



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 11 SEPTEMBER 2023
at 10.30am.

Present:

Item 3 (i)

Councillor Tye in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Dodds, Haley, Hunter, Patterson, G. Smith, Warne and Woodwark.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Burdis, Johnson, Keegan, Kilgour, Usher, Welsh, Wood and also PCC K. McGuinness.

Announcements

The Chair reflected on the 9/11 Twin Towers incident on the anniversary of that terrible event commenting that American Firefighters selflessly put themselves on the front line throughout that period and that Firefighters around the world, continuously continued to do so. There had been significant incidents over the weekend whereby again, Firefighters went above and beyond and that the Control Room staff had also played a huge part and should be commended.

DCFO Heath agreed and added that recently an 83-year-old gentleman had managed to call the Fire Service after being alerted to a fire alarm in his home and received fire survival guidance from control room staff prior to arrival of firefighters. The service responded within four minutes, with the second appliance within six minutes and NEAS within 15 minutes. This was incredibly swift action by the crews and DCFO Heath was pleased to report that the gentleman was now recovering. Following further detail from the Station Commander, consideration would be given to a form a recognition to both the Firefighters and the Control Staff involved

Members commented that the staff were highly trained, and that the rapid response should be commended and recognised.

DCFO Heath then advised that at the Great North Run Event on Saturday, due to flooding the Service (crews and control) had assisted partners to support around 4000 participants leave the event area.

Councillor Haley raised the issue of climate change and the speed in which weather affected the afternoon and commented that this was something that the Service needed to be mindful of.

Councillor Haley then referred to the 9/11 incident commenting that nearly 400 American Firefighters lost their lives with even more dying from toxic related diseases.

CFO Lowther agreed and commented that 363 Firefighters died on the day with a further 306 losing their lives sadly due to respiratory and mental health issues therefore the wellness of staff was a keen area of focus for the Service.

Members were then then advised that one of the Service's Group Managers who was a keen motor cyclist had recently been involved in a major accident. Thankfully he was now slowly recovering, and the Service was seeing what they could do in terms of support. The Chair, on behalf of the Authority wished him well and a speedy recovery.

Declarations of Interest

All Members declared an interest in relation to Item 5 – Members' Allowances Scheme for the Financial Year 2023/2024.

Minutes

17. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Authority held on 24 July 2023, Part I be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 10 July 2023, Part I be noted for information; and
- (iii) The Minutes of the Meeting of the Appointments Committee held on 4 August 2023, Part I be noted for information.

Councillor Haley referred to Item 3 (ii) – Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee and in particular, the case where the fire alarm had not been heard and asked for further information in relation to risk assessments, for example how many smoke alarms should be fitted and whether there were changes in technology whereby smoke alarms did not need to be fitted to the mains.

DCFO Heath responded by advising that smoke alarms should be fitted in habitable rooms. Members were assured that any resident would not be left without a smoke alarm if following a fire this was found to be the case.

Appointment of Independent Person

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Deputy Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report requesting that the Authority approve the recruitment process for the appointment of the Independent Person (IP).

Members were advised that the Authority was required to appoint at least one Independent Person (IP) to assist in carrying out its duties in respect of dealing with Code of Conduct complaints. The IP must be consulted before the Authority took a decision in respect of any allegation made against an elected member which had been investigated. They may also be consulted about any other aspect of a councillor's alleged breach of the Code of Conduct for Members and may be consulted by a councillor against whom any allegation had been made.

The Authority currently had one IP, namely Dennis Hall, who would have served for six years by the time his current term of office expires at the end of October 2023. His appointments had been extended on two previous occasions, but it was now necessary for a public advertisement to be placed again.

Members were advised that Sunderland Council was also about to advertise for two positions of IP, and so it was suggested that a similar process was followed on this occasion to the process followed previously, namely that the Deputy Clerk advertised the roles at both the Council and the Authority at the same time and invited applicants to apply for one or both positions.

It was proposed that the appointment be for an initial term of two years, and that the Authority may extend the appointment for two further two-year terms (i.e., for a period of six years in total). The Authority awarded an annual allowance of £200 for the role of IP, plus reasonable travel and subsistence expenses and it was recommended that this should continue.

As the recruitment process for both the Authority and Sunderland Council may take some weeks, it was proposed that the Authority extended the current term of office of Mr Hall until the conclusion of the recruitment and appointment process.

18. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The recruitment process for the role of Independent Person as outlined in the report be approved;
- (ii) Following the conclusion of the recruitment process, an appointment be made to an Independent Person for a term of two years' duration, which may be extended by the Authority for two further two-year terms (i.e., six years in total) and to award an annual allowance of £200 and reasonable travel and subsistence expenses in respect of the role;
- (iii) The current term of office of Mr Hall until the conclusion of the recruitment process and appointment of Independent Person for the new term of office be approved; and

- (iv) the Deputy Clerk be authorised to make all associated arrangements.

Members' Allowances Scheme for the Financial Year 2023/2024

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report for Members to consider approving the recommendation by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) to accept the proposed Scheme for the financial year 2023/2024 and to adopt the principle of using the annual pay award for grey book staff to inform Members Allowance increases in future years, with an independent review carried out every 4 years.

The Finance Director explained that the Authority was required to adopt and approve a Members' Allowances Scheme for each financial year. The practice of the Authority in past years had been to use the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) appointed by Sunderland City Council, to make recommendations regarding its Scheme, however other Authorities had adopted other alternative arrangements to update Members Allowances annually.

One of the other options commonly adopted was to index link Members allowances to either the annual increase in the rate of inflation or to link the annual increase to that of the annual pay award of staff within the service/(s). The Grey Book staff pay award was 5% from 1st July 2023.

At the Authority meeting in March the Authority agreed to a detailed review of Members Allowances by the well-established use of the Independent Remuneration Panel to inform the scheme for 2023/2024, although the logistics of carrying out this review had proved very problematic and had been further delayed due to the lack of availability of the Panel members.

Given that Members had received no increase in their allowances since 1st April 2018, despite the fact that the level of inflation had continued to rise significantly above the government's inflation target of 2% over the past five years, it was proposed that members allowances should be increased in line with the grey book staff pay award.

The Authority was also advised that it was proposed that every four years an Independent Panel Review would also be scheduled to ensure the remunerations were still current and appropriate.

The view and recommendation of the Chief Fire Officer was therefore to increase all Members Allowances by 5% for 2023/24 which would be applied from 1st April 2023.

The Finance Director explained that as the Authority had also now separated out the Vice Chair role from the Chair of Policy and Performance Committee it was also recommended that these two roles were separately identified and remunerated at the same level as that paid to the Chair of the HR Committee. It was therefore proposed to remunerate the Chair of Policy and Performance Committee at £6,719

and the Vice Chair role also at £6,719 to ensure conformity across all of the similar special responsibility roles.

Members were then advised that if members agreed to the recommendations set out, then the amended cost would amount to £89,637. There was a further small resource implication for separating out the Vice Chair and the Chair of Policy and Performance Committee roles with an increased cost of £2,938. This would mean a total increased cost to the members allowance scheme of £6,968 for 2023/24 making the revised cost £92,575 in total.

Councillor Woodwark queried why the Leader of the Majority Party in Opposition's remuneration was marginally less than that of the Chair of the Governance Committee and was advised that these allowances had been previously proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel and that it was for Members to agree these. Applying the 5% was deemed to be a fair and balanced approach and every 4 years, this would be reviewed again by the Panel.

19. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The recommendation by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) to accept the proposed Scheme for the financial year 2023/2024 and to adopt the principle of using the annual pay award for grey book staff to inform Members Allowance increases in future years be approved, with an independent review carried out every 4 years. The first of which would apply to the 2026/27 Scheme; and
- (ii) The Proposed remuneration for the Vice Chair and Chair of Policy and Performance Committee as set out in the report be approved to bring greater consistency for those members.

North East Devolution – Consultation

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) submitted a report notifying Members of the response received to TWFRAs letter of support.

Members were reminded that the Leaders and Elected Mayor of the seven North East councils, had agreed in principle to a devolution deal, which the Government had confirmed it was 'minded to' approve.

The devolution deal would unlock £4.2 billion of investment, over 30 years, and see additional powers transferred from Whitehall to local people with better knowledge and experience of their communities.

DCFO Heath advised Members that as part of the consultation process, in February 2023 a combined letter from the offices of the Leaders of Gateshead, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Northumberland and Durham Councils, along with the Mayor of North Tyneside was received, setting out their request as they were now consulting on the proposals.

The consultation provided an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to understand how the proposed devolution deal could be implemented in the region. As a key stakeholder TWFRS were keen to share its views and provided a letter of support for the proposals.

Members were referred to appendix A of the report which was a letter received in August 2023.

20. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) Further reports be received as appropriate.

DCFO Heath at the close of the meeting advised Members that Stuart Nicholson had been appointed to the role of DCFO and would commence his employment on 1st November.

Members of the Appointments Committee commented that all three candidates who progressed to the final stage displayed incredibly credible performances throughout what was a very competitive process and that both internal applicants should be congratulated on their performance.

(Signed) P. TYE
Chairperson