

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING

24 JULY 2026



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Cllr David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Leisa Smith, Chris Wallace, Christine Wiley

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs John Kabuye, Dennis McCabe

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Peter Chaney, Steve Kay

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Jim Beall, Andrew Sherris, Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Interim Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer

ACFO - Director of Strategic Planning, People & Resources (Teams)

Temporary ACFO - Director of Service Delivery

BRIGADE OFFICERS

Temporary Area Manager – Prevention, Protection & Training

Assistant Director of Assets

Assistant Director of Governance & Assurance

FIRE BRIGADES UNION (OBSERVING)

James Sudron, Nick Cain, Jonny Wills, Ross Jewel, Max Heason-Phillips

APOLOGIES:

Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council

Councillors Mary Ovens, David Taylor – Redcar & Cleveland B.C.

Councillors John Gardner, Stefan Houghton,

Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer

Temporary Area Manager – Response, Policy & Planning

23. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

24. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of proceedings of the Annual meeting of 5 June 2026 be confirmed.

25. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee on 26 June 2026 and the Executive Committee on 3 July 2026 be confirmed.

26. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR

No communications were received by the Chair.

27. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

27.1 Service Plan Priorities 2026/27 – Update Report

The Assistant Director of Governance & Assurance (ADG&A) provided Members with an update on the progress against the 25 priorities agreed for inclusion in the 2026/27 Service Plan which were split across five pillars: People, Prevention, Protection, Resources, Response and Strategic Planning.

She gave Members assurance that the priorities were progressing to plan with close scrutiny on those priorities carried over from 2025/26. Future reports would be supported with a high-level overview of the activity to provide greater narrative on progress.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the progress against the 2026/27 Service Plan Priorities.

27.2 HMICFRS Areas for Improvement (AFIs) – update report

Members received an update on the progress of the 16 AFIs identified in the Brigade's 2023-25 inspection report by HMICFRS which highlighted the following:

- 6 – progressing to plan
- 6 – progressing with issues
- 1 – progressing with significant issues
- 3 – action complete and signed off by ELT

Members were reassured that the AFI relating to Protecting the Public through Fire Regulation, which was progressing to plan, would be signed off by ELT in the coming weeks. The ADG&A confirmed that she would be monitoring the progress of the other 6 areas progressing with issues to ensure significant progress in the next quarter.

The ADG&A informed Members that a full position statement on the AFIs would be prepared ahead of the forthcoming visit from the new Service Liaison Lead (SLL).

RESOLVED – That Members noted the progress against the HMICFRS Areas for Improvement (AFIs).

27.3 Information Pack

27.3.1 National Joint Council Circulars

27.3.2 Employer Circulars

27.3.3 Campaigns

RESOLVED – that the information pack be noted.

28. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & TREASURER

28.1 Project Aspect: Service Cuts Proposals

The Treasurer reminded Members that as outlined in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved in February 2026 the Interim Chief Fire Officer (ICFO) was required to submit a savings plan by July 2026. This was to identify cuts of £1.198m, with £0.707m to be implemented from April 2027 and the remaining £0.491m from April 2028.

28.1 Project Aspect: Service Cuts Proposals cont.

He reported that since February, the USA/Iran war had resulted in significant financial uncertainty feeding into higher inflation and requiring the existing MTFS forecast to be updated to reflect:

- Impact of higher inflation 2026/27-2027/28 on national pay awards and non-pay costs
- Impact of higher interest rates on Asset Management Plan and Investment Income
- Impact on Government Spending Priorities

The Treasurer referred Members to Tables 4 & 5 of the report showing: Forecast Deficit Scenarios with and without the annual Band D Council Tax increase of £5 for 2027/28 and 2028/29. He confirmed that at this stage it remained appropriate for the Chief Fire Officer to progress with the savings plan to identify £1.198m as mandated by the Authority.

The ICFO reported that in January 2026 Project Aspect was established by the Brigade in response to the anticipated financial challenges to identify and assess potential savings opportunities across the organisation in a structured, evidence based and transparent manner.

The ICFO provided Members with a detailed presentation which outlined the scope, methodology, considerations, initial feasibility assessment (IFA) and detailed feasibility assessment (DFA). He reported that 15 considerations advanced to the IFA stage with eight progressing to the DFA stage showing the strongest potential for financial savings.

The final options report was presented to ELT in June 2026 which outlined:

- proposals resulting in efficiencies which when implemented result in smaller savings with minor disruptions to the service
- operational configuration changes impacting on response arrangements (requiring the approval of the Fire Authority)
- East-Cleveland modelling analysis to address findings of the ORH Fire Cover Review report produced to support the development of the CRMP 2026-30.

The ICFO reported that while removing a wholetime appliance would have been the easiest decision to achieve the savings (circa £1.25m) he was aware that once that asset was gone it was unlikely to ever be replaced. Therefore, day crewing a second appliance (at a two pump station) was considered to be the lowest risk option with the least impact on response standards. He added that it was about getting the assurance that the Brigade's appliances and specialisms were in the right places.

He took Members through a detailed presentation outlining each of the following Savings Efficiencies Proposals for implementation on 1 April 2027:

- Day Crew E3 (Thornaby Fire Station's second appliance) **£484,000**
- Twin Water Rescue with Stockton Fire Station
- Additional Hours Cap - will second a dedicated Staffing Officer to ensure consistent approach
- Disturbance Allowance Review – policy is generous compared to region – dedicated Staffing Manager to monitor
- East Cleveland Day Cover (Scheduled Model) – currently 38% not available across these four on-call stations. Therefore, will trial sending one wholetime appliance each day to carry out preventative work and cover calls for 12 months from 1 January 2027 using second pump appliances.

