

Item 3 (i)

Minutes of the Meeting of
the TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND
RESCUE AUTHORITY held
remotely using **Microsoft Teams**
and **livestreamed on YouTube** on
on MONDAY 13 JULY 2020 at
10.30am.

Present:

Councillor Taylor in the Chair

Councillors Burdis, Butler, Dodds, Duggan, Flynn, Forbes, Haley, Hunter, Kilgour, Pickard, Samuels, Stephenson and Woodward together with Ms K. McGuiness, PCC.

Part I

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Oliver and Purvis.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the minutes of the Authority, Part I held on 16 March 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record;
- (ii) the minutes of the meeting of the Emergency Committee, Part I held on 6 May 2020 be noted for information; and

- (iii) the minutes of the meeting of the Emergency Committee, Part I held on 29 June 2020 be noted for information.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Highlight of Service Activity

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (The Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to highlight the Service's ability to respond with partners to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this had had on the Community.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted how the TWFRS had had to rapidly respond during a period of immense pressure during the emerging global Covid-19 pandemic. He reported that not only had the Service had to enact its robust business continuity arrangements, but it also had to adapt, evolve and support its staff and the communities of Tyne and Wear. He advised that the Service had been more agile, been bold in decision-making and came together as an organisation in response to the needs of the community. He was pleased and proud to report that the Service was being seen not only locally, but nationally, as an exemplar service. He commended the work of the ACFO Heath and ACFO McVay who had largely led on implementing the plans while he had provided strategic support.

The Chief Fire Officer was pleased that the efforts of the Service were being recognised today. He reminded Members that the Service had been judged as a 'Good' Fire and Rescue Service by HMICFRS in 2019. He advised that the Service's aspirations were to build on this grading to seek to achieve 'Outstanding' and over the next few months this would be part of Service's programme of work 'TWFRS 2025.' He explained that the vision of the programme would be to make the TWFRS the best service in the country and be the service Authority Members and residents deserve. He then invited ACFO Heath to present the remainder of the report.

ACFO Heath reported that the Authority had legal duties under both the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as a 'Category 1' responder in addition to our primary legislation, The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, to establish and maintain effective business continuity arrangements whilst providing a Fire and Rescue Service. He commented that not only had the Service achieved that, but it had gone above and beyond minimum standards through its good officers and partnership working arrangements. He drew attention to the strong industrial relationships with representative bodies, the unequivocal flexibility in both serving and retired staff members having a resilient 'can do' approach.

Members were advised that the Service had been recognised by partners and accolades had included letters of appreciation from HRH Prince William, Lord Greenhalph, the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police and the Chief Executive of North Tyneside Council (SCG Chair). Particular appreciation had been received for the work undertaken by ACFO McVay on the Tactical Coordination Group.

ACFO Heath provided a synopsis of the Service's response to the pandemic which included:-

- Developing and influencing risk assessments and being recognised as best practice nationally with a number of these having been adopted across the Fire and Rescue Sector;
- Body movement as part of the Local Resilience Forum, Excess Deaths work;
- Accelerating the implementation of new technology and provision of equipment and software had equipped the Service with the systems and tools to work remotely and effectively throughout the pandemic;
- To ensure that all staff were able to access critical information whilst supporting those staff who are shielding, a dedicated COVID 19 SharePoint Site was established;
- The Estates and Facilities Department adopted new ways of working to respond to urgent requests for 'Deep Cleaning' of premises where there had been the potential for virus spread from infected staff who had tested positive for COVID in order to ensure the Service could continue to operate;
- Payroll services operated seamlessly to ensure that all staff and suppliers were paid as normal;
- Staff absences had been at an unprecedented low level and it was testament to the flexible approach of the workforce in supporting the organisation throughout the pandemic;
- The instructors at the Brigade Training Centre had worked tirelessly to ensure a safe learning environment for the new Recruits undertaking the trainee firefighter training programme and the continuation of risk critical training of existing firefighters;
- Prevention and Education Teams had continued to protect and support the most vulnerable in communities throughout lockdown and Fire Safety support to businesses;
- Responding to a number of challenging operational incidents during COVID19 across TWFRS in addition to supporting cross border incidents;
- Being at the forefront of the Local Resilience Forum which included the coordination and distribution of PPE to the NHS and Care Sector and supporting a safe design layout for the Nightingale Hospital;
- The establishment of a logistics cell to manage internal and external requests for support from a volunteer database of staff and former employees and firefighters;
- Working with and enhancing relationships with existing and new community groups to deliver care packages to the vulnerable; and
- It was expected that the next HMICFRS inspection would be on business continuity and the Service's response to the pandemic would be highlighted to inspectors.

Authority Members commended the report and the incredible response of the Service to the pandemic, particularly in supporting the most vulnerable people in communities, the NHS and Care Services and the joint working with all the emergency services. They congratulated and expressed their gratitude to all the staff for their commitment and dedication in operating well beyond what was statutorily required.

In response to an enquiry on remote working, Members were advised that the majority of office staff had worked from home with a small number of officers working in Headquarters on a rotation basis with appropriate safety measures in place. The

commitment of staff to help during this crisis and the flexible working arrangements had resulted in increased productivity levels. Members commended their outstanding work.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be endorsed; and
- (ii) further reports be submitted to the Authority as appropriate.

Date, Time and Venue of Future Meetings

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Deputy Clerk to the Authority, the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report setting out the proposed dates, times and venues of meetings of the Authority and its Committees, together with training sessions for the Municipal Year 2020/2021.

Councillor Woodward having enquired when the meetings would revert back to being held at the Fire Brigade Headquarters, he was advised by the Deputy Clerk to the Authority that as it was a changing situation, it would be difficult to predict when the meetings would revert back to meeting in person and it would be necessary to continue to meet remotely in the meantime. She reported that, in the circumstances, if Members were happy just to note that there was a changing position and in consultation with the Chair, arrangements would be made to hold the meetings at the headquarters, or if more appropriate in line with Government guidance, to hold remotely as an alternative.

It was therefore:-

3. RESOLVED that the cycle of meetings 2020/2021 as set out in the report be approved and that consultation take place with the Chair of the Authority in relation to holding the meetings at Brigade Headquarters or remotely as time progresses.

Annual Governance Review 2019/2020

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 present the findings of the Annual Governance Statement that was incorporated into the Statement of Accounts and to seek approval to the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 which was included as an appendix.

ACFO Baines highlighted that it was a statutory duty for the Authority to prepare an Annual Governance Statement in accordance with the Authority's Local Code of Corporate Governance. He drew attention to the Statement was set out in Appendix A of the report.

Members were also advised that the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012, and which was revised in 2018, placed a further duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities to produce a public facing Annual Statement of Assurance.

ACFO Baines reported that the Framework identified four key roles, namely:-

- To engage in effective partnerships and provide leadership for and with the community.
- To ensure the delivery of high quality local services whether directly or in partnership or by commissioning.
- To perform a stewardship role which protects the interests of local people and makes the best use of resources.
- To develop citizenship and local democracy.

He explained that these four roles were encapsulated in the seven core principles of good governance which were set out in summary at Section 2.5 of the report. He added that there was a full breakdown of these principles on pages 62 to 88 of the agenda.

The attention of Members was then drawn to the methodology of the annual review which identified the membership of the Corporate Governance Steering Group together with the structured stages and timeline of the review set out in the diagram included under paragraph 3.3.

ACFO Baines reported that an employee survey was undertaken between 11 November and 9 December 2019 and the response had been slightly down on previous years at 37%. He clarified that whilst this had been disappointing, it might have been due to the impact of a significant number of surveys taking place during that period. He advised that going forward the Service would examine other ways of engaging with employees.

ACFO Baines drew attention to the other aspects of the methodology which included functional self-assessments, Area Manager Controls Assurance Statements, evaluation of internal control arrangements, views of Elected Members and concluding with the annual review.

Turning to the findings of the Corporate Governance Steering Group, ACFO Baines was pleased to report that there were no significant issues to report on. He advised that there were a small number of some newly identified actions to further develop governance and control arrangements and drive the Service's continuous improvement model.

