



DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting at 10:00 hours on 14 June 2023.

Members present

Cllr Cameron Adams	Cllr Abdul Amin	Cllr Pete Barrow
Cllr Richard Biggs	Cllr Daniel Cave*	Cllr Brian Dalton
Cllr Richard Herrett	Cllr Paul Hilliard	Cllr Bob Jones
Cllr Rebecca Knox	Cllr Lisa Northover	Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Paul Oatway	Cllr Byron Quayle**	Cllr Pip Ridout
Cllr Kevin Small	Cllr Clare Weight	

*Cllr Daniel Cave was present in the meeting for part consideration of item 23/25 and not present for all subsequent items.

**Cllr Byron Quayle was present in the meeting for part consideration of item 23/25 and not present for all subsequent items.

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell
Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair
Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter
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

23/14 Welcome

23/14.1 The Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair, opened the annual meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority and welcomed Members, including new Members, Cllr Cameron Adams, Cllr Abdul Amin, Cllr Daniel Cave, Cllr Richard Herrett, Cllr Lisa Northover and Cllr Clare Weight.

23/15 Apologies

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23/15.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Matthew Courtliff.

23/16 Election of Chair

23/16.1 Jonathan Mair asked for nominations for the role of Chair of the Authority for 2023-24. Cllr Rebecca Knox was nominated by Cllr Paul Oatway and seconded by Cllr Cameron Adams. Members unanimously agreed this nomination, and Cllr Rebecca Knox was duly elected.

23/16.2 **RESOLVED: That Cllr Rebecca Knox be elected as Chair of the Authority for the year 2023-24.**

23/17 Election of Vice Chair

23/17.1 Cllr Rebecca Knox asked for nominations for the role of Vice Chair of the Authority. Cllr Paul Oatway was nominated by Cllr Pip Ridout and seconded by Cllr Daniel Cave. Cllr Bob Jones was nominated by Cllr Pete Barrow and seconded by Cllr Richard Biggs. Following a vote, Cllr Bob Jones was duly elected.

23/17.2 The Chair expressed her thanks to Cllr Paul Oatway in his role as Vice Chair to the Authority over a number of years.

23/17.3 **RESOLVED: That Cllr Bob Jones be elected as Vice Chair of the Authority for the year 2023-24.**

23/18 Code of Conduct and Declaration of Interests

23/18.1 The Chair asked Members for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. In respect of item 23/31, Future Internal Audit Provision, Cllr Richard Biggs made a personal statement that he was appointed as Dorset Council's representative on the South West Audit Partnership's Owners Board and he subsequently withdrew from the meeting for consideration of this item.

23/19 Review minutes of Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 8 February 2023 and any matters arising

23/19.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

23/19.2 Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Ben Ansell referred to page 8, Minute 23/12, Appointment of Head of Financial Services and Treasurer to the Authority and informed the meeting that following interview Ryan Maslen had been appointed to this position. Mr Maslen was currently employed by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and attended the meeting as an observer.

