

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

19 JANUARY 2024



PRESENT

CHAIR

Councillor David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillors Tom Cassidy, Ben Clayton

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillors Mary Ovens, Peter Chaney

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillors Sufi Mubeen, Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, Legal Adviser, Treasurer

Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning & Resources

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Community Protection

67. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

It was noted no Declarations of Interests were submitted to the meeting.

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee on 17 November 2023 be confirmed.

69. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

69.1 Community Risk Management, People and Resource Plans 2022-26 and Service Plan Priorities 2023/24 Progress Report

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with a summary progress report on the priorities contained within the Service Plan 2023/24.

The CFO referred Members to the Brigade's Internal Operating Plan for 2023/24 at Appendix 1 which captured the progress of improvement actions and highlighted key achievements.

He noted that sickness absence in the Brigade was high at over 12 shifts per person. Members discussed this issue in detail and agreed that the cost of sickness was a burden on the Authority's finances and questioned whether the current policy on sick pay was over-generous.

The CFO confirmed that tackling staff sickness levels and reviewing the Brigade's occupational health provision will be a key priority for 2024/25.

69.1 Community Risk Management, People and Resource Plans 2022-26 and Service Plan Priorities 2023/24 Progress Report cont.

RESOLVED – that the progress on the corporate priorities set out in the Authority’s CRMP, People and Resource Plans 2022-26, as detailed in the service plan, be noted.

69.2 Priorities 2024/25

The CFO informed Members that the annual key strategic and integrated risk management and financial planning activities had been completed by the Executive Leadership Team on 9 January 2024. This resulted in a review and clarification of the Authority’s priorities for 2024/25 contained within the Corporate, Community Risk Management, People and Resource Plans 2022-2026.

The CFO referred Members to Appendix 1 which outlined the key priorities 2024/25 along with other strategic actions. These will be presented within the Service Plan 2024/25 for approval by the Authority at its meeting on 22 March 2024 and the progress and implementation monitored by the Executive Committee regularly.

RECOMMENDED – that the Corporate Priorities 2024/25 to deliver the Authority’s corporate goals (as detailed within the CRMP, People and Resource Plans 2022-26) be approved by the Authority at its meeting on 22 March 2024 for inclusion in the Service Plan 2024/25.

69.3 HMICFRS Inspection 2023/24 (Round 3) Update Report

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Strategic Planning and Resources (ACFO-SPR) provided Members with an update of the HMICFRS Inspection 2023/24 which covered:

- Cleveland Fire Brigade’s Inspection 2021/22
- HMICFRS Inspection ‘Tranche 3’ Fire and Rescue Services 2023/24
- Cleveland Fire Brigade’s Inspection 2023/25
- HMICFRS Thematic Inspection on Handling of Misconduct 2023
- Value and Culture in the Fire and Rescue Service: Spotlight Report

She referred Members to the HMICFRS Improvement Plan 2023/24 at Appendix 1 outlining the Brigade’s progress against areas of improvement identified by the inspection team and the timeline for the Round 3 Inspection at Appendix 2.

Members noted that it was difficult to compare results due to the changes in the scoring for the third round and highlighted the challenge of continuously striving to improve under a regime of cuts. The CFO reported that the Brigade prides itself on being self-aware and on continuous improvement.

RESOLVED – That the update of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) ‘Round 3’ Inspections 2023/24 be noted.

69.4 Government White Paper: Reforming our Fire and Rescue Services

Members received a summary of the Government's consultation response to the fire reform White Paper which covered the case for reform, integrity matters and keeping communities safe during strikes.

The Government's vision for reform centred around three key themes:

- People – improving systems, flexibility and culture
- Professionalism – helping fire professionals to best serve their communities
- Governance – strengthening oversight and leadership

The CFO outlined the Home Office Actions against each of the key elements of the proposed reform package and agreed that any internal actions will be included in the prioritised corporate internal operating plan.

Councillor Clayton referred to the Home Office decision not to take forward the mandatory transfer of fire and rescue authority functions to Police and Crime Commissioners, Mayors or single elected individuals at this stage. He stated that Cleveland Police were currently not in a position to consider taking on the governance of the Brigade.

The CFO noted that the revised National Framework was due to be published in April 2024.

RESOLVED – that Members considered the report and provided views and comments to inform internal actions for inclusion in the Authority's Corporate Internal Operating Plan, for final approval by the Authority.

69.5 HMICFRS Values & Culture in FRS – Progress Against Recommendations

The CFO provided Members with the Authority's progress against the recommendations from the HMICFRS Spotlight report on values and culture in the FRS.

He reported that the action log at Appendix 1 of the report specifically captured the outcomes from the Brigade's gap analysis on the recommendations for Chief Fire Officers and the progress made to date against those actions.

The Chair asked if Authority Members would be required by the Brigade to have DBS checks in place. The CFO stated that these were only required for staff who had direct contact with children or vulnerable adults, and it was for respective councils to decide whether they require their Councillors to obtain them.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the progress against the recommendations for Chief Fire Officers following the publication of the HMICFRS' Spotlight Report on Values and Culture in the FRS, at Appendix 1.

69.6 South Wales FRS Independent Culture Review Report 2024.

Members considered a summary of the outcomes from the independent culture review commissioned by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service published on 3 January 2024.

The report detailed the terms of reference set out by the independent review team and the key findings. In addition, a set of phased recommendations were included at Appendix 1.

The CFO acknowledged the unacceptable behaviour and attitudes exposed at South Wales FRS and the underlying failings in leadership, governance and decision-making by management at all levels. He added that as a learning organisation the Brigade would review the report and its recommendations in detail and where appropriate, implement improvements into existing prioritised plans.

(11.54am) Councillor Sufi Mubeen left the meeting.

He also highlighted that this was the first time Authority members had been mentioned in this type of review. The Chair stated that it was a stark reminder of what can go on if it is allowed to. The CFO reported that EDI training is mandatory for all staff at Cleveland along with an awareness and understanding of the Values and Behaviour Framework.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the content of the South Wales Fire and Rescue

69.7 Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Policy

The ACFO-SPR presented the Authority's Whistleblowing Policy which had been reviewed in line with the Brigade's Key Document Framework and to address the HMICFRS spotlight report on Values and Culture recommendation that CFOs ensure provisions for a confidential way for staff to raise concerns and that whistleblowing processes are explicit.

This policy had been equality impact assessed and subject to consultation with the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU), with no issues reported.

RESOLVED – That the Authority's Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure) Policy attached as Appendix A be approved.

69.8 Grievance Policy

Members considered this Policy which had been reviewed in line with the Authority's Key Document Framework and to address the following recommendations from the HMICFRS spotlight report on Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services:

- Recommendation 3 - that CFOs review the support available for those who have raised concerns and take action needed to make sure these provisions are suitable
- Recommendation 18 - that CFOs should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations

69.8 Grievance Policy cont.

The ACFO-SPR confirmed that the review also considered 'good practice' from other organisations including Cleveland Police and ACAS and the Policy had been equality impact assessed and subject to consultation with the FBU with no issues raised.

The revised Policy will form part of the Brigade's 'Integrity Health Check' requiring staff to sign to confirm they have read and understand these policies and procedures on an annual basis.

RESOLVED – That the Authority's Grievance Policy at Appendix A be approved.

69.9 Dignity at Work Policy

The ACFO-SPR presented this revised Policy which had also been reviewed in line with the Brigade's Key Document Framework and to address Recommendations 3 and 18 of the HMICFRS spotlight report on culture and values, as detailed above at Min. No. 69.8.

This policy will also form part of the Integrity Health Check and had been equality impact assessed and considered by the FBU, with no issues raised.

RESOLVED – That the Authority's Dignity at Work Policy attached as Appendix A be approved.

69.10 Fire Control Collaboration Project

The Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Community Protection (AACFO-CP) informed members that negotiations between the four collaborating fire and rescue authorities of Cleveland, County Durham & Darlington, Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire & Wrekin and Motorola Solutions had concluded with the final agreement on the contract reached and signed off in December 2023.

He reported that Hereford & Worcester were the lead Authority on the project with the others entering into addendum agreements. A strategic steering board has been established between the four authorities with a collaborative agreement drawn up and signed to oversee project management, local delivery, ongoing contract management and operational use.

The AACFO-CP confirmed that the milestones associated with the project have been revised and the start date is now January 2024 with a go-live date expected to be June 2025.

The Chair asked if the Brigade was content with the arrangements. The AACFO-CP confirmed that this collaborative approach provides the Brigade with additional resilience and confirmed that there would be no change to the 18-month timeframe in the event of other FRS's joining the project.

69.10 Fire Control Collaboration Project cont.

RESOLVED – That the progress on the Fire Control Collaboration project for the provision of a new Fire Control mobilising system between Cleveland, County Durham & Darlington, Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire & Wrekin be noted.

- 70. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION ORDER) 2006** “That Under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, namely information relating to any individual; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority) holding that information and namely information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.”

- 71. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**
RESOLVED - that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee on 17 November 2023 be confirmed.

72. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

72.1 Procurement Report

Members received details relating to contract letting procedures, exemptions to contract procedure rules and future procurement plans.

(12.18pm) Councillor Tom Cassidy left the meeting.

72.2 Provision of Cleaning Services – Contract Award

Members considered a report on the contract award for the Brigades provision of cleaning services.

72.3 Police Fleet Maintenance Collaboration

The CFO provided an update on this collaborative scheme.

73. CONFIDENTIAL JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & TREASURER

73.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 – 2026/27

The CFO and Treasurer outlined the Authority's MTFS and Council Tax levels for the 2024/25 budget.

COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR