tax Freeze Grants. This Grant also now included the Pensions Grant allocation of £2.593m which was paid to the Authority as specific grant funding in previous years (and as such was not new monies). The MTFs assumed an increase of 2%, so there was additional RSG for the Authority on a like for like basis (which included the adjustment for the Pensions Grant allocation) of £472k from this variation.

Members were then advised that Services Grant which according to the government was one-off funding for 2022/23 had been retained once more in 2024/25 although this had been reduced significantly on this occasion. The continuation of this grant was welcomed but this funding was now only worth £0.099m compared to the £0.629m received in 2023/24.

The table detailed at Section 3.3 of the report also assumed members would accept the 2.99% Band D Council Tax increase which generated almost £0.516m of additional funds in 2024/25 provided the Tax Base also grown by the assumed increase the Government had included of 0.88%. If there was no growth, then the amount of additional funds reduced to only £0.276m.

Councillor Haley commented that the finance settlement being so close to Christmas with an expectation of a response by the 15<sup>th</sup> January was totally unacceptable and also expressed his concerns in relation to the pension grant being rolled into the Revenue Support Grant as there was no transparency, adding that service delivery was down by 84% which was staggering and that every year CT was being increased which residents could not afford, despite the reduction in National Insurance.

Councillor Woodwark commented that clearly the financial system was not fit for purpose as there were more fires in lower band areas which Tyne and Wear had.

42. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report which included the updated Draft Revenue Budget resources position for 2024/25 taking into account the implications of the provisional local government finance settlement at this stage be noted;

- (ii) The comments made on the Authority's behalf to the government's consultation on the Provisional Grant Settlement for 2024/25 be noted and endorsed; and
- (iii) It be noted that the final Revenue Budget and Precept for 2024/25 would be presented at February's Authority meeting together with an updated and more detailed MTFs.

### **Capital Programme 2023-2024 Third Quarterly Review**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to review the current year's Programme and reflect any changes necessary to those that were presented to the Authority in the Second Capital Programme Review held on 20th November 2023.

The Head of Financial Services explained that the Capital Programme was showing a decrease of £2,467,937 in the total estimated costs, from £16,625,988 reported at the Second Review stage to £14,158,051.

The national Government led Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project (ESMCP) had experienced a number of delays during the years whereby the timing of progress and expenditure had continued to be uncertain. An independent review had shown that it was correct to move to the ESN Network but was now anticipated that this would not go live until beyond 2027.

Members were then referred to the additional projects amounting to £297,445 which included and inflatable boat, roller brake tester, fire safety accommodation provision and enhancing female firefighter safety.

Work had been ongoing to review the current small fleet and consider options for replacement. A number of essential vehicles had been purchased this financial year and were currently awaiting delivery. Due to vehicle lead in times the remaining small fleet budget would need to be slipped in to 2024/2025. Future requirements would be considered at budget setting and the small fleet budget realigned to reflect current and future needs. The Head of Financial Services explained that the bulk of the Authority's Capital Programme (89%) was funded from its own reserves which it had built up over time and that these were set out in Appendix B for information. The detail showed that all reserves held by the Authority were fully committed and as such there was no flexibility to use reserves to help fund the Revenue Budget.

In relation to the Prudential Indicators there were no areas for concern or any issues which required any review of the indicators as originally approved. A further review of the indicators would be reported at the Capital Programme Outturn stage.

43. RESOLVED that the progress to date and the reported variations since the Third Quarterly Review be noted and approval be given to the revised Capital Programme for 2023/2024, as set out at Appendix A.

## **Revenue Budget 2023-2024 Third Quarterly Review**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to update Members on all of the financial issues relating to the 2023/2024 Revenue Budget position at the third quarter stage of the financial year.

The Head of Financial Services advised that regular monitoring of the Revenue Budget had continued to take place and the underspend at outturn was now projected to be £607,000. A summary of the updated position was set out at Appendix A which showed the projected costs compared to both the revised and original budget positions for the main budget headings.

At this stage in the financial year a net overspend of £347,000 was projected on the total employee budget and was made up of a collection of different variable factors. Members were advised that the pay awards had now been agreed.

Members were advised that in relation to interest on balances, at budget setting in February 2023, interest received was calculated at the Bank of England Base Rate at the time and set at £613,000.

The service had received £651,000 for the half yearly interest payment. Using the current Bank Base Rate, it was projected that the second half yearly interest payment would be approximately £710,000.

Councillor Woodwark commented that the interest rates may reduce which could have an impact on the Authority. The Head of Financial Services responded by advising that assumptions had been made on the rates for the current year. The Chief Fire Officer advised that as reserves were continually being spent, several projects were being delayed however funding was being sourced.

44. RESOLVED that the Third Quarter position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2023/2024 as set out in this report and summarised at Appendix A be noted.

## **Schedule of Precept Instalments 2024-2025**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to advise that the Authority must agree with its Billing Authorities all of the precept payment dates for the financial year ahead which were required to be made by twelve equal monthly instalments, commencing in April, and payable on the last working day of each month, to continue the practice adopted in 1993/1994. The proposed dates agreed were therefore:

Tuesday	30th April 2024
Friday	31st May 2024
Friday	28th June 2024
Wednesday	31st July 2024
Friday	30th August 2024
Monday	30th September 2024

Thursday	31st October 2024
Friday	29th November 2024
Tuesday	31st December 2024
Friday	31st January 2025
Friday	28th February 2025
Monday	31st March 2025

45. RESOLVED that the schedule of instalments proposed under paragraph 4(4) of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) Regulation 1992, as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved.

At the Close of the meeting, the Chief Fire Officer notified the Authority of the s151 Officers' intention to retire at the end of March.

(Signed) P. TYE  
Chairperson