



**Draft Minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting at 10:00 hours on 30 September 2021 held at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Salisbury.**

These are draft minutes to be approved by the Fire and Rescue Authority at their next meeting.

Members present:

Cllr Rebecca Knox (Chair)	Cllr Steve Baron	Cllr Pete Barrow
Cllr Brian Dalton	Cllr Malcolm Davies	Cllr Paul Hilliard
Cllr Russell Holland	Cllr Toby Johnson	Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Byron Quayle	Cllr Pip Ridout	Cllr Ann Stribley
Cllr Kevin Small		

Note: Cllr Bob Jones observed virtually via MS Teams

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell  
Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Johnathan Mair  
Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Derek James  
Director of Community Safety, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Andy Cole  
Director of People Services, Jenny Long  
Head of Corporate Support, Vikki Shearing  
Head of Service Improvement, Jill McCrae  
Corporate Communications & Engagement Manager, Emily Cheeseman  
Democratic Services Manager, Gemma Kelly  
Democratic Services Officer, Dave Shaw  
Executive and Democratic Services Administrator, Steph Howard

**21/34 Welcome**

- 21/34.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. It was explained that Cllr Bob Jones was observing the meeting virtually via MS Teams due to personal constraints arising from the national fuel shortage. The Chair explained that he may be invited to contribute at the meeting at the behest of the Chair but not vote on the items under consideration.

**21/35 Apologies**

21/35.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Paul Oatway and Cllr Ashley O'Neill.

**21/36 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interests**

21/36.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. Cllr Russell Holland declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in item 21/41 - Home Office consultation on giving greater powers of competence to Police and Crime Commissioners, as he had recently been appointed as the new Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Wiltshire. Jonathan Mair, Clerk & Monitoring Officer, confirmed that this was not a disclosable pecuniary interest and Cllr Holland voted on this item.

**21/37 Review minutes of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 16 June 2021 and any matters arising**

21/37.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

21/37.2 Cllr Malcolm Davies stated that he had been present at the meeting, although his name had been omitted from the list of those in attendance.

21/37.3 The Clerk and Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair, reported on Action 21/23.15 from the 16 June 2021 meeting. Jonathan Mair informed the meeting that he was in contact with the Chair to appoint a substitute to the Local Pension Board outside of the meeting.

21/37.4 Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Ben Ansell reported on Action 21/27.14. CFO Ansell confirmed that the wording of the Scheme of Delegation to Officers section in the Members' Handbook had been completed under the guidance of Jonathan Mair. This action was therefore complete.

21/37.5 CFO Ansell further updated the meeting that the White Paper on Fire Reform had been delayed possibly until the end of the calendar year. Consequently, Members agreed to cancel the 21 October 2021 Member Seminar date on this topic and retained the 18 November 2021 Member Seminar date, which it was agreed to be a virtual seminar held in MS Teams.

21/37.6 In reply to a question from Cllr Pete Barrow, CFO Ansell updated the meeting on the latest position in respect of the national pay award offers to corporate and operational staff. CFO Ansell stated that corporate staff negotiations were ongoing at a national level and that any pay award, when made, would be backdated to the 1 April 2021.

*Initials* \_\_\_\_\_

- 21/37.7 **ACTION: Democratic Services to cancel the 21 October 2021 Members' Seminar and to retain the 18 November 2021 date as a virtual seminar in MS Teams to consider the White Paper on fire reform.**
- 21/37.8 **RESOLVED: That subject to the correct attendance being recorded, the minutes of the 16 June 2021 meeting be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**
- 21/38 Receive minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting of 28 July 2021 and verbal update from the 15 September 2021 meeting.**
- 21/38.1 Cllr Byron Quayle presented the minutes of the meeting of 28 July 2021 and provided a general overview of the meeting.
- 21/38.2 Cllr Quayle also gave a verbal update on the 15 September 2021 meeting. He reported that the Authority had received an unqualified audit opinion.
- 21/38.3 **RESOLVED: Members received the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting of 28 July 2021 and noted the Chair's verbal update from the 15 September 2021 meeting.**
- 21/39 Public questions**
- 21/39.1 No questions were received from members of the public.
- 21/40 Exceptional decision-making arrangements – proposed changes to Members' Handbook**
- 21/40.1 Clerk and Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair, presented the report.
- 21/40.2 The Chair commented that as Chair of the Authority, she would also consult with chairs of the Local Performance & Scrutiny Committees should the need arise, in exceptional circumstances, to convene an informal remote meeting of the Authority.
- 21/40.3 Cllr Kevin Small gave an example of where similar decision-making arrangements had been introduced successfully at parish council level and it was also commented by Cllr Ann Stribley that the approach was sensible.
- 21/40.4 **RESOLVED: Members considered and approved the exceptional decision-making arrangements described in the Report and approved the making of consequential changes to the Officer Scheme of Delegation.**

