

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

19 SEPTEMBER 2025



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Councillor David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Gary Allen, Bob Buchan

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer

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

ACFO - Director of Service Delivery

BRIGADE OFFICERS

Area Manager - Assistant Director of Operations

Area Manager - Assistant Director of Prevention, Protection & Planning

Assistant Director - Assets

Assistant Director - Governance & Assurance

APOLOGIES:

Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer

Councillors Peter Chaney, Mary Ovens, David Taylor - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

36. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

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

37. MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee on 4 July and Special Executive Committee on 29 August 2025 be confirmed.

38. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

38.1 HMICFRS Inspection 2023-25 – Update on Areas for Improvement (AFIs)

Members considered a report outlining the Brigade's progress to date against the sixteen areas for improvement identified in Cleveland's third round HMICFRS Inspection report covering the period 2023-25.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Director of Strategic Planning, People and Resources (DoSPPR) referred Members to Appendix 1 which provided a detailed update on each of the areas and highlighted the following progress:

38.1 HMICFRS Inspection 2023-25 – Update on Areas for Improvement (AFIs) cont.

AFI – Nos.1 & 2

The Area Manager – Assistant Director of Prevention, Protection and Planning (ADoPPP) provided an update on the improvement to the Community Safety System which had been piloted at Stockton and Hartlepool Stations with positive feedback and is scheduled for launch at all stations on 10 November 2025. He added that this satisfied the requirement to assure the Brigade has an effective process in place to refer people at risk to partner organisations.

AFI - Nos. 3, 4, 5 & 6

The ADoPPP informed Members that the Risk Based Inspection Plan (RBIP) was initially a 4-year trial which demonstrated early was not working as expected. He confirmed that the Brigade was currently working with external experts to develop a definition of risk and provide reassurance via independent robust feedback.

AFI - No.7

The DoSPPR confirmed this action relating to operational learning should show as being 'in progress'.

AFI – No.11

The Area Manager - Assistant Director of Operations (ADoOps) confirmed that work was underway to improve the Brigade's annual appraisal process to ensure staff are developed to their best potential. This will feed into the organisational training needs analysis and be updated on the current Personal Development Record (PDR) system for both grey and green book staff. He added that he is currently looking at practice from other services and hopes to roll out the new system early 2026.

AFI – No.14

The DoSPPR confirmed that an evaluation exercise on the Brigade's promotion process had been undertaken to ensure it is fair and transparent. The outcomes have been discussed by ELT and the new process should be ready to share with the trade unions in the coming months.

The CFO welcomed the detailed report and gave Members assurances that the HMICFRS Action Plan would be updated to reflect changes in project leads, dates for completion and a health check on key areas before reporting to the full Authority. He also recognised the need to understand the root cause of each action and envisaged some areas would be ongoing into 2026 to ensure adequate improvement work is carried out.

RESOLVED – That progress against the HMICFRS Areas for Improvement, detailed at Appendix 1, be noted.

38.2 Service Plan 2025/26 - Update Report

Members were updated on the progress made to date against the priorities contained in the 2025/26 Service Plan, approved by Cleveland Fire Authority on 28 March 2025 for implementation on 1 April 2025.

38.2 Service Plan 2025/26 - Update Report cont.

The DoSPPR confirmed that a new streamlined Brigade meeting structure had been implemented with a joint monthly directorate meeting feeding into a monthly Executive Leadership Team (ELT) meeting. This will now have a quarterly focus on either Finance & Performance, People & Culture or Governance and has been aligned to the CFA reporting schedule.

The DoSPPR informed Members that of the 59 service priorities:

- 2 were completed
 - Evaluation of the Wholetime Duty System
 - Roll out of BA set, cylinders and BA telemetry
- 43 were in progress
 - 37 on track
 - 6 currently behind schedule
- 13 were not yet started

The ACFO - Director of Service Delivery (DoSD) provided an update on the Fire Control Mobilisation System delivered by Motorola in partnership with Durham & Darlington, Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services. He confirmed the project had now been pushed back to July 2025 due to Home Office security technicalities. Motorola has given assurances that the delays had no cost implications and actually contributed to a £220k underspend for 2025/26 and £116k on the revenue budget.

The DoSPPR referred to the priority to implement the National Age Discrimination Remedy for Firefighter Pension Schemes which was highlighted as being behind schedule and confirmed this position was reflected nationally across all fire and rescue services.

RESOLVED - That progress against the 2025/26 Service Plan priorities be noted.

38.3 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2026-30 – Verbal Update

The CFO provided Members with an update on the progress of the draft CRMP 2026-30 which was currently out for 12-week consultation.

He confirmed that since the launch on 15 September there had been 181 responses and there had been an exceptional response to the pre-consultation survey. The ADoPPP asked Members to promote the survey in their own districts to ensure maximum reach.

The CFO thanked all teams involved for their combined efforts in producing the document which had a different feel to previous iterations and featured artwork on the cover designed by a member of staff.

38.2 Community Risk Management Plan 2026-30

He added that the next steps were to agree core performance metrics, the vision / purpose and a four year delivery plan to cement the Brigade's commitment to its

communities to deliver what it has asked for, within the parameters of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (Min. No. 39.1 refers).

