



## **AVON FIRE AUTHORITY**

### **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE (PRC) MINUTES**

**29 SEPTEMBER 2023**

#### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs Brennan, Hardie, Hulme, Massey (Chair), May, Payne, Smith and Thomas (arrived at 10.50hrs)

The meeting started at 10.30hrs.

#### **19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Eddy, Saini and Walker.

#### **20. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

Officers confirmed the emergency evacuation procedure for the venue.

#### **21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received.

#### **22. PUBLIC ACCESS**

None received.

#### **23. CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

1. Members were advised that the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) intended to present a Budget Shortfall Options Paper to the next Fire Authority meeting on 4 October, rather than to this committee. This would seek to address the savings required to maintain a balanced budget in coming financial years, as highlighted to the Fire Authority when they considered the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
2. Members and Officers introduced themselves and the Chair outlined that the meeting was taking place at Severn Park Training Centre. The meeting would

also be recorded and uploaded to the Avon Fire Authority (AFA) YouTube channel.

3. Members were reminded that they had been sent a link to the Equality and Dignity in the Workplace E-Learning. This was voluntary training and if completed, Members were asked to please advise the Democratic Services Assistant and provide any feedback on the contents.
4. The Clerk advised that as this Committee discharged the Authority's responsibilities as Scheme Manager for the Firefighters' pension schemes, she could confirm that our pension administrators were ready for the implementation of the new pension Regulations which would come into force on 1 October 2023 to remedy the age discrimination issue. An update on the implementation of the new Regulations would be provided to Members at the next PRC meeting in December.
5. The Chair explained the voting system for the meeting, i.e., votes against a motion would be recorded first, followed by abstentions, then votes in favour.

#### **24. MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 JULY 2023**

The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee were moved by Cllr Massey.

**It was RESOLVED -**

**That the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 27 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

#### **25. CONSIDER PROCUREMENT FORWARD PLAN £250K-£1M (SNAPSHOT 15.09.2023)**

Members received a report from the Head of Procurement who confirmed that the Fire Authority authorised changes to Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) on 25 April 2023 as part of the Governance review changes.

CPR 3.3 stipulated that a procurement plan would be considered by this committee on a quarterly basis. The plan would show ongoing and potential procurements with a contract value above £250k giving Members an indication of forthcoming higher value procurements, noting those contracts with an estimated value of over £1m which would require a business case to PRC.

Members were advised that items included proposed procurements for 2024/25. Those highlighted in yellow were likely to come to PRC with a business case to consider as over £1m, prior to a tender taking place.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) pointed out that, following recent changes to the Constitution, Members now had an opportunity to look at business cases for high value future procurements prior to the tender process. Members would be able to apply appropriate governance prior to tender as opposed to asking for approval once the tender process was complete.

A Member mentioned that the procurement process had to be secure until a final decision was made. As the press were attending the meeting, would the Committee be required to go into private session if further information was required? The Clerk advised that the process had been improved to look at business cases rather than tenders and was not intended to contain sensitive business information, but Members could move into exempt, if necessary.

## **26. UPDATE ON SERVICE PLAN APPROACH AND COMMUNITY RISK FINDINGS**

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Assurance and Business Planning Manager. Members were updated on progress towards developing Avon Fire Authority's Service Plan. This plan incorporated the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) based on key community risk findings identified by the Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) team.

During the 2023/24 planning cycle, Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) had considered the approach to our Service Plan including its objectives, duration, and format. Following discussion with the Service Leadership Board (SLB), the proposal was to develop a four-year, non-rolling and web-based Service Plan, which focused on six key objectives.

It was recognised that development of the Service Plan would need to include the outcomes of the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Round 3 inspection, the efficiency review, and the Government's white paper on Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service.

Members were advised that when our plan was benchmarked against other Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), it was identified that a non-rolling four-year plan would be preferable when setting and achieving priorities. Delivery of the plan would be supported by annual action plans benefited by a downloadable PDF to a website giving greater accessibility and engagement.

It was advised that the Service were also working towards enhancing the systems and reporting in place to support effective governance. Regular community risk and reporting would take place ensuring the Service remained agile and reactive to emerging community risks. Furthermore, if significant risks or trends did emerge, the plan would be adapted accordingly.

The Station Manager CRMP advised that the Service was able to review year on year incident data which had now returned to pre-pandemic levels. The data provided to Members included:

- 38% of calls responded to were fire alarm incidents.
- During 2022/23, there was an increase in percentage of fires and special service calls.
- There was a slight increase in fires caused by lithium-ion batteries and the Service was working with local businesses, local communities, and our training team to ensure that we were prepared, matching resource to risk.

- There was an increase in physical vulnerability in our residents over 65 years of age.
- In addition, population density was increasing in our Service area, which provided increased demand on existing infrastructure and pressure on housing.
- Numbers of electric vehicles continued to rise and around 40% of waste fires were caused by lithium-ion batteries. The UK was the third biggest global importer of electric cars and the Port of Bristol had 500 acres of new car storage. The Service was completing work with the Port to manage risk.
- Fire in tall buildings continued to be a high risk and resources were matched appropriately.
- The word 'cladding' would be changed to 'external wall systems' as there is often the misconception that when cladding is mentioned it meant 'Grenfell cladding'. The risk in these premises is always the Service's priority.

The Corporate Assurance and Business Planning Manager added that at the time of writing the report, the Service had not received the full HMICFRS report. However, the Service had put together an action plan to address the two accelerated causes of concern already raised. With regards to the Efficiency Savings project, this would be presented to AFA next month.

Service leads were currently drafting objectives for 2024-28 based on current projects, horizon scanning and areas for improvement. These would be shared with the Service Leadership Team (SLT) in October and would then be reported to the PRC meeting in December for approval prior to public consultation.

Cllr Thomas arrived at 10.50hrs.

A Member mentioned that they supported moving to a four year non rolling plan. It was asked, that once the plan was introduced, would the users be able to drill down to action plans and would all action plans be available? It was advised that the Service was working hard on the underlying golden thread plans and systems to provide greater visibility of data and to report on specific actions and objectives. Members were advised that the benefit of having the plan online was that we could add links to other documents.

The CFO added that moving the plan online made it more interactive, so that communities can drill down. This would enable a different way to present the work we are doing on a day-to-day basis.

A Member agreed that there were no surprises in the community risk snapshot information provided. It was anticipated that the next stage would be the difference the changes proposed would make to planning and resources. The Station Manager, CRMP confirmed that the evaluation of risk was ongoing, and the Service was identifying trends on a daily basis which determined where the resources were placed. The team met regularly and were proactive to ensure that control measures were in place to meet these risks. Regular updates were also held with the SLB.

The CFO added that the combined CRMP and Service Plan would be one document. The analysis of risk takes into consideration a range of data and information and the Service was required to ensure that we had our resources in the right place across the Service area. Emerging risks are identified through this process which influenced the content of the Service plan.

A Member advised that the four Local Authorities (LA) were reviewing emerging risks and including within their local plans. It was asked whether the Service was engaging effectively with the LAs about their local plans to pick up fire requirements. The CFO advised that from a strategic perspective, part of the consultation process is to share changes to our Service Plan with our LAs, partner agencies and neighbouring FRSs for their feedback on the proposals. However, it was agreed that the Service would check that it is sufficiently consulted on the LAs review of their local plans.

The CFO was asked whether the Service was aware of where developments were taking place. The CFO confirmed that the Service was given the opportunity to respond and provide feedback on proposed developments.

A Member was interested in the operational impact of the Community risk findings and how this would impact on firefighter training and engagement. The CFO confirmed that research into lithium-ion batteries was being undertaken locally and nationally. Work was being carried out with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) standards and operational guidance which would influence training for firefighters. The Head of Corporate Assurance confirmed that the new approach would also allow the Service the opportunity to consult earlier in the process. Officers would have the opportunity to get out on station earlier to obtain feedback rather than to wait until the plan was drafted and at the end of the process.

The Member commented that the research could take some time and how soon could the necessary training be provided for Lithium-ion batteries. The CFO advised that the batteries had been in existence for a long time, and therefore the fire risk was not new. A range of tactical firefighter methods and techniques were used to influence how a fire is dealt with alongside a dynamic risk assessment., The Service often utilised practical tips for engagement and prevention advice to local communities.

A Member mentioned that the contract for electric scooters in Bristol had been placed with another company, would the Service be having a consultation with the new company? The CFO confirmed that we had strong links with the current provider and with Bristol City Council particularly in our Protection teams, which would continue with the new provider including the option for site visits in storage facilities for audits and risk information.

The recommendation was moved by Cllr May and seconded by Cllr Smith.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

**a) Approved proposed changes to the Service Plan objectives, duration, and**

format.

b) Noted the emerging community risks, findings and key themes identified to date in this report.

c) As these key findings inform the development of the Service Plan for 2024-2028, considered whether there are further priorities or objectives for inclusion in the plan at this stage.

## **27. 2023/24 CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE AS AT 31 JULY 2023**

Members received the update from the Head of Finance which reported an overview of the 2023/24 to 2025/26 Capital Programme and updated on spend against the Programme for 2023/24 Financial year.

The Capital Programme presented at the AFA meeting of 17 February 2023 approved a total Capital Programme for the three years from the 2023/24 financial year of £12.456m. Following the outturn of the 2022/23 financial year, the Capital Programme had been updated with brought forward adjustments. This had taken the total Capital Programme spend for the three years to £12.457m.

Members attention was drawn to p31, where it was confirmed that all projects were moving as expected including a £600k spend on the Bedminster project which was the majority of the allocation for premises during this year. Spend has begun on operational equipment, some IT spend and also Transformation supporting Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) on appliances. Members were advised that the Service was not forecasting spend against the allocated control budget at this point. Finance had been working closely with Control to prioritise the number of projects ongoing. At a recent meeting of the Capital Prioritisation Steering group, a discussion took place to allocate some of the spend for replacement radios.

A Member asked for clarification on the adjustment for the house sale and enquired whether this was still going ahead. The Clerk advised that the house sale needed to be approved by the AFA, the sale would go ahead but the date had slipped. This was likely to be a 'Right to Buy' sale and although the Service would receive this income, it could not be predicted in which financial year.

A question was asked about unspent budgets, would this be moved into the next financial year? The Head of Finance advised that the Service allocated an ICT budget each year which was not carried forward if unspent. The Transformation cost is different as specifically allocated and would move into the next year.

A Member pointed out that it was forecasted that borrowing would be required in 2025/26, was there a restriction on borrowing limits? The Head of Finance advised that as part of the Capital Programme, the Service estimated how much borrowing would be required. There was a borrowing limit of up to £1m over our capital programme. Further information would be provided to the Fire Authority meeting in February 2024.

The recommendation was moved by Cllr May and seconded by Cllr Smith.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

**a) Approved the Revised Capital Programme attached at Appendix 1 with adjustments made for final brought forward balances from 2022/23.**

**b) Noted the 2023/24 current position shown in Appendix 2 and to review any key issues within the updates provided.**

## **28. 2023/24 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING AS AT 31 JULY 2023**

Members received a paper from the Head of Finance which provided the latest Revenue Monitoring Report for the current financial year, based upon spending for the four months ending 31 July 2023.

The 2023/24 Net Revenue Budget was approved at the AFA meeting on 17 February 2023. It was important that the Authority and the relevant committees received regular budget monitoring reports which provided a forecast of spending against this budget.

The latest revenue position forecasted the Service would be £75k underspent for the year ended 31 March 2024. This compared to the budgeted balanced budget position.

Members were advised that the forecast outturn for the end of the financial year was not showing much movement and was likely to come in on budget at the end of the financial year.

The Head of Finance advised that our investment income budget of £200k reflected income received from bank balances, where we were receiving a good return. Since this report was published, the Service received a further £74k. This was expected to be the peak return having received a payment from central Government in relation to pensions, so our bank balance is at its maximum level for the year and interest rates are now stabilising.

