

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING

13 FEBRUARY 2026



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Cllr David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Gary Allen, Bob Buchan, Chris Wallace

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Cllr Naweed Hussain, Dennis McCabe, John Kabuye

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Peter Chaney, Mary Ovens, David Taylor

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Jim Beall, John Gardner, Stefan Houghton, Andrew Sherris, Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer, Treasurer,

ACFO - Director of Strategic Planning, People & Resources

ACFO - Director of Service Delivery

Area Manager – Assistant Director of Operations

Area Manager – Assistant Director of Prevention, Protection & Planning

Assistant Director of Assets

Assistant Director of Governance & Assurance

FORVIS MAZARS

Jack Brown – Audit Manager

James Collins - Audit Director

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE TEAM

Station Manager Marty Challenor

Watch Manager Tim Jackson

Jacqueline Mason – Operational Assurance Assistant

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

Chris Porter – Cleveland Acting Chair (Observing)

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Steve Kay – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

84. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTEREST

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

85. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of proceedings of the Ordinary meeting on 5 December 2025 be confirmed.

86. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 23 January 2026 be confirmed.

87. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR

No communications were received by the Chair.

88. JOINT REPORT OF TREASURER AND CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

88.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2028/29 (including 2026/27 Budget and Council Tax Setting)

The Chair agreed that Members considered this report as the first item on the agenda. The Treasurer provided Members with a detailed presentation providing an updated MTFS 2026/27 - 2028/29 which included the final local government settlement and tabled the following appendices:

- Appendix F - Statutory Calculations
- Appendix G - Revenue Budget

He informed Members that the early approval of the 3 interdependent principles, detailed at section 3 of the report, had supported a clear strategic direction to address the significant budget deficit for 2026/27-2028/29. The updated presentation covered:

- 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement
- Impact of Settlement on the MTFS
- Conclusion and Robustness Advice
- Impact on Households of Council Tax Increases

The Treasurer reported that the final government settlement increased the Floor Funding Grant which increased Core Spending Power (CSP) by 3.8% for 2026/27. This was the amount requested by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and supported by this Authority. This provides the Authority with an additional £0.572m, front loaded in 2026/27 and reduces the 2026/27 deficit and total deficit by this amount.

While the settlement was not as bad as forecast the Authority still faces a gross forecast deficit over the next three years of £1.198m which would increase to £3.746m without annual £5 Council Tax increases. The Treasurer proposed that the net deficit for 2026/27 of £0.402m should be funded from the Budget Support Fund and the CFO would need to develop detailed savings plan to identify cuts of £1.198m deferred from 2026/27 with £0.707m to be implemented no later than April 2027. The remaining savings of £0.491m would need to be implemented from April 2028.

He highlighted the impact of the settlement on the Authority's Core Spending Power (CSP) which will increase by just 6.3% over the next three years against a national average increase of 12.5% with four authorities gaining increases over 20%.

For Cleveland, this low increase in CSP is due to a reduction in Government funding of £1m between 2025/26 and 2028/29 and the forecast increase in Council Tax income reflecting the £5 Band D Referendum Limit. This leaves the Authority at risk from managing the uncertainty of national pay awards and inflation and the Treasurer noted that a 10% CSP would have given the Authority an additional CSP increase of £1.3m, which would have reduced the next three-year deficit of £1.198m significantly.

88.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2028/29 (including 2026/27 Budget and Council Tax Setting) cont.

The Treasurer referred Members to the tables at section 6 which set out the annual deficits 2026/27 to 2028/29 to reflect the impact of the settlement, with and without the £5 Council Tax increase, and the scenarios for identifying those savings against the added risks of national pay awards for Grey and Green Book staff and non-pay inflation.

He reported that in Cleveland, the £5 Council Tax increase equated to 6p per week for Band A households which make up 45% of households in the Brigade area. Band D households (9.3%) would receive an increase of 9p per week. He highlighted to Members that not utilising the Council Tax referendum limits would require significantly higher cuts to services equating to 62 firefighter posts versus 20 with the £5 increase.

He stressed to Members that fundamental changes to the national funding system from 2026 creates uncertainty around the Fair Funding Allocations from 2029/30 and the Floor Funding Grant, a new grant from 2026 to support five fire and rescue services (including Cleveland), to manage the transition to the new national funding system which by 2028/29 will be £2.1m (5.4%) of the Authority's CSP.

The Treasurer referred Members to the Asset Management Plan (AMP) covering capital expenditure from 2025/26 to 2029/30 which includes the reduction of the number of fire appliances to be re-phased from 6 to 5 and these savings be used to address the capital funding shortfall for Fire Behaviour Training Units (FBTU).

