



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 20 NOVEMBER 2023 at
10.30am.

Item 3

Present:

Councillor Tye in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Burdis, Haley, Hunter, Johnson, Keegan, Patterson, Usher, Smith, Warne, Welsh, Wood, and Woodwark and also Kim McGuinness (PCC).

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Dodds and Kilgour.

Announcements

The Chair on behalf of the Authority, welcomed Councillor Burdis back and also sent well wishes to Councillor Dodds. The Authority wished him a speedy recovery.

In relation to the bonfire period, a report would be submitted to the next meeting and the Chair commented that the Service had dealt with the period with the upmost professionalism and that the support from the Police had been welcomed.

Councillor Haley commented that he had spent time with fire crews and call handlers on the bonfire evening and that he appreciated the time which was spent. DCFO Nicholson commented that staff were also very grateful for the time and effort shown by Members.

ACFO McVay provided a verbal update in relation to statistics for the period 1st November – 5th November 2023. There will be a full written report presented at the December Fire Authority meeting.

Importantly, there had been less attacks on Firefighters.

Members commented that any attack on an emergency worker should not be tolerated and that it needed to be stressed that this was a humanitarian role.

The Chair advised that he had recently attended the Chief/Chair's Conference and raised his concerns in relation to the Police and Fire Service being amalgamated as the Services were very different. Partnership working was beneficial, especially during the bonfire period, however a distinction in services still needed to be maintained.

Councillor Woodwark agreed and commented that there were still issues around the HMICFRS inspection in that what was required of the Police was not necessarily required of the Fire Service. Partnership working with the Police benefited both parties however more injuries were being seen with Police Officers.

The PCC commented that prevention was key and that the Police Service were also grateful of the partnership working. The Police also wanted to see an enforcement in the law and that lobbying had taken place. Kim went on to say that even a minor injury took emergency services of the streets which was ultimately of harm to the public.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

26. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Authority held on 16 October 2023, Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Governance Committee held on 29th September 2023, Part I be noted for information; and
- (iii) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Disciplinary Committee held on 29 September 2023, Part I be noted for information.

Capital Programme 2023/2024 – Second 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 First Capital Programme Review held on 26th June 2023.

Members were advised that the Capital Programme was showing an increase of £477,169 in the total estimated costs, from £16,148,819 reported at the First Review stage to £16,625,988.

Michelle advised that there were a number of additional programmes amounting to £275,000 and that these were:-

- Replacement Telephony System;
- USAR Rig Refurbishment;
- Fuel Management System Replacement; and
- Asset Management System Replacement

Members were then advised that it had been proposed to purchase an additional new standard pumping appliance which was a result of the previous IRMP actions where an additional appliance was allocated to Station Alpha. This new appliance would replace the oldest vehicle of the frontline pumping appliances and would supplement the 24 new appliances acquired which were all fully operational across the service. The operational equipment would also need replacing as the current equipment was recycled from the reserve store. The total cost was estimated to be £348,000, of which £48,000 had been recognised for the required equipment.

Michelle then explained that 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 Third Quarterly Review stage.

Councillor Haley questioned what progress was being made in relation to the small fleet and was advised that work was still ongoing to review the current small fleet and consider options for replacement. Pending its completion, the small fleet replacement budget had remained as agreed by Members in February with no plans to exceed the planned capital budget at this stage. It was highly likely that this budget would need to be slipped in to 2024/2025 due to vehicle lead in times. These would be monitored and a decision made at the Third Quarterly Review stage in January.

In relation to the specialist car cost detailed in Appendix A (£223,000), Members were asked to note that this related to a number of vehicles.

Councillor Woodwark referred to decarbonisation and suggested that any policy/plans be revised.

27. RESOLVED that the progress to date and the reported variations since the First 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 – Second Quarterly (Half Yearly 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 half way point in this financial year.

Members were advised that regular monitoring of the Revenue Budget took place and, at this half way stage in the financial year, variances had been identified which projected an underspend at the end of the year of £632,000.

One underspend related to interest earned which amounted to £748,000. 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. As this was a variable rate, heavily influenced by the prevailing Base Rate, it was not known with any certainty what future daily rates would be.

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 circa £710,000. As the final amount paid would reflect actual rates at that time, an updated projection would be calculated for the Third Quarterly Review.

Councillor Haley commented that this could potentially be a one off spike given the fluctuation in interest rates and questioned what the risk was to the Authority.

At this stage in the financial year a net overspend of £167,000 was projected on the total employee budget and was made up of a collection of different variable factors.

Michelle went on to say that the pay award Green Book staff had now been agreed.

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

Fire Funding Settlement for 2024/25 – Letter

The Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to update Members on correspondence the Authority had sent to the government in respect of lobbying for an improved Finance Settlement for 2024/25 for both this Authority and the wider Fire and Rescue Service.

Members were advised that the fact the Authority like others in the fire sector were continuing to be challenged to ensure that their budgets were resilient and sustainable over the medium term agreed to lobby the government before they issued their Autumn Budget and Public Sector Finance Settlements in order to request improved funding and retain financial flexibility for the fire service.

In response to the NFCC request and to add more weight to the potential plight of the fire service and the Authority over the Medium Term it was considered important to provide government with an up to date position of the finances of the service (potentially looking at a £2.9m budget gap to 2026/27) and that an improved grant settlement was necessary to address the financial concerns not only of Tyne and Wear FRA but across the whole fire service sector. The letter was attached at Appendix A for information.

29. RESOLVED that the Letter sent to government be noted.

Forthcoming HMICFRS Inspection of TWFRS

The Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) submitted a report to inform Members of the forthcoming inspections of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS), by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

DCFO Nicholson advised Members that ten of the 44 Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in England had been selected to be inspected as part of a thematic inspection. TWFRS were notified on 26 July 2023 that TWFRS service was one of the ten FRS selected to be inspected.

All thematic inspections would be concluded by late January 2024 and HMICFRS had confirmed that there would be no graded judgements and/or reports published for individual services inspected.

The thematic inspection into misconduct case handling would commence in TWFRS on 4 December 2023 and last for three weeks, concluding on 22 December 2023.

30. RESOLVED that:-

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

(Signed) P. TYE
Chairperson

