



AVON FIRE AUTHORITY MINUTES

29 MARCH 2023

Present: Councillors S Bromley, N Butters, D Davies, R Jacobs, B Massey, Y Mohamud, A Monk, R Payne, B Nutland, S Smith, R Tucker, A Varney and D Wilcox and P Butler (Substitute for M Shelford).

The Clerk welcomed Paul Butler who attended on behalf of Mark Shelford, Police & Crime Commissioner.

The meeting began at 14 45hrs.

88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs A Ali, J Ashe, E Brown, R Eddy, P Goggin, B Hopkinson and Y Kumar and J Mason, Independent Person.

89. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Members were advised by the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO) that in the event of an emergency, to exit the room and meet in the rear yard.

90. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Clerk drew Members' attention to Item 10 – Members' Allowance Scheme. Members were asked to note that this introduced the second year of increases in Member Allowances as recommended by the Independent Review of Member allowances conducted by Bryony Houlden, Chief Executive of South West Councils in her report dated November 2021. She conducted benchmarking across Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and found that allowances at Avon Fire Authority were low and recommended increases over two financial years. Therefore, all Members had an interest in this paper.

91. PUBLIC ACCESS

None received.

92. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and drew attention to the following:

1. The Chair confirmed that the meeting was taking place at Severn Park. The meeting was being recorded for the public to view.
2. Members and Officers introduced themselves.
3. The voting arrangements for the meeting were as follows:
 - The Chair to ask for any votes against.
 - The Chair to ask for any abstentions.
 - The Chair to ask for a show of hands for Members voting “for”.
4. The Chair advised that following suggestions from Members, to save time at Fire Authority meetings, all committee minutes, including confidential, would be noted together in one block (as they had already been approved by their Committees). Therefore, Members should please raise any discrepancies at the beginning of this section as we would not be going through each set of committee minutes individually. However, if Members wished to discuss the committee confidential minutes further, they should advise the Chair and not raise the content of the exempt minutes until the confidential section was reached at the end of the meeting. Fire Authority minutes would still be considered separately.
5. The Chair advised Members that the Fire Authority had now published its pre-election guidance, which remained in place until the polls closed on 4 May 2023. Elections were taking place for the unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Members and Officers were encouraged to read the guidance emailed on Friday 17 March and to act in accordance with it. Fire Authority meetings would continue to deal with the ‘day-to-day’ business for the Fire Authority.
6. The Chair advised that the Fire Authority AGM would take place on 21 June which would allow the Unitary Authorities to nominate new Members to the Fire Authority. A new Members Induction event would take place on 14 June.
7. The Chair confirmed that this would be the last Fire Authority meeting for the following Members – Cllrs Don Davies, Shelley Bromley, Ruth Jacobs, John Ashe and Neil Butters. The Fire Authority thanked them for their service to the Authority and wished them well for the future. On behalf of the Fire Authority and the Service, the CFO presented them with Certificates. The Chair noted that there could also be a change of Members following the elections on 4 May. For any Members who did not return to the Fire Authority, the Chair thanked them and wished them well for the future. The Chair advised Members that if they were not returning to the Authority and had an ID badge for headquarters, to please return it to Emma Bowen today or as soon as possible.
8. The Clerk advised that following the earlier briefing on the Governance Review, she had arranged a cross-party Constitution Working group meeting on 5 April, to consider the Governance Review Report in detail. In addition, an Extraordinary Fire Authority had been arranged for Tuesday 25 April at 11.00hrs at Severn Park to consider recommendations of the Constitution Working Group concerning amendments to the Fire Authority’s governance arrangements and consequential amendments to the Constitution.

93. MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2022

The minutes were moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Nutland.

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Avon Fire Authority held on 14 DECEMBER 2022 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2023

The minutes were moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Bromley.

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Avon Fire Authority held on 17 FEBRUARY 2023 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

The Confidential minutes (16.1/16.2/16.3) of Avon Fire Authority were also moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Bromley.

94. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

7.1 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Audit, Governance & Ethics Committee held on 22 September 2022.

7.2 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the People & Culture Committee held on 5 October 2022.

7.3 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Performance, Review & Scrutiny Committee held on 7 October 2022.

17.1 Confidential minutes of the People & Culture Committee Meeting held on 5 October 2022.

The Committee minutes already approved by the Committees, were noted by the Fire Authority, moved by Cllr Davies and seconded by Cllr Monk.

95. APPOINTMENT OF STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

The Clerk reminded Members that the People and Culture Committee were tasked by Avon Fire Authority (AFA) to conduct a recruitment process for a new Statutory Finance Officer. Interviews took place on 30 January 2023 and the Fire Authority was asked to formally appoint Ms Verity Lee as the AFA's new Statutory Finance Officer.

Ms Lee must work notice with her current employer and was available to start her role as Statutory Finance Officer on 2 May 2023. In the meantime, the CFO had extended the appointment of Mr Kevin Woodward as interim Treasurer until

9 May 2023, to ensure that the Service was able to meet its statutory responsibilities. The CFO added that this would allow for a handover to take place. It was confirmed that the CFO had, through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), arranged for a Finance Officer to become a mentor and provide support to Ms Lee.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Davies and seconded by Cllr Varney.

**It was resolved that the Fire Authority:
Appointed Ms Verity Lee as Avon Fire Authority's new Statutory Finance Officer from 2 May 2023.**

96. ANNUAL UPDATE OF SERVICE PLAN INCLUDING IRMP

The AFA's four-week public consultation period on the Service Plan (SP) commenced on 3 January 2023 and ran until 31 January 2023. The results of which were detailed in Appendix 2 and presented to the AFA for consideration.

Based on key findings, analysis, and a consultation process which captured 444 questionnaire responses, the SP for 2023-2026 included updated narrative in relation to key challenges and community risk findings, updated performance metrics, financial information, and recent Service achievements.

The CFO introduced the refreshed plan to Members. He thanked colleagues who had worked together to produce the refreshed plans with a mention to Scott Ward, Darren French, Amber Foreman, Helen Dumbarton, and Natalie Mainstone who had all been instrumental in bringing the refreshed plan to Members.

The CFO added that the plan consisted of two documents – the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and our Service Plan. This was our response to who, why, what, where and when somebody is at risk (locally and nationally) and may need our service. This information came together to allow the Service to make assessments and resources to be able to respond to those risks. The plan also included the Service Mission, Vision and Values and our two key priorities: making our Communities safer and making our Organisation stronger. In addition, there was a third element through Transformation and digitising our Service to make it fit for the future.

The Head of Corporate Assurance, the Area Manager Risk Management and the Head of Corporate Communications then provided a detailed overview of the SP and the consultation process.

The CFO confirmed to Member's that following the feedback received, minor changes were made along with a review of the available risk information.

The Chair confirmed that the plan was an attractive and easy to read document.

A Member added that this was the first time that they had been through the process. It was felt that the SP was easy to read but was 'light' on some details.

It was assumed that other documents sat behind the plan, which was confirmed by the CFO who advised that these were mainly internal documents, but some were available on the Avon Fire & Rescue Service website.

The Member added that some actions appeared vague and not smart, it was felt that the SP would be difficult to understand if revisited in 2/3 years. The Head of Corporate Assurance agreed that the information which sat behind the plan could be more detailed. However, the team made sure that the objectives were strategic and high level. It was confirmed that the performance metrics which sat behind the SP are reported to the Performance, Review & Scrutiny Committee and were available for public scrutiny.

A Member asked about the national response to deal with Lithium battery fires. The t/Group Manager advised that there was a lot of work going on in the background with the NFCC to increase understanding. Some Services were taking steps to contain the fire including a large skip that the vehicle could be submersed into. However, there was no clear evidence that the water would immediately put the fire out. There was also the question of how to dispose of contaminated water.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Monk.

It was RESOLVED that Avon Fire Authority:

- a) Considered the outcomes of the public consultation.**
- b) Approved the Service Plan 2023–2026 for publication.**

97. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2023-24

The AFA received a report from the Clerk who advised that in accordance with Local Government legislation, the Fire Authority updated its Members' Allowances Scheme each financial year. The Scheme updated the basic allowance paid to Elected Members, special responsibility allowances, the Independent Person's allowance and travelling and subsistence allowances.

Members were reminded that a Fire Authority Declaration of Interest had been made at the beginning of the meeting.

The Scheme was independently reviewed by Bryony Houlden, Chief Executive of South West Councils and her report dated November 2021 was presented to the Fire Authority on 15 December 2021, when all eleven recommendations were approved. The next review was due in Autumn 2025.

The Clerk advised that the AFA were now entering Phase 2, which increased allowances for the upcoming financial year as set out in paragraph 4.2.

Member allowances also tracked the pay increases awarded by the NJC for Green Book local Government staff. The pay award for 1 April 2022 was announced on 1 November 2022 and allowances were uprated by 4.04%, therefore the figures recommended in the Independent Review for 2023/24 needed to be adjusted to reflect that pay award.

A Member advised that there were proposals to reduce the number of committees from 3 to 2, and asked whether the allowance increase reflected the increase in work for the Committee chairs. The Clerk advised that the next planned review may be brought forward to take account of this.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Bromley and seconded by Cllr Smith.

It was resolved that the Fire Authority:

a) Approved the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2023-24.

98. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SERVICE CHARGES 2023-24

The interim Treasurer presented the report to Members and outlined that the amount of the charges was to be set by the AFA for each financial year and must ensure that the Authority's income from charges did not exceed the cost to the Authority of taking the action for which the charges are imposed. The AFA was therefore not able to fix charges with the objective of making a profit. The charges had been increased by 7% from 2022/23 to 2023/24 in line with our inflation assumptions within the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Members were advised that it was rare that the Service levied a charge for our services, but we did have an ability to charge in some circumstances. This financial year the Service had charged around £2k but going forward we could use this more in view of possible budget restraints.

Members were asked to note that not all incident types provided within the Home Office IRS definition were chargeable, although they were classed as a Special Service Incidents.

A Member remarked that there was no reference to false alarms calls although the statistics were quite high. The CFO advised that the Service had a call challenge system in process but would still respond where life was at risk i.e., hospitals. If there were repeated incidents, we would make a fire protection intervention to work with the responsible person to reduce the number of events. The Service would rather tackle the root cause through protection and prevention.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Davies and seconded by Cllr Nutland.

It was resolved that the Fire Authority:

a) Approved the charging structure set out in Appendices 1 and 2 with effect from 1 April 2023.

b) That the charges be levied in full in all cases, but power be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive to remit the whole or part of the charge if, in all the circumstances, he considers it appropriate to do so.

99. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24

The AFA received a report from the Clerk who advised at their meeting on 3 March 2023, the People and Culture Committee reviewed the Pay Policy

Statement for the financial year beginning on 1 April 2023, and recommended its approval by the Fire Authority.

It was noted that within the Recommendations on p115 the date of the statement should be 2023/24 and not 2023/23. The Fire Authority was therefore asked to approve the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 at **Appendix 1** for publication.

The AFA was required under the Localism Act 2011 to prepare an annual Pay Policy Statement. This states the Fire Authority's policy towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce and in particular the relationship in pay between senior staff and the lowest paid employees.

Members attention was drawn to p116 and were advised that the Service was required to publish the Statement before 31 March. It was noted that since the People & Culture Meeting on 3 March there had been a settlement in relation to Grey book pay. Therefore, the version of the statement approved by the People & Culture Committee did not include the agreed settlement. However, the settlement has now been added into the Pay Policy Statement at Appendix 1.

A Member questioned whether the statement included Interims and Consultants who would be on high pay levels. The CFO confirmed that that Service would only use Consultants for specific support or tasks which we would go out to tender for.

A Member enquired why under paragraph 6.2; the word 'competent' was used. The CFO advised that this was national terminology as we do have firefighters who were in development and on a different payrate.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Jacobs and seconded by Cllr Wilcox.

It was RESOLVED that the Avon Fire Authority:

a) Approved the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 for the financial year beginning 1 April 2023 for publication.

100. FORWARD PLAN 2023-24

The Clerk presented a revised Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which set out the anticipated major decisions and key papers to be delivered in 2022/23.

It was noted that if the committee structure should change, the document would be re-drafted.

It was RESOLVED that the Avon Fire Authority:

Noted the revised Forward Plan 2023/24.

101. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was RESOLVED that Avon Fire Authority noted the date of the next meeting as being an extraordinary meeting on 25 April 2023 at 11.00hrs.

The Fire Authority also noted that the Annual General Meeting would take place on Wednesday 21 June 2023 at 1400 hours.

102. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items of business on the grounds that they contained exempt information pursuant to Schedule 12A, Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 and that in accordance with Schedule 12A, Part 2, paragraph 10 of the Local Government Act 1972 the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

103. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2022

Confidential minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 22 November 2022.

It was **RESOLVED** that the confidential minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 22 November 2022 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

104. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2022

Confidential minutes of the ordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 22 14 December 2022.

It was **RESOLVED** that the confidential minutes of the ordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 14 December 2022 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

105 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2023

Confidential minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 17 February 2023.

It was **RESOLVED** that the confidential minutes of the extraordinary meeting of Avon Fire Authority held on 17 February 2023 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 15.55 hrs.

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Chair