Members had the opportunity to fully read the tabled appendices and asked for further clarity on why the government settlement for Cleveland was so poor compared to other fire and rescue services.

The Treasurer reported that the funding had been allocated based on population numbers and failed to address the high hazard risks and levels of deprivation in Cleveland. The CFO confirmed he had reiterated to government that Cleveland is widely viewed as a metropolitan fire service but not funded accordingly and had invited Ministers to visit the area to gain a greater understanding of the risks.

The Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer (LAMO) informed Members that in line with best practice a vote would be recorded on the budget decision. Votes were cast and Members unanimously supported the recommendations from the Executive Committee, which had been updated to reflect the latest information tabled at Appendices E and F.

RESOLVED – That as recommended by the Executive Committee on 23 January 2026 the following proposals be approved:

- i) **That the national reliance on Council Tax increases to fund 75% of the forecast national Core Spending Power increase over the next three years (detailed in paragraph 4.4) be noted.**
- ii) **That the detrimental impact of the 2026/27 settlement on the Authority's grant allocation and reliance on Council Tax to partly mitigate the impact on Core Spending Power over the next three years (detailed in paragraph 5.4) be noted.**

88.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2028/29 (including 2026/27 Budget and Council Tax Setting) cont.

- iii) That Members confirmed the previously approved strategy to reduce the gross forecast deficit from £3.746m to £1.198m which is based on the following measures:
- Implementing a 2026/27 Band D Council Tax increase of £5, with the same increases being approved in future years for 2027/28 and 2028/29 (subject to annual confirmation of the Council Tax referendum limit by the Government);
 - Using £0.402m of the Budget Support Fund to balance the 2026/27 budget, noting this measure defers this deficit to 2027/28;
 - Instruct the Chief Fire Officer to submit a savings plan by July 2026 to identify cuts of £1.198m, with £0.707m to be implemented from April 2027 and the remaining £0.491m from April 2028.
 - To note that implementation of the savings plan may need to be supported by using the Budget Support Fund in either 2027/28 or 2028/29 to manage the phasing of retirements / leavers to achieve the necessary permanent savings. This issue will be addressed in the July report.
- iv) Members approved the following detailed Council Tax amounts for 2026/27

Council Tax Band	2026/27 Council Tax	Annual increase	Weekly increase (approximate)	% households
A	£66.31	£3.33	6p	45.1%
B	£77.36	£3.89	7p	18.7%
C	£88.41	£4.44	9p	18.3%
D	£99.46	£5.00	10p	9.3%
E	£121.56	£6.11	12p	5.3%
F	£143.66	£7.22	14p	2.1%
G	£165.77	£8.33	16p	1.1%
H	£198.92	£10.00	20p	0.1%

- v) Members approved the proposal to manage any 2026/27 changes in resources between the provisional and final settlement, plus any changes in the final notifications from the four councils, by increasing / decreasing use of the Budget Support Fund. Members noted that these details will be reported to the Authority on 13th February 2026.
- vi) Members noted the risk scenarios to the revenue budget 2026/27 to 2028/29 detailed in section 6 and the financial outlook for 2029/30 detailed in section 7.
- vii) Members confirmed the Reserves Strategy detailed in section 8 which underpins the MTFS, AMP and ongoing financial planning.
- viii) Members approved the Asset Management Plan amendments detailed in section 9, which reduce the number of fire appliances to be rephased from 6 to 5, with the resulting capital saving being allocated towards the Fire Behaviour Training Units (FBTUs). To also approve the allocation of the Collection Fund surplus (once confirmed) as a revenue contribution towards the remaining FBTUs capital funding shortfall.

88.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2028/29 (including 2026/27 Budget and Council Tax Setting) cont.

- ix) Members noted the Treasurers statutory robust advice detailed in paragraphs 10.8 to 10.10.
- x) That Members approved the supporting 2026/27 statutory budget and council tax calculations detailed in Appendices F and G, which were tabled at the meeting owing to the timing of the final 2026/27 Local Government Finance Settlement.

89. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

89.1 Organisational Assurance Departmental Presentation

Members received a detailed presentation outlining the role of the Organisational Assurance Team. The Chair thanked the Team for the insight into the departments work.

RESOLVED - That Members noted the presentation.

89.2 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2026-30 – Development and Agreement of a new purpose for Cleveland Fire Brigade

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning, People & Resources (ACFO – SPPR) provided Members with details outlining the engagement process undertaken with the workforce to develop a new purpose for the organisation for inclusion in the next CRMP covering 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2030.