Members were advised that Internal Audit continued to review areas of work within the Service and it was considered that overall throughout the Authority there was substantial assurance regarding the internal control environment. In addition, it was highlighted that the frequency of the reviews of the Corporate Risk Register by the Corporate Risk Management Group (chaired by the Chair of the Authority) had increased from biannually to quarterly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

ACFO Baines reported that the Authority continued to deliver an excellent service across the five local authority areas. He advised that the combination of safety advice and the installation of smoke detectors had enabled the Authority to keep people safe across Tyne and Wear and had been an essential part of the aim to reduce injuries and deaths from fires. He reported that tragically, this year had seen 9 fire fatalities, 7 of which were accidental dwelling fires. He explained that following each fatality a case conference was convened to look at any emerging trends, analyse data, shape targeted intervention, any shared learning and feed into 2020/21 strategy to reduce the number of fire deaths.

In terms of information governance, ACFO Baines commented that the Service continued to work in alignment with ISO:27001 Information Security Management and with the General Data Protection Regulation requirements. He advised that there had been two external audits by Sunderland City Council to assess compliance in which the Service received substantial assurance. The summary of the audit was that TWFRS had all necessary processes and procedures in place to support compliance with GDPR. Action points raised during the audit, included minor changes to internal audits and station inspections.

Members were then advised that the Annual Audit Letter and Audit Completion Report prepared by the Authority's external auditors, Mazars, covering 2018/19, had given independent assurance of financial control and Value for Money, including financial resilience and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority. Mazars had issued an unqualified conclusion on both the Authority's financial management and Value for Money arrangements.

ACFO Baines drew attention to a number of other external assessments which the Service valued which contributed to the programme of continuous improvement, such as Investors in People, RoSPA, Stonewall and the White Ribbon accreditation. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) carried out the first inspection of TWFRS in 2018/19 and the Service had received 'Good' ratings across all three categories of effectiveness, efficiency and people.

Members' attention was drawn to the Annual Governance Statement attached at Appendix D. ACFO Baines reported that based on the evidence examined, the Authority had robust and effective governance and internal control arrangements in place.

Councillor Stephenson commended the report and commented that this highlighted that all the necessary checks and balances were in place and it was evident in the previous report in the Service's response to Covid-19. ACFO Baines agreed and added that when the HMI returned to continue its thematic review, it would see, fully documented, the amount of work which had been undertaken to keep tight governance arrangements.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 be approved; and
- (ii) the Corporate Governance Action Plan 2020/2021 be noted.

Revenue Budget Outturn 2019/2020 and First Quarterly Review 2020/2021

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to reflect the final position for the 2019/2020 financial year and also report the Revenue Budget First Quarterly Review 2020/2021.

The Finance Director reported that the Authority's Statement of Accounts were normally completed by now. However due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the statutory deadline had been revised and the Statement would be presented to the Authority's Governance Committee on 28 August 2020. The audited accounts would then be presented to the Governance Committee on 30 November 2020 as the accounts must be approved no later than this date in accordance with the government's revised coronavirus accounting regulations.

Before going into the detail of the report, the Finance Director gave some background on the 2019/2020 budget. He advised that Members would recall that they were looking at making a contribution to reserves of £841,000 to help fund the budget at that time and also as the HMI had stated that the Authority's budget was not sustainable. He reported that during the financial year, which had helped to realise the reported underspend, the first stage of the IRMP actions approved by the Authority had been implemented and that had saved £746,000. He explained that this effectively reduced employee costs. He added that in addition a review of contingencies and a level of reserves had been undertaken which resulted in the budget being more sustainable and overall a net underspend for the financial year had been achieved as planned. He cautioned, however, that this level of underspend was not sustainable as most of the permanent savings that they had been aware of, when the budget for 2020/21 had been drawn up, had been taken out of the base budget for 2020/21. He advised that this helped to show that the budget was in a healthier position.

The attention of Authority Members was drawn to Appendix A and Section 2.4 of the report which highlighted in detail where the savings had been achieved.

The Finance Director reported that this underspend, together with the view from Government that austerity had ended in September 2019, meant that the update for the medium term financial strategy in February 2020 (before the Covid-19 pandemic) showed that the Authority had a sustainable budget, but only if resources were also sustainable and the medium term financial settlement confirmed the one-year settlement position. He then referred to the 2020/21 position and whilst the Authority had a sustainable budget, he reminded Members that some of the funding had been used for the capital programme which would be highlighted in the next report on the agenda.

The Finance Director reported that in relation to the 2020/21 budget, the COVID-19 pandemic was, and would continue to impact on Service activity, and the financial implications of this would be monitored closely over the coming months. He assured Members that they would be updated on the financial impact of the coronavirus throughout this financial year as this was expected to have far wider financial repercussions on the Authority than just on the 2020/21 financial year.

Members were advised that additional grant funding had been received from the Government of £1.121 million and there were plans to use approximately £720,000 and it was expected to use the remainder during the rest of the financial year. The Finance Director outlined that there was access to a fund of a further £6 million from the Home Office and applications had to be made on a Bellwin scheme principle. He explained that applying for this funding would incur some costs in formulating a business case to demonstrate the need for the funding. He reported that an intent to apply for the funding had been submitted.

The Finance Director reported that similar to other authorities, there was a clear risk that Council Tax and Business Rates in the year would not be collected and he had been liaising closely with the Tyne and Wear district councils to determine what the position was. He explained that currently it was predicted that there would be a £1.2 million funding gap and this had been relayed to the Government. He anticipated that other authorities would also be relaying similar circumstances as it was a business critical issue. He cautioned that if this was not addressed, the Authority could be facing an in-year budget review if there was insufficient funding to fulfil its budget requirement that was set in February 2020. He advised that the Government had responded that the Treasury would be considering the issue in the spending review expected in the Autumn. He hoped that this would cover the needs of the Authority in the medium term and plan the services for post-covid-19 recovery and heading towards Brexit. He reminded Members of the discussions on the budget at previous meetings and emphasised that the impact of Covid-19 gave additional uncertainties to the budget.

Before inviting Members to make comments and ask questions on the report the Finance Director advised that there was an error on Appendix B under the heading for Transformation and Reform Reserve. He reported that the table should read that the transfer to reserve was £2,026,000 and the expected closing balance was £4,494,000 resulting in the overall total transfer to reserves being £5,241,000 and total expected closing balance would be £29,658,000.

The Chief Fire Officer added narrative to the Finance Officer's presentation and reported that the underspend of £1.5 million was not an accidental underspend and every single penny had been the result of the Finance Director and his team working extremely hard to change the way the Service spends its resources. He explained that the intention for this underspend was to pump prime the transformation they wanted to achieve for the organisation. It was going to give ACFO Heath and his team opportunities in the next IRMP to assess the risk in the area, what resources were needed to mitigate that risk and innovation in applying those resources to create efficiencies. He advised that as it could be anticipated that there would be a potential loss of income of £1.2 million in year from Council Tax and Business Rates, Members might need to redirect the underspend, that officers had worked so hard to achieve to transform the organisation, to cover this shortfall and therefore deprive

the public of the organisation it deserves and the opportunity to accelerate the transformation unless the Authority receives some top-up funding to cover the income loss. He added that this had been hard-earned money which had had to be put in a Covid-19 reserve. He assured Members that every opportunity was being taken to lobby Government hard to seek top-up funding from Central Government grants.

Councillor Woodward reported that it was important to flag up the difficulty of revenue being raised from Council Tax and Business rates on top of the uncertainty due to Covid-19 and Brexit. He commented that the theory would be that the Authority should not lose out through something that was beyond its control. He hoped that the lobbying that would be taking place would bring some benefits to the Authority. He agreed that the IRMP process should be about delivering good risk management and not be used as a budget tool as it had had to be used for far too many years. He was pleased to hear that moving forward, depending on the response of Central Government, there could be smoother times ahead.

Councillor Haley concurred that the IRMP should not be used as a budget tool. However, he reminded Members that this had started with the Government's austerity measures ten years ago with austerity by the Coalition Government and that the Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service had faced the biggest cuts and depletion of resources than any other Fire Service in the country.

Councillor Flynn echoed the comments of the Chief Fire Officer, that the Service had been underfunded by the Government for ten years. He wondered whether, as the Service continued to perform well, the Government thought that the Service did not need any additional funding. He appreciated that the Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director would be lobbying the Government and also through their professional bodies, but he emphasised that this was also incumbent on Members of the Authority to implore the Northern Group of Labour Members of Parliament to lobby on behalf of the Authority as well. The Chief Fire Officer agreed to write a letter to the regional Members of Parliament on behalf of the Authority and to seek a virtual meeting with them to outline the potential risks to the Authority if further funding was not made available to the Government in-year.

Consideration having been given to the report and the proposed action of the Chief Fire Officer, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the Revenue Budget Outturn position for 2019/2020, set out at paragraphs 2.2 to 2.5, be noted;
- (ii) the proposed creation of the Covid-19 Reserve and transfer of funds as set out in paragraph 2.6, be approved;
- (iii) the General Fund position detailed at paragraph 3.1 be noted;
- (iv) the position with regard to the Revenue Budget for 2020/2021 detailed at section 4 be noted; and

- (v) the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to write a letter to the regional Members of Parliament on behalf of the Authority and to seek a virtual meeting with them to outline the potential risks to the Authority if further funding was not made available to the Government in-year.

Capital Programme Outturn 2019/2020 and Capital Programme First Review 2020/2021

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report to present the capital outturn for 2019/2020, highlighting the main variances from the 2019/2020 Capital Programme Third Review; and to review the current year's programme to reflect the 2019/2020 outturn position and other changes since the original programme for 2020/2021 was approved.

The Finance Director drew attention to the table outlined in paragraph 2.1 of the report which showed a reduction in the proposed capital programme spending of almost £8 million. He reported that savings of £72,397 had been made as a result of a net underspend on a number of schemes completed in 2019/2020. He drew attention to an additional spend of £10,000 to purchase extra smoke detectors as part of the IRMP initiative to ensure risk reduction.

Members were advised that there had been some slippage of almost £8 million on a number of projects due to events beyond the control of the Authority due to establishing a preferred site for a station, the impact of Covid-19 and other issues with contractors. The Finance Director reported that the bulk of the slippage related to four main projects; the new Hebburn Station, security measures, the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project (ESMCP) and the Vehicle Replacement Programme.

The Finance Director reported that the full detail of the Capital Programme for 2020/2021 to 2023/2024 was outlined in Appendix A to the report and the revised programme for the first review for 2020/2021 was detailed at paragraph 3.1. He highlighted that there were two additional schemes to note. Firstly, the network wireless resources project of approximately £550,000 which had become a priority as more employees were working remotely due to the pandemic. The other being the acquisition of industrial washing machines at various stations as part of the IRMP actions to revise locations for appliances and new cleaning facilities to decontaminate PPE to keep firefighters safe.

The Finance Director assured Members that they continued to monitor what issues might arise and impact upon capital schemes and projects during the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and would be reported to the Authority in the quarterly reports.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

6. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the final outturn position for 2019/2020 be noted;
- (ii) the transfer of the additional slippage (£2,785,433) into 2020/2021 be approved;
- (iii) the additional projects (£620,000) for 2020/2021 be approved; and

- (iv) the revised Capital Programme for 2020/2021, as set out at Appendix A, in light of the capital outturn position for 2019/2020, be approved.

Update on Collaboration Annual Report

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 progress update on the Services' collaborative activities from July 2019 to June 2020, including those in to support the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) from March 2020.

ACFO Baines highlighted that the Service had a successful track record of collaborating, including co-location at a number of sites and improved operational and preventative activities. He reported that following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, blue light emergency services in the region formalised a collaboration groups with the objectives to provide improved outcomes, reduce demand and deliver better value for money.

