



DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting at 10:00 hours on 30 September 2020. This was an online meeting held in Microsoft Teams.

Members present:

Cllr Rebecca Knox (Chair)	Cllr Byron Quayle (Vice Chair)
Cllr Abdul Amin	Cllr Steve Baron
Cllr Pete Barrow	Cllr Richard Biggs
Cllr Malcolm Davies	Cllr Paul Hilliard
Cllr Peter Hutton	Cllr Toby Johnson
Cllr Bob Jones	Cllr Christopher Newbury
Cllr Paul Oatway	Cllr Garry Perkins
Cllr Pip Ridout	Cllr Ann Stribley

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell
Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair
Head of Financial Services and Treasurer, Ian Cotter
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Derek James
Director of Community Safety, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Jim Mahoney
Director of People Services, Jenny Long
Head of Information and Communications, Vikki Shearing
Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Assurance, Jill McCrae
Area Manager (AM), Andy Cole, Response Support, Response Development,
Resourcing & Review
Corporate Governance Manager, Nicki Whitehouse
Democratic Services Support, Steph Howard.

20/21 Welcome

20/21.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Members introduced themselves and the Chair gave a roll call of officers in attendance.

20/22 Apologies

20/22.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Brian Mattock and Director of Service Support, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Byron Standen.

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20/23 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interest and Notifications of Any Other Business

20/23.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. Cllr Paul Oatway reported that he had consulted the Monitoring Officer regarding his employment with Wiltshire Police in relation to agenda item 20/26, which he has disclosed on his Register of Interest. The advice from the Clerk & Monitoring Officer was that he does not need to leave the meeting for the item. The Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair clarified that it was not simply that Cllr Paul Oatway has registered his interests, but that he is employed by Wiltshire Police, not the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, which is why he is able to take part in the item.

20/24 Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 18 June 2020 and any matters arising

20/24.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

Cllr Abdul Amin commented that he had been able to be in the meeting at some point.

Post meeting note: Cllr Abdul Amin was able to listen to part of the meeting via the public gallery/live stream and the minutes have been updated to reflect this.

20/26.2 Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Ben Ansell drew Members' attention to paragraph 20/19.6, noting that the Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees had taken place remotely, and this had highlighted the effectiveness of remote meetings, particularly in respect to quorate, as Cllr Rebecca Knox had been able to act as substitute at one of the meetings to ensure it was quorate and able to be held.

20/24.3 **RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed without amendment and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**

20/25 Receive the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 4 March 2020 and a verbal update from the 17 September 2020 meeting.

20/25.1 Cllr Bob Jones presented the minutes of the meeting of 4 March, which he confirmed had been signed as a true record. He gave a verbal update on the meeting of the 17 September 2020. Cllr Bob Jones explained that he had discussed the Service's strategy of undertaking property valuations on a five-year rolling basis with the External Auditor, noting that this was a more cost effective option and in line with others. He reported that External Audit agreed that this was accepted practice and that the rating for this area in the Auditor's report would be ranked as green rather than amber. He further explained that External Audit had provided a good unqualified opinion. Cllr Bob Jones went

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on to report that Internal Audit provided an update for quarters 1 and 2 of 2020-21 and had raised no issues of concern.

20/25.2 **RESOLVED: Members received the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting of 5 March and a verbal update from the meeting held on 17 September 2020.**

20/26 Request to join the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority

20/26.1 Jonathan Mair presented the report, which Members considered and discussed in detail. Members discussed the content of the letter received from the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and raised concerns about the lack of detail of how involvement of the PCCs would make the Authority more effective and efficient. Members agreed that the Service currently works very well with both Police Forces.

20/26.2 Members expressed a range of views on the proposal and when asked, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer clarified the fact that any appointment to the Authority of a Police and Crime Commissioner would be for that person's term of office, rather than for the post on an ongoing basis. Members discussed the fact that this would mean there would be very little time for the current PCCs to make a lasting contribution, due to the fact that both have indicated that they will not be standing at the forthcoming PCC elections.

20/26.3 The Chair drew Members' attention to the current Home Office consultation on a review into the role of the Police and Crime Commissioners, which was due to report its outcome in the near future.

20/26.4 Members agreed that under the Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities (Membership and Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, the Authority must give reasons for its decision to agree to or refuse a request.

