



AVON FIRE AUTHORITY AND AGM MINUTES

21 JUNE 2023

Present: Councillors L Brennan, R Eddy, P Goggin, P Hulme, B Massey, Y Mohamud, B Nutland, R Payne, O Saini, S Smith, J Stansfield, D Thomas, R Tucker, A Varney, K Walker, D Wilcox and M Williams and J Mason, Independent Person.

The meeting began at 14.00hrs.

1. RE-ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Cllr Nutland and seconded by Cllr Tucker that Cllr Massey be re-elected Chair of Avon Fire Authority for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year. There was a vote and it was:

RESOLVED – that Cllr Massey be re-elected Chair of Avon Fire Authority for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Varney that Cllr Nutland be elected Vice Chair of Avon Fire Authority for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year. There was a vote and it was:

RESOLVED – that Cllr Nutland be elected Vice Chair of Avon Fire Authority for the 2023-2024 Municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Hardie, May and Riddle and Mark Shelford, Police and Crime Commissioner.

4. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Members were advised by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) that in the event of an emergency, to exit the engine bay at the rear of the building and congregate in the car park.

Members were reminded that the meeting was being held in Avonmouth Fire Station, a working fire station and the crews could be called out at any time. The meeting would be paused in the event of a call out.

5. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

A declaration was received for Paper 16 from the Chief Fire Officer (as the paper related to his remuneration) and the Service Leadership Board (SLB) and Statutory Officers, as they are paid a percentage of the Chief Fire Officer's remuneration. The Clerk explained that despite her declaration of an interest in the paper, she was needed to present the paper to Members.

6. PUBLIC ACCESS

None received.

7. 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 Avonmouth Fire Station. The meeting was being recorded for the public to view.
2. The Chair extended a warm welcome to the New Members who had joined the Authority over the past few weeks – Cllrs Dan Thomas, Martin Williams, Karen Walker, Onkar Saini, Paul May, Philippa Hulme, Liz Brennan, Matthew Riddle, Ron Hardie and Jayne Stansfield. The Chair also thanked Cllrs Kumar, Ali, Monk, and Hopkinson for their work on the Fire Authority and wished them good luck for the future. Thank you letters had been sent.
3. The Chair thanked Station Manager Lee Rogers and the crews at Avonmouth Station for their help in arranging the earlier demonstrations today and for accommodating this meeting.
4. A reminder was given to please complete and return Member Form 2 (register of interests) to the Democratic Service Assistant (DSA) as soon as possible.
5. Members and Officers introduced themselves.
6. 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".

Cllr Goggin and James Mason joined the meeting at 14.10hrs

8. MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 29 MARCH 2023

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

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Avon Fire Authority held on 29 March 2023 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 25 APRIL 2023

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

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Avon Fire Authority held on 25 April 2023 be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned temporarily due to a video recording issue.

9. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

9.2 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the People & Culture Committee held on 9 December 2022.

9.3 Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Performance, Review & Scrutiny Committee held on 18 January 2023.

19.1 Confidential minutes of the Audit, Governance and Ethics Committee Meeting held on 22 November 2022.

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

10. MEMBER APPOINTMENTS FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023/24

The Clerk introduced the report which sought approval from Members to make appointments for the Municipal Year beginning in June 2023.

Appointments made by the Fire Authority generally lasted for a Municipal Year which ran from one Annual Meeting until the next. There were a range of appointments that the Fire Authority were required to appoint at the meeting.

The Clerk drew Members' attention to the table of 20 Elected Members on p53 of the pack along with the Committee structure on p50. The structure had been agreed by the political groups and new Members had moved into the vacant slots. Vice chairs would be appointed at the first Audit, Governance & Oversight and Policy & Resources Committee meetings.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Eddy and seconded by Cllr Mohamud.

It was RESOLVED that the Fire Authority:

- a) Allocated Members to the Fire Authority Committees (with the Committees to appoint their Committee Vice Chairs at the first Committee meetings of the Municipal Year).**
- a) Appointed Cllr Brenda Massey as its representative on the Local Government Association.**
- b) Appointed Cllr David Wilcox as its representative on South West Councils.**
- c) Appointed Cllr David Wilcox as its representative on South West Councils' Employers' Panel.**
- d) Appointed Cllrs Steve Smith and Andrew Varney as its Employer Representatives for the Local Pension Board.**

11. 2022/23 REVENUE FINAL OUTTURN

The Statutory Finance Officer presented the report to Members which provided an updated Revenue Monitoring report for the current financial year, based upon spending at the end of March 2023.

This final outturn position spending against the net revenue budget was £-417k underspent. This compared to the previously reported small overspend position which was based upon spending to the end of February 2023, as reported to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee (PRSC) in April 2023.