This was to replace the existing Vision and Mission which staff feedback considered too wordy and difficult to recall. A two-stage engagement approach was taken with a survey launched on 5 December inviting colleagues to propose ideas for the Brigade's new Purpose with 28 high level responses submitted. The next stage was to ask staff to vote for their preferred Purpose with 247 votes cast and the clear overall favourite being 'Protecting, People, Places and Futures', which the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) agreed was aligned with the strategic direction of the new CRMP and was clear, memorable and easy to communicate.

Cllr Chaney supported the process of involving staff in choosing the purpose and asked what cost was involved. The ACFO-SPPR confirmed there was no cost implications other than the time taken to complete a short survey. She added that the next step was to review corporate branding to ensure the new 'purpose' was embedded across the organisations documents, frameworks, plans and communications over the next four years.

RESOLVED – That Members noted process undertaken and endorsed the new Purpose for Cleveland Fire Brigade: 'Protecting People, Places and Futures'.

89.3 Review of Scale of Charges 2026/27

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) presented the Authority's Scale of Charges which had been fully reviewed for 2026/27 for implementation from 1 April 2026. The review was undertaken in agreement with the Treasurer and entailed a 4% uplift to all pay-related elements to reflect the Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast pay award and a 3.5% uplift to all non-pay items based on the November 2025 CPI figure.

89.3 Review of Scale of Charges 2026/27 cont.

The CFO confirmed that the Scale of Charges had been approved in line with the delegation scheme and will be published on the Brigade website by 31 March 2026. Councillor Kabuye asked for information regarding the revenue generated from the charges. The CFO agreed to provide this information to Members.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the Scale of Charges for 2026/27 to be implemented with effect of 1 April 2026.

89.4 Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG)

Members received details relating to the Government publication Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, the NFCC Guidance: Statement of Commitment and the Authority's commitment to White Ribbon.

The ACFO-SPPR reported that every year, 1 in 12 women are subjected to violence including domestic abuse, sexual abuse and stalking and 1 in 4 experience this at some point in their lifetime. She confirmed her role as a VAWG lead officer feeding back to the NFCC.

The CFO confirmed his role as a White Ribbon advocate and reminded Members that the Brigade's wholtime fire stations were safe havens for anyone in distress or feeling threatened. He reported that the organisation was ahead of other fire and rescue services with its commitment to tackle VAWG, with a growing number of White Ribbon ambassadors and champions throughout the organisation.

Cllr Kabuye confirmed that himself and Cllr Coupe were leading the VAWG work at Middlesbrough Council and offered their support to delivering further information to Members.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Guidance: Statement of Commitment and development of guidance be noted.**
- (ii) That the update on the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy be noted.**
- (iii) That Members receive further details on become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.**

89.5 Electronic Payslips and Reports – Verbal Update

The ACFO-SPPR provided Members with an update on the use of MyView to access electronic payslips from 1 April 2026 and the move away from issuing paper copies of reports from 5 June 2026.

Members supported this and highlighted the need to have the technology in place to access power points and Wi-Fi in the conference rooms. The Assistant Director of Assets (ADoA) gave assurances that the rooms were flexible to accommodate Members needs and that IT support would be available to ensure a smooth transition.

RESOLVED – That the verbal update be noted.

89.6 Information Pack

89.6.1 National Joint Circulars

89.6.2 Campaigns

RESOLVED – that the information pack be noted.

90. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

90.1 Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 and 3rd Quarter 2025/26 Review

The Treasurer provided a review of Treasury Management activity for 2024/25, including the 2024/25 outturn Prudential Indicators, and provided a second quarter update of 2025/26 Treasury Management activity. This covered:

- Economic Background and Outlook for Interest Rates
- Treasury Management Outturn Position 2024/25
- Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 2nd Quarter Review
- Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27
- Borrowing Strategy 2026/27
- Investment Strategy 2025/26
- Minimum Revenue Provision and Interest Costs and Other Regulatory Information 2026/27

The Treasurer advised Members that the investment strategy will provide a one-off income in 2025/26 of £863k, and recommended this amount be earmarked as a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP) for use by the Authority to reduce the overall level of borrowing to fund capital expenditure or be released over multiple years by reducing Minimum Revenue Provision. These options will be presented in a future Treasury Management Strategy and MTFS to reflect the financial position of the Authority at that time.