Members were advised that the Service had a £391k contingency to help manage risks including the outstanding green book pay award. A 5% contingency had been built into the budgets for Green book pay awards, but the Service was not sure if this would cover the pay award. The contingency was also held to help mitigate emerging risks around the outcomes of our HMICFRS and Spotlight reports. Currently, all of those things were expected to be covered by the contingency fund.

A Member asked about income and in particular the grant from central Government. Was it possible to provide information as to how that income had changed over a period of time and moving forward how likely was it that we receive further funding from Government. The Head of Finance advised that these points would be reviewed when presenting budget figures at the AFA meeting in February. The two parts that form the funding would be covered, a revenue support grant and business rates top up.

A Member enquired why there was a forecast underspend on on-call Firefighters Employee costs. The Head of Finance advised that this was dependent on the number of incident call outs. The number of call outs was slightly lower than predicted but still in line with previous years.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

**a) Noted the forecast spending position against the 2023/24 Revenue Budget shown in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.**

## **29. ACTION PLANS IN RESPONSE TO HMICFRS ACCELERATED CAUSES OF CONCERN**

The Committee received an update from the CFO who outlined that his Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook its Round 3 inspection of Avon Fire & Rescue Service between 29 May and 4 August 2023.

The post-inspection debrief was held on 8 August 2023 and on 16 August 2023 HMICFRS published two accelerated Causes of Concern – one in relation to the collation and management of risk information, and the other in relation to the Service's mobilising system.

Members were advised that the Service was already working on the risk information concern and a team had been appointed. Concerns were raised regarding the speed of progress identified.

With regards to the Mobilising system, this was an externally sourced software that the Service hosted but was maintained by an external company. Individual consoles were freezing but not the whole system and work had already started to identify the fault and working towards rectifying the issue. The company had identified causes and we had put Business Continuity in place to deal with the incidents on individual consoles. The CFO confirmed that the Service was still available to mobilise appliances and respond to our community needs.

The HMICFRS required an action plan to address the two accelerated causes of concern to be submitted by 19 September 2023. Extensive work including liaison with the NFCC, had been undertaken to develop a detailed action plan which was submitted in line with HMICFRS deadline.

The CFO confirmed that there had already been completion of some actions with the mobilising system, which endorsed that work was already ongoing. Members were advised that this week a second software update had been added. Further work around our internal system upgrades would be presented to SLB in the near future.

Work was ongoing and the Service continued to maintain a focus to deliver against the accelerated Causes of Concern. HMICFRS intended to re-visit the Service



week commencing 4 December and the CFO continued to have regular appointments with HMICFRS.

A Member enquired around Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) and a comment in the HMICFRS letter having spoken to operational Firefighters who were aware that risk assessments did exist but were not using them. The Member had watched a station exercise recently where the commander couldn't find the correct page required to manage the incident. The CFO confirmed that there is a nationally best practice format which covers headings in relation to i.e., the risk, the buildings, the water supply. The plan allowed time for training of operational staff and for them to contribute towards that risk gathering as well.

A Member added that it was a surprise that he was not aware of the issue with Control, and it had not been recorded within a risk assessment that the AFA had seen. The CFO advised that the concern had not been escalated and the number of times the system was freezing had not been sighted on. However, the issue had been reported to the supplier and twice daily meetings were taking place. The frequency of these incidents had started to increase at the time of the inspection but had not been escalated to SLB level or added onto the Corporate Risk Register. The Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) updated Members that the HMICFRS acknowledged that this issue had not impacted on our response standards.

A Member confirmed that it was only right that we welcome HMICFRS and work effectively with them. It was also important we keep a gold standard in mind and deal with issues as they are raised along the way. He added that there were several amber and red ratings on the HMICFRS action plan, should Members be worried or were they moving ahead? The CFO advised that amber indicated that work had already started and was in progress. Work on red ratings had not yet started, because they were a follow on from a previous action.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

- a) Noted the content of this report and the action plan provided at Appendix 2; and**
- b) Noted the further verbal update from the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive at the meeting.**

### **30. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Transformation Manager who confirmed that the programme was due to come to an end on 31 March 2024.