Members were advised that the onset of COVID-19 had strengthened existing partnerships through national and local associations. The Services' response had also initiated interactions with new partners, increasing engagement with the most vulnerable in the communities.

ACFO Baines then drew attention to the collaborative activities which had taken place over the last year detailed in Section 4 of the report, specifically:-

- The establishment of a Scientific Advisory Cell by the NFCC utilising the Public Health and Scientific team at West Midlands FRS. The Cell would report into the NFCC Operations Coordination Committee (OCC) chaired by CFO Lowther and Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) Heath was the NFCC representative for that group. A key activity of the Cell is to consider Public Health England, wider Government and health advice and how this was implemented within UK FRS' to ensure safety was prioritised whilst maintaining emergency services;
- Working reactively with the NFCC's Water Safety Practitioners' Board around water safety campaigns and driving prevention activities including working with Newcastle and Sunderland Councils on risk assessments of open water sites within their localities;
- To support the OPCC Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), to examine causes of violent crime and identifying appropriate interventions, by providing incident and prevention activity data. Building on previous initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) and a successful funding bid from the VRU, developing a further boxing hub at West Denton to give young people an environment to learn discipline through sport, with the aim to reduce ASB, attacks on Firefighters and deliberate secondary fires ;

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Service had devised a number of risk assessments, hygiene and decontamination procedures for premises and vehicles, all documents were shared with the HSCG and nationally with the NFCC. For example, the TWFRS had been one of the only organisations to continue with its beginners' Firefighters Course during the lockdown and by sharing learning and Health & Safety risk assessment models, this had enabled other Services to commence their training courses.
- Driving key work around accreditation with the NFRS' Fire Investigation Officers (FIOs) and NP and key work about establishing the cause of suspicious fires, fire fatalities and the detection of crime through the fire investigation (FI) work;
- A twelve-month Firestoppers pilot scheme was launched which had led to successful interventions and work to reduce ASB around key themes e.g. the 'Kicks Initiative' and the 'Knuckle Down' campaign which had been developed through collaboration;
- Collaboration with health and social care partners to deliver exercise classes and falls prevention visits, as well as fire safety information, for older people;
- The Service continued to explore co-location opportunities to maximise its estate footprint, support collaboration and generate revenue income. At present 29 partners operated from the estate with lease agreements yielding around £333,000 per annum;
- A bunkered fuel pilot, with NE Ambulance Service and Northumbria Police, commenced in November 2019 at Tynemouth Community Fire Station to reduce time and distance for first responders spent refuelling;
- The Service continued to explore the sale of surplus land and assets, with the land to the rear of Tynemouth Community Fire Station and Fulwell site now complete; and the former Gateshead Service centre sale was nearing completion;
- Site investigations and land acquisition continue apace for the proposed Hebburn Tri Community Fire Station with NE Ambulance Service and Northumbria Police;
- In relation to Service Support Functions, firefighter recruitment and training courses continued in collaboration with Durham and Northumberland and a regional Occupational Health Service provider was being scoped with Durham and Cleveland;
- Following training, the Service now had 23 Workplace Hate Crime Champions offering support and advice to colleagues;

- Collaborate training and development continued with both regional and national Fire and Rescue Services including urban search and rescue and police negotiator awareness sessions;
- Outreach work with the public continued around dementia awareness and safety awareness in road, fire, water, drugs and alcohol in addition to electrical safety in the home and safe behaviour on the Metro had been delivered;
- The Disability Network Group (DNG) hosted their first national conference 'Ability not Disability' on 3 December 2019 which promoted good practice, shared learning, and included employee reflections from personal experiences, and organisational approaches to disability support and awareness in the workplace;
- Significant work had been undertaken around mental health programmes across the region and working with the Northumbria Police Suicide Prevention team. In addition, the Blue Light Choir had championed mental health issues at a number of key events;
- The Services' engagement teams continued to work with in a range of cultural and religious settings in addition to working with refugees and asylum seekers across the region. The Service also continued to be strongly involved in promoting and supporting the LGBT+ community. A number of Fire and Rescue Services had joined to form a national LGBT+ Network. A flag raising ceremony would be taking place later in the day which included the Black Lives Matter;
- The Service launched its commitment to the White Ribbon campaign in November 2019 and was awarded accreditation. To achieve the accreditation the Service produced an action plan, which covered a number of items including raising awareness, changing cultures, and engagement. There were a number of champions across the Brigade;
- Work with the Girls' Network continued with 11 female leaders across the organisation and 156 hours of mentoring had taken place. A similar initiative would be undertaken with the newly founded Boys Network; and
- A number of key joint resilience exercises had been undertaken to support emergency planning and preparedness on a local, regional and national basis.

ACFO Baines concluded by advising that the income generated from collaborative activities including co-locations and NFRS Service Level Agreement in 2019/20 was £841,000 which was an increase of £18, 000 on the 2018/19 income.

The Police and Crime Commissioner commended the comprehensive report and the collaboration work which had been undertaken, in particular with the Crime Reduction Unit and the preventative initiatives which was a huge positive for the region.

Councillor Woodwark also commended the report and the amount of work which had been undertaken over the year especially the “Don’t Drink and Drown” partnership campaign on water safety. He commented that, other than perhaps examining and possibly adding more locations to access the Community Public Access Defibrillators, the report was very positive.

The Chair drew attention of the Authority Members to the Prevention and Education Department in relation to the water safety and awareness initiatives in light of the re-opening of public houses along waterways and reinforcing the message to take care when walking near waterways.

Councillor Stephenson commented that anyone watching the livestream of the meeting, could not fail to be impressed and to be so much more informed about the work that is carried out by the TWFRS, the Authority, its partners and volunteers in the community, all carried out in a collaborative way. She reported that in many cases this work was led by the TWFRS. She applauded the work which had been undertaken to support communities, other organisations and work to bring people together. She added that this illustrated the diversity of the work and communities and how inclusive the Service was in every aspect.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the progress on collaboration be noted; and
- (ii) the Authority continue to support and champion the collaboration between the Service and its partners.

IRMP Response Review 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 IRMP 2017-20 plan and to seek the Authority’s agreement to authorise the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to delay implementing the outstanding proposed changes to operational response resulting from the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-20. The report also sought the Authority’s agreement to authorise the Chief Fire Officer to transfer proposals 2 and 3 from the 2017-20 IRMP into the revised Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process for 2020-2023 allowing for new ways of working to be considered and lessons to be learnt from the worldwide pandemic – Covid 19.

ACFO Heath reported that the proposals set out in the report supported the TWFRS ambitions for the Service to 2025 to ensure that functions were planned, designed, and delivered in a way that balances available resources and community risk. He advised that since 2010, the IRMP actions had been developed against a background of significant reductions in the budget available to the Authority as a result of changes in Government spending and funding.

Members were advised that there remained considerable and significant uncertainty over fire and rescue service funding and there was insufficient detail to be able to confirm at this stage what the financial prospects of the Authority were both in year and also over the medium term, at this stage. What was clear was that planning for the fire service remained very difficult in these very unique and challenging circumstances.

ACFO Heath drew the attention of Members to IRMP Response Review proposals at Section 4 of the report. He advised that all of the proposals in Proposal 1 had been implemented, with the exception of broadening the role of targeted response vehicles to include attendance at other incidents, which was still ongoing and different ways of using the vehicles at different time of the day were being examined.

In relation to Proposal 2 and 3 which were deferred at the last time they were considered by the Authority, ACFO Heath reported that further work would be needed to consider what the service would look like and it was therefore proposed that they be taken forward to be considered with the current work being undertaken on IRMP process for 2020-2023. He highlighted that the Area Risk Profile was being shaped up by the Area Managers.