The underspend represented a positive position for the Fire Authority given the additional pay and inflationary pressures placed upon the budget. These pressures had been mitigated by underspends elsewhere in the budget had avoided the need to utilise Reserve balances.

It was highlighted that there had been a delay in the IAS 19 pension figures for the LGPS for the 2021/22 statement of accounts which had a knock-on effect to the 2022/23 accounts. The draft 2022/23 accounts would be presented to the Audit, Governance and Oversight Committee on 27 June 2023.

A Member congratulated the Finance team for producing a satisfactory financial situation.

The Chair wished to thank the whole Finance team for their work over the past 12 months.

A Member enquired how a reduction in cleaning and refuse had been achieved as shown on p61. The Head of Finance confirmed that the reduction had been achieved by returning to pre COVID-19 cleaning levels as well as other changes made.

The Vice-Chair also passed on his congratulation and welcomed the Statutory Finance Officer to the Service and to her first Fire Authority meeting.

It was RESOLVED that Avon Fire Authority:

a) Noted the final Income and Expenditure position against the 2022/23 Revenue Budget.

12. FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING DATES AND 2023/24 FORWARD PLAN

The Clerk presented the report to the Avon Fire Authority (AFA) and asked Members to approve the proposed schedule of meetings for the Municipal Year 2023/24. In addition, the Clerk presented a revised Forward Plan of Key Decisions, which set out the anticipated major decisions which would need to be taken by Members at the next scheduled meetings.

Members were reminded that at the AFA meeting on 25 April 2023, the recommendations of the Independent Governance review were to reduce the number of committees to two.

It was clarified that AFA meetings would begin at 14.00hrs and committee meetings at 10.30hrs. It was also confirmed that meetings would take place at the Police & Fire Headquarters in Portishead, Severn Park training facility and in fire stations. Where possible, meetings would also be held around the four Unitary Authorities. If Members had an idea for a venue, they were asked to pass those details to the DSA.

The Clerk advised that the AFA agenda for the 4 October meeting would include the report from the recent HMICFRS visit, if available. In response to a Member's question, the CFO confirmed that the HMICFRS report would also be scheduled on the agenda of an upcoming Policy and Resources Committee (PRC).

At 14.30, the meeting was paused due to video recording issues.

Following an enquiry from a Member, the Clerk confirmed that the meeting scheduled on 13 December would now not be required.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Williams and seconded by Cllr Walker.

It was RESOLVED that the Avon Fire Authority:

a) Approved the proposed schedule of meetings for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

b) Noted the revised Forward Plan 2023/24.

13. 2022/23 CAPITAL FINAL OUTTURN

The Statutory Finance Officer presented the report to Members which provided an updated capital monitoring report for the current financial year, based upon spending at the end of March 2023.

The Fire Authority reviewed the final year end Capital position to ensure the correct figures were provided within the Annual Accounts. The actual position was slightly lower than the previous forecast provided to the PRSC in April as

there was a slight delay to some of the Premises works, however, these had now commenced.

The Capital Programme approved for 2022/23, included adjustments for the final 2021/22 carry over of £7.741m. The Capital Finance Report and the updated values were shown as Appendix 1.

Members were advised that there was a £-3.6m underspend, most projects would be moved into the coming year. The underspend was in premises and fleet, including the delay in starting work at Bedminster.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 1 on p73, which outlined that the majority of funding came from Capital Reserves.

A Member commented that the Finance team had been proactive, ensuring the appropriate capital return for the changing times and contents of projects taking place. It was asked the amount approved for the previous year and whether there was an element of contingency or were we aiming to spend the whole reserve. The Head of Finance advised £6.3m for the 2023/24 programme was approved for specific projects. There was some contingency built into projects, which would require a significant business case to access that Capital funding.

A Member mentioned that the Bath and Weston projects were paused and had slipped into the current financial year. However, as they won't be delivered within 2023/24, should they be included? The Head of Finance advised that there may be some exploratory work being carried out for Bath and Weston which would result in a small amount of spend.

A Member asked for a summary of the current position of the Weston project. The CFO reminded Members that although the Service had searched for alternative sites, it was found that it was not financially viable to move. Therefore, we were looking to either rebuild or refurbish the current site. However, it was felt that this was not the correct time to look at capital borrowing due to the high cost of materials and high interest rates. The CFO reassured Members that the Service was still exploring the best option for Weston and Bath Fire Stations.

It was resolved that the Fire Authority:

a) Noted the outturn spending position against the 2022/23 Capital Programme.

14. MEMBER INFORMATION 2022/23

The Clerk presented the report which provided information on Members' allowances and expenses paid in the Municipal Year 2022/23.

The Clerk pointed out the table of expenses claimed also included the names of former Cllrs who had received payments during the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

It was noted that previously details of Members' attendance had been provided in previous years, but this information was now available to view on Modern.gov.

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

**It was RESOLVED that the Fire Authority:
Noted the report and authorised publication of the figures at Appendix 1 on
the Avon Fire Authority website.**

15. 2023-2027 RESERVES STRATEGY

Members received a report from the Statutory Finance Officer which provided the Fire Authority with the updated Reserves strategy for the period 2023-2027. This updated strategy was based on the previously approved 2022-2026 Reserves strategy and reflected the movements in reserves which had taken place to the end of May 2023.

The financial impact of this Reserves strategy had been included within the approved 2023/24 Annual Budget and the 2023-2027 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and had been reviewed by the SLB, working with the Statutory Finance Officer.

It was pointed out that the Reserves position was needed to support the Capital Strategy and Mid Term Financial Plan. In Appendix 2, the £417k revenue underspend had been added into reserves to cover future challenges expected over the next 2/3 years.

Funds had also been put into reserves to cover costs such as the historic review of employment cases, increases in legal fees and £100k had been put aside to deal with any recommendations from the HMICFRS spotlight report.

It was noted that following the capital spend during 22/23 the reserve created as a result of the sale of the former Headquarters was now diminished. £9.4m remains held in general capital reserves as a result of previous prudent financial planning and transfers from the revenue budget in prior years. This will be able to fund the delivery of the capital programme over the majority of the coming two financial years. Whilst this was positive, Members were asked to note that the AFA would be required to consider capital funding options towards the end of 2024 to be able to continue to deliver the planned capital programme. This was likely to involve external borrowing and therefore consideration needed to be made to the costs of servicing that debt and associated impact on the revenue budget in future years.

The AFA continued to hold a General Reserve of £1.5m, which formed part of the Reserve Strategy for unexpected events and cashflow situations, but this would need to be topped up if used.

A Member asked regarding the ESMCP reserve of £611k from the Government, as Appendix 2 showed that the Service did not expect to have used these funds within the next 4 years. The CFO advised that this Government project had been paused whilst reviews were undertaken. This was a national project and there was no current information available as to when the project would begin again.

At 14.55, the meeting was paused due to video recording issues.

A Member enquired about the IT reserves. The Head of Finance advised that this was linked to a number of projects including IT, communications and control and the digital structure. The CFO advised that the communications equipment was coming to the end of life and would require replacement.

The recommendations were moved by Cllr Eddy and seconded by Cllr Williams.

It was RESOLVED that the Avon Fire Authority:

a) Approved the 2023-2027 Reserves strategy, attached within Appendix 1.

b) Agreed for the approved 2023-2027 Reserves strategy to be published on the website.

16. ANNUAL REVIEW OF REMUNERATION OF CFO/CE

The Clerk presented the report to Members which outlined the National Joint Council's pay award for Brigade Managers for 2022 and 2023, which was belatedly announced on 31 May 2023.

The CFO/CEO is engaged subject to the 'National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services, Constitution and Scheme of Conditions of Service (5th Edition)', otherwise known as the 'Gold Book'.

The Clerk advised that this report would usually be presented alongside the Pay Policy Statement at the end of the financial year. At the AFA meeting on 29 March, Members were advised that the report had been delayed as the pay award for the CFO under the Gold Book scheme had not yet been announced for both January 2022 and January 2023.

The Clerk provided some background information advising that staff were under different terms and conditions. The Gold Book pay awards had been delayed for two years. On an annual basis, the NJC published their pay award and any other decisions about local pay awards are to be taken locally. The CFO was not recommending the consideration of a local pay award at this time.

However, as the formula for calculating salaries for members of the Service Leadership Board as a percentage of the CFO's salary had not been reviewed since 2017 (following the removal of the Deputy CFO role), the CFO recommended the commissioning of a thorough independent review of senior officers pay instead.

A Member asked what was the likely timescale to instigate the review. The Clerk advised that a paper would be taken to the PRC on 27 July, along with recommendations for organisations that might be able to help with that independent review.

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

It was RESOLVED that the Avon Fire Authority:

- a) Noted the National Joint Council (NJC) pay award for Brigade Managers for 2022 and 2023, which was announced on 31 May 2023.**
- b) Noted that the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO/CE) did not seek at this stage to engage the two-track approach, which allows for a local pay award.**
- c) Referred senior officers pay (Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Fire Officers, Director of Corporate Services and Statutory Officers) to the Policy and Resources Committee for an independent review to ensure that senior officer salaries were aligned to national averages for the relevant population band and ensure that salary percentages reflected the responsibilities of senior officers.**

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was RESOLVED that Avon Fire Authority noted the date of the next meeting 4 October 2023 at 14.00hrs.

The Chair thanked the crews at Avonmouth Fire Station for the demonstrations which had been interesting especially for new Members. She was pleased to welcome new Members and looked forward to working together.

The meeting closed at 15.15 hrs.

.....
Chair