



Draft Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting at 10:00 hours on 08 February 2024 at held at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Salisbury.

These are draft minutes prepared by Officers in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair to be approved by the Fire and Rescue Authority at its next meeting.

Members present:

Cllr Rebecca Knox (Chair)	Cllr Cameron Adams	Cllr Abdul Amin*
Cllr Pete Barrow	Cllr Daniel Cave	Cllr Paul Hilliard
Cllr Richard Herrett	Cllr Kelvin Nash	Cllr Lisa Northover
Cllr Paul Oatway	Cllr Byron Quayle	Cllr Pip Ridout
Cllr Kevin Small	Cllr Clare Weight	

*Cllr Amin was not present in the meeting from item 24/12 onwards

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell
Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair
Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter
Designate Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Derek James
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Community Safety, Andy Cole
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae
Head of Corporate Support, Vikki Shearing
Corporate Communications & Engagement Manager, Emily Cheeseman
Democratic Services Officer, David Shaw

24/01 Welcome

24/01.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

24/01.2 The Chair led tributes to Cllr Bob Jones who had sadly passed away on 4 January 2024. Reference was made to Cllr Jones' support to the Authority,

the Service and his time on the Finance & Audit Committee. Cllr Paul Oatway and Cllr Kevin Small also reflected on their memories of Cllr Jones. Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Ben Ansell stated that on behalf of the Officers he was sorrowful at Cllr Jones's passing and spoke of the positive relationship that Cllr Jones had with Officers. The Authority then held a period of silence in his memory.

- 24/01.3 CFO Ansell also informed the meeting that Station Manager Sam Allison had been awarded the King's Fire Service Medal for his work on greater inclusivity working with harder to reach communities, being a positive role model in helping the Service to engage with ethnic minority staff and work during the pandemic to increase the take-up rates of the COVID-19 vaccine from under-represented groups and remote communities. CFO Ansell added that Sam was now on a two-year leave of absence to concentrate on his work as a Premiership football referee and would continue to act as an ambassador for the Service. Cllr Small also added his congratulations.

24/02 Apologies

- 24/02.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Matthew Courtliff and Cllr Brian Dalton.

24/03 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interests

- 24/03.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. No disclosures were made.

24/04 Review minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 12 December 2023 and any matters arising

- 24/04.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

- 24/04.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 12 December 2023 meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**

24/05 Public questions

- 24/05.1 No questions were received from members of the public.

- 24/05.2 RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

24/06 Budget and Precept Implications 2024-25 and MTFP

- 24/06.1 Ian Cotter, Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, presented the report. It was explained that the Local Government Finance Settlement was for one year only and that there was significant uncertainty around inflation and other factors impacting on overall funding. This led to a recommendation to increase council tax by the maximum amount within the 3% core council tax referendum threshold allowed, resulting in a basic amount of Band D Fire Precept at £86.95 for 2024-25.
- 24/06.2 Ian Cotter highlighted that from April 2024 there would be an increase in the employer contribution rate for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, from 28.8% to 37.6%, which equated to an additional cost of £2.13m. However, a new fire pensions grant would be provided by the Home Office, although the allocation for 2024-25 was £1.98m, leaving a shortfall. The new fire pensions grant was also only guaranteed for 2024-25 at this point. In addition, a one-off pension administration grant of £139k would be provided by the Home Office in 2024-25 in respect of dealing with remedy requirements resulting from the McCloud judgement cases on age discrimination.
- 24/06.3 Ian Cotter outlined the assumptions that had been made for the purposes of medium-term financial planning, for example on future government grants and inflation, as set out in the report. Given the significant uncertainty around a number of these assumptions, and the lack of a longer-term Settlement from Government, this made the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) difficult to predict going forward.
- 24/06.4 The meeting was advised of a correction in the Budget Report within paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 on page 11 of the report, where, in table 6, the impact of a £5 precept increase in 2025-26 would provide a scenario of total funding of £75.865m in 2025-26; £77.466m in 2026-27 and £79.118m in 2027-28, resulting in a budget deficit of £0.131m in 2025-26, £0.536m in 2026-27 and £1.078m in 2027-28. Further, continuation of the 2.99% core referendum principle past 2024-25, as shown in table 7, would provide a scenario of total funding of £74.766m in 2025-26; £76.561m in 2026-27 and £78.729m in 2027-28, resulting in a budget deficit of £1.520m in 2025-26, £1.441m in 2026-27 and £1.467m in 2027-28. Members were informed that Officers had set an overall objective to save £2.5 m over the next 12-to-18-month period.
- 24/06.5 In reply to a question from Cllr Small, Ian Cotter explained that table 1 in the report did contain the final settlement funding assessment although there may be a slight variation in final business rates grant funding. Cllr Small continued that the Authority needed to be prepared to meet its financial challenges and that there was a need to consider further use of revenue to support capital expenditure as borrowing was an expensive option. Cllr Small concluded that the budget as presented was sound and should be supported.

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- 24/06.6 A number of Members spoke of the need for local Members of Parliament to support the Authority and to be aware of its financial challenges and the resultant implications for local service delivery. CFO Ansell provided detail on the representations that had been made.
- 24/06.7 The Chair explained that to address the financial shortfalls and to better align resources to risk that the level of decision-making to the CFO would be formally considered under the scheme of delegation by lead Members, Clerk and Monitoring Officer and CFO.
- 24/06.08 RESOLVED:**
- 1. That the revenue budget of £73.919m and capital budget of £14.0m for 2024-25 be approved.**
 - 2. That the basic amount of Band D Fire Precept for the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority at £86.95 for 2024-25 be approved.**
 - 3. That the Treasurer be authorised to issue precept notices on the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Dorset Council, Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council.**
 - 4. That the Financial Principles shown in Section 4.2 and the resulting Medium-Term Finance Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28 be approved.**
- 24/07 Treasury Management 2024-25**
- 24/07.1 Ian Cotter presented the report which set out the treasury management strategy for 2024-25, including the prudential indicators 2024-25 to 2027-28 and the capital strategy 2024-25.
- 24/07.2 Ian Cotter informed the meeting that that new borrowing of £5m would potentially be undertaken in 2023-24. The borrowing would be taken on a short - term basis to support cashflow, due to the presently high level of interest rates. This would be for an initial period of a few months until the 2024-25 Home Office pensions grant funding was received by the Authority. Longer term borrowing would be considered when interest rates had reduced from current levels, to avoid locking in the Authority to longer-term borrowing at expensive interest rates.
- 24/07.3 RESOLVED:**
- 1. That the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices (including the Annual Investment and Treasury Management Strategy) 2024-25 – (as set out in Appendix A), be approved.**
 - 2. That the Capital and Treasury Management Prudential Indicators 2024-25 (as set out in Appendix B), be approved.**

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3. That the Capital Strategy 2024-25 (as set out in Appendix C), be approved.
4. That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement as defined in paragraph 3.11, be approved.

24/08 Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees

- 24/08.1 Jonathan Mair, Clerk and Monitoring Officer and Cllr Pete Barrow, Chair of the Dorset Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee, introduced the report. The positives and negatives of the proposal to move the Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees (LPSs) to a more informal arrangement were outlined.
- 24/08.2 Members discussed the merits of the proposal to have informal meetings, including the option to attend online remote meetings, reducing Officer time in report preparation and to ensure that meetings were quorate. The potential reduction in the opportunity for the public to attend the meetings to hold the Authority to account was also commented upon.
- 24/08.3 Following debate there was agreement that change was required as the present structure could be enhanced.
- 24/08.4 Cllr Small suggested that the LPSs could be based on the three operational command group areas. Members could be appointed to a command group based LPS with six Members representing each group. Members commented that meetings could be hybrid with Members and Officers having the opportunity to attend in person or remotely online. The meetings could be either informal or formal to enable the public to be in attendance.
- 24/08.5 There was recognition that it would be advantageous if the new arrangements could be considered and a recommendation prepared for the annual meeting in June 2024, to allow appointments to be made at that meeting.
- 24/08.6 In conclusion, it was agreed that the existing LPS chairs meet with the Officers to explore options for consideration at the June meeting of the Authority.
- 24/08.7 RESOLVED:**
- That a Members' working group comprising of the existing Local Performance and Scrutiny chairs be established to formulate a revised proposal to agree at the June 2024 Authority meeting.**

24/09 Biennial Review of Authority Policies

24/09.1 Jill McCrae, Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, presented the report and highlighted the areas of policy change compared with the previous policies. The changes resulting from the review were not fundamental and in policy 7 (people) reflected the new Code of Ethics.

24/09.2 Cllr Small commented that under the section on document management within the policy statements, future reviews would use the responsible persons job title rather than name.

24/09.03 RESOLVED:

That the eight Policy Statements set out in Appendix A be approved.

24/10 Pay Policy Statement 2024-25

24/10.1 Jenny Long, Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, presented the report. There were no Member questions arising.

24/10.2 RESOLVED: That the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2024-25 be approved.

24/11 Gender Pay Gap Report 2023

24/11.1 ACO Long presented the report.

24/11.2 In reply to a question from Cllr Abdul Amin, ACO Long stated that data on the numbers of women and those from an ethnic minority background that were retained by the Service would be provided to the Member outside of the meeting.

24/11.3 RESOLVED: That the report be noted

24/12 Corporate Staff - Enhanced Redundancy – Review of Multiplier

24/12.1 ACO Long presented the report.

24/12.2 Cllr Small observed that in view of the financial pressures faced by the Authority, it might be considered that the corporate staff enhanced redundancy multiplier be reviewed annually.

24/12.3 RESOLVED:

- 1. That the redundancy multiplier remains at 1.5.**
- 2. That the policy position be retained that redundancy payments should be calculated on the basis of ‘actual’ salary.**

3. That the policy position be retained that the same level of multiplier be applied for compulsory and voluntary redundancy.

24/13 Draft Community Safety Plan 2024-2028

- 24/13.1 ACO McCrae introduced the report stating that the draft Community Safety Plan was aligned with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and there was the option to bring the plan back for consideration by the Authority within the four-year period if required.
- 24/13.2 ACO McCrae highlighted the revised and new corporate targets on first appliance attendance at road traffic collisions, reduction in attendance at automatic fire alarms, reduction in CO₂ emissions and reducing the number of working days lost to work related injuries and ill health had been included or revised to reflect previous Member discussions.
- 24/13.3 Members commended the plan on the range of methods included to communicate the consultation and engage with the community and other stakeholders.
- 24/13.4 Cllr Richard Herrett enquired if staged improvements could be included to reduce CO₂ emissions. CFO Ansell explained that there was a consistent approach to target setting within the plan. ACO McCrae added that in addition to the Community Safety Plan there was also the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- 24/13.5 CFO Ansell replied to a question from Cllr Barrow and explained that the target of achieving a 15-minute response time on average, for the first appliance in attendance at confirmed traffic collisions was based on Service experience and shared learning.
- 24/13.6 Cllr Lisa Northover enquired if the flow chart on page 73, referring to planning, oversight, and scrutiny, could be improved by simplifying the layout of the decision-making process. ACO McCrae responded that this could be considered in the final version.
- 24/13.7 RESOLVED:**
- That the draft Community Safety Plan 2024-2028 and associated consultation process be approved.**

24/14 Election of Vice Chair

- 24/14.1 Cllr Rebecca Knox asked for nominations for the role of Vice Chair of the Authority. Cllr Paul Oatway was nominated by herself and seconded by Cllr Pip Ridout. Members unanimously agreed the nomination and Cllr Paul Oatway was duly elected.

24/14.2 RESOLVED: That Cllr Paul Oatway be elected as Vice Chair of the Authority for the remainder of 2023-24.

24/15 Date of next meeting

24/15.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Authority meeting as 12 June 2024 from 10:00am.

24/15.2 This being the last meeting of the Authority in the 2023/24 year, Members expressed their thanks and best wishes to Cllr Knox and Cllr Barrow as this would be the last Authority meeting that they would be attending prior to not standing for re-election this May in the Dorset Council local election. Thanks were also expressed to Ian Cotter, Head of Finance and Treasurer following his decision to retire.

Meeting ended at 12.40hrs

Signed: _____