ACFO Heath informed the Members that added to the uncertainty and impact caused by being required by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to consider potential changes to the Day Crewing (Close Call) ("DC (CC)") staffing model at Birtley and Rainton Bridge community fire stations, to ensure that they comply with the working time directives. This was a national decision that affects many Fire and Rescue Services. He explained that rather than send repeated requests, as a follow up in March, he had advised the HSE that he would bring forward proposals to them by December 2020 by which time he would have been able to consult with the Chief Fire Officer and Executive Leadership Team, the Authority and, the public. He added that as yet he had not had a response from the HSE and therefore unless informed otherwise, they would continue to form their thinking around the CC model. He reassured Members that the welfare arrangements and the support for the crews remained in place.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the contents of the report be endorsed;
- (ii) the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to carry proposals 2 and 3 from the 2017-20 IRMP into the revised Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process for 2020-2023 allowing for new ways of working to be considered and lessons to be learnt from the worldwide pandemic – Covid 19; and
- (iii) further reports be submitted to the Authority as appropriate

Prosecution Update – Fire Safety

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Deputy Clerk to the Authority submitted a joint report to inform Members of the outcome of prosecutions brought by the Authority during 2019/2020 and to provide an update on upcoming prosecutions.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that Members would be aware that it was the strategy of the Service to work with local businesses and offer them support and to avoid prosecutions as far as possible. He reported that this had had tangible benefits in terms of how risks were treated in the area. He added that however, where it was deemed necessary because of the acts or omissions of employers or others were of such a significant nature, there would be no hesitation in bringing prosecutions.

The Chief Fire Officer drew attention to the report which outlined the most recent prosecutions. He reported in the first case relating to Mr Ashraf, an appeal was made to the Magistrates for the TWFRS to receive compensation for destroying 376 kilograms of fireworks which were seized. He explained that that amount of fireworks was equivalent to a World War II bomb and it had been located in a domestic property. Unfortunately, the Court did not grant the appeal for compensation, so the cost to destroy the fireworks had fallen to the TWFRS.

Members were advised in this instance, there had been a tremendous risk to the public and to the firefighters if they had had to attend an incident at that property, not knowing or expecting what was contained there. It could have led to a substantial number of fatalities. It was down to the strength of these inspection teams that a disaster had been averted.

Councillor Haley expressed disappointment that the Court had not awarded compensation for the costs to the TWFRS. He enquired whether the costs incurred by the TWFRS could be highlighted in any future prosecutions during the legal process and that the Service would be seeking recompense to prevent this happening again. He agreed that it was right that the individual was prosecuted because had there been an incident in that property the consequences could have been catastrophic. The safety of firefighters and residents was paramount. He added that no doubt that there would be coverage in the media about this prosecution and hopefully it would act as a deterrent.

The Chief Fire Officer responded that the TWFRS had retained the services of a fire safety barrister, David Stotesbury and the Service had actively spoken to him about this issue. He advised that unfortunately this had not been the first incident whereby the TWFRS had not been granted compensation.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to a previous incident where fireworks had been stored in a container on a farm where an incident had occurred and firefighters had lost their lives.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that he would take an action from this meeting to try and pre-empt compensation claims in the future and also build it in to the protection strategy. He added that it was not right that this cost fell to the TWFRS but they had an obligation to remove the dangerous explosives from circulation.

Members were advised that whilst the National Fire Chiefs Council did not hold a view that fireworks should be subject to a total ban, they did recommend that people should only attend organised, licenced displays. It had been pleasing to note that less shops were seeking to sell fireworks and needing licences.

Councillor Stephenson concurred with the comments raised and advised that she was aware during the 'Darker Nights Campaigns' that residents were complaining that the fireworks were getting bigger and louder and they had concerns for animal safety. She advised that the consequences of that amount of explosives being in a residential premises could have been disastrous and safety was paramount. She added that an appropriate deterrent had to be there to prevent a tragedy and every avenue should be explored and the Government need to examine the issue.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

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

Retirement of ACFO Baines

The Chair highlighted that this would be the last Fire Authority meeting for ACFO Baines as he was retiring following completing over thirty years' service. He thanked John for his service to the Brigade and wished him well for his retirement.

Authority Members and Officers also wished to convey their congratulations to John and wished him a long and happy retirement.

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

10. 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, which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) or to consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relations matters arising between the Authority and employees of the Authority (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4). 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.