RESOLVED – That as recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee on 21 November 2025, the following recommendations were approved:

- That the 2024/25 Treasury Management outturn detailed in Section 5 and Appendix A be noted.**
- That the 2025/26 Treasury Management third quarter position detailed in section 6 be noted.**
- That the prudential indicators outlined in Appendix C be approved.**
- Borrowing Strategy 2026/27**
That the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) i.e. capital borrowing requirement is funded from short-term borrowing until such time as long term interest rates reduce to a sustainable level be approved.
That the proposal to use any temporary revenue budget savings arising from temporary borrowing interest being less than budgeted to make earmarked contributions to the Capital Phasing Reserve. These amounts can then either be used to reduce the CFR, or offset future higher longer term borrowing costs if these arise be approved.
- Investment Strategy 2026/27**
That the Counterparty limits as set out in paragraph 9.7 be approved.

90.1 Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 and 3rd Quarter 2025/26 Review cont.

vi) Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP) Statement

That Members approved the following MRP statement:

- **For capital expenditure incurred before 1st April, 2008 the Authority's MRP policy is to calculate MRP in accordance with former DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) Regulations. This is 4% of the Capital Financing Requirement except where the Authority makes Voluntary Revenue Payments (VRP) which is in excess of the amount required by these regulations, based on asset life;**
- **From 1st April, 2008 the Authority calculates MRP based on asset life for all assets or where prudential borrowing is financed by a specific annuity loan, MRP will be calculated according to the actual annuity loan repayments;**
- **The Authority approves the allocation of the 2025/26 forecast investment income of £0.863m to make a Voluntary Revenue Provision (VRP) payment to reduce the Authority's overall Capital Financing Requirement (i.e. total amount of borrowing required).**
- **Members noted that after reflecting the above VRP amount the cumulative VRP at 31.03.26 will be £1.163m. This amount will either be held to (a) permanently reduce the Capital Financing Requirement, or (b) to reduce future MRP payments by at least £0.250m per year for 4 years, which will effectively extend this level of support for the revenue beyond 2028/29, as detailed in paragraph 6.4. The decision between options (a) and (b) will be made within a future Treasury Management Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy to reflect the financial position of the Authority at the time.**

91. JOINT REPORT OF TREASURER AND FORVIS MAZARS

91.1 The Financial Report 2024/25 and Audit Completion Report

The Treasurer provided Members with an update on the process for approving the 2024/25 Financial Report (including the Statement of Accounts) in light of the Authority being unable to produce Group Accounts following liquidation of the CFB RMS C.I.C in July 2025.

He reported that the Authority's draft Statement of Accounts were produced ahead of the 30 June 2025 deadline and had been scrutinised by the Audit & Governance Committee on 27 June 2025 and published on the Brigade website.

The statutory deadline for 2024/25 audits, owing to national backlog, had moved from 30 September 2025 to 27 February 2026. However, while the audit was substantially complete Forvis Mazars were unable to express an opinion on the financial statements and value for money arrangements due to the absence of Group Accounts due to the liquidation of the C.I.C..

In mitigation, the Treasurer confirmed that a Post Balance Sheet Event had been added to the 2024/25 financial statement at page 61 (Note 37) to provide a narrative around why the Authority received a disclaimed audit opinion.

91.1 The Financial Report 2024/25 and Audit Completion Report cont.

He added that in his capacity as Section 151 Officer he could assure Members that there was no impact on the useable reserves which underpin the MTFS and also noted that the net liability of the C.I.C. to the Authority was £1.

The Audit Director (AD) referred Members to the draft Audit Completion Report (ACR) at Appendix B and confirmed that the Authority's inability to produce Group Accounts had restricted the scope of the audit. He explained that the 'Disclaimed Opinion' indicated that the Financial Statement had not been audited and the value for money commentary was also outstanding.

He informed Members that two areas of significant weakness had been identified in the audit relating to the inability to produce Group Accounts due to the liquidation of the C.I.C. and issues relating to its governance.

Councillor Allen asked if this was the first time the Authority has been unable to produce Group Accounts. The AD confirmed the Authority had never received a modified audit in the past. The Treasurer reported that the Audit & Governance Committee had received a full report on the C.I.C. which clearly documented the lessons learned.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the 2024/25 Financial Report (including the statement of accounts) attached at Appendix A be approved.
- (ii) That the Audit Completion Report (ACR) tabled at Appendix B be noted.
- (iii) That Members noted that the Management Representation Letter will be issued once the audit has concluded.
- (iv) That Members noted and agreed that should a material accounting error be identified in the outstanding work which does not result in a change to the Authority's useable reserves, but requires amendments to the Financial Report, that these amendments are actioned and delegated authority be given to the Treasurer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

92. 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 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."

93. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of proceedings of the Ordinary meeting on 5 December 2025 be confirmed.

94. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 28 November 2025 be confirmed.

The CFO provided Members with a confidential update relating to the complaint referenced at Min. No. 65.1.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR**