

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 14 MARCH 2022 at
10.30am.

Present:

Item 5 (i)

Councillor Taylor in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Doyle, Flynn, Forbes, Haley, Hunter, Johnson, Keegan, Kilgour, Samuels, Warne and Woodwark and also Kim McGuinness (PCC).

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Burdis, Dodds and Ord.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Announcements

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Authority that early on during the start of the War between Russia and Ukraine he requested a list of potential exposure to the Authority from Russian Companies. As a gas supplier to TWFRS was a Russian Company, this contract had been terminated and from 1st April, 2022 a UK based supplier would be used. This has been conducted in full compliance with the necessary procurement and regulations relating to awarding of contracts.

In addition, the previous week support for operational hardware to be shipped to Ukraine had been carried out, whereby the Service undertook a survey of items which were either due to be disposed of or could be spared. This resulted in 15 Pallets of operational equipment from TWFRS being shipped to Ukraine as part of UK FRS wide humanitarian support for Ukrainian Firefighters and people all of which was completed within a very short timescale.

Kim McGuinness (PCC) expressed her thanks to the Service for the amount of items which had been donated and in a very quick timescale, adding that residents would be incredibly proud of the support given by TWFRS.

Minutes

66. RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Authority, Part I held on 14 February 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Members' Allowances Scheme for the Financial Year 2022/2023

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority and the Finance Director submitted a joint report for the Authority to give consideration to the Members' Allowances Scheme for the Financial Year 2022/2023.

The Finance Director referred Members to the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel as attached at Appendix A and advised that the Panel had recommended that the allowances scheme remained unchanged for 2022/2023 and that a detailed review would be undertaken prior to adoption of the scheme for 2023/2024. This exercise had been delayed due to Covid-19 however a thorough review would be carried out in the Autumn for the next financial year.

Members were advised that none of the schemes of the constituent authorities contained a special responsibility allowance for Members who sat on the Fire Authority and that from the information available on the websites of the authorities concerned, it appeared that these amounts were in accordance with the recommendations of the relevant Independent Remuneration Panels, other than in respect of Newcastle and Sunderland, where the Panel recommended an increase, but this was rejected.

The Finance Director explained that the total cost of allowances paid by the Authority to Members of all of its various Committees, based on the existing scheme, would be £80,637.

Councillor Woodward commented that this should be a national scheme and welcomed the review for the next financial year, given that the review was now long overdue.

67. RESOLVED that the terms of the current Scheme be applied for the financial year 2022/2023.

Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2022/2023, including Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators For 2022/2023 To 2025/2026

The Finance Director submitted a report for Members to approve the proposed Treasury Management Policy and Strategy (including both borrowing and investment strategies) for 2022/2023 and also to approve the Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 taking into account any feedback or comments

provided by the Governance Committee who scrutinised the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy at their meeting held on 7th March 2022.

Members were advised that the Authority continued to fully adopt and to re-affirm annually its adherence to the updated CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

The Finance Director explained that there were no major changes being proposed to the overall Treasury Management Strategy in 2022/2023, which maintained the careful and prudent approach adopted by the Authority in previous years. Areas that informed the strategy included the extent of potential borrowing included in the Authority's Capital Programme, the availability of borrowing and the current and forecast world and UK economic positions, in particular forecasts relating to interest rates and security of investments.

This prudent approach had served the Authority well over the years with TWFRA's borrowing rate being one of the lowest in the Country.

Members were referred to the Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators 2022/2023 to 2025/2026, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and were advised that the authorised limits were consistent with the Authority's current commitments, existing plans within the recently approved Capital Programme 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 which set out its agreed capital expenditure and financing, and with its proposed treasury management policy statement and practices. The Finance Director explained that the Capital Programme was funded through borrowing and the use of reserves and that it was both affordable and sustainable.

In relation to interest rates, whilst the Bank of England had previously reduced these, however due to the high inflation rates these were forecasted to steadily increase over the forthcoming years. This gave the Authority time to consider any future borrowing should it be needed, however was not anticipated at the present time, due to the use of reserves. Members were advised that this approach eased any pressure on the Revenue budget.

Referring to Appendix 3 of the report (Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022/2023), Councillor Haley thanked the Finance Director for making it explicit that the current position (Section 2.1) related to Sunderland City Council, of which the Fire and Rescue Authority was part of and had been quantified separately.

Councillor Haley then referred to Section 2.6.3 and in particular, the decision to borrow over longer-term periods and asked whether this was now a strategy for all future borrowing.

The Finance Director responded by advising that consideration was given to both the length of borrowing and the interest rates to be applied. The reason for borrowing over a longer period of time was that it could be re-profiled at a later date.

68. RESOLVED that :-

- (i) The Annual Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2022/2023 (including specifically the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategies) be approved and;
- (ii) The Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 be approved.

Pay Policy Statement 2022/2023

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/2023 for the Authority and seeking approval to publish this information in accordance with the statutory requirements.

The Finance Director advised Members that the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 came into force on 15th January 2012 and that Section 38 of the Act required English and Welsh local authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities to produce an annual pay policy statement, setting out authorities' policies for the financial year in relation to the remuneration of their senior staff/chief officers, the remuneration of their lowest-paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of chief officers and that of other employees.

Members were advised that the Pay Policy Statement was appended to the report and had not changed from that previously approved by members. The Pay Policy Statement 2022/23 must be published by 31st March 2022 as this was the deadline set out by the 2011 Act, however it still required formal approval by the Authority before publication.

Referring to Section 2.4 of the report, Members were asked to note that whilst pay was important as a whole, it was fairness which was of most importance. The current pay multiples for the Chief Fire Officer and lowest paid employee within TWFRS was 8.60:1. This ratio was well within the Government's expectation that the pay multiple relationship should be below 20:1 in local government. In addition, this was below the national average of 15:1 in the wider public sector. Unfortunately there was no data to compare this with the private sector, which would be a significantly much higher ratio.

The Finance Director went on to say that the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 provided for data in relation to Trade Union facilities time to be produced annually.

Members were advised that the FBU had 2 FTE's on trade union facilities time and 28 workplace Representatives and that UNISON had 2 workplace Representatives.

The basic estimate of spending of Unions was £81,302 which was 0.30% of the total pay bill. The Finance Director commented that the Service had good industrial relations with the Unions and that this cost was very good value for money.

Councillor Woodwark commented that as the purpose of the Trade Unions was to improve the HR Service, it was extremely good value for money given the benefits which were realised by the fire service.

69. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The Pay Policy Statement for 2022/2023 be approved; and
- (ii) Further reports be received as necessary.

At the conclusion of the Part I business, the Chief Fire Officer advised that this was the last meeting for both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority and thanked them for the support they had given all staff of TWFRS over the years commenting that their legacy would live on.

Both the Chair and Vice responded by stating that the Authority was incredibly well run paying a tribute to all staff for their enthusiasm, dedication and outstanding work.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

At the instance of the Chairman, it was: -

70. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of exempt information relating to consultations/negotiations in connection with any labour matter arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (including the Authority holding that information (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 4). The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(Signed) T. TAYLOR,
Chairman

Note:-

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.

(Signed) T. TAYLOR,
Chairman