RESOLVED - That Members noted the verbal update.

39. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

39.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 – 2028/29

The Treasurer gave a detailed presentation outlining:

- National Policy Issues
- Spending Review
- Fair Funding Review 2 – consultation proposal
- Forecasts 2026/27 to 2028/29
- Asset Management Plan
- Recommended Strategy for Managing Forecast Deficit

The Treasurer reported that the proposed Fair Funding Review 2 changes were extremely disappointing and meant that the Authority was facing total budget cuts of £2.973m, assuming Council Tax is increased in line with forecast referendum limits. This includes the impact of a forecast Government funding reduction of £2.416m which is 81% of the forecast deficit.

The Treasurer provided Members with the following three interdependent proposals to address the budget deficit:

Proposal 1 – Council Tax

The strategy is based on using available Council Tax flexibility to secure recurring local income to reduce the forecast deficit to the lower figure of £2.973m. The Authority needs to recognise that not using available Council Tax flexibility reduces recurring resources and the only viable option for replacing this income is additional recurring service cuts.

Proposal 2 – Use of Budget Support Fund

The Authority has previously earmarked a Budget Support Fund to manage the impact of national funding reforms. In previous years use of the funding has been limited, with £0.294m approved to support the 2025/26 Revenue Budget, leaving £2.563m currently uncommitted. This is a temporary solution to a permanent reduction in recurring funding and simply defers a budget deficit to a later year.

Therefore, use of the Budget Support Fund should only be used in the context of also implementing proposals 1 and 3. On the basis of Members approving both these proposals the Treasurer will be able to support the use of £1.345m of this reserve (i.e. 53%) to support the 2026/27 revenue budget.

39.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 – 2028/29 cont.

Adopting both these principles will enable the Treasurer to also discharge his statutory responsibility and confirm to the Authority when the final budget proposals are approved that they are robust.

Proposal 3 – Development of robust savings plan

Adoption of proposal 1 and 2 will enable the 2026/27 budget to be set without requiring service cuts to be implemented from April 2026.

The Treasurer reported that if the Authority does not wish to support the budget using available Council Tax flexibility in 2026/27 the reduction on recurring income of £0.995m will need to be replaced by identifying recurring savings from 1 April 2026 to ensure the budget position does not become unmanageable.

He added that at this early stage the forecasts in the report do not include any budget pressures which may emerge as part of the detailed budget review which has not yet commenced. Details of any emerging issues will be reported in the next MTFS update, although given the scale of the forecast deficit every effort will be made to minimise any unavoidable net budget pressures.

The Chair thanked the Treasurer for presenting the stark details of the Brigade's financial position. Councillor Allen recognised the frustration of being a well-run service which may be severely impacted by the government settlement.

The CFO informed Members that he would have to look at response arrangements and acknowledged that the budget deficit would impact morale and the ability to have a diverse workforce. He highlighted to Members that the Brigade was already operating against a unique backdrop of high hazard industries and social deprivation and nationally was considered a metropolitan fire service, but without equivalent funding provision.

He added that he had written to all four local MPs outlining the Brigade's funding situation and had received a response from two to date. He had also met with Chief Executives of the local authorities and will be writing to the new Fire Minister to ensure they are fully aware of the funding situation. In addition, the CFO confirmed that he had the full support of the trade unions at this stage.

The Treasurer outlined the timetable for reporting to the Authority and confirmed that an update would be brought to the 17 October 2025 meeting.

RECOMMENDED – That at the full Authority meeting on 17 October 2025 Members:-

- (i) **Note the report and the phasing of the net forecast three-year budget deficit of £2.973m detailed in paragraph 7.4.**
- (ii) **Approve the proposed strategy for managing the forecast net deficit as detailed in paragraph 7.6.**
- (iii) **Approve the proposal to bring forward the replacement of 6 Fire Appliances and to approve:**
 - (a) **The revised phasing of £2.280m of capital expenditure.**

39.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 – 2028/29 cont.

- (b) **The allocation of £0.308m to meet rephased loan repayment costs from the earlier replacement of fire appliances from either (a) revenue budget**

underspend achieved in the current year, or if this is insufficient (b) forecast investment income.

- (c) Note the recurring revenue cost of £0.139m of approving this proposal from 2028/29 is reflected in the updated MTFS forecasts.
- (d) Note this position will be reviewed when the provisional settlement is received.

- 40. **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 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.”
- 41. **CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**
RESOLVED - that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee on 4 July 2025 be confirmed.
- 42. **CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**
 - 42.1 **Procurement Update Report**
Members received details relating to contract letting procedures, exemptions to contract procedure rules and future procurement plans.
 - 42.2 **Provision of Smoke Alarms – Tender Acceptance**
The CFO presented the outcomes of the procurement exercise for the provision of smoke alarms.
 - 42.3 **Cleveland Fire Brigade Risk Management Services C.I.C**
The CFO provided Members with a verbal update on changes associated with the community interest company.

COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR