
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING

12 FEBRUARY 2021



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Cllr Paul Kirton – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Marjorie James, Stephen Thomas

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Teresa Higgins, Naweed Hussain, Jon Rathmell, Ashley Waters

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Billy Ayre, Adam Brook, Cliff Foggo, Mary Ovens

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Luke Frost, Lynn Hall, Jean O'Donnell, William Woodhead MBE

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, ACFO – Strategy, Policy & Resources, ACFO – Community Protection, Treasurer, Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Tim Fleming – Hartlepool Borough Council

167. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

168. MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting on 11 December 2020 be confirmed.

169. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee on 22 January 2021 be confirmed.

170. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR

NJC Covid-19 Support Agreement – New Activities

HMICFRS Covid-19 Inspection

RESOLVED – that the communications be noted.

171. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

171.1 COVID-19 Briefing – Presentation

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with a detailed presentation on the latest position of the Covid-19 pandemic which covered:

171.1 COVID-19 Briefing – Presentation cont.

Situational Awareness

The CFO outlined a 7 day analysis of the figures for the Tees Valley up to 8 February 2021 which covered the rate per 100,000 population for Hartlepool (179), Stockton (235), Redcar & Cleveland (195) and Middlesbrough (343). He reported Middlesbrough and Stockton were in the top three highest rates in the North East. Despite this there had been some substantial reductions in the number of positive cases in the Authority area.

He reported the rate for the over 60s age group for Middlesbrough (202), Hartlepool (120), Redcar & Cleveland (122) and Stockton (120). He noted that while the rolling 7 day average is being driven down by the lockdown the Directors of Public Health believe it is too early to see the impact of the vaccination programme.

Vaccination Programme

- 91% of over 80s in the Authority area have been vaccinated. As a profile there are just below 30,000 over 80s and 26,000 have received their 1st dose of the vaccine.
- Over 70s group – 73,000 and 70% of those have had 1st dose.
- Government target is for all over 50s to receive their first dose by May. There are 225,000 people in that profile in our area so still 145,000 still to vaccinate by May deadline.
- At this point in time 14% of population have been vaccinated and still 86% to vaccinate moving forward.

Strategic Intentions

- These continue to be: to ensure statutory functions remain resilient and effective; support the broader public sector response; and maintain high standards of health, safety and wellbeing for staff.

Operational Response

- 9,000 calls up until January - reduction of 16% on previous year.
- Total incidents 6,380 attended – reduction of 13% on last year.
- Causes for decline in calls and incidents could be due to the lockdown process
- Deliberate secondary fires (rubbish, grassland) reduced by 21% (over 600 incidents less).
- RTCs reduced by 23% due to less traffic on the roads.
- Unwanted Fire Signals 19% reduction.
- Accidental Dwelling Fires increased by 11% on previous year due to people spending more time at home.
- Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) have reduced by 20% but 11,944 visits have still been completed to the most vulnerable people in the community and digital technology has been utilised to turn those trends around to support people in their homes.

Councillor Ovens passed on thanks to the crews who have continued to deliver HFSVs and Safe and Well Visits throughout the pandemic and passed on thanks to Brigade personnel volunteering with the vaccine programmes.

Councillor Luke Frost commended the positive picture but expressed concern that violence to staff incidents have not decreased despite the lockdown and limited contact with the community.

171.1 COVID-19 Briefing – Presentation cont.

The CFO noted that 39 occasions of violence to staff had been reported which is unacceptable. As an Authority, Members have invested in CCTV on all appliances and body worn cameras for front line services. In addition the Brigade supports the appropriate agencies to assist in the prosecution of those who engage in violence to staff of those in the public sector. Councillor James suggested increased press coverage of violence to staff court cases may work as a deterrent.

Councillor Rathmell acknowledged the difficulties of community engagement for both fire and police due to the pandemic and hoped that these incidents would decrease next year. The CFO confirmed that the Brigade had launched a new targeted engagement strategy as a fundamental tool to tackle these issues. In addition funding had been secured for the next 2 years to run youth engagement initiatives which will benefit both the Brigade and the wider public sector.

Broader Role

- 734 essential items delivered to vulnerable people (prescriptions/food/medical equipment)
- 41 PPE and medical equipment collected/delivered to health partners
- 70 training sessions in care homes
- 401 hours of staff volunteering for vaccine programme

Staff Welfare

From a workforce of 550:

- 29 operational and 3 corporate staff currently absent from work
- 3 members of staff are currently Covid positive (less than 1%)
- 10 are self-isolating
- Very positive reflection of the Brigade's arrangements to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of staff.

Covid Key Dates

- 15 February - half term and opening of testing site at QMC for Brigade staff
- 22 February - Government Review detailing pathway out of lockdown.
- 8 March – Earliest date for children to return to work
- Early March – South Tees vaccine centre to open – staffed by Brigade personnel
- Mid-March – North Tees vaccine centre to open – staffed by Brigade personnel
- End of March – Easter holidays
- May – Local Elections – supported by Brigade facilities

Finance

The CFO confirmed that a Covid grant of £587,000 already received from government and the total forecasted cost to the end of financial year is £734,000 (overspend £157,000). A bid for further grant funding has been submitted to government.

Other Issues

The CFO informed Members that nationally, the Tripartite Agreement ended on 11 January 2021 and there was currently no national agreement in place. Locally, risk assessments, guidance, PPE, training and health surveillance provisions were in place to protect staff.

171.1 COVID-19 Briefing – Presentation cont.

QMC Test Centre

From 15 February, a two-pod test centre for staff would be piloted at the Brigade's Training & Technical Hub with the intention of rolling this out to all operational stations in the near future. The CFO thanked Hartlepool Borough Council's Director of Public Health for providing support to establish the testing facility.

Vaccine Centre Support

There is currently a training programme underway for fire-fighters to become vaccinators with the intention they will be deployed at North and South Tees Hospital sites. A number of staff are also volunteering for support roles at other vaccination sites.

The CFO reported that as there was no programme to vaccinate front line fire service staff, an arrangement was in place with vaccination centres to offer any spare vaccinations to crews at the end of the day on a planned priority basis.

Councillor Ayre asked what the impact of not having a national agreement in place was for operational crews. The CFO confirmed that local agreements were in place with local FBU to deliver the additional activities required during the pandemic.

Councillor James referred to the establishment of a testing site at the QMC and asked if this could be used by other businesses. The CFO noted that the workplace testing regime is to compliment the community testing sites and reduce their burden and while the intention of the pilot is to offer testing to staff initially it may be extended wider in the future.

RESOLVED – that the presentation be noted.

171.2 HMICFRS: COVID-19 Inspection 2020 - Cleveland Fire Brigade

Members received details of the Brigade's COVID-19 Inspection Report which covered the first wave of the pandemic and was published by HMICFRS on 22 January 2021. The CFO outlined the following key findings which demonstrated that the Brigade:

- adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively by prioritising the health, safety and wellbeing of both the community and staff;
- displayed good governance by adapting its pandemic flu plan and business continuity arrangements into a Covid pandemic plan;
- carried out all statutory responsibilities – prevention, protection and response services
- staff wellbeing was a clear priority for senior leaders and the Brigade promoted wellbeing services throughout the period;
- engaged with partners through the local resilience forum, local authorities, NEAS and NHS to offer support and assistance where requested;
- managed resources well in relation to £500k Covid grant received from government;
- Members of the Authority were actively engaged in discharging core functions; and
- services were adapted and staff were quick to adapted to new ways of working, particularly home working.

The CFO concluded that this report provided a positive reflection of the Authority and Councillor Frost praised the Brigade for its outstanding performance with limited financial support from Government. He also highlighted the area of the report which referred to the productivity of whole-time fire-fighters.

171.2 HMICFRS: COVID-19 Inspection 2020 - Cleveland Fire Brigade cont.

The CFO confirmed that this was a general issue within the service rather than specific to the Brigade and that throughout the pandemic the Brigade continuously fulfilled its core role. Councillor Higgins passed on thanks and admiration for what all staff achieved daily throughout the pandemic.

Councillor Ovens queried how the additional cost of Covid would be recovered by the Brigade. The CFO reported an estimated £157,000 overspend up to end on March 2021 due to Covid and that a grant bid had been submitted to cover that cost which would otherwise have to be absorbed into the revenue budget.

Councillor Ovens asked whether the vaccine marshals were seconded and what shifts they worked. The CFO confirmed they were not seconded but volunteered around their own work schedule and while volunteers were required 8am – 8pm this was split down into two 6 hours shifts.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the outcomes of Cleveland Fire Brigade’s HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection 2020, as detailed at Appendix 1, be noted.**
- (ii) That Members noted that any identified areas of improvement/development will be captured and progressed within the Brigade’s Corporate Internal Operating Plan.**

171.3 HMICFRS: Responding to the Pandemic

The CFO outlined the findings of the HMICFRS inspection of all 45 fire and rescue services in England in relation to their response to Covid-19, as detailed at Appendix 1.

He reported that the inspectorate had been specifically tasked with considering: what is working well and what is being learnt; how the fire sector is responding to the Covid-19 crisis; how fire services are dealing with the problems they face; and what changes are likely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The CFO referred Members to section 5 of the report which contained the headline findings and how they related specifically to Cleveland, with the Brigade fairing positively in most outcomes. Section 6 listed other findings referenced by HMICFRS within the report.

The CFO referred Members to HMI Zoe Billingham’s conclusion that: *“the fire and rescue service can be proud of how it responded during the initial stages of the pandemic, and the support it gave communities. Our comments on the barriers to doing more shouldn’t detract from our recognition of the important and significant contribution fire and rescue services made and continue to make. Fire and rescue services, firefighters and staff stepped up and supported their communities well beyond what they would normally do.*

“Nonetheless, now is a pivotal time for the country in terms of the fight against the virus. The fire service has much more to offer in supporting the mass vaccination programme and other pandemic activities; thereby matching the ambition of fire service leaders and the commitment of their staff. The barriers dominating the sector need to be overcome or resolved. The sector should look to the good work outlined in this report and continue to serve its communities to the best of its ability. I know there is a desire to do more, and I hope that all those vested with the power to enable this to happen will do so.”

171.3 HMICFRS: Responding to the Pandemic cont.

RESOLVED – that the findings of the HMICFRS inspection in relation to how well all fire authorities in England responded to the COVID-19 outbreak as detailed in the ‘Responding to the Pandemic’ report at Appendix 1, be noted.

171.4 Information Pack

- 173.4.1 Employers Circulars
- 173.4.2 National Joint Council Circulars
- 173.4.3 Campaigns
- 173.4.4 Local Pension Board Firefighter Pension Schemes: Annual Business Report

RESOLVED – That the information pack be noted.

172. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

172.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 – 2023/24

The Treasurer provided Members with a detailed report outlining the MTFS Strategy for 2021/22 -2023/24. This covered:

- Spending Review and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021/22
- 2020/2 Budget Position
- Financial Impact of Covid-19 on 2020/21 Resources
- 2021/22 Budget and Future Years Financial Outlook
- Financial Outlook 2022/23 and 2023/24
- Reserves Strategy
- Asset Management Plan (AMP)
- Robustness Advice

The Treasurer outlined the background to the ongoing financial challenges that the Authority has faced over the past nine years resulting in the significant Government funding shift from 62% of total funding to 47% and the increase in reliance of council tax from 32% to 46%.

The Government Spending Power chart at Section 3 of the report highlighted significant divergence in cumulative Spending Power Increases for FRAs with Cleveland having the lowest increase of 0.1%.

The Treasurer referred Members to Lord Greenhalgh’s letter at Appendix A which confirmed a settlement funding increase in line with inflation for 2021/22. In addition, Core Spending Power across standalone FRAs would increase by 2.6% and the £115m pensions grant will continue to be paid next year at the same allocation as last year and baseline into the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022/23.

The Treasurer highlighted the economic impact of COVID-19 which has resulted in a Collection Fund Deficit £462,000. One-off resources of £400,000 were previously earmarked to manage this risk and the report recommends funding the remaining shortfall of £62,000 from the Budget Support Fund to avoid this impacting resources into 2021/22.

The Treasurer noted that the one year settlement for 2021/22 created an uncertain financial environment for 2022/23 and future years which would be challenging to budget planning and highlighted the following areas of uncertainty:

172.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 – 2023/24 cont.

- the outcome of the 2021 Spending Review;
- the impact of delayed major reforms of the funding system until 2022/23;
- the overall level of grant funding in the settlement for 2022/23 and future years;
- national pay awards for 2022 and 2023;
- Pensions costs and funding arrangements; and
- the trigger level for the 2022/23 council tax referendum limits

Councillor Woodhead thanked the Treasurer for presenting the strategy which demonstrated the efficiency of the Authority and asked whether local MPs had responded to concerns about the grant settlement. The CFO confirmed that all local MPs were appraised on the Authority's financial position but the government's decision to change the formula had been deferred. Therefore it was timely for Members to actively lobby MPs on the Authority's behalf ahead of the 2022/23 settlement.

Councillor James suggested it would be helpful if the MTFs itemised increases in Council Tax Collection Fund income from new house builds across the 4 local authority areas. The Treasurer noted that the budget was set based on an estimated council tax base of each local authority and any variations would be reported as a council tax surplus/deficit and explicitly reported in the following years' MTFs. He added that extra income from new house builds was one of many reasons for a variance to the estimate, which was based on a complex calculation.

Councillor Foggo asked whether new fleet was procured under a regional framework. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning and Resources confirmed that the Authority used a national fire-specific framework for procurement of appliances.

Councillor Hall referred to Appendix D of the report and queried why prudential borrowing was used to fund many items on the Capital Programme. The Treasurer noted that historically vehicles were predominantly leased however now prudential borrowing is used to spread the cost long term with low interest rates which provides a revolving finance facility to replace fleet and keep appliances on the run.

A formal vote was taken and Members unanimously voted in favour of the Statutory Budget and Council Tax Calculations for 2021/22 and the Asset Management Plan for 2021/22 to 2026/27.

RESOLVED – That as recommended by the Executive Committee on 22 January 2021 the report be noted and the following proposals be approved:

- (i) That Members noted that the economic impact of Covid-19 has resulted in a forecast Collection Fund deficit of £462,000, which exceeds the one off resources previously earmarked to manage this risk by £62,000 and approved the proposal to fund the shortfall from the Budget Support Fund;**
- (ii) That Members noted that the Government's forecast Spending Power increases are predicated on authorities increasing Council Tax, which for this Authority will provide recurring additional Council Tax income of £234,000, compared to an increase in Revenue Support Grant of £29,000;**

172.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 – 2023/24 cont.

- (iii) That Members approved the proposal to balance the 2021/22 budget from a combination of using £336,000 of the Budget Support Fund and a 1.9% Council Tax increase, and approved the supporting statutory calculations detailed Appendix E and 2021/22 Revenue Budget detailed in Appendix F;
- (iv) That Members noted the following resulting Council Tax levels for 2021/22;

2020/21 Annual Council Tax £	Property Band	2021/22		Annual increase £	
		Annual Council Tax £	Weekly Council Tax £		
52.55	A	53.55	1.03	1.00	Approximately 64% of households are in Band A or B
61.31	B	62.48	1.20	1.17	
70.07	C	71.4	1.37	1.33	
78.83	D	80.33	1.54	1.50	
96.35	E	98.18	1.89	1.83	
113.87	F	116.03	2.23	2.16	
131.38	G	133.88	2.57	2.50	
157.66	H	160.66	3.09	3.00	

- (i) To address the forecast deficits for 2022/23 (£577,000) and 2023/24 (£198,000) Members instructed the Chief Fire Officer to develop a contingency plan to address future funding reductions.
- (ii) Members approved the updated Asset Management Plan detailed in Appendix D.

173. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

173.1 Stockton Safer Partnership Representative

The CFO informed Members that there was currently a vacancy for an Authority representative on Stockton Safer Partnership group following a change to Stockton’s membership on the Authority. As no nominations were received it was agreed the Chair would take the position until the CFA Annual Meeting in June when a representative would be appointed for 2021/22.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Paul Kirton be Cleveland Fire Authority’s representative on Stockton Safer Partnerships until the Authority’s Annual Meeting on 4 June 2021.

(1554) Councillor Cliff Foggo left the meeting.

174. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION ORDER) 2006

RESOLVED - “That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 below 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 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.”

175. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the confidential minutes of the Ordinary Meeting on 11 December 2020 be confirmed.

176. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

RESOLVED – that the confidential minutes of the Executive Committee on 22 January 2021 be confirmed.

177. ANY OTHER CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

177.1 Confirming Minutes in Confidential Session

Members discussed whether it was necessary to move into private session to confirm minutes on occasions when no other confidential business is on the agenda. Agreed that the Chair could use discretion to establish if Members wished to raise any issues with the confidential minutes and if there are none they can be confirmed in open session.

**COUNCILLOR PAUL KIRTON
CHAIR**