



AVON FIRE AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE (PRC) MINUTES

13 DECEMBER 2023

MINUTES OF MEETING

PRESENT: Cllrs Brennan, Hardie, Hulme, Massey (Chair), Payne, Saini and Smith

The meeting started at 11.30hrs.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

34. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES

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.

35. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

36. PUBLIC ACCESS

Matt Senior from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) read out a Statement which is available on the Avon Fire Authority (AFA) website.

The CFO responded to the statement: 'I would like to acknowledge the Public Access Statement and also thank the FBU for their support during the trials of the scenario planning which will be covered in paper 12 on the agenda.

Following on from the budget statement on local authority spending, the medium-term financial plan now shows a deficit of over 3 million pounds over the next three years, which is greater than originally anticipated which is covered in paper 12 on the agenda. To ignore the deficit is not an option I have available to consider.

I have a duty to present to you as the Fire Authority a balanced budget for you to comply with the Authorities statutory duties.

Any alternative options in finding such efficiencies are far worse and will have a significant impact on our attendance times and service delivery to our communities. The progress report requested by Members demonstrates that our response times and service provision can still be met by not reducing the number of appliances or closing fire stations, and maintain a risk based safe system of work'.

37. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

1. 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 AFA YouTube channel.
2. 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.

38. MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 29 September 2023 were moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Smith.

It was RESOLVED -

That the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 29 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39. PEOPLE SERVICES STRATEGY 01 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

The Committee received a report from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery Support (ACFO SDS).

Members were advised that this was a new strategy for the introduction of the newly formed People Services Department consisting of Learning and Development (L&D), Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE), Human Resources (HR) and Health & Safety (H&S) with additional support from Resource Planning Unit (RPU), Corporate Communications and Service Transformation.

This strategy would be delivered within a one-year timeframe and focused on the successful integration of the new operating model and its associated themes within People Services. By April 2025, the Service would be well positioned to formulate and execute a more comprehensive, long-term strategy.

This strategy was the first People Services Strategy, which reflected the aims of the department during the first year of the new operating model for the four departments.

A Member asked whether the new strategy would become part of the new Service plan. The ACFO, SDS confirmed that the objectives and key results had been written in line with the Service Plan.

The recommendation was moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Hulme.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Considered the strategy and approved its publication.

40. UPDATE ON PENSION ADMINISTRATOR IMPLEMENTATION OF IMMEDIATE DETRIMENT REGULATIONS

The Committee received a report from the Pension Advisor which provided a summary of the current position of pension administration and the implementation of rectification following the McCloud and Seargeant legal cases as well as the Matthews second option which went ahead from 1 October 2023.

In respect of the Matthews case, the Pensions Advisor had identified those on-call firefighters in scope and had written to them asking them to contact the Pension Advisor as soon as possible. It was noted that the Calculator, to prepare their calculations, would not be available until January 2024.

With regards to the McCloud cases, all firefighters must be provided with two sets of figures. One on the rectification basis and one on the current basis, which had caused considerable problems with the administrator resulting to delays in figures being issued. The Pension Advisor explained that he was advised in August that the software system was almost up and running, which was frustrating. Without the software, this involved manual calculations of every individual, 'undoing' their pension contributions for 7 years, and re-applying them which is time consuming. There was a delay for people receiving their pensions in November, all figures have been issued for December.

The Pension Advisor confirmed that he had written to everybody affected but had been reliant on Bristol City Council (BCC) and B&NES for information.

The CFO reminded Members that the AFA had decided to pause processing ID cases until October 2023. We had also carried out a case-by-case assessment for those facing financial hardship. Whilst legislation was passed on 1 October 2023, the Service was led to believe that an electronic calculator would be provided. However, this did not happen, and this had caused some compression with a number of stakeholders involved that required the data. The two options were to receive benefits up until 31 March 2022 in their legacy schemes or receive their pension benefits from 2015 with the 2015 scheme. This involved manual calculations in the absence of the electronic systems so that they could make a more informed decision.

A Member surmised that it was not clear when this situation would be resolved and asked for confirmation that no firefighter was in financial hardship because of this.

The Pension Advisor advised that legally the process must be completed by March 2025 and as far as he was aware, no one was in financial hardship.

A Member asked whether members who had previously retired over the last few years, were still waiting for the timescales to catch up with them. The Pension Advisor advised that there was a priority order where ill health retirements and members who had died would be processed first and would then look at the most recent cases then older ones.

The CFO advised that there was an 18-month window from 1 October 2023 to rectify members choice. All members had received a pension, but it is their option to decide which pension benefits they received. These could not be processed all at once, so a plan has been put together to deal with those most affected.

