



DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Draft Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting at 10:00 hours on 08 February 2023 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 Paul Oatway (Vice Chair) | Cllr Steve Baron |
| Cllr Pete Barrow | Cllr Richard Biggs | Cllr Malcolm Davies |
| Cllr Brian Ford* | Cllr Paul Hilliard | Cllr Russell Holland |
| Cllr Toby Johnson | Cllr Bob Jones | Cllr Kelvin Nash** |
| Cllr Byron Quayle | Cllr Pip Ridout | Cllr Kevin Small |

*Cllr Ford was not present in the meeting for consideration of item 23/12.

**Cllr Nash was not present in the meeting for consideration of item 23/11 and 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

23/01 Welcome

23/01.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

23/01.2 The Chair made the following statement:

23/01.3

“You will all be aware of the media reports that arose last week concerning allegations of deeply concerning behaviour within the Fire and Rescue Service. It is important that I address this issue at the start of this meeting.

Firstly, and I am sure I speak for everyone here, when I say these allegations are shocking and alarming. They are being treated with the utmost seriousness, not only by this Authority as a governing body, but by the Service, and also the police.

As the Chief Fire Officer has made clear in his public statements last week, an independent investigation is being commissioned so we can get to the heart of these matters and act accordingly on its findings. In the circumstances, this is entirely appropriate. It is what members of the public will expect and it is what we, as Members of the Authority, expect.

Officers have prepared draft terms of reference for the independent investigation and in order to be inclusive, they are consulting on these with key stakeholders. I will consult all Members of the Authority on the terms of reference before they are approved.

In addition, the Service has set up a confidential helpline so that if any members of staff have immediate issues as a result of these allegations, the right support is in place.

We know that the vast majority of staff are good people, working hard and doing a good job. Let us not forget that, but neither must there be any complacency - where bad behaviour, or worse, is identified, that must be tackled head on.

I will pass to the Chief Fire Officer in a moment, but before I do, I must bring to your attention back to the police investigation. As there is a live police inquiry underway, we will be unable to take questions on the allegations, for obvious reasons.

I will now ask the Chief Fire Officer to say a few words.”

23/01.4

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell, made the following statement:

“Thank you, Chair. While I am speaking to you under similar legal restraints, I can expand a little on what actions we are currently undertaking.

Firstly, you may have seen we have committed to consulting with all our female staff as part of the independent investigation. This is clearly no small undertaking but is entirely appropriate in the circumstances.

With that in mind - and given the nature of some of the allegations - it is important that the head of this investigation is female. We have a shortlist of potential inquiry leads and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on this appointment shortly.

The terms of reference are being consulted on as I speak, but I can tell you that once the inquiry is completed, the main findings will be published and presented to this Authority.

There is already an expectation for our staff to work in line with our Code of Ethics which sets out high levels of expected behaviours. From my perspective, it is important that the inquiry examines the extent to which our people feel safe, supported and listened to, and that our culture is fully aligned to our Code of Ethics.

I would also like the inquiry to look at whether there are any barriers that inhibit the reporting of inappropriate behaviours and that our procedures are suitably robust.

I will, of course, update the Authority on all relevant developments as and when I can, subject to the on-going police investigation.

Thank you.”

23/02 Apologies

23/02.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Brian Dalton, Cllr Millie Earl and Cllr Ashley O'Neill.

23/03 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interests

23/03.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.

23/04 Review minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 14 December 2022 and any matters arising

23/04.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

23/04.2 CFO Ansell drew attention to Minute 22/55.3 and the note made subsequent to the meeting that approval to invest in an overseas bank was by the Treasurer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee. This point would be made explicit in the Treasury Management Strategy, minute 23/08 post refers.

23/04.3 **RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 14 December 2022 meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**

23/05 Public questions

23/05.1 No questions were received from members of the public.

23/06 Inspection of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2022: Final report

23/06.1 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae introduced the report. The methodology underpinning the inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was explained, including the extensive preparation work undertaken by Nick Sjogren, the Service's Standards and Assurance Manager.

23/06.2 The results of the inspection for the effectiveness pillar were outlined to the meeting by Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Community Safety, Andy Cole. ACO McCrae provided details on the results of the efficiency pillar and Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long, provided detail on the people pillar. ACO McCrae also outlined how the results compared favourably with those nationally and the actions that were being taken to strengthen the areas for improvement that had been identified during the inspection.

23/06.3 ACO McCrae proceeded to summarise the State of Fire and Rescue Report 2022 and informed the meeting that round three of inspections by the Inspectorate had commenced this month and it was estimated that this Service would be scheduled for inspection at the end of 2024, for which preparation was already being undertaken.

23/06.4 CFO Ansell added that the Officers were proud of the report which had followed a rigorous inspection. The results of good and outstanding for the three pillars indicated a lean and high performing Service and no areas for concern had been highlighted.

23/06.5 The Chair and Cllr Byron Quayle, Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee, thanked the Officers for the work undertaken on the inspection and for the outstanding outcome.

23/06.6 Cllr Pete Barrow commented on the improvement that had taken place over time within the Service. He asked about the six areas previously identified within the State of Fire and Rescue report for improvement, highlighting that two had been completed but four remained in action. The Chair explained that these remaining actions sat nationally with the Home Office and also within the White Paper on 'Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service', with the Government's response to the White Paper consultation not yet published.

23/06.7 In reply to a question by Cllr Kelvin Nash regarding that 47% of incidents attended in the year to the 30 June 2021 were false alarms, ACFO Cole explained the action that the Service was taking to reduce this figure including

having a dedicated Demand Analysis Group to assess calls. Reference was also made to the Authority's demographic and the high degree of sheltered accommodation and high-rise buildings within the area that created a sleeping risk.

- 23/06.8 Cllr Richard Biggs referred to the excellent results and enquired, under the people pillar, whether the Independent Review referred to by the Chair at the commencement of the meeting could result in learning, in that individuals could raise concerns internally in a small number of cases of inappropriate behaviour. CFO Ansell replied highlighting the findings of the HMICFRS inspection and added that the Service was not complacent and that the Independent Review would consider this matter.
- 23/06.9 In reply to a question by Cllr Paul Hilliard, ACO McCrae explained that the results of staff interviews at stations remained confidential to the Inspectorate with no adverse themes being brought to the attention of the Service.
- 23/06.10 Cllr Hilliard and Cllr Toby Johnson noted that in future inspections there would be a change of approach from the Inspectorate with the removal of the overall three pillar gradings. Instead, all 11 key lines of inquiry would be graded. CFO Ansell added that the Service had a good working relationship with the Inspectorate and looked forward to the next round of inspections. The changes in the methodology also applied to the police.
- 23/06.11 Cllr Kevin Small congratulated the Officers on the results and commented that more balanced results could be obtained from the inspections if the Service was compared with Services of a similar composition, for example in the numbers of on-call firefighters employed.
- 23/06.12 **RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

23/07 Budget and Precept Implications 2023-24

- 23/07.1 The Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter, provided a detailed presentation to support the report.
- 23/07.2 Ian Cotter referred to the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023-24 and reported that the revenue support grant had increased by the September Consumer Price Index of 10.1% or £405k; that the Government had frozen the business rates multiplier, and that the Top-Up grant had been recalculated for April 2023 valuations, amongst other implications. He further reported that details of actual business rates income and grant funding had now been received and this would provide an additional £718k of funding over and above that reported in the paper.
- 23/07.3 Ian Cotter reported that confirmation of specific grant allocations from the Home Office had not yet been received, and this included the £2.7m expected pensions grant.

- 23/07.4 The £5 council tax flexibility for all standalone fire and rescue authorities was recommended to be approved by Members and although the financial projection had improved over earlier forecasts, there remained risks around pay, inflation and capital financing. The financial situation in respect of balances and reserves was reasonable.
- 23/07.5 It was noted that a significant element of the overall budget requirement was related to staffing costs and CFO Ansell added that members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had recently voted to undertake strike action following a national ballot. Any action had been temporarily paused to allow for further discussions to take place within the National Joint Council (NJC) between the FBU and the National Employers. The NJC were meeting this same day.
- 23/07.6 In reply to a question from Cllr Small, Ian Cotter explained that the unexpected additional business rates funding coming to the Authority in 2023-24 would initially be managed through a transfer to reserves to maintain the overall budget requirement in line with that set out in the report. It was likely that the additional funding would have to be used to pay for the increased pay award that was likely to be offered to operational staff.
- 23/07.7 Cllr Quayle commented that the financial effects of strike action, pay awards and inflation would not be covered by the £5 council tax flexibility and the local Members of Parliament should continue to be canvassed on this point.
- 23/07.8 In reply to a question from Cllr Biggs, Ian Cotter explained that the general balances risk assessment made allowance for the potential costs of strike action and this could be utilised on a one-off basis if the need arose. However, a potential 11% pay award for operational staff would have an ongoing impact on the Authority's finances and this represented a significant financial risk.
- 23/07.9 In conclusion, CFO Ansell referred to the £5 council tax flexibility for 2023-24 and the need to canvass local Members of Parliament for it to be also provided for 2024-25.
- 23/07.10 **RESOLVED:**
- 1. That the revenue budget of £65.99m and capital budget of £7.1m for 2023-24 be approved**
 - 2. That the basic amount of Band D Fire Precept for the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority at £84.43 for 2023-24 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 Medium-Term Finance Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27 be approved.**

23/08 Treasury Management Strategy 2023-24

23/08.1 Ian Cotter presented the report which set out the Treasury Management Strategy for 2023-24, including the relevant prudential indicators, the capital strategy and the Authority policy on minimum revenue provision (MRP).

23/08.2 Ian Cotter highlighted that section 3.6.2 of Treasury Management Policy 5, relating to the authority of the Treasurer, now included explicit reference to approval of investments in foreign/overseas banks (in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority and Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee) as referred to in the Minutes of the Authority held on 12 December 2022 (Minute 22/55 refers). There were no Members' questions arising.

23/08.3 **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Practices (including the Annual Investment and Treasury Management Strategy) – (as set out in Appendix A), be approved**
- 2. That the Capital and Treasury Management Prudential Indicators 2023-24 (as set out in Appendix B), be approved**
- 3. That the Capital Strategy 2023-24 (as set out in Appendix C), be approved**
- 4. That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement as defined in paragraph 3.11, be approved.**

23/09 Pay Policy Statement 2023-24

23/09.1 ACO Long presented the report. There were no Members' questions arising.

23/09.2 **RESOLVED: That the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2023-24 be approved.**

23/10 Gender Pay Gap report 2022

23/10.1 ACO Long presented the report by way of a detailed presentation highlighting the extensive work undertaken to retain and develop female members of staff and to embed equality, amongst many other initiatives. Members noted and were very supportive of the positive work being undertaken in this regard. There were no Members' questions arising.

23/10.2 **RESOLVED: That the report be noted**

23/11 Modern Slavery Statement

23/11.1 ACO McCrae presented the report. In reply to Members' comments, CFO Ansell stated that at its annual review as part of the annual Statement of Assurance required under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, the Modern Slavery Statement would be reviewed to make it more bespoke to the Authority, considering key performance indicators to cover effectiveness.

23/11.2 **RESOLVED: That the Modern Slavery statement be approved and that the statement be reviewed as part of the Authority's annual Statement of Assurance.**

23/12 Appointment of Head of Financial Services and Treasurer to the Authority

23/12.1 In reply to a comment by Cllr Quayle, Jonathan Mair stated that there would be no requirement to appoint the interview panel in accordance with political proportionality should group leaders agree to this.

23/12.2 **RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the interview process as outlined in the paper be approved**
- 2. Delegate to the Clerk and Monitoring Officer after consultation with group leaders the appointment of three Members to form part of the interview panel**
- 3. Delegate to the interview panel in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk and Monitoring Officer approval to designate the successful candidate as Treasurer to the Fire and Rescue Authority.**

23/13 Date of next meeting

23/13.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Authority meeting as 14 June 2023 from 10:00am.

Meeting ended at 12.30hrs

Signed: _____