28.1 Project Aspect: Service Cuts Proposals cont.

- Flexi Duty Officer Response Vehicles **£113,000** – reduce fleet from 20 to ten and consider purchasing option instead of lease.
- Light Vehicles **£43,000** – consider purchasing instead of lease and keep for 12/15 years
- Catering arrangements **£40,000** – consider reducing provision for training courses to main meal only
- Cleaning of Service Premises **£13,000** – consider reviewing cleaning frequency and collaboration with other Blue Light services
- Security at Headquarters **£50,000** – review current 24-hour provision
- Printers **£7,000**
- Ridership Factor potentially **£242,000 - £483,000** – this initially appeared to be a potential solution to the bulk of the required savings. However high absence levels mean this is not currently a viable option

The ICFO re-assured Members that ELT had met with the Fire Brigade's Union, middle managers and staff at Thornaby, Stockton and all four East Cleveland stations to ensure they were fully aware of the proposed changes and had the opportunity to ask questions.

He recognised that the above proposals totalled £750k savings and represented a phased approach to meeting the £1.2m deficit, noting that they could be reconsidered in light of any alternative savings options or additional funding. The next step was to establish an implementation team ahead of the 12-week consultation with staff and external stakeholders.

Councillor Kay thanked the ICFO for the presentation and welcomed the high profile given to the needs of the people in East Cleveland. He acknowledged that Cleveland was a high risk area that consistently goes unnoticed and asked if the Authority was still putting significant political pressure on the government. The ICFO acknowledged the unfairness of the funding settlement and added that local MPs had been lobbying government but were told categorically that there would be no additional funding until 2029.

Councillor Beall also expressed thanks for the full and clear presentation of the proposals and said that while no Councillor wanted to cut services successive governments had put them in that position. He added that it was with great reluctance but he recognised the position the Authority was in and supported the proposals.

The Chair asked whether there was any risk from the day staffing proposal for Thornaby Fire Station relating to nearby high rise buildings. The ICFO confirmed that the evidence was that the Brigades stations were so geographically close to each other the risk was minimal.

Councillor Smith suggested the catering provision be removed all together stating that no other government organisation would provide this for training. She also asked for the Scoring Matrix for the proposals to be shared. Councillor Smith referred to the high levels of sickness which were preventing the ridership savings option from being implemented and asked whether officers anticipated sickness increasing further following the implementation of these proposals. The ACFO – Strategic Planning People & Resources (ACFO – SPP&R) recognised that sickness levels of 12-13% were high for a fire service and were not being well managed. She added that she was confident that these levels could be significantly reduced in the future.

28.1 Project Aspect: Service Cuts Proposals cont.

Councillor Wiley commended the ICFO for the comprehensive report and asked how confident he was that the savings could be achieved and what management processes would be implemented to improve sickness. The ICFO confirmed he would not have presented Members with these options without full confidence that they could work with no impact on public safety which was due to resources being so close together. The ACFO - SPP&R said she would be implementing a flexible approach to bring people back to work sooner by working with Occupational Health and would roll out a wholesale training programme which had not previously been done in the Brigade.

The ICFO invited James Sudron from the FBU to comment on the proposals. Mr Sudron informed Members that the workforce had already been seriously cut by 33% (163 jobs) and the FBU had started a campaign against the proposals and would be lobbying local MPs. He re-iterated that this was not against the Authority but about central government funding. The Chair stated that these proposals were all reversible if the funding could be increased and thanked the FBU for attending and offered opportunities to talk further.

Mr Sudron thanked Officers and Members for their level of transparency about the whole process and the opportunity to speak and agreed to share the FBU letter to local MPs.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) **That the methodology employed by Project Aspect to reach the conclusions and recommendations set out within this paper be noted.**
- (ii) **That Members approved the implementation of the following proposals to achieve the savings required, subject to a formal consultation process, to address the forecast budget deficit within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2027/28 and 2028/29, and authorised the Interim Chief Fire Officer to progress the necessary implementation arrangements:**
 - **Day Crew E3 (Thornaby Fire Station's second appliance)**
 - **Convert Water Rescue to a twinned Station model**
 - **Additional Hours Cap**
 - **Disturbance Allowance Review**
 - **East Cleveland Day Cover (Scheduled Model)**
 - **Flexi Duty Officer Vehicles**
 - **Light Vehicles**
 - **Catering arrangements**
 - **Cleaning of Service Premises**
 - **Security at Headquarters**
 - **Printers**
 - **Ridership Factor**
- (iii) **That Members approved the two-year phased strategy to resolve the deficit of £1.198m. £750k savings will be met in 2027/28, as set out in this report, with the remaining £448k being met through focused management of sickness levels, additional hours expenditure and disturbance allowance payments.**

28.1 Project Aspect: Service Cuts Proposals cont.

- (iv) **Members confirmed that these proposals constituted the Authority's approved savings programme for the purposes of developing the 2027/28 revenue budget, with the approved savings to be reflected in the Authority's formal budget-setting reports.**
- (v) **Members noted that the increased risks relating to inflation and national pay may require further cuts, which, if necessary, will be subject to a separate report and consultation.**

- 29. 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 item of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2, 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 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.”
- 30. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF MEETINGS**
RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee on 3 July 2026 be confirmed.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR**