
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF ORDINARY MEETING

8 DECEMBER 2023



PRESENT:

CHAIR

Cllr David Coupe – Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllr Ben Clayton

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs John Kabuye, Naweed Hussain

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Peter Chaney, Steve Kay, David Taylor

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllrs Stefan Houghton, Sufi Mubeen, Mick Stoker

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

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

Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Strategic Planning & Resources

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Community Protection

MAZARS

Mr Gavin Barker - Audit Engagement Lead

APOLOGIES:

Councillors Henry Ashton, Tom Cassidy – Hartlepool Borough Council

Councillor Dennis McCabe – Middlesbrough Council

Councillor Mary Ovens – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Councillors Jim Beall, John Gardner – Stockton Borough Council

The Chair informed Members that an amended agenda had been issued to include Mazars' Draft Auditors Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2022 (Min. No. 62.2 refers).

57. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTEREST

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

58. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of proceedings of the Ordinary Meeting of 13 October 2023 be confirmed.

Councillor Kay asked for the amended minutes from the 9 June 2023 Annual Meeting to be circulated detailing his appointment as Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee.

The Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer (LAMO) confirmed they had been amended and circulated following the 13 October 2023 meeting and published on the Brigade website.

59. MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 17 November 2023 and Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 24 November 2023, be confirmed.

60. COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY THE CHAIR

Communications were received from:

- LGA – Local Government Services Pay Agreement 2023
- Lee Rowley MP – Response to CFA Fire Funding Letter

61. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

61.1 Annual Statement of Assurance 2022/23

Members considered the Annual Statement of Assurance 2022/23, 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 24 November 2023.

RESOLVED – that, as recommended by the Audit & Governance Committee on 24 November 2023, the Annual Statement of Assurance 2022/23 be approved.

61.2 Information Pack

61.2.2 Campaigns

Councillor Kabuye asked whether e-bikes and e-scooters posed an increased risk on the roads over the Christmas period. The CFO confirmed that the main risk was from the potential for the batteries to explode while charging and cause fires in homes.

Councillor Taylor confirmed there had been an influx of e-scooters in his ward and suggested the Brigade might consider a shared campaign with the local authorities.

RESOLVED – that the information pack be noted.

62. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

62.1 Final 2021/22 Financial Report & Follow-up Letter to Audit Completion Report

The Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) informed Members that the Draft 2021/22 accounts had been presented to the Audit & Governance Committee for scrutiny on 18 November 2022, however, could not be approved due to outstanding assurances from the Pension Fund auditors and outstanding work relating to Property, Plant and Equipment which was now completed. He reported that additional delays were encountered by Teesside Pension Fund carrying out a triennial review in March 2023 which resulted in changes to the Authority's 2021/22 pension actuarial reports.

The AEL confirmed that the final audit opinion required the final financial statements to be approved by the Full Authority and informed Members that once the audit activity was concluded the Authority was required to issue a Management Letter of Representation to Mazars. This letter sets out the responsibilities and representations made by officers and confirms the accuracy and completeness of the information that management have provided to auditors.

Members sought assurances that similar delays would not be encountered with the 2022/23 audit. The AEL acknowledged that the return to a pre-pandemic deadline of signing off audits by the end of September was unrealistic. He confirmed that resources were in place to 'blitz' the Authority's 2022/23 audit in the new year with the aim of completing it by 31 March 2024.

62.1 Final 2021/22 Financial Report & Follow-up Letter to Audit Completion Report cont. RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the final 2021/22 Financial Report attached at Appendix A be approved.
- (ii) That the follow-up letter from Mazars attached at Appendix B be noted.
- (iii) That Members noted that the Management Letter of Representation will be issued once the audit activity on the Teesside Pension Fund has concluded.

62.2 Draft Auditors Annual Report – Year Ended 31 March 2022 - Tabled

The AEL thanked Members for allowing him to table this draft report which covered the audit of the financial statements and commentary on value for money arrangements and was required to allow Mazars to close down the 2021/22 audit before the end of December 2023.

He outlined a positive report with no significant issues identified and highlighted the Authority's financial sustainability in extremely challenging times. He also described the Authority as having very effective governance and providing lots of challenge through the Audit & Governance Committee which receives unparalleled performance information on the Authority's priorities.

RESOLVED – That Members approved the Draft Auditors Annual Report for the Year ended 31 March 2022.

63. 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, 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."

64. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of proceedings of the Ordinary Meeting of 13 October 2023 be confirmed.

65. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED – that the Confidential Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 17 November 2023 be confirmed.

66. CONFIDENTIAL JOINT REPORT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

66.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 – 2026/27 Update - Presentation

The Treasurer provided an update on the Authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting for 2024/25.

COUNCILLOR DAVID COUPE
CHAIR