

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

19 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT: Councillor C Hogarth (Chair)
Councillor A Cherryholme (Vice-Chair)
Councillors: M M Chaplin, J Ridler, T Smith, S Ball, K Wyatt,
S Ayris and S Alston

CFO C Kirby, DCFO T Carlin, ACFO A Strelczenie and
L Haigh, AM S Dunker, AM P Heffernan and P Fieldhouse
(South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service)

N Copley, M Potter, D Nutall and D Thorpe (Barnsley MBC)

Dr Billings and S Abbott (in attendance virtually)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Elliot,
Councillor D Hutchinson, Councillor C Ransome and
S Ghuman

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Hutchinson, Elliot and Ransome.

2 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair noted that this meeting was the last Fire and Rescue Authority meeting that DCFO Carlin would attend before his retirement. The Chair thanked DCFO Carlin for all his hard work on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authority and wished him a happy retirement.

3 URGENT ITEMS

None.

4 ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Item 21.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS IN RELATION TO ANY ITEM OF BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA

None.

6 REPORTS BY MEMBERS

None.

7 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

None.

8 TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC, OR COMMUNICATIONS SUBMITTED BY THE CHAIR OR THE CLERK AND TO PASS SUCH RESOLUTIONS THEREON AS THE STANDING ORDERS PERMIT AND AS MAY BE DEEMED EXPEDIENT

None.

9 MINUTES OF THE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

10 2024-25 ANNUAL REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING REPORT

L Haigh presented the 2024-25 Annual Revenue Budget and Council Tax Setting Report.

The Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) was required to approve the 2024/25 revenue budget and set the council tax and precept by the legislative deadline of 1 March each year.

This Budget took the first year of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), 2024-27, approved in November 2023 and adjusted for the implications of the Local Government Finance Settlement and changes following further review by Finance and Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The key points were noted as follows:

- In relation to funding, the Local Government Finance Settlement set a council tax increase limit of 2.99% but confirmed higher CPI of 6.7% so the revised funding scenario was £67.454m, an increase of £0.621m. The total core funding increased from 2023/24 is 5.3%. This included an uplift in the minimum funding guarantee from 3% to 4% of £0.759m. The total funding increased less than inflation.
- In regard to pay costs, inflation assumptions had been reduced from 5% (£2.587m) to 3% (£1.851m) in 2024/25. This was subject to annual pay negotiations for both operational and corporate staff.
- The Service had reanalysed non-pay cost inflation and this had been reduced from 6% to 3%. It was noted that the Firefighter's pensions employer contributions had increased by 8.8% which would not be entirely covered by the Government grant as presumed previously.
- Efficiencies of £2.614m had been removed from the budget which represented a 20% reduction when compared to the non-pay budget.
- Revenue investments totalling £3.053m were included, and any investments marked to be confirmed would be reviewed by SLT.

- Members were informed that to remain sustainable the FRA would ideally achieve break-even or better each year. In 2024/25 a surplus of £0.027m was forecast and the S151 Officer recommended that any deficits in the short-term were funded from reserves while efficiencies were generated.
- Total reserves were expected to reduce from £18.856m predicted in March 2024 to £18.247m by March 2025. Useable earmarked reserves (those that could be used to mitigate risks which emerge in the revenue position) were expected to reduce to £9.883m by March 2025 and £6.048m by March 2027.
- It was noted that the most significant risks to this Budget were uncertainty over future funding and pay and non-pay inflation.

Councillor Smith asked if the Service was certain that borrowing undertaken was sustainable.

L Haigh responded that within the revenue budget the Service forecasted the revenue costs of repaying loans and any associated interest. A full affordability assessment was always carried out with the Section 151 Officer.

Councillor Ayris questioned the efficiencies and investments that were marked to be confirmed.

L Haigh informed Members that these would be reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team.

Dr Billings informed the FRA that he supported the recommendations as set out in the report and that public services needed to keep using the full precept flexibility that was offered.

Councillor Alston asked if there was anything Members could support with in terms of lobbying for longer term funding settlements.

L Haigh responded that the Service continued to lobby the Government in regard to funding settlements and that support from Members was welcomed.

N Copley further confirmed that the investments as set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan were not deemed high risk as they were not subject to market volatility. Any investments made were always in secure products with low risk and highly credit rated counterparties.

Councillor Wyatt queried what concerns that Service had regarding the reduction in reserves.

L Haigh responded that the ideal position would be to maintain reserves and break even or be in a surplus each year.

Councillor Ball asked if he could be provided with information on how accurate the Service's financial forecasting had been in the past.

L Haigh informed the Committee that since taking up post of Director of Finance and Procurement a new approach had been taken but a formal response to the forecasting queries would be provided in due course.

Councillor Hogarth referred the Authority to the recommendations in the report.

A recorded vote was taken and recorded as follows:-

For approving recommendations A, C, E, F G and H (8) Councillors Hogarth, Wyatt, Chaplin, Ridler, Cherryholme, Smith, Alston and Ayris.

Against the recommendations (0). Abstained (1) Councillor Ball.

The recommendations were approved.

RESOLVED that Members:-

- a) Approve the Authority's 2024/25 Revenue Budget at Annex A;
- b) Note the S151 Officer's Section 25 Statement (Section M) confirming the robustness of the budget;
- c) Approve the Capital Investment Strategy (Annex H) including the updated Capital Programme and new approvals as set out in Section H and Annex D of this report;
- d) Endorse the proposed approach for managing reserves as set out in Section J, noting that if deficits emerge in the short term reserves will be used to address the funding gap;
- e) Approve the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy at Section L;
- f) Approve the fees and charges schedule for 2024/25 at Annex G;
- g) Approve a Council Tax Increase of 2.99% for 2023/24 (Section B);
- h) Approve the recommended approach to financial management set out in the Executive Summary; and
- (i) Members to be provided with financial forecasting for previous years.

11 SERVICE PLAN 2024-25

ACFO Strelczenie presented the Service Plan 2024-25.

It was explained that the plan had been developed following consultation with staff and corporate planning events involving senior leaders to identify the Service's short and medium term priorities.

There were six priorities identified in the plan which the Service would focus on.

The priorities identified were:

- Efficiency
- Leadership
- Inclusion, diversity and culture
- Performance and productivity
- Sustainability
- Service delivery improvements

RESOLVED that Members approve the Service Plan 2024-25.

12 ASSET MANAGEMENT UPDATE - ESTATES (PRESENTATION)

P Fieldhouse took Members through a presentation regarding the latest developments in the Service's estate projects, which included updates on the refurbishment at the TDC training centre and the 2nd floor of SYFR Headquarters which was now rented by the Integrated Care Board.

It was noted that the estates teams were currently undertaking an internal review of the modular build that was planned for Elm Lane due an increase in costs.

Both ACFO Strelczenie and CFO Kirby placed on record their thanks to the estates team for their hard work especially for their consultation with neurodiverse staff on the TDC project and the collaboration work between the Service and the Integrated Care Board.

Councillor Smith commented that modular builds may become more popular due to the current shortages of tradespeople and materials.

Councillor Ball asked how much the costs of the modular build had increased by.

P Fieldhouse responded that costs had increased by approximately £2000 per square meter therefore a report regarding the Elm Lane rebuild will be presented at an upcoming FRA meeting.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

13 FIRE REFORM WHITE PAPER

CFO Kirby presented the Fire Reform White Paper, which Members were asked to note.

The consultation paper "Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service" was published in May 2022 which sought views on the Government's ideas for reform, building on lessons from independent inspection, national reports and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Following consultation, the Government published a response in December 2023, which covered three areas - people, professionalism and governance. The Government's response was attached at appendix A.

The Government was not pursuing mandatory transfer of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) functions to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Mayors or single elected individuals at this stage. This had been proposed in the consultation draft. Instead, the Home Office would encourage PCCs and Mayors who want to take on fire governance functions to step forward.

A more detailed discussion on the Fire Reform White Paper would take place at the upcoming Corporate Advisory Group on 27 February.

RESOLVED that Members note the contents of the Fire Reform White Paper.

14 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 2023/24

L Haigh presented the Financial Performance Report Quarter 3 2023/24.

At the end of Quarter 3, the Service forecasted a £1.413m surplus for 2023/24 outturn. This was a favourable variance of £2.823m compared to the revised budget deficit (£1.410m) and a favourable variance of £2.833m compared the original budget deficit (£1.420m).

There were 3 main variances causing this improved outturn:

- In Q1 the Service received £1.206m more Section 31 funding relating to Business Rates.
- The Wholetime pay forecast was under budget by £1.141m. This underspend reflects vacancies at firefighter level and this underspend was offset by an overspend in overtime of £0.8m.
- The capital financing costs were forecast to be £0.5m lower than budget in Q3 as less loans had been taken out to fund capital.

The Asset Management board were due to review all capital investments to confirm they were essential and minimise capital spend, so further capital spend reductions may be reported in Q4.

RESOLVED that Members:-

a) Note the forecast outturn surplus of £1.413m which is a reduction of £2.823m compared to revised budget (Section A);

b) Note the underlying and significant financial risks and uncertainties facing the Service and Sector during the remainder of this financial year (Section A) and into 2024/25 and beyond (Section C);

c) Note the latest estimated change in General and Earmarked Reserves (Section C); and

d) Note the forecast position of the capital programme for the financial year ending 2023/24 (Section E).

15 PEOPLE AND CULTURE BOARD UPDATE QUARTER 3

S Kelsey presented the People and Culture Board Update Quarter 3.

SYFR's People and Culture Board meets quarterly to monthly to monitor progress of the Service's People Strategy and to scrutinise information from the four SYFR committees that report to the Board:

- Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HSW) Committee
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee
- Workforce Planning Committee
- Workforce Development Committee

No new risks had been escalated to the Board in this quarter.

RESOLVED that Members note the contents of the report and provide further scrutiny and support to enable continuing effective management of people issues.

16 SERVICE DELIVERY BOARD UPDATE

AM S Dunker presented the Service Delivery Board Update.

The Service Delivery Board provided a service forum for principal stakeholders involved in Service Delivery to support the development and improvement of efficiency and effectiveness in all areas of Service Delivery.

The Board would primarily focus on the quality assurance of working with community partners to enhance the effectiveness of the Service's delivery, working together to best comprehend and respond to relevant community and risk information.

Members' attention was drawn to appendix A, which contained the Board's Terms of Reference.

Councillor Smith queried the laundry issues as stated in the report, and asked how many kits firefighters were issued with.

AM S Dunker responded that this was ongoing action and the Service was looking at additional laundry collections to combat this issue. In regard to kit, firefighters were provided with two sets with pool kit available in each district.

Councillor Wyatt asked for detail regarding the Body Worn Cameras project.

AM S Dunker informed Members that Business Fire Safety had used body cameras as part of evidence gathering exercises and the benefit analysis document would be reviewed in due course.

Councillor Ayris asked who the data controller was for the body cameras.

AM S Dunker responded that the project was subject to GDPR protocol, and the senior responsible person was the DCFO. Members would be provided with some case studies of how this data was used.

ACFO Strelczenie further added that Business Fire Safety only used cameras when there was a need to collect evidence.

Councillor Hogarth queried the cameras on turntable ladders.

AM S Dunker confirmed that the project was now defunct as there were considerable costs attached and no justified reason to retrospectively fit dedicated cameras to Turntable Ladders. In addition, mobile cameras could be used in addition to the use of SYPs drone for operational incidents where aerial footage was required.

RESOLVED that Members:-

- (a) Note the contents of the report and provide further scrutiny and support to enable the continuing effective management of the Service Delivery function; and
- (b) Be provided with case studies on the Body Worn Cameras project.

17 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT BOARD UPDATE

ACFO Strelczenie presented Service Improvement Board Update.

MICFRS inspection report for SYFR (published January 2023) identified 20 Areas for Improvement (AFIs). All of these AFIs were determined to be high priority. The Board received and scrutinised reports for all the AFIs identified in the SYFR inspection report. HMICFRS will expect to see progress against these AFIs.

Some of the deadlines for the completion of AFIs were imminent but that the 'progress complete' measure was showing a low percentage. The deadlines and percentage completions, for the majority of the AFIs, had been reviewed and amended. Many of the AFIs were on track for completion prior to the SYFR HMICFRS inspection commencing in February 2025.

Councillor Hogarth requested that original completion dates be included alongside revised completion dates.

Councillor Ball asked a question regarding progress addressing any gaps in capability which affect the availability of fire engines.

DCFO Carlin responded that the report had been produced in December and further work regarding on-call availability had progressed.

AM S Dunker further added that the latest on-call availability statistics showed a 10% improvement from last year.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Members note the contents of the report and provide further scrutiny and support to enable continuous service improvement; and

(b) Original completion dates be provided in the next update report.

18 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the draft minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 15 January 2024 be noted.

19 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the draft minutes of the Appointments Committee held on 24 January 2024 be noted.

20 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act and the public interest not to disclose information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it.

21 SUMMARY REPORT OF WAIVERS 2023

L Haigh presented the Summary of Waivers 2023 report.

At the November 2023 Fire and Rescue Authority meeting, Members requested that the committee be provided with a summary report detailing waivers that go through the approval process.

The data provided at Appendix A included all waivers that were approved under Section 33 of Contract Standing Orders part 5e using the appropriate delegated authority.

RESOLVED that Members note the contents of this report and endorse the ongoing scrutiny of waivers under the Contract Standing Orders.

CHAIR