20/26.5 Jonathan Mair summarised the debate and concerns as follows:

a) Timing

It is the Authority's understanding that the term of office of the current PCCs come to an end at the beginning of May 2021, when elections are held. Even if appointments were to be made to the Authority with immediate effect, they would only have served as Authority Members for seven months. Members were of the view that this was too little a time to be able to make a lasting contribution to the governance of the Authority.

b) Contribution to efficiency and effectiveness:

When a Police and Crime Commissioner applies to become a member of a Fire and Rescue Authority there is no requirement to provide a business case. Nevertheless, Members were disappointed by a lack of any detail in the application letter to explain how the PCC involvement would make what has

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already been judged to be a good fire and rescue service more effective and more efficient or what additional benefits would be achieved.

c) Home Office Consultation:

Members did not wish to accept a request whilst there is an ongoing consultation concerning the role of PCCs.

20/26.6 Cllr Ann Stribley proposed the following resolution to replace the two recommendations in the report. 'That the request from the two Police and Crime Commissioners be declined' and the reasons be provided as summarised by Jonathan Mair. Cllr Pip Ridout seconded the proposal.

20/26.7 The resolution was put to a vote and 13 Members agreed, one disagreed and two Members abstained.

20/26.8 **RESOLVED: Members declined the request from the two Police and Crime Commissioners to join the Authority.**

20/27 Treasury Management Annual Report 2019-20

20/27.1 The Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter presented the report. He drew Members' attention to page 4 paragraph 3.3, explaining that the Authority had borrowed £4.4m in August 2019. As at the end of March 2020, the under-borrowed position had reduced to £9.7m from £13.1m last year. Ian Cotter explained the table in paragraph 3.5, showing balances in terms of the borrowing of new loans, repayment and interest paid during year 2019-20. He reported that there had been no new borrowing since that time.

20/27.2 Ian Cotter explained that there was a consultation on Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) borrowing results later this year may result in a reversal of the sudden increase in the rates that had been applied last October. Current PWLB rates remain historically low at 2% over ten years, but it is not necessary for the Authority to borrow at this stage. In terms of investments in section 4 of the report, Ian Cotter reported that targets had been slightly exceeded for income last year, but that this would not be repeated this year due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on interest rates.

20.27.3 Ian Cotter reported that treasury management activity had been managed within the Prudential Indicators set for the year and that the Capital Prudential Indicators were all favourable, mainly due to the lower than forecast capital spend for the year. He confirmed that a full report had been provided to the Finance & Audit Committee on 17 September 2020.

20.27.4 RESOLVED: Members noted the report.

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20/28 Annual Report 2019-20

- 20/28.1 CFO Ben Ansell presented the report with an accompanying presentation. He referred Members to pages 19 and 20 of the Annual Report in appendix A, 'Being there when you need us' on which Members focus in detail at their Local Performance & Scrutiny Committee meetings. He gave an overview of the Priorities on page 7 of the report and explained that for each there was a summary of the outcomes of the work of the Service and a narrative of the focus moving forwards.
- 20/28.2 CFO Ben Ansell went on to explain the impact to wider society of Safe and Well visits which help to reduce the demand on the Service's emergency response and that of partners, as well as providing value for money. He referred Members to the successful national Armed Forces Day event held in Salisbury in June 2019, which was reported on page 13.
- 20/28.3 Moving to page 16 of the report, CFO Ben Ansell referred to actions the Service was taking in fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire and subsequent Phase 1 report from the Inquiry.
- 20/28.4 CFO Ben Ansell was pleased to report a 5% reduction in accidental dwelling fires. 86 people had been rescued from fire and 301 from road traffic collisions during the year. At the time of publication of the draft report, sadly there had been six deaths in fire related incidents, of which the Coroner had determined two were caused by fire. He reported that the Coroner had since determined one further death was fire related, with three still awaiting a Coroner's verdict. He confirmed that the report would be amended to reflect this prior to publication.
- 20/28.5 Referring to page 23 and the Priority 'Making every penny count', CFO Ben Ansell reported that the Authority continues to be low spending, with firefighter costs per person lower than the national average and he referred to the chart on page 24, showing the Authority's charges within band D council tax against other fire authorities in England.
- 20/28.6 CFO Ben Ansell reminded Members that the Service had achieved 'good' ratings across all three pillars of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services inspection regime in June 2019.
- 20/28.7 He was delighted to receive the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award and reported that the area has a significant military presence with the Service employing a number of military spouses and ex-forces personnel and releasing a number of reservists.
- 20/28.8 Referring to page 29 of the report on diversity and inclusion, CFO Ben Ansell pointed to Appendix B, the Annual Workforce Equality Report and referred Members to page 30, the Priority 'Developing and supporting our people' and the good work being done.

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- 20/28.9 CFO Ben Ansell referred to the strategic performance on page 32 and took Members through the reported performance. In particular, he was pleased to report that the Service had achieved the ISO standard 45001 Occupational health and safety management.
- 20/28.10 CFO Ben Ansell explained to Members that he would amend the performance rating of 'For sickness absence, to be no higher than average reported for other comparable fire and rescue services in England' from green to amber as the performance was slightly under target.
- 20/28.11 He summarised by saying that the Service was self-aware and knew where it needs to focus.
- 20/28.12 In response to a Member's question, Director of People Services, Jenny Long explained the positive action the Service had taken in respect to previous recruitment campaigns, including 'have a go days', by encouraging people to come onto station with an opportunity to speak to staff. She explained that since the coronavirus pandemic, the Service had moved to have more information on social media and the Service's website. The Service had recently run two Facebook live activities which gave people an opportunity to pose questions to staff and had introduced a buddying scheme for under-represented groups to ask questions which might be deterring them from applying.
- 20/28.13 In answer to a question about the support the Service provides in bullying and harassment cases, Jenny Long explained that strong procedures are in place and the Service will not tolerate bullying and harassment. She reported that cases are always investigated, and the Service provides support to those making allegations via the HR business partners (HRBPs) which are aligned to all workplaces. There is also support available from Workout Solutions, the Service's counselling provider and from the Health and Wellbeing team.
- 20/28.14 The Chair congratulated officers on the work reflected in the Annual Report and commented that she was very pleased to see the Annual Workforce Equality report.
- 20/28.15 RESOLVED: Members considered and approved the Annual Report as set out in Appendix A with the amendments indicated by the CFO.**
- 20/28.16 RESOLVED: Members considered and noted the Annual Workforce Equality Report as set out in Appendix B.**
- 20/29 Statement of Assurance 2019-20**
- 20/29.1 The Head of Strategic Planning & Corporate Assurance, Jill McCrae, presented the report, explaining that the Statement of Assurance was a requirement of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England and that

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the Service's process for producing it had been reviewed by Internal Audit and the Local Government Association (LGA) during their recent review of the Authority's governance arrangements. She explained that it covers three assurance areas, governance, financial and operational.

20/29.2 Jill McCrae drew Members' attention to the current and future challenges detailed on page 11 of the Statement, which align to the Authority's Strategic Risk Register. She also referred to paragraph 1.41, a quote from Her Majesty's Inspector, Wendy Williams, which stated the Service is performing to a high standard in all areas'.

20/29.3 In response to a Member's question, ACFO Jim Mahoney explained how the Service was evaluating prevention activities to ensure that they produce positive outcomes and value for money and some of the challenges in doing this.

20/29.4 RESOLVED: Members approved the Statement of Assurance 2019-20.

20/30 Report on the implications of Building and Fire Safety Bills - verbal update

20/30.1 ACFO Jim Mahoney gave a presentation and explained that the Grenfell Tower fire, the subsequent reports and Government responses had been a catalyst for change. He explained that the Service had adapted its processes where necessary and that these were soon to be tested at the Fire Service College to ensure these revised procedures were effective. ACFO Jim Mahoney confirmed that in terms of multi-agency specific areas, the Service had been working effectively for a number of years.

20/30.2 ACFO Jim Mahoney reported that the Service had set up an internal working group to ensure there were no gaps in procedures and arrangements with an action plan which was on track.

20/30.3 In terms of the legislative environment, ACFO Jim Mahoney highlighted the new legislation and changes to the Regulatory Reform Order. He reported that the Building Safety Act has resulted in some changes in Building Regulations and highlighted the establishment of a Building Safety Regulator, with which fire and rescue services will be heavily involved. There is a Building Risk Review programme underway, focussing on high rise residential buildings and other building safety matters.

20/30.4 ACFO Jim Mahoney explained that a Building Risk Review programme has been established to focus on high-rise buildings over 18m or six floors and that the Service has a list of 218 buildings from MHCLG, which are currently being triaged for inspections in a programme planned to run to December 2021.

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- 20/30.5 Legislative changes are expected to receive Royal Assent early in 2021 and the impacts are still emerging, but likely to include external facades, fire doors, floor and evacuation plans, lift testing records, premises information boxes and personal emergency evacuation plans. This work will be an addition to what the Service currently does. The Service's risk-based inspection programme will be larger than it is currently, as will be the number of premises and criteria or scope of inspection.
- 20/30.6 ACFO Jim Mahoney explained that there is a revised competency framework for fire safety staff, which will require at least a two year lead time for those new in this area, before they can be considered competent to inspect unsupervised.
- 20/30.7 The Service is developing a management information system to assist and ensure added value in terms of risk management and working on the capacity requirement to manage the larger scale of work. It aims to integrate protection work across the Service and use other staff members to understand building safety systems and carry out lower level fire safety checks, as well as acting as the eyes and ears of the protection teams.
- 20/30.8 ACFO Jim Mahoney reported that the Government has provided a one-off grant of £340k, which, whilst welcome, will not address the longer-term sustainability of this work and the Service and sector are currently lobbying for additional funding to be built into base budgets. He confirmed that the Service will be investing in the Protection team but is mindful of the financial challenges and it is a focus within the Resourcing and Savings Programme.
- 20/30.9 CFO Ben Ansell explained that this is the most significant change in fire safety legislation for a generation. Currently, the focus is on higher risk residential properties, but he explained that this is not just high-rise, but all high-risk buildings, for example, care homes, hospitals and schools. CFO Ben Ansell reminded Members that he sits on the Building Regulations Advisory Committee as a direct appointment by the Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government and can provide assurance that the Service is involved nationally and locally.
- 20/30.10 The Chair commented on the importance of this issue and reminded Members that they all have the ability to influence local authorities to ensure the Service is supported, in particular in areas such as installation of sprinklers in schools.

20/31 Strategic Financial update

- 20/31.1 Ian Cotter presented the report, an update on some of the key financial planning issues the Authority faces. He drew Members' attention to the table on page 3, which detailed the Medium Term Finance Plan, with a balanced budget for 2020-21, but facing projecting deficits of £1.5m for next year rising to just over £3m in 2023-24. He confirmed that this position was before the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

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- 20/31.2 Ian Cotter explained that he was considering the assumptions for the taxbase within the agreed financial principles and proposing to reduce these down to 1% from 1.5% to align with local authority assumptions. He referred to recommendation 2 in the report, which asked Members to approve this change.
- 20/31.3 Ian Cotter referred to paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 of the report, detailing future significant budget pressures in terms of pay awards and pensions funding.
- 20/31.4 Section 3 of the report related specifically to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, of which the financial impacts are currently not clear. £1.3m of one-off funding had been received from the Government to cover some specific impacts, but it was clear that the impacts will continue past this financial year. Ian Cotter reported that the Service is making savings where it can.
- 20/31.5 The biggest concern is the impact on future funding, as 75% comes from council tax, but it is too early to predict the impact and the Service is waiting to see if this is addressed in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Ian Cotter explained that the three-year CSR may be replaced by further one year rolling settlement.
- 20/31.6 Ian Cotter referred Members to appendix B, the Fire Spending Review Proposal, a collaborative Local Government Association and National Fire Chiefs Council submission, that makes the case for an increased base funding to help with the funding pressures for the expectations of the new fire protection activities.
- 20/31.7 Ian Cotter explained the Service's Resourcing and Savings programme, a comprehensive financial review detailed on page 7, with a working assumption on the need to make savings of between £2-2.5m from 2021-22. The work is looking across the Service, with a range of scalable savings options. Ian Cotter referred Members to the table on page 7, outlining the key milestones of the programme including the engagement with Members.
- 20/31.8 CFO Ben Ansell concluded by explaining that the Authority is in a financially challenging place, although the Service is lean and efficient. He reminded Members that the Government grant is a small part of the income and that it would be appropriate for a modest increase in council tax, an issue that he and the Chair had been discussing with all 15 local MPs.
- 20/31.9 RESOLVED: Members noted and considered the content of the report.**
- 20/31.10 RESOLVED: Members approved the changes to Financial Principles outlined in paragraph 2.2 of Appendix A.**
- 20/32 Members Podcast**
- 20/32.1 CFO Ben Ansell introduced the Members Podcast.

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20/33 Date of Next Meeting

20/33.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Authority meeting as 10 December 2020 from 10am.

20/34 To consider passing the following resolution:

20/34.1 In accordance with Section 100A (2 & 3) of the Local Government Act 1972, 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 Paragraphs 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.

PART 2

20/35 Insurance arrangements

20/35.1 Members reviewed and discussed the report and recommendations were agreed.

Meeting closed at 13:03hrs

Signed: _____

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