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- 23/19.3 **RESOLVED: That the minutes be confirmed without amendment and be signed by the Chair as a correct record.**
- 23/20 Receive the approved minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 7 December 2022 and a verbal update on the meeting held on 8 March 2023**
- 23/20.1 The Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee, Cllr Byron Quayle, presented the approved minutes of the 7 December 2022 meeting to Members and provided a general overview of the meeting held on 8 March 2023.
- 23/20.2 **RESOLVED: Members received the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting of 7 December 2022 and noted the Chair's verbal update from the 8 March 2023 meeting.**
- 23/21 Public Questions**
- 23/21.1 No questions were received from members of the public.
- 23/22 Questions from members of the Authority (Standing Order 18)**
- 23/22.1 The meeting noted a question submitted by Cllr Pete Barrow in respect of planning application reference P/FUL/2023/02446 for the proposed installation of a battery energy storage system in Weymouth. Details of the question and the answer provided at the meeting are contained in the appendix attached to the minutes.
- 23/23 Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority Appointments 2023-24**
- 23/23.1 Jonathan Mair introduced the paper and reminded Members that appointments were based on the political proportionality of Members on the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority. The party groups comprised of eight Conservatives, seven Liberal Democrats Alliance and two Labour. There was in addition one Independent, ungrouped member.
- 23/23.2 Jonathan Mair asked for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee. A nomination for Chair was received for Cllr Kevin Small from Cllr Byron Quayle and seconded by Cllr Rebecca Knox. Cllr Kevin Small was unanimously elected as Chair.
- 23/23.3 A nomination for Vice Chair was received for Cllr Paul Hilliard from Cllr Pip Ridout and was seconded by Cllr Kevin Small. A further nomination for Cllr Pete Barrow was proposed by Cllr Richard Biggs and seconded by Cllr Paul Hilliard. A further nomination for Cllr Byron Quayle was proposed by Cllr Rebecca Knox and seconded by Cllr Kelvin Nash. Cllr Paul Hilliard withdrew his nomination and following a tied vote the Chair cast her second vote in favour of Cllr Byron Quayle. Councillors Kevin Small and Cllr Byron Quayle were duly elected Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

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- 23/23.4 Members from the Conservative Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:
Cllr Rebecca Knox
Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Byron Quayle
Cllr Pip Ridout
- 23/23.5 Members from the Liberal Democrats Alliance Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee were:
Cllr Pete Barrow
Cllr Richard Biggs
Cllr Paul Hilliard
- 23/23.6 Member from the Labour Group to be appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee was:
Cllr Kevin Small
- 23/23.7 Jonathan Mair consulted with Members and confirmed the following appointments to further committees, groups and additional bodies.
- 23/23.8 **Local Pension Board**
Cllr Richard Biggs and Cllr Rebecca Knox were unanimously appointed to the Local Pension Board and Cllr Clare Weight was unanimously appointed as a substitute.
- 23/23.9 **Local Government Association (LGA)**
Cllr Rebecca Knox, Cllr Bob Jones and Cllr Pip Ridout were unanimously appointed to the Local Government Association.
- 23/23.10 **LGA Fire Commission**
Cllr Rebecca Knox and Cllr Bob Jones were unanimously appointed to the LGA Fire Commission and Cllr Paul Oatway was unanimously appointed as a substitute.
- 23/23.11 **South West Councils**
Cllr Rebecca Knox was unanimously appointed to South West Councils.
- 23/23.12 **South West Councils Employers' Panel**
Cllr Rebecca Knox was unanimously appointed to South West Councils Employers' Panel.
- 23/23.13 **Wiltshire Public Service Board**
Cllr Rebecca Knox was unanimously appointed to the Wiltshire Public Service Board and Cllr Bob Jones was unanimously appointed as a substitute.
- 23/23.14 Constituent Authority **Community Safety Partnerships** were unanimously agreed as follows:

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Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole – Cllr Lisa Northover
Dorset - Cllr Pete Barrow
Swindon – Cllr Abdul Amin
Wiltshire – Cllr Paul Oatway

- 23/23.15 **RESOLVED: Eight Members were appointed to the Finance & Audit Committee.**
- 23/23.16 **RESOLVED: Members elected the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee as Cllr Kevin Small and the Vice Chair as Cllr Byron Quayle.**
- 23/23.17 **RESOLVED: Members made appointments to the Local Pensions Board, the Local Government Association, the LGA Fire Commission, South West Councils, South West Councils Employers' Panel, Wiltshire Public Service Board and the four constituent authority Community Safety Partnerships.**

23/24 Members' Allowance Scheme - revision

23.24.1 The recommendation was unanimously carried without debate.

23.24.2 RESOLVED:

1. That the Scheme of Allowances be adopted to be published in the Members' Handbook.
2. That the commencement date for the Scheme of Allowances be 14 June 2023.
3. That the Clerk and Monitoring Officer be authorised to determine, after consultation with the Panel, how any inflationary increase should be implemented in the event of a consolidated cash payment to Green Book conditioned staff.
4. That the Panel be thanked for their work in arriving at their recommendations.

23/25 Service annual performance review 2022-23 - presentation

- 23/25.1 Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) Derek James introduced the presentation and provided narrative and context to the performance slides.
- 23/25.2 DCFO James gave an overview of the previous year and referenced the five priorities of the Service and explained how these aligned to Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees and the Finance & Audit Committee.
- 23/25.3 In summary, performance had been positive over the period with good outcomes, including delivering well on value for money and the Service being a strong and valued partner. Challenges remained, particularly relating to finance and the sustainability of the on-call duty system.

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- 23/25.4 Reference was made to Priority 1 - making safer and healthier choices. Points highlighted included that 9,712 safe and well visits had been completed and that new partnerships were being established with Thames Water and Wessex Water; that an assumed 1% reduction in accidental dwelling fires (626 against a target of 707) resulting from safe and well visits equated to a societal saving of £5,900,666, which for the Service was a non-cashable saving of £62,193 and cost avoidance of £50,272; the Service was now using Nextdoor.com as a platform to engage on a local level to issue safety messages and advice; that there were 548 safeguarding referrals which represented a 19.4% increase; that there were five unconfirmed fire related deaths in the period and one confirmed; that there was a 1% reduction against the five-year average in deliberate fires (927 against a target of 936), which was largely down to improved data quality; and that the societal savings on deliberate fires was £104,130, which for the Service was non-cashable savings of £2,706 and cost avoidance of £2,187.
- 23/25.5 Regarding road safety, the long-term trend was upwards for road traffic collisions with a 10.4% increase against the five-year average (711 against a target of 644). The Service had attended less road traffic accidents where people had to be extricated. The societal savings from road safety education was £10,666,976, which for the Service was non-cashable savings of £32,449 and cost avoidance of £45,751.
- 23/25.6 Reference was made to priority 2 – protecting you and the environment from harm. Changes to fire safety legislation and the work of the fire safety department were highlighted. The trend was also upwards for unwanted automatic fire alarms (4,653 against a target of 4,517) showing an 3% increase against the five-year average presenting a non-cashable saving of £66,931 and cost avoidance of £29,633.
- 23/25.7 Reference was made to priority 3 – being there when you need us. Details were provided on Service response times and the number of incidents/fires/non-fire related incidents and false alarms attended and performance was on track. The average attendance time of the first appliance to a sleeping risk premises was nine minutes and 13 seconds, against the target of ten minutes. Reference was also made to recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, which continued to be a challenge, with recruitment now further away from stations to help maintain fire engine availability, which stood at 73.1% of optimum availability for on-call appliances.
- 23/25.8 Reference was made to priority 4 – making every penny count. There had been good performance in the various audit and inspection regimes. The Service had achieved British Standards Institution ISO 55001 in Asset Management. There were challenges regarding financial management over the forthcoming years and grant income from partners for prevention activities was good. Over £44m had been saved by the Service since combination. Reference was also made to resilience and business continuity with a substantial number of multi-agency tabletop exercises being held. Over the period 11 new appliances had been delivered as well as two wildfire specialist vehicles. The information on the carbon footprint and

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electricity and gas consumption were also highlighted as well as progress with the training centres. There had been good overall performance regarding information governance.

23/25.9 Reference was made to priority 5 – supporting and developing our people. The key lines of inquiry were on track, and it was noted that workforce diversity had a 6.4% increase against the five-year average (22.8% against a target of 21.8%) and that the average number of shifts lost to sickness had increased by 22% against the five-year average absence of 11 shifts against a target of 9.05 shifts. It was noted that absences due to mental health and musculoskeletal issues were the main reasons for increases, and Members were advised that a number of these absences were due to individuals going through management processes or were exacerbated by NHS waiting times. Information was also provided on discipline, grievance, bullying and harassment investigations with 33 cases in the year. Details were given on the strengthening people process, including the 37 members of staff undertaking apprenticeships, the leadership development programmes and the strengthened uniformed promotion processes.

23/25.10 RESOLVED: Members noted the Service annual performance review.

23/26 Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services

23/26.1 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) Jenny Long presented the report by way of a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the Service's self- assessment against the national recommendations.

23/26.2 In reply to Members' questions the Officers explained that basic Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for Authority Members were made by their constituent Councils and that data on Equality and Diversity was provided quarterly via a portal.

23/26.3 ACO Long added that basic DBS checks were required on entry to the Service and that in accordance with the Code of Ethics the obligation was on staff to inform the Service if their circumstances had changed during their course of employment. Those requiring an enhanced DBS check were renewed every three years. CFO Ansell observed that there would be cost implications if basic DBS checks required continual renewal, and that this and other implications would form part of the gap analysis against the 'spotlight' report.

23/26.4 RESOLVED: That the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Spotlight report regarding values and culture in fire and rescue services and the action the Service was taking in response be noted.

23/27 Proposed changes to the Members' Handbook and Seminar Programme 2023/24

23/27.1 In reply to a question from Cllr Lisa Northover regarding the gender balance

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of Members on the Appointments and Disputes Committee and the Appeals Committee, Jonathan Mair stated that a balance of two males and two females could be sought if this was merited for the case to be considered. Cllr Kevin Small welcomed the proposed reduction of membership from five members to four commenting that a large panel could be intimidating for the members of staff having their case considered.

23/27.2 RESOLVED: That the amendments to the Members' Handbook and the seminar programme for 2023/24 as set out in the report be approved.

23/28 Service Highlights - public video

23/28.1 CFO Ansell introduced the in-house video which was available on the Service's YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/FS-ij8qoMCw>. The video continues to be made available to local councils and others.

23/29 Date of next meeting

23/29.1 The Chair confirmed the next meeting of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority would take place on 28 September 2023 at 10.00am.

23/30 Exempt Business

23/30.1 In accordance with Section 100A (2, 3 & 4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to move to exclude the press and public for the business specified below because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public. The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered.

PART 2

23/31 Future Internal Audit Provision

23/31.1 In accordance with his statement recorded at minute 23/18.1 Cllr Richard Biggs withdrew from the meeting for consideration of this item. Cllr Pip Ridout, Vice Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee at the 8 March 2023 meeting when the item was initially considered, outlined the Committee's support for the recommendation. Cllr Small referred to the importance of the break clause, which was the Authority's fallback position if required. The recommendation was unanimously supported.

23/31.2 **RESOLVED: That subject to a report to the Authority in 2027 to agree continuation, or for the Authority to provide 12 months' notice to leave the partnership, Option 2, as set out in the report, be approved.**

APPENDIX

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Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting – 14 June 2023

22/32 Questions from members of the Authority (Standing Order 18)

22/32.1 The following question had been received from Cllr Barrow.

22/32.2 Context:

Corylus Planning and Environmental Ltd have submitted a planning application for the installation of a battery energy storage system (BESS) of up to 60MW, associated infrastructure and enclosing compound, together with access and landscaping works. Comments close on 30/06/2023.

Question:

The application has raised serious concerns amongst local residents with one of the issues being the possibility of a serious fire. Evidence from previous fires involving BESS sites around the world suggests that these fires are extremely difficult to extinguish due to the construction and chemistry of the batteries and that any fire will require a significant amount of water to extinguish. The application site is not easily accessible so providing an adequate water supply may be difficult and water run off may be very difficult to contain.

Previous BESS fires have also required the evacuation of local residents due to the toxic nature of any smoke plume. Based on the evacuation areas put in place for previous BESS fires a significant fire on this site could require the evacuation of large parts of Chickerell and Weymouth.

So the questions are.

1. Has DWFRS been consulted on this application?
2. Has DWFRS raised any concerns about the application?
3. Is DWFRS satisfied that the risk of a fire on the site can be controlled to the extent that it is as low as reasonably practicable?
4. Is DWFRS satisfied that the design of the site would prevent a fire in one battery spreading to involve other batteries on the site?
5. Is DWFRS satisfied that any fire on the site can be extinguished without significant risk to local residents, DWFRS staff and the environment?

22/32.3 The following reply was provided by Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Andy Cole at the meeting:

1. Has DWFRS been consulted on this application?

DWFRS have received a number of enquiries from members of the public and local residents in relation to this proposed development as well as a formal approach from the Planning. Fire and Rescue Services are not normally statutory consultees at the planning stage, although we do attempt to identify new developments which may impact on our response arrangements to take the opportunity to engage with developers at an early stage to improve the fire safety arrangements. We have previously liaised with the local Planning Authority to seek early discussions regarding potential for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) sites, including this development. In relation to this proposal, we have also had an approach from

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the fire safety consultant working on behalf of Statera to discuss the design and configuration of the site. We have provided a copy of the National Fire Chiefs Council guidance document to Dorset Council as part of our formal response, which was submitted on 06/06/23.

2. Has DWFRS raised any concerns about the application?

Following a number of similar applications for BESS sites across the service area, and considering concerns raised nationally and internationally as a result of significant incidents at BESS facilities, DWFRS have drafted a position statement which highlights the concerns and some of the considerations which site developers should take during the design phase. These concerns are not specific to the Chickerell site and are supported by a recent publication from the NFCC, who now have a dedicated subject matter expert, which forms the basis of our communication with the Planning Authority. In line with best practice, we have provided a response which outlines our concerns and areas for consideration in general terms, I can provide a copy of the response and the guidance.

3. Is DWFRS satisfied that the risk of a fire on the site can be controlled to the extent that it is as low as reasonably practicable?

The proposal DWFRS have seen incorporates the design features and control measures aligned to guidance for BESS sites outlined in NFPA 855 (the standard for the installation of stationary energy storage systems). If this best practice guidance is followed, and appropriate engagement and familiarisation facilitated to allow the development of detailed emergency plans, DWFRS consider the risk to be controlled and as low as reasonably practicable. However, it will remain the responsibility of the site owner to mitigate the fire risk from their process through risk assessment and technological controls. Access and facilities for fire and rescue appliances, coupled with site familiarisation and the detailed emergency plans are key to an effective response and we will continue to collaborate with the developers and operators to support the production of these. Any new technology presents the potential for unknown hazards and risks.

4. Is DWFRS satisfied that the design of the site would prevent a fire in one battery spreading to involve other batteries on the site?

BESS sites do not currently fall within the remit of statutory consultation under Building Regulations and therefore DWFRS have limited opportunity to influence the design of these technically complex facilities. The proposal for this site states the design and layout will be in accordance with NFPA 855, by virtue of this the site will be designed to mitigate the chance of a fire occurring or spreading if one should occur by stipulating separation distances between modules. Further control measures including ventilation, battery management system, early detection, and local suppression systems, as well as consideration to access for fire service vehicles are included in the proposal. If this best practice guidance is followed, the risk of fire spread between modules is as low as reasonably practicable.

5. Is DWFRS satisfied that any fire on the site can be extinguished without significant risk to local residents, DWFRS staff and the environment?

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DWFRS are developing our training and awareness packages for these installations to ensure that we keep up to date with best practice in the response to a fire at a BESS site. The technology associated with BESS is rapidly evolving. It is our aim to minimise the impact of any operational incident on members of the public, local communities, and firefighting staff. Where sites are identified local crews will conduct site specific familiarisation visits during the construction phase and once commissioned to assist with our emergency planning arrangements and organisational learning. We are not able to guarantee that smoke or toxic products resulting from an incident at any of these sites will have no impact on local residents, as is the case with any fire incident. Since any incident at a BESS site will be considered to involve hazardous materials, we would seek specialist support from the Environment Agency and other scientific advice at the earliest opportunity in the event of an incident. Through national learning we know, the greatest risk presented by incidents at these sites is the containment of the large volumes of firefighting water which can pose an environmental issue.

Meeting closed at 12:20hrs

Signed: _____

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