

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

24 JANUARY 2025



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Councillor David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Dennis McCabe

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Peter Chaney

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer,

Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning & Resources

Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Community Protection

Senior Head of Assets

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Bob Buchan, Ben Clayton – Hartlepool Borough Council

Councillor Sufi Mubeen – Stockton Borough Council

Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer

76. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

77. MINUTES

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee on 15 November 2024 be confirmed.

78. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

78.1 Worker Protection Act 2023

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with details of this recent legislation relating to employers taking positive and proactive reasonable steps to prevent the sexual harassment of their workers. The Act came into force on 26 October 2024 and steps were already underway by the HR Team to comply with the requirements with staff attending fire-specific workshops delivered by the Equality & Human Rights Commission.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning & Resources (ACFO-SPR) confirmed that work was also underway across the sector to help staff identify what constitutes sexual harassment and within the Brigade to ensure these conversations become part of everyday culture.

78.1 Worker Protection Act 2023 cont.

The ACFO – Community Protection (CP) gave Members further assurance that learning from legacy discipline cases will also be used by managers to raise awareness and strengthen the conversation around sexual harassment.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

78.2 HR Policy Updates

Members considered a suite of HR policies which had been updated in line with the Brigade's Key Document Framework and to reflect recent changes to the Authority's Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policy following legislative changes. These were:

- Secondment Policy & Procedure
- Redeployment Policy and Procedure
- Redundancy Policy and Procedure

The CFO confirmed that the policies had been equality impact assessed in line with the Brigade's procedure with no detrimental impact on any group of staff, including those with one or more protected characteristic.

RESOLVED – that the changes to the Authority's Secondment, Redeployment and Redundancy policies be approved.

79. TO RECEIVE THE JOINT REPORT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & TREASURER

79.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28

The Treasurer provided an update of the Authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 and detailed proposals for the 2025/26 budget and council tax. This covered the following key areas:

- Changes in recurring resources
- Impact of previous budget reductions
- National Pay awards and inflation
- Provisional 2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement
- Core Spending Power Increases
- Impact of provisional settlement on standalone FRAs Core Spending Power
- Funding for Employers National Insurance Increase

The Treasurer reported that the 2025/26 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was published on 18 December 2024 for consultation with the final settlement expected late January 2025.

Key changes announced in the settlement which impact the Authority included: Revenue Support Grant and Top-up Grant increased in line with September CPI (£0.233m); Funding Grant Removed (-£0.294m); Services Grant Removed (-£0.065m); and forecast increase in business rates (£0.102m). This totals a forecast net decrease in resources (excluding Council Tax) of £0.024m.

79.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 cont.

The Treasurer reported that Cleveland, as a stand-alone Fire Authority, has a Core Spending Power increase for 2025/26 of 2.7% which is based on the government's assumption that authorities will use the available council tax flexibility of the £5 Band D limit. For Cleveland adopting the £5 Council Tax limit in 2025/26 will secure a recurring additional income of £0.813m which avoids having to make additional cuts to services to balance the budget.

The Treasurer outlined the following updated measures proposed to address the gross 2025/26 Budget Deficit of £2.522m:

- £0.813m Council Tax
- £0.376m Budget Support Reserves Fund
- £0.266m Tax Base Growth
- £1.067m Savings

The Treasurer stated that using the Budget Support Fund defers a deficit from 2025/26 to 2026/27 with updated planning forecasts showing a deficit for 2026/27 and 2027/28 of between £0.599m and £1.675m, dependent on national pay awards, inflation and changes to the funding system from 2026/27.

Members acknowledged the growing financial pressures households are under and also recognised the need for the Brigade to remain financially stable to be able to continue to deliver services to Cleveland, which had already seen a 33% reduction in Wholetime firefighter posts since 2013 (494 to 332).

Following discussion, Members unanimously supported the recommendation to the Authority to approve a £5 Council Tax increase, which equates to 9p per week for Band D properties. However, as most of the households in the Cleveland area are either Band A or Band B this equates to 6p or 7p per week respectively.

Members also stressed the need for clear communication so the communities of Cleveland understand the wide range of services the Brigade provide for their precept.

RECOMMENDED – That the following recommendations be made to the full Authority:

- 1. To note the final 2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement will be issued in late January 2025 (i.e. between this Executive Committee meeting and the full Authority meeting on 14th February) and any changes in the provisional figures will be reflected in the final statutory budget calculations. Based on experience in previous years, any changes are expected to be small.**
- 2. Note the provisional Core Spending Power (CSP) increase for FRAs of 2.8% (2.7% for the Authority) is less than half the national CSP increase of 6%, which reflects the prioritisation of social care within the overall settlement.**

79.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 cont.

3. Note the provisional 2025/26 CSP increase for FRAs is wholly predicated on all FRAs using the £5 Council Tax referendum limit (details paragraph 4.14 and Appendix A).
4. Note the provisional settlement details the proposed formula for allocating funding for increased employers National Insurance costs may disadvantage FRAs. The current funding assumption is the grant will fund 50% of these costs, with the remaining 50% (£0.250m) falling on the existing budget and therefore increasing the forecast 2025/26 budget deficit.
5. Note the forecast deficit scenarios for 2025/26 to 2027/28 detailed in paragraph 5.5 show a forecast deficit between £0.599m and £2.254m depending on the level of Council Tax for these years.
6. Note the robustness advice detailed in section 8 and the recommendation to fund the gross 2025/26 budget deficit from the following combination of measures:

	Value	%age of gross deficit
Budget savings	£1.067m	42%
£5 Band D Council Tax increase	£0.813m	32%
Use of Budget Support Fund	£0.376m	15%
Tax Base Growth	£0.266m	11%
Total	£2.522m	100%

7. Note use of the Budget Support Fund in 2025/26 of £0.376m defers this deficit to 2026/27 and means that a forecast deficit of between £0.599m and £1.675m will need to be addressed in 2026/27 and 2027/28.
8. Note that approving recommendation (6) will result in approximately 216,000 households (82%) having to pay a weekly increase of 9p or less, as highlighted in the following table:

2024/25		2025/26					
Annual Council Tax	Property Band	Annual Council Tax	Weekly Council Tax	Annual increase	Weekly increase (pence)	Number of households (approx.)	% households
£59.64	A	£62.97	£1.21	£3.33	6p	119,000	45.1%
£69.58	B	£73.47	£1.41	£3.89	7p	49,300	18.7%
£79.52	C	£83.96	£1.61	£4.44	9p	48,100	18.2%
£89.46	D	£94.46	£1.82	£5.00	10p	24,600	9.3%
£109.34	E	£115.45	£2.22	£6.11	11p	14,000	5.3%
£129.22	F	£136.44	£2.62	£7.22	14p	5,400	2.0%
£149.10	G	£157.43	£3.03	£8.33	15p	2,900	1.1%
£178.92	H	£188.92	£3.63	£10.00	20p	300	0.1%
						263,600	100.0%

79.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2027/28 cont.

9. Note that if the recommended £5 Band D Council tax increase is not approved recurring income will be lower and replacement budget cuts will need to be implemented. Owing to the timetable for setting the 2025/26 budget these additional budget cuts will need to be approved at the Authority meeting on 28th March 2025. The implementation timetable for savings in 2025/26 will depend on the level of consultation required for additional saving proposals.

10. Approve the Asset Management Plan detailed in Appendix B, which updates the existing approved plan.

11. Note the Reserves Review detailed in section 7, which underpins the robustness strategy and ensures the Authority maintains appropriate one-off resources to manage existing commitments phased over more than one financial year and provide some financial flexibility to manage ongoing financial uncertainties.

80. **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 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 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.”

81. **CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**
RESOLVED - that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee on 15 November 2024 be confirmed.

82. CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

82.1 HMICFRS Inspection 2023-25

The CFO provided Members with an update on the Brigade’s recent Inspection report was due early February 2025.

82.2 Priorities 2025/26

The ACFO-SPR reported that planning work was underway to set priorities for 2025/26.

82.3 Procurement Update Report

Members received details relating to contract letting procedures, exemptions to contract procedure rules and future procurement plans.

82.4 Provision of Microsoft MPSA and Enterprise Software

The CFO outlined the results of the Brigade analysis of the tenders received for the provision of Microsoft Licensing - contract award.

82.5 Provision of Battery Powered Rescue Tools

Members considered the results of the Brigade analysis of the tenders received for the provision of rescue tools - contract award.

82.6 Provision of Aerial Ladder Platform

The CFO outlined the results of the Brigade analysis of the tenders received for the provision of an aerial ladder platform - contract award.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR**