

Minutes of the Meeting  
of the TYNE AND WEAR FIRE  
AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
held remotely using **Microsoft  
Teams** and **livestreamed on  
YouTube** on MONDAY 16  
NOVEMBER 2020 at  
10.30am.

### **Item 3 (i)**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Taylor in the Chair

Councillors Burdis, Butler, Dodds, Doyle, Duggan, Flynn, Forbes, Haley, Hunter, Pickard, Purvis, Samuels, and Woodwark together with Ms K. McGuinness, PCC.

#### **Part I**

#### **Apologies for Absence**

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

#### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Doyle declared an interest in relation to Item 4 – Appointments to Authority.

#### **Minutes**

30. RESOLVED that the minutes of the Authority, Part I held on 12 October 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

#### **Appointments to the Authority**

The Deputy Clerk to the Authority submitted a report to confirm the appointment of Councillor Doyle to the Authority with effect from 25 October 2020, clarify the seats

that had been vacated by Councillor Oliver and also to confirm the appointment of Mr G N Cook as co-opted member and Chair of the Governance Committee.

Members were reminded that Councillor Doyle had taken his position on the Authority, with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 and were advised that an error was inadvertently made in the report to the October meeting regarding the committee seats that had been vacated by Cllr Oliver, which should have been identified as the Personnel Appeals Committee and Disciplinary Committee, rather than those stated in the report.

Members were then reminded that an annual meeting had not been held by the Authority during 2020 and appointments had automatically “rolled over” in accordance with legislation introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the case of Mr Cook, the last meeting of the Governance Committee which he attended was on 13 March 2020 and due to illness, he had been unable to attend a further meeting to date.

As a consequence of the application of section 85 Local Government Act 1972 and Mr Cook’s non-attendance at a meeting of the Fire Authority for a consecutive period in excess of six months, his position as member and Chair of the Governance Committee ceased on 13 September 2020. It was therefore proposed that the Authority reappoint Mr Cook as a co-opted member and Chair of the Governance Committee with immediate effect.

Councillor Woodward commented that there would not have been an issue had an Annual Meeting been held and therefore suggested that the re-appointment be approved.

Councillor Burdis agreed, and reminded Officers that consideration also needed to be given to the schedule of Governance Committee meetings.

31. RESOLVED that:

- (i) It be noted that the appointment of Councillor Doyle to the Authority took effect from 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2020;
- (ii) The decision to appoint Councillor Doyle to the Governance Committee and the Appointments Committee be rescinded and confirmation be given to appoint Councillor Doyle to the Personnel Appeals Committee and to appoint him to the Disciplinary Appeals Committee; and
- (iii) Mr Cook be re-appointed as a co-opted member and Chair of the Governance Committee with immediate effect.

### **Capital Programme 2020/2021 - 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 on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Members were advised that the Capital Programme was showing an increase in total of £356,961, from £13,199,600 at the First Review stage to £13,556,561.

With regards to continuing projects, replacement of the laundry washing machines at Sunderland Central, West Denton and Gosforth and the intelligent charger installations at various locations were now complete with a small combined underspend reported of £2,048.

There were currently delays in the Genous Security System project, however the Estates team was working with the project leads at Sunderland City Council (SCC) to resolve some tendering issues, therefore it was considered unlikely that this project would be fully completed by the end of the financial year.

Councillor Doyle asked for further information in relation to the tendering issues and was advised that negotiations were ongoing to ensure that the specification was fit for purpose and exactly was what required by the Service.

The ICT project for the Integrated Data System (IDS) required £5,000 in addition to the current project budget.

Members were then advised that the national Government led Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project (ESMCP) was delayed in the last financial year, pending a revised business case which was due in early 2020/2021. This was yet to be received and was now subject to further delay with an update expected in the new year.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on various aspects of the Capital Programme and as a result, a number of additional projects were required to be added to the Capital Programme to meet the requirements and demands and changes to the ways of working within the Service. These would be funded from Government Grant.

Members were referred to Section 2.9 of the report where it was noted that due to the current remote working arrangements, a total of 124 laptops plus docking stations were identified at a cost of £128,000. Likewise, to support the more agile way of working, a proposal had been made to increase the number of smartphones across the Service. This was seen as a long-term requirement and had identified the need for an additional 46 smartphones at a cost of £28,525.

There was a recognised need to standardise the Audio Visual (AV) equipment within the Service Headquarters (SHQ) and the BTC meeting rooms to help support the new agile ways of working and allow improved Microsoft Teams access within these rooms. This project was estimated to cost £62,000.

In order to support staff wellbeing at Service locations outside SHQ, it was proposed to provide outdoor wellbeing areas across the whole estate which was expected to cost £27,000 in total and as the Service currently only had publicly accessible defibrillators at some community fire stations, it was deemed an essential requirement to purchase and install NEAS registered community accessible defibrillators at the remaining twelve sites at a total cost of £20,000.

Further additional projects had also arisen since the Capital Programme was updated in July:

- There was now a requirement to issue cameras to all Flexible Duty Officers (FDO's) and Duty Executive Officers (DEO's) to further enhance the deterrent (and protection) of firefighters from violence whilst at work. The purchase of 40 additional body worn video cameras would cost £13,440.
- Due to increased training activity, there had been a requirement to carry out emergency works on the fire tiles of the Breathing Apparatus (BA) structure and large training complex. The works costing £18,743 had been funded from the capital reserve and added into the Programme.
- There was a requirement to enhance the USAR training facilities to include an extension to the "rubble pile" and improvements to the existing welfare and storage facilities. The costs of the project were estimated to be £75,000 and would be funded from the New Dimensions Reserve.
- The vacant former MRU photo development suite on the first floor of the BTC was to be redeveloped to accommodate SCC's CCTV monitoring team, who identified SHQ as being the most appropriate site for their future operational requirement. The works were estimated to cost £120,000 and would be fully funded by a contribution from SCC, so that this project would be net cost neutral in terms of the Authority's Capital Programme.

Members were reminded that the Capital Programme was set in February with an additional £1.400m being allocated for business critical, invest to save schemes that would be prioritised in 2020/2021. £550,000 of the additional one-off RCCO had been allocated to fund a project to update the Service's networks and wireless infrastructure, but plans for repairs to Barmston Mere Training Centre and relocation of Safetyworks, although in progress, had been delayed due to the pandemic with an update to be reported in January.

At the end of 2019/2020, £235,000 was slipped to complete the refurbishment of the fireboat. The refurbishment works were now complete with a saving of £158,051 which would be allocated into future years to fund the eventual boat replacement cost.

Members were advised that the project to replace the rigid inflatable boat (RiB) currently in the 2021/22 Capital Programme was now required in 2020/21, and that the budget and funding relating to this needed to be accelerated.

Internal monitoring procedures had been established to track performance against the various Prudential Indicators agreed by the Authority, and Members were advised that there were no areas for concern or any issues which require any review of the indicators as originally approved.

Councillor Haley referred to the slippage over a couple of years in relation to the significant investment at Hebburn and asked whether Officers were still confident that this could be delivered.

The Chief Fire Officer responded by advising that an advanced design had now been considered and it was anticipated that the station would be up and running in 2022. This unique station would also produce energy and training facilities and was an exciting opportunity for the Authority.

Councillor Flynn welcomed the proposals and commented that the 'green side' of these plans was very beneficial.

In response to a question from the Chair asking what feedback had been received in relation to the new fire appliances, DCFO Heath confirmed that engagement sessions had taken place and that feedback was extremely positive.

32. RESOLVED that the reported variations since the First Quarterly Review, the addition of the new projects set out in the report and the changes made to the Vehicle Replacement Programme be noted, and the revised Capital Programme for 2020/2021, as set out at Appendix A be approved.

### **Revenue Budget 2020/2021 - Second Quarterly Review**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to advise Members of issues relating to the 2020/2021 Revenue Budget position at the half-way point of the financial year.

Members were advised that there were two errors in the report in that section 2.9 of the report should read 'January 2021' and section 2.10 bullet point 3 should read 'section 2.8'.

Members were reminded of three main factors to highlight the context of this and future reports, in that:

- The COVID-19 pandemic would continue to impact on Service activity, and the financial implications of this had been assessed as creating an efficiency of just over £0.220m of non-employee costs on the current year's budget at this stage. This would continue to be monitored;
- The Authority had received a one-off £85,000 un-budgeted income as part of the projected underspend; and
- The drive for ensuring efficiency through challenge and ensuring best value would continue, and savings could be either reinvested in the TWFRS 2025 programme or used to fund any potential future shortfall in resources.

Regular monitoring of the Revenue Budget continued to take place and, at this half-way stage in the financial year, variances had been identified which projected an underspend at outturn of £1.416m.

By far the greatest savings had been in relation to employee costs whereby a confirmed saving of £0.750m had accrued, and a net underspend of £1.018m was projected overall on the total employee budget.

Members were advised of the three main factors in that:

- The Firefighter and Corporate establishment were both currently under budget, and the Authority had reviewed a number of vacant Corporate support services roles which had also generated efficiencies in the employee budget and in addition, Covid19 had also caused delays in filling a number of vacancies;
- There were more Firefighters in development because of the increased number of recruits than the numbers budgeted for, meaning the actual cost of their salaries was lower than the full competency grade assumed in the budget; and
- There were savings being made on employer pension costs, arising from the impact of temporary staffing arrangements, transitional movements between pension schemes, and employees opting out of the pension scheme.

An underspend of £40,963 was projected on premises costs, as a result of reduced electricity consumption across the estate due to the current COVID-19 pandemic arrangements. With regards to transport costs, a saving of £90,000 was predicted on fuel costs due to reduced usage and the Authority's access to free fuel from BP, the value of which was almost £19,800.

With regards to supplies and services, a net underspend of almost £21,000 was projected due to a reduction in travel, catering provisions and uniforms.

Members were then advised that there was a projected net over achievement of income of £216,000, due to the factors outlined in section 2.10 of the report.

In recognition of the operational and budget pressures that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on public sector organisations, the Government had allocated additional grant funding to help meet this financial burden. TWFRS had to date received £1,120,705, with £632,600 of this spent by the end of October, and the remainder committed to be spent by the end of the financial year.

In addition to the grant reported above, the Authority had claimed Loss of Income Grant of £39,000 in recompense for lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Authority was referred to Section 4 of the report which detailed a proposal to transfer £1.000m of the projected revenue budget underspend at this stage into the Transformation and Reform Reserve, which would be used at a future date for initiatives planned under the TWFRS 2025 Programme, and asked that this be given consideration.

Councillor Haley referred to the savings made in relation to employee costs in particular, the reference to employees opting out of the pension scheme and proposed that this be flagged as an issue for the Human Resources Committee to monitor in the future.

33. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The mid-year position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 as set out in this report and summarised at Appendix A be noted; and

(ii) the transfer of £1.000m to the Transformation and Reform Reserve as proposed in paragraphs 2.2 and 4.1 of the report, be approved.

### **Coronavirus (Covid-19) Highlight of Service Activity Update**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide an update on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Highlight of Service Activity in the year to date.

DCFO Heath advised Members that in August 2020 the Service decided to adopt a new approach to flu vaccinations for winter 2020/2021, in the light of the additional health and risks that seasonal flu presented in combination with Covid-19 and it was agreed to offer every TWFRS employee a voucher that could be exchanged for a flu vaccination at a range of pharmacies. Following a six week campaign, 40% of employees applied for their free voucher and these were now being used by staff. This take up rate being far higher than previous years.

Health, Wellbeing and Attendance Levels had been monitored daily and during the period 1 July to 30 October 2020 absence levels remained low until September when, in line with trends across the whole population, the rate of absences started to rise again due to cases of Covid-19, requirements to self- isolate and the other usual seasonal factors. In August, absence rates were 2.59% when compared to 6%, in October and at the present day, were 5.38%.

Members were also asked to note that the Service had continued to grow as an organisation through the pandemic with several roles being recruited to via the internal and external adverts, which was a testament of strength, despite the challenging circumstances.

Where there had been the potential for virus spread from infected staff who had tested positive for Covid-19 the Service had secured an urgent 'Deep Cleaning' response within an hour for all premises and overall cleaning of stations had also been improved.

PPE requirements had been challenging through the pandemic and compounding the issue, there had been an increased need to validate the quality of those products to ensure they were suitable for the purpose. The Service was now in a much stronger position to face the months ahead, with circa 32,000 masks being purchased, which would last until March 2020.

DCFO Heath explained that Prevention and Education Teams continued to protect and support the most vulnerable in the community during the pandemic, and that the distribution of PPE stocks to local authorities via the LRF resumed in September with regular monthly deliveries planned going forward. Without this support, PPE to local authority sites would have been delayed causing further pressure on frontline services.

In addition to this, the Fire Safety Department had continued to protect the business community by re-tuning their risk-based inspection programme to ensure physical inspections were undertaken at premises where a specific high risk to the public was identified.

Members were advised that the department had continued with their national role to influence future legislation and policy changes and last week, drafted the Strategic Intentions for Operational Non-Emergency Response, which was now NFCC guidance.

Through revised working practices and Covid-19 Safe workplaces, the Service continued to see a limited impact on Service Delivery due to the pandemic and still maintained 100% appliance availability across Service Delivery. DCFO Heath commented that this was due to the flexibility of staff and commended the workforce on this way of working.

With regards to the financial implications, the position was being closely monitored and government had already been made aware of our funding shortfall position of £0.092m which could increase depending on how long the pandemic lasted and how it affected the service over the winter. Further regular updates would be provided to Members on this issue, throughout the rest of the financial year.

Councillor Woodwark referred to section 2.1 of the report which highlighted how agile the Service had been, and successfully adapted and continued to evolve during this period and commented that the Service had responded superbly.

Councillor Woodwark then questioned whether a 40% up take in the flu vaccine was deemed to be good and also commented that Members needed to remain mindful of the funding shortfall position of £0.092m especially given that the CSR20 had been delayed and that the government was now going to release a further one year Spending Round for 2021/22 which was to be announced in late November.

In response to Councillor Woodwark's comments, Members were advised that the 40% take up on the Flu Vaccine had been by far the highest reported to date, and that whilst there continued to be uncertainties in relation to funding and the delayed Spending Review, prudent measures had been taken and conservative assumptions made.

Councillor Burdis referred to Section 5.4 of the report and commented that the Juvenile Firesetter Education programmes and Princes Trust programmes were of paramount importance and complimented the Authority on delivery of these, throughout especially difficult times.

Councillor Haley agreed and commented that the work of the Service to engage young people was exemplary and encouraged Members to suggest that this be included within their constituent Authority's Annual Reports.

34. RESOLVED that:-



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

### **Bonfire Period Update**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) submitted a report to inform Members of the 2020 bonfire campaign.

DCFO Heath advised Members that a full report would be submitted to the December meeting of the Authority.

Between the period of 1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 the number of calls received did increase by 14% from 796 in 2019/2020 to 910 in 2020/2021. Members were reminded that this could be due to several calls being received for the same incident.

An increase had also been seen in the number of Deliberate Secondary Fires from 179 in 2019/2020 to 201 in 2020/2021. Given that the Country was in lockdown, these figures were not as expected.

DCFO Heath explained that whilst the number of attacks on Firefighters had reduced from 6 in 2019/2020 to 4 in 2020/2021, no attack on a Firefighter was acceptable and work continued to take place with Northumbria Police and other partners to educate the community on the impact that antisocial behaviour had had. In addition, it was hoped that the additional body worn cameras would have a positive impact.

The PCC extended her thanks to the Fire Service and the Police for their outstanding work over the Bonfire Period and commented that following visiting the Control Room, it was clearly evident that both services were working extremely well together.

Councillor Woodwark agreed and commented that partnership working between Local Authorities, the Fire Service and the Police had been of huge benefit, however was disappointed to see the increase in the number of calls and also the number of attacks of Firefighters, despite the Country being in Lockdown.

Councillor Butler agreed and commented that these attacks could result in life changing injuries, or even death, and as a result, tighter measures needed to be implemented.

Councillor Samuels referred to the planning which had taken place in Southwick prior to Bonfire night in attempt to reduce anti-social behaviour, and commented that it had been a huge success story.

The PCC agreed and commented that a real concerted effort had been made within the area and that this was a good example of how directed and focused work could make a positive difference.

Councillor Dodds commented upon and explained, the Injunction Order recently obtained by Leeds City Council Dodds and suggested that discussions should take

place with the LA7, the Fire Service and the Police to generate support for an approach with Tyne and Wear.

35. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

### **Emergency Powers and Delegated Decisions from 1 July to 31 October 2020**

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide a further update to members covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

Members were reminded that the coronavirus pandemic and its wide ranging implications on the public meant that the Authority agreed that the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) could use his Emergency Powers from the 18th March 2020 to ensure the continued operations and response of the fire service for the duration of the COVID19 pandemic, which would cover all eventualities.

As the pandemic showed no signs of easing, and the Service was starting to encounter a second wave, it was timely to provide a further update to members covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.

Members were asked to note the Delegated Decisions made by the CFO using his emergency Powers from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020 which were summarised in Appendix 1 of the report.

Members were advised that there had now been 4 tranches of additional direct COVID19 grant funding provided to local government totalling £4.6bn to date and in addition a further £500m had been provided to compensate authorities for lost sales, fees and charges income up to end of June 2020. The Authority had only received allocations from the first two tranches of government funding in March and April which in total amounted to additional grant of £1.121m but unfortunately did not receive any further grant allocations from the past two tranches announced in July and October. The Authority however was made aware that it could make a claim for any lost income and had since lodged a claim of almost £0.039m as a result which would take the total additional grant funding to approximately £1.160m to date.

Risks associated with delegating these powers to the Chief Fire Officer were mitigated due to the inclusion of a requirement to consult with both the Finance Director as Section 151 Officer to the Authority and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority as appropriate.

The Delegated decisions made by the CFO whilst using his Emergency Powers must also observe the requirement to consult with the Chair as appropriate under the Scheme of Delegation and also the requirement to report all such decisions to the next full authority for their information.

Referring to Appendix 1 of the report, Councillor Burdis questioned whether the cost of providing all staff with the flu vaccine this winter as a one-off cost at £7,632 was being funded by the NHS or Central Government.

The Chief Fire Officer responded by advising that the COVID Grant from Government had been used to support this initiative.

Councillor Haley referred to reference 1156 (to provide additional support required regarding significantly increased H&S workloads due to the Pandemic at a cost of £39,090) and requested further detail in relation to this.

Members were advised that this was due to an additional staffing requirement within the establishment due to COVID-19 in terms of Health and Safety and Risk Assessment, which was currently a secondment with a current employee of the Authority.

36. RESOLVED that all of the Delegations taken by the CFO using his emergency powers as summarised in Appendix 1, be noted.

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

37. 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 information relating to any individual or which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1 and 2). The public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Prior to moving to Part II of the agenda, it was confirmed that the livestream of the meeting had ended.

(Signed) T. TAYLOR  
Chair

**Note:**

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

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