A Member asked whether once the software was available, would that speed the process up. The Pension Advisor confirmed it would and he had prompted BCC not to archive information as we would require salaries and contribution information going back over the last seven years. The Pension Advisor had seen a demonstration from the new administrator and was confident that there would be an improvement seen.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Noted the current position with Immediate Detriment and Remedy.

b) Noted the letter sent to all retirees (Appendix 1)

c) Considered the potential tax implications and costs associated with HM Treasury revaluation rates for active members of the FPS 2015 (Appendix 2).

41. SERVICE PLAN – DRAFT OBJECTIVES FOR CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Assurance and Planning Manager.

The purpose of the report was to inform the PRC on progress towards developing the AFA's Service Plan (SP) for 2024-2028.

The SP 2024-2028 would set out the AFA's strategic aims and priorities, acting as a point of reference for our staff, partners, and communities. It would highlight the areas that we considered were important, enabling us to execute our core Service activities excellently while delivering continuous improvement.

Public consultation on the draft SP objectives was planned to commence in January 2024 and run for a period of six-weeks.

The final draft of the SP would be presented to the AFA for review and approval at its meeting on 20 March 2024. This will be accompanied by the consultation report, collating feedback from key stakeholders, and our Strategic Assessment 2024, which would document the identification and analysis of risks.

Members were advised that the objectives were underpinned in Appendix 1, delivery of these objectives were achievable and would be effectively planned and monitored.

The Station Manager, Community Risk Management Planning provided an overview of the four headers Prevention, Protection, Response and Resilience. Members were advised that the Service had worked hard to ensure that our communities owned the plan, and the language was accessible.

A Member confirmed that at the AFA meeting later in the day, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report would be discussed. Would that action plan eventually become part of the Service Plan. The Head of Corporate Assurance, Planning & Continuous Improvement (Head of CAP&CI) confirmed that this would be anticipated in the long term and there was currently an increased focus on governance arrangements. The Service was looking to accelerate these areas of improvement and there was a number of actions and priorities that did overlap, the Service did not want to create an alternative action plan. Going forward, as the HMICFRS action plan progresses, the Service would look for it to become part of the Service Plan.

The CFO added that we had introduced a continuous improvement framework, which would be the overarching infrastructure to monitor progress, and sit under 'one umbrella' in relation to HMICFRS actions and the Corporate Plan over the next four-year period.

A Member referred to the objective of 'Improving health and wellbeing of communities' and questioned whether this should be a key objective for a Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). The CFO commented that our objectives were aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) strategy under Prevention. Health and equalities are directly correlated and linked to vulnerabilities from fire. The Service would work with other agencies to support and reduce vulnerability from fire.

Reference was made to Improving our Service, Objective two, action four around acquiring Severn Park. The CFO advised that the final decision had not yet been made, project work was ongoing and would be brought back to the AFA at an appropriate time.

A Member asked what steps the Service was taking in terms of increased engagement for the public consultation. The Corporate Assurance and Business Planning Manager confirmed that the Service was improving communication to share our vision and objectives with local communities. The format would be reviewed to make it easier to use and encourage more participation.

The CFO added that the engagement strategy aimed to consult communities around our proposals. The Service internet site would also be rebuilt to increase accessibility. We had also employed a DICE engagement officer to engage with communities around their needs and how we could shape our Service.

The recommendation was moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Hardie.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Approved the draft Service Plan 2024-2028 objectives and actions in Appendix 1 for public consultation.

b) Noted the consultation strategy in Appendix 2.

42. 2023/24 CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE AS AT 31 OCTOBER 2023

Members received an update from the Statutory Finance Officer (SFO) who reported an overview of the 2023/24 to 2025/26 Capital Programme and updated on spend against the Programme for 2023/24 Financial year up to 31 October 2023.

The Capital Programme approved for 2023/24, included adjustments for the final 2022/23 carry over, of £6.332m. An adjustment of £350k to Fleet, to take account of reprofiled (pulled forward) costs, had increased this to £6.682m.

The updated 3-year Capital Programme was shown in Appendix 2, demonstrating the net-nil impact of the £350k pull forwards on the Fleet line, with the total Capital Programme remaining at £12.457m across the three years.

Members were advised that there was actual expenditure of £172k against the IT budget. The projected underspend against this budget, of £130k, would not be carried forward to the next financial year.

Members were advised that for future years, the SFO was reviewing the capital programme to present in February 2024. It was noted that the current capital programme does not include station development at Bath and Weston-super-Mare. These projects were being reviewed and considered as part of the updated capital programme, and should they be included the result would be an increase in prudential borrowing to fund.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) advised that these stations were part of the Estates strategy. They were in a poor state and ongoing maintenance costs were higher. A timetable and request for decision would be going to a future AFA meeting.

A Member asked about the underspend on ICT and added that around only half of the budget had been spent and was the initial budget incorrect. The Head of Finance advised that the budget had been increased due to the IT replacement plan, which was the maximum that could be invested through the capital programme.

The DoCS advised that the Service needed to invest more into our IT integration which would be included in the reports at the February meeting. A discussion will be required around reprofiling our ICT spend going forward. The current IT

allocation within the capital programme contained a provision for hardware only, but more significant investment would be required going forward.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Noted the 2023/24 current Capital spend position and reviewed issues within the updates provided to gain assurance on the 3-year approved Capital Programme.

43. 2023/24 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING AS AT 31 OCTOBER 2023

Members received a paper from the SFO which provided the latest Revenue Monitoring Report for the current financial year, based upon spending for the seven months ending 31 October 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 report forecasted that spending against the net revenue budget would be £132k underspent. This compared to the budgeted break-even position.

Members were advised that the Service was in a fortunate position and that we had been able to use the underspends in certain areas of the revenue budget to help offset the overspends against other cost categories. However, this was a one-off situation and there would still be challenges in future years.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Noted the forecast spending position against the 2023/24 Revenue Budget.

44. PROGRESS REPORT ON CHANGES TO CREWING MODELS AND FLEET IN RESPONSE TO BUDGET SHORTFALL OPTIONS PAPER

The Committee received a report from the CFO who advised that in May 2023, he commissioned a project to identify efficiencies to address the savings required to meet forecast funding pressures in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and maintain a balanced budget. Funding pressures became known following the confirmation of the unfunded Grey Book pay award and uncertain future funding settlements for 2024/25 onwards.

Approval for the recommendations was sought at the Fire Authority meeting on 4 October 2023. At this meeting some amendments to the recommendations were agreed along with an additional recommendation to return to the Policy and Resources Committee (PRC) with a report outlining progress on the implementation of these recommendations to this meeting.

Currently the Local Government financial settlement for the next financial year was unknown, it was anticipated that the settlement would be communicated to Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) in late December 2023.

A number of time task analysis scenario training events were hosted at Hicks Gate Fire Stations domestic fire training building. A comparison of riding 5 firefighters and 4 on the second appliance versus 4 firefighters on both was completed to see if there were critical delays or safety implications to safe systems of work in the early stages of fireground set up and subsequent firefighting activities.

The CFO thanked the FBU for their involvement and engagement during the trials.

The Station Manager, Efficiency and Savings updated Members that the scenario training had taken place with the attendance of key stakeholders including incident command, the FBU and operational crews. Member's attention was drawn to Appendix 1, the Brigade Response Option System (BROS) which provided further details of the trials.

Members were advised that since October, the assumptions had been updated in respect of current inflation rates, which forecasted an increased shortfall from £2.5m to £3.7m.

The trials took part at Hicks Gate Fire Station using BROS guidelines which was a Government lead system and the FBU were advocates of. The template was a domestic fire scenario and time analysis was completed comparing 5 personnel against 4. In conclusion, the data supported that the riding of four personnel on all appliances could be achieved with a safe system of work within AF&RS.

A Member asked for clarification whether the exercises were desktop or physical. It was confirmed that the training took place at Hicks Gate using a life critical incident scenario. The Station Manager, Efficiency and Savings advised that during the trials the question asked was 'what the average response looked like for our crews'. Initially the response times were compared with four and five personnel on the first appliance followed by the average response time of the second appliance. In a subsequent desktop exercise, the timing of the second appliance was adjusted using the data received from the Performance Improvement Team, to establish whether there was a point, with the second appliance average response time, where there would be a detrimental effect to our safe systems of work. From the data obtained, using the average timings, there was not a point where the Service would be putting our staff in that danger.

The Member asked regarding the FBU's point about on a crew of four, there would not be personnel available to control the Breathing Apparatus (BA) board. The Station Manager, Efficiency and Savings advised that the second appliance had always ridden with four personnel. The Member added that if the Service attended an incident with four personnel, were there life saving actions that we can do to save life? It was explained that the crew could prevent escalation i.e. removing a chip pan from a kitchen. The CFO assured Members that there would be no

circumstances where the Service would ask a firefighter to step out of current policy and procedure, safety would not be compromised.

The CFO added if we had a crew of four first in attendance, if there was a rescue that needed to be carried out and confirmed persons reported, the Service had operational guidance and procedure, for the crew to deploy into that building to carry out a lifesaving activity, whilst waiting for the second crew to arrive.

The Member summarised that if a crew of five arrived first on scene, they would also carry out the rescue but with a control board operative. The CFO confirmed that both procedures involved a control board. A breathing apparatus board would be used to keep control on where personnel were and how much air they had left. Both procedures were the same whether four or five personnel were in attendance.

A Member asked whether increasing the use of four crew as opposed to five, increased the likelihood of a less effective safe response, in terms of crews and those effected. The Station Manager, Efficiency and Savings confirmed that four different scenarios were run with different crews each time, looking at the difference between having four and five crews in the first appliance. Looking at the point when BA entered the building, there was less than 75 seconds difference between having five and four on the appliance.

A Member enquired whether Unions had been involved and consulted during trials. The CFO confirmed that the FBU attended, observed the trials and provided feedback.

It was also asked if the process to run with four crew was taking place, why was this not the norm? The CFO responded that in essence we do have standard crewing of five and four. Throughout COVID-19, the Service worked with the FBU and agreed four would ride on every appliance. This still happened when there are crewing deficiencies.

The Member also mentioned that it appeared that most of the trials were carried out in a 'perfect world', is the reality different in an emergency situation? The CFO advised that there was data from other FRS who had undertaken similar trials, however, it was difficult to predict every variance and there were certain circumstances that we could not plan for.

A Member advised that since the AFA meeting in October, he had spoken to firefighters at his local station. The Member pointed out that he believed that the Service could not underestimate the strength of feeling on this issue. There was a feeling that this would adversely affect the ability to deal with an incident. If the ability is impaired, the response time was irrelevant. They asked if the average response time for the second appliance, was the same across all of the Avon area? The CFO advised that our station locations were aligned to the risk profile. We did take an average attendance time of eight minutes for the first appliance in attendance. We also take an average attendance time of the second appliance based on the different variances, which could be less.

The Member asked if we currently run on five, but actually have a crew of four because of crew shortages, then would the move to four mean appliances would not be able to run due to crew shortages. The CFO advised that riding with a crew of four is not new to the sector and had been adopted in other areas of the country, which is why we had undertaken the trials, which was the least-worse scenario. If the CFO was to recommend to the AFA that fire stations were closed or appliances taken off the run, this would have an impact on response times and would have less appliances. The reality was that the AFA is faced with over a £3m funding deficit over the next 3 years, which was not an ideal situation. The CFO was proposing to Member options that allowed us to maintain our average attendance times.

It was resolved that the Committee –

a) Noted the continued development towards the implementation of a crewing model that reflected 4 personnel on every pumping appliance at wholetime stations. Crewing would be maintained on 5 at Hicks Gate where we have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for National Resilience.

45. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report of the Transformation Programme Manager Officer Manager (PMO) on behalf of the Head of Transformation.

The total budget approved by the Fire Authority in February 2021, for this programme equated to £2.473m funded through approved reserves of £1.964m and through the approved Capital Strategy. The programme budget is on track, with no overspends anticipated.

There were currently four priority areas of work in the Transformation Programme: Improvements to the Firewatch IT system, policy reviews, Flexi Duty System review and smart tablets for digitalising station activities and enabling access to update and view site specific risk information.

It was confirmed that 75% of work packages were on track, with some work on hold due to waiting for other dependencies to complete. Others were on hold due to more pressing urgencies, but all anticipated to be complete by March 2025.

It was advised that over the last couple of months significant progress had been made to bring the Service policies up to date. Following a review, some had been removed from the library as were procedures rather than policies. It was hoped that the number of policies could be reduced to 38.

The recently launched a policy hub and had moved away from PDF to Microsoft SharePoint, which had a useful search mechanism feature and would inform policy owners when policies were due to be refreshed. It was anticipated that the policy hub would be brought up to date within the next few months.

It was resolved that the Committee –

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

46. CONSIDER PROCUREMENT FORWARD PLAN £250K-£1M (SNAPSHOT 29.11.2023) AND APPROVAL TO PROCEED FOR BUSINESS CASES OVER £1M.

Members received a spreadsheet 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.

47. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED – that the date of the next meeting be held on Thursday 18 April 2024 at 10.30am.

48. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The recommendation was moved by Cllr Massey and seconded by Cllr Smith

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items of business on the grounds that they contain 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.

49. COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEM BUSINESS CASE

Following an introduction from the CFO, the Committee received a report from the Group Manager Control.

Chair

The meeting ended at 13.40hrs.