
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

25 NOVEMBER 2022



PRESENT

CHAIR

Councillor Paul Kirton – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Ben Clayton

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Tom Mawston

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Lynn Hall

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mary Ovens

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer

BRIGADE OFFICERS

Tracy Hall – Intelligence Manager

APOLOGIES:

Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer

ACFO – Strategic Planning & Resources

ACFO – Community Protection

Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council

Councillor Jean O'Donnell – Stockton on Tees Council

68. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

69. MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee on 23 September 2022 and Executive (Appeal) Committee on 5 October 2022 be confirmed.

70. REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

70.1 Community & Workforce Profiles - Presentation

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) reported that the Authority's Digital Transformation Strategy was built upon a business platform called 'The Bridge' designed to explore the use of technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Brigade's business processes over the next four years.

He informed Members that the Brigade had launched its new 'live' digital community and workforce profiles which in the past have been captured within traditional paper-based reports that were resource intensive and only updated on an annual basis.

70.1 Community & Workforce Profiles - Presentation cont.

These will now be regularly updated by the Risk and Performance team and easily accessed by staff through The Bridge and can be used to:

- Improve the targeting of our community safety activity
- Improve access to our communities and them to us
- Improve the targeting of our positive action campaigns with a view to better diversifying our workforce

The CFO welcomed Intelligence Manager Tracy Hall to the meeting to give a detailed demonstration of the Community & Workforce Profiles on the Bridge.

Members welcomed the use of technology to ensure resources are better targeted across communities. They also recognised the increase in staff reporting their sexuality as a positive change which reflects the inclusive culture of the Brigade.

The CFO informed Members that a recruitment freeze on firefighters over the last decade of austerity left the Brigade with an ageing workforce and work was underway to change that profile with apprenticeship schemes, as detailed at Min. No. 70.4.

RESOLVED – That the outcomes of the presentation be noted and further reports be received as appropriate.

70.2 HMICFRS State of Fire & Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire & Rescue Services in England 2022

The CFO informed Members that His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Andy Cooke QPM DL had written to request advice and assistance in preparation for the annual assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of Fire and Rescue Authorities in England 2022, as detailed at Appendix 1.

He referred Members to the response prepared at Appendix 2 which covered seven key areas including: fire reform; the second round of inspections; learning from Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report; challenges achieving people priorities; challenges providing public value; and challenges achieving a more representative workforce which reflects the communities.

Members thanked the Chief and Chair for providing a clear and concise response. The CFO confirmed that the Brigade was awaiting the results of the second round of tranche three inspections which was expected early 2023.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) **That the request from His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Andy Cooke QPM DL for advice and assistance in preparation for the annual assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue authorities in England 2022, attached at appendix 1, be noted.**
- (ii) **That the joint response of the Chair and CFO to the above request, attached at Appendix 1, be noted.**

70.3 Annual Statement of Assurance 2021/22

Members considered the Annual Statement of Assurance 2021/22, outlined at Appendix 1, which contained details relating to financial, governance and operational matters. The CFO reported that this document was a statutory requirement produced in line with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012 and had been scrutinised by the Audit & Governance Committee on 18 November 2022.

Councillor Ovens commended the report for giving assurances to the public.

Councillor Mawston referred to the NFCC Building Risk Review Programme at 3.14 of Appendix 1 and welcomed the assurance that the 21 buildings identified as high rise across Cleveland were captured in this programme. The CFO confirmed that following the Grenfell Tragedy every high rise building in the Brigade area was inspected with a bespoke plan for each building which crews have trained, exercised and prepared for.

RESOLVED – that, as recommended by the Audit & Governance Committee on 18 November 2022, the Annual Statement of Assurance 2021/22 be approved.

70.4 Apprenticeship Strategy 2022-26

The CFO outlined the Brigade's Apprenticeship Strategy 2022-26 which has been developed to support workforce planning, workforce development and succession planning arrangements.

He referred Members to the Strategy at Appendix 1 which sets out: the Brigade's 'apprenticeship first' approach; the aims and actions needed to achieve them: the apprenticeship levy, governance and equality and diversity considerations; plans for 2022-26; and pay rates for apprenticeships.

Members welcomed the strategy and acknowledged that it had the support of the trade unions. The CFO confirmed that the Brigade would be running a wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign in 2023 and while the aim is always to recruit the best, they would take cognisance of the need for diversification.

The Chair highlighted the Brigade's excellent pay rates for apprentices which came in high above the £4.85 living wage. The CFO agreed that this living wage rate was not considered to be 'appropriate' in the current climate.

Councillor Clayton referred to the fire engineering apprenticeships and asked if there would be a skills gap in the Brigade while they are undergoing training. The CFO confirmed that the Fire Engineering Department comprised both uniformed and corporate staff and a number of the corporate staff had left for competitive salaries in the private sector, leaving a skills gap and the need for succession planning.

RESOLVED – that the Brigade's Apprenticeship Strategy 2022-26, attached at Appendix 1, which supports workforce planning, workforce development and succession planning, be noted.

71. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER**71.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 - 2025/26**

The Treasurer provided a detailed update on the Authority's MTFS which integrates the revenue budget, Asset Management Plan, and Reserves Strategy and underpins the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). The report covered:

- Changes in recurring funding 2013/14 to 2022/23
- Low council tax base
- Impact of previous budget reductions
- Impact of Economic Environment on MTFS Forecasts
- Update of MTFS Forecasts
- Local Government Funding Settlement and Fair Funding Review
- National Pay Awards
- Government funding 2023/24 onwards
- Pension Grant
- Council Tax Referendum Limits
- Revised forecast deficits based on core planning assumptions 2023/24 to 2025/26
- Core planning assumptions 2022/23 to 2025/26
- Planning scenarios – Alternative potential budget deficits 2023/24 to 2025/26
- Asset Management Plan (AMP)

The Treasurer confirmed that this was without doubt the most difficult and uncertain budget position the Authority had ever faced with potentially two unsettled pay awards at the point of budget setting and a deficit of between £1.8 and £2.4m for 2023/24.

He reported that at this stage there was too much uncertainty and variability regarding the actual deficit to be faced by the Authority to enable a detailed strategy to be developed and put forward for Members consideration. The announcement of the provisional 2023/24 Local Government Finance Settlement, including confirmation of the actual Council Tax referendum limit, will be a key milestone and provide funding certainty. Detailed proposals to address the budget deficit will then be developed and reported in line with the budget timetable as follows:

- 9 Dec 2022 - Full Authority to consider the MTFS update report
- 20 Jan 2023 - Executive Committee to receive the updated MTFS to reflect the 2023/24 Local Government Settlement and to determine proposals to be referred to the Full Authority.
- 10 Feb 2023 – Full Authority to consider recommendations from the Executive

The Treasurer confirmed that the strategy to address the deficit will be based on a combination of identification of budget saving which can be implemented over the period 2023/24 to 2025/26; use of interest income; and use of the Budget Support Fund. Work is ongoing to update the AMP as inflation will increase the cost of the approved programme and details will be reported in line with the budget timetable

71.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 - 2025/26 cont.

He reported that additional costs will need to be funded from a combination of value engineering, re-assessing priorities and potentially additional prudential borrowing. This includes the additional £191k required to fund the Drill Towers due to the impact of construction industry inflation (Min. No. 74.2 refers).

Councillor Mawston congratulated the Treasurer on providing the detail of the report based on the limited information available from government and the level of uncertainty surrounding pay awards and inflation.

The CFO referred to the Planning Scenarios set out in the table on page 9 and reminded Members that the Authority had already had £12m taken out of the budget over the past nine years, leaving minimal room for further efficiencies without significant risks to jobs. He added that the Authority had nothing left to absorb the cuts this time round and needed a fair funding allocation to continue delivering services to those who are most vulnerable in society.

Councillor Mawston asked if the existence of the Brigade was under threat. The CFO stated that a 'failing authority' is no longer able to deliver the level of services that the community needs. Councillor Mawston acknowledged that this was due to inefficiencies in central government and not through the bad management of the Authority.

Councillor Ovens recognised that low council tax rates were a key issue for the Authority and would not wish to impose a greater burden on local people already struggling to pay it.

The Chair confirmed that the CFO and himself had attended a number of meetings with Jill Mortimer MP (Conservative, Hartlepool) who now understands that the formula is wrong for this Authority and consequently wrote to request a meeting with the Fire Minister to lobby for a fairer funding formula for Cleveland.

Councillor Clayton agreed the funding formula was completely wrong and relying on council tax to fund local services was not working and it was time for the Government to step in and fund services.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That Members referred the report to the Authority meeting on 9th December 2022 to ensure all Members are aware of the increased financial challenges facing the Authority and the timetable for setting the 2023/24 budget and Council Tax level.**
- (ii) Approve the proposal that a strategy to address the budget deficit is developed in line with the principles detailed in paragraph 5.11 once the 2023/24 Local Government funding announcement has been made.**
- (iii) Note the Chief Fire Officer will progress the Drill Towers capital project and a funding strategy for the increased costs will be developed as part of the next MTFS report in line with the principles detailed in paragraph 6.6.**

- 72. 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, 4 and 7 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; namely information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.”
- 73. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**
RESOLVED - that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee on 23 September 2022 and Executive (Appeals) Committee on 5 October 2022 be confirmed.
- 74. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**
- 74.1 Procurement Report**
Members received details relating to contract letting procedures, exemptions to contract procedure rule and future procurement plans.
- 74.2 Provision of Specialist Works and Installation of New Drill Training Towers – Tender Acceptance**
Members considered tender submissions for the specialist works and installation of new drill training towers.
- 74.3 Pay Claim / Industrial Action**
The CFO and Chair provided a verbal update to Members on an ongoing issue.
- 74.4 Health & Safety Executive – Accident Investigation**
Members received an update on this accident investigation.
- 74.5 Collaboration on Fire Control Mobilisation Systems**
The CFO provided Members with details of an opportunity to pursue a collaborative procurement of fire control mobilisation and integrated communications.

COUNCILLOR PAUL KIRTON
CHAIR