**21/41 Home Office consultation on giving greater powers of competence to Police and Crime Commissioners**

21/41.1 Clerk and Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair, presented the report.

21/41.2 In reply to Cllr Paul Hilliard's question on the benefits and risks of the proposed response to the consultation, CFO Ansell explained that affording greater powers of competence to Police and Crime Commissioners and Combined Fire Authorities would align the CFO's position with that of police chief constables and chief fire officers in other fire services that were delivered through local authorities, for example Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, who already had the powers of competence.

21/41.3 Members considered that the proposal was sensible and were supportive of the proposed response to the consultation and also suggested some clarifications and points to raise as part of this exercise. It was also agreed that a copy of the response be sent to the Authority area's Members of Parliament.

21/41.4 The Chair requested that Jonathan Mair consider the additional wording that had been suggested by Members for its possible inclusion.

21/41.5 **ACTION: Democratic Services to send a copy of the response to the consultation to the Authority area's Members of Parliament.**

21/41.6 **RESOLVED: That subject to the Clerk and Monitoring Officer considering the additional wording suggested by Members, the suggested response to the Home Office Consultation about giving PCCs greater powers of competence be approved as set out below:**

- **The extension of a general power of competence for PCCs should be supported and welcomed.**
- **A general power of competence for PCCs is to be preferred over the option of wider functional powers as a general power will provide greater confidence to act whereas functional powers might leave doubt.**
- **Consistent with the position in Councils, the safeguards provided by the statutory roles of the Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer should be seen as sufficient to enable the extension of a general power of competence to PCCs.**
- **The Home Office should be asked to consider the question of consistency of approach and the opportunity to align PCC, Authorities and Council powers so that all have access to a general power of competence.**

## **21/42 Annual Report 2020-21**

- 21/42.1 CFO Ansell introduced the report and highlighted to Members the significant headlines within Appendix A of Report 21/42. CFO Ansell gave further details of the circumstances of the six deaths as determined by Her Majesty's Coroner, which were caused by fire as reported at the time of publication of the Annual Report, with three other cases awaiting consideration by the coroner. CFO Ansell also clarified that the percentage of operational staff intake from under-represented groups was 9.6% and not 9.3% as set out on page 36 of the Report. The final version of the Annual Report would be amended to show the correct figure.
- 21/42.3 The Director of People Services, Jenny Long, introduced the Annual Workforce Equality Report (Appendix B of Report 21/42 refers). A short presentation was provided to highlight key areas to the meeting.
- 21/42.4 CFO Ansell concluded the presentations stating that although finance remained a challenge, the outcomes for the year were pleasing and that further improvement could be made before Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service's (HMICFRS) inspection in Spring 2022.
- 21/42.5 Cllr Holland welcomed the Annual Report and asked if the equality objectives were set out within the Annual Report. Jenny Long explained that they were within the short presentation at the meeting, but not included in the Annual Report. The objective is the corporate target to increase the diversity of our workforce.
- 21/42.6 Jenny Long also confirmed to Cllr Holland that the average shifts lost per person due to sickness (page 28 of Appendix B refers) were largely influenced by an individual on long term sick leave.
- 21/42.7 Jenny Long explained to Cllr Holland the actions that were undertaken in cases of bullying and harassment (page 23 of Appendix B refers).
- 21/42.8 Cllr Barrow made reference to page 31 of Appendix A which showed the Service's Band D Council Tax charges for 2020-21 compared to other fire and rescue services and asked how the Service compared with total funding figures. The Chair stated that this information was available, and it would be provided to Cllr Barrow. CFO Ansell explained that Council Tax was an important funding element for the Service.
- 21/42.9 Cllr Barrow observed that 49% of staff were greater than 55 years of age and asked if the Service was confident that measures were in place to allow staff succession without affecting service delivery. Jenny Long provided details of the steps that were being taken to monitor the situation, including the apprenticeship scheme. CFO Ansell added that staff were being asked to give as much notice as possible of their intention to leave or retire from the Service.

- 21/42.10 Cllr Hilliard observed that 9.6% of operational staff intake was from under-represented groups and queried if a target figure of 20% was achievable and also whether the emphasis should be on 'seeking' to improve diversity and inclusion rather than 'ensuring'. CFO Ansell replied that staff would only be appointed on their merits, but it was important for the Service to be as diverse as it could be. Jenny Long confirmed that there was no preferential treatment on the assessments, but it was an objective the Service that: 'We will improve the diversity of our workforce as a whole compared to the last five years'.
- 21/42.11 Cllr Pip Ridout referred to the fact that 317 members of staff had not stated their sexual orientation (page 15 of Appendix B refers). It was asked if this should be explained further in the Report to set the context for comparative purposes. Following debate, it was agreed that future reports should explain that an element of the data is compiled from longer serving employees who were in the Service prior to the combination and therefore will not have been previously asked to state their sexual orientation. CFO Ansell added that the Service was making cultural change over the long-term and all staff were encouraged to provide this information.
- 21/42.13 **ACTION: Ian Cotter to provide Cllr Barrow with information on how the Service compared with others in terms of total funding.**
- 21/42.14 **RESOLVED: Members approved the Annual Report as set out in Appendix A and noted the Annual Workforce Equality Report 2020-21 as set out in Appendix B.**
- 21/43 Statement of Assurance 2020-21**
- 21/43.1 The Head of Service Improvement, Jill McCrae, presented the report. The statement outlined the overall governance, financial and operational arrangements of the Authority. Reference was made to the Local Government Association governance peer review in July 2019 that had provided positive assurance as well as other methods of assurance, including that of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, internal and external audit and CIPFA/SOLACE.
- 21/43.2 **RESOLVED: Members approved the Statement of Assurance 2020-21.**
- 21/44 Treasury Management Annual Report 2020-21**
- 21/44.1 The Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter presented the Report. He explained that further to the publication of the Report, the Authority had repaid a £2m loan incurred by a former authority. This had reduced the amount of long-term debt from £14m to £12m. This meant that there had been an increase in the level of under borrowing.

- 21/44.2 Ian Cotter continued that the Authority was giving consideration to borrowing up to £8m and was in liaison with its treasury advisors, Link, to find the best time for this to occur to fit in with the Authority's cashflow. The borrowing would be in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy.
- 21/44.3 In reply to questions from Cllr Holland, Ian Cotter explained that the carry forward of capital expenditure in the year was slightly in excess of £3m. This was largely accounted for by 19 fire appliances that were on order but not yet all delivered. It was expected that all deliveries would be complete by December 2021.
- 21/44.4 Ian Cotter also stated that he would look to provide details of how the Authority's debt compared with other fire services, adding that there was a wide variation between services on their approach to financing capital programmes and how much debt they had incurred.
- 21/44.5 In reply to a question for Cllr Small, Ian Cotter explained that the Service had made savings by not borrowing in 2020/21. The savings had been used to make a revenue contribution to capital to reduce the need to borrow. The position in 2021/22 would be similar, where savings could be used to reduce future borrowing need.
- 21/44.6 CFO Ansell commented that the impact of the corporate and operational staff pay awards also needed to be taken into account when considering savings.
- 21/44.7 **ACTION: Ian Cotter to provide detail of how the Authority's debt compared with other fire services.**
- 21/44.8 **RESOLVED: Members noted the Report**
- 21/45 Service highlights – public video**
- 21/45.1 CFO Ansell introduced the in-house video which is available on the Service's You Tube channel and encouraged Members to promote this within their authority areas.
- 21/45.2 **RESOLVED: Members noted the Service highlights – public video.**

**21/46      Date of next meeting**

21/46.1      The Chair confirmed the date of the next Authority meeting as 15 December 2021 from 10:00am to be held at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Salisbury.

Meeting ended at 12.15hrs

*Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_