Due to the loss of some resources from the team, and challenges in recruiting to digital roles, a report was taken to SLT with a proposal to extend the transformation programme for a further period of 12 months funded by the current underspend in the programme budget. This proposal included the extension of some of the existing staff resources into 2024/25. This proposal was agreed in principle, subject to the work programme being reviewed and updated (in relation

to current challenges, the efficiency work, and the forthcoming Service Plan) and re-prioritised to accelerate certain work packages.

A report was taken to SLB in July, setting out a proposal to extend the programme until 31 March 2025, to carry out the outstanding work and also extend the contracts of some of the team. This was agreed in principle.

Since the last meeting, FireWatch has been migrated to the cloud which would result in the reduction of cost for future upgrades, due to no longer using the services of our IT provider.

The Supporting Attendance Policy had been overhauled and improved. A toolkit for managers had been launched earlier in the week. There had been a lot of interest already and the toolkit would aid managers looking after the welfare of their teams and to increase attendance at work.

In addition, a digital job application had been launched for corporate staff.

A new policy hub would be launched on 2 October. This was currently accessed through the intranet and was difficult to access and find. The new hub had been built using SharePoint, so it looks like a website and was fully user friendly.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

**a) Noted the report, scrutinised its contents, and made any recommendations or suggestions it saw fit.**

### **31. ANNUAL ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT 2022-2023**

The Committee received a report from the DoCS. AF&RS's environmental performance for the financial year 2022-2023 was detailed in the Environmental Report, including progress against the Environmental Strategy's 12 Strategic Aims.

During 2022-2023, the Service had focused on the development of an Environmental Management System and demonstrating environmental leadership in the Fire & Rescue sector.

Members were advised that AF&RS had developed a 10-year Environment Strategy and made a commitment to be net zero by 2030. The Service was recognised as leaders within the Fire Sector and had won awards.

Implementation and targets were presented to Members on an annual basis and for 2022/23 the following achievements were highlighted:

- Proactively replaced firefighter foam with fluorine-free foam on the majority of operational fleet, which is less damaging to the environment.
- Considerable work to our estates to release energy and carbon savings and all of our buildings are supplied by 100% renewable electric and green gas.
- All of our sites have electric vehicle charging points.

- We have a number of electric vehicles within our fleet.
- We have been successfully reviewed against phase 1 of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) process.

The Service was currently off its year-to-date targets for net zero by 2030. It is hoped we will be on track soon as we are now able to apply retrospectively, the savings in respect of renewable energy use.

Members were advised that the Service hoped to achieve further public sector decarbonisation funding. The Service also hoped to make improvement in our operational fleet emissions. This was more difficult in terms of cost and balancing with operational need.

A Member congratulated the Service on improvements made to premises. However, fleet improvements would be more difficult, with the need to offset the price of low emission appliances against making efficiencies at next week's AFA meeting. It was asked whether the higher costs were included within the MTFP and would there be a point where we needed to manage our ambition to reach net zero whilst managing reducing budgets. The DoCS agreed that this was a challenge as there was several initiatives that we were committed to and passionate about and which would need to be balanced given limited budgets. However, being able to include savings from renewables would assist with our net zero environmental ambitions. There was a provision in our budgets around research for blended fleet which could assist with operational fleet emissions.

A Member referred to the Fleet and Business travel section and enquired why frontline fleet were involved in Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV). The DoCS advised that we had a blended approach, and our appliances would go out to HFSV and other visits. The CFO confirmed that our operational crews do undertake HFSV but remain available for fire calls if required. There was also a drive from HMICFRS on how the Service used the full workforce and in particular our operational staff not just for response but also for prevention and protection activity.

**It was resolved that the Committee –**

**a) The Policy and Resources Committee noted the Environmental Report 2022-2023.**

## **32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED – that the date of the next meeting be held on Wednesday 13 December 2023 at 10.30am.**

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Chair

The meeting ended at 12.00hrs.