

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY

25 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

Members

Representing East Riding of Yorkshire Council:

Councillors Chadwick, Dennis, Jefferson, Smith and West

Representing Hull City Council:

Councillors Chambers, Dad and McMurray

Representing North East Lincolnshire Council:

Councillors Barfield, James and Shepherd

Representing North Lincolnshire Council:

Councillors Briggs (*Chairperson*), Grant, Sherwood and Waltham MBE

Officers of Humberside Fire & Rescue Service

Chris Blacksell - Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive, Phil Shillito - Deputy Chief Fire Officer/Executive Director Service Delivery, Kevin Wilson - Executive Director of Corporate Services/Section 151 Officer, Christine Cooper - Temporary Director of People and Development, Niall McKiniry - Director of Service Improvement, Ruth Gilmour - Head of Human Resources, Martyn Ransom - Head of Finance, Simon Rhodes - Head of Corporate Assurance, Jamie Morris - Senior Service Improvement Officer, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary and Samm Campbell - Committee Manager

Auditors

Gavin Barker - External Auditor (Mazars)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Independent Co-opted Members of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Martin Allingham, Doug Chapman (presented Minute 94/20) and Andrew Smith were in attendance as observers.

HMICFRS

Davinder Johal - Service Liaison Lead (Merseyside FRS, Humberside FRS and Durham & Darlington FRS)

The remote meeting took place via video conference (Zoom).

88/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Fox, Green, Nicola, Singh and Swinburn, and from Keith Hunter - Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside Police.

89/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - No declarations were made.

90/20 MINUTES - Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 24 July 2020 be received as a correct record.

91/20 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS -

(a) Councillor Nicola was permitted to ask the following question:

“Does the Authority intend to appoint a new Director of People and Development and if so, how long is it anticipated that the process of advertising and appointing to the post will take?”

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive replied that the Temporary Director of People and Development would remain in post on a part-time basis until the end of 2020. Some of the responsibilities associated with the post would be assumed by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer in the meantime while the Service determined whether to recruit to the post on a full-time basis or enter into partnership arrangements. The Authority would be kept informed during the following months.

(b) Councillor Dad was permitted to ask the following question:

"Recent research (see below) suggests that schools are at higher risk because of the current legislation on sprinklers. If this is indeed the case, what can we as a Fire Authority do to help address this?"

With reference to the information cited in Councillor Dad's question, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer replied that, in November 2019, a return had been provided to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government consultation on Approved Document B of the Building Regulations regarding 'Sprinklers and other fire safety measures in high-rise blocks of flats'. The consultation provided the opportunity to offer feedback on other premises, and The Service's response highlighted schools as 'high risk' premises. The Service also endorsed the return of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to the same consultation, noting the same feedback regarding schools.

During April/May 2019, a call for evidence took place on the technical Building Bulletin 100: Design for Fire Safety in Schools (BB100), again the Service expressed concerns about the loopholes present within document regarding: the fitting of sprinklers, discrepancies between Local Authority schools and academies, and there not being a mandated need for fitting sprinklers in new build (or significantly refurbished) schools. This view was supported in the NFCC response.

The NFCC continued to engage with the Department for Education (DfE) on the progress of BB100. The BB100 was expected to be published for consultation by DfE. However, there had been little stakeholder engagement following the call for evidence. An All Party Parliamentary Group for Fire Safety had been established and had been making contact with the DfE to try and establish their current position.

Resolved - (a) That the Service write to local councils about the benefits of having sprinkler systems in schools, and

(b) that the topic of sprinkler systems in schools be addressed at a subsequent meeting of the Fire Authority or a Member Day.

92/20 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS - No petitions or requests for a deputation had been received under Rule 13, Part 4 of the Constitution.

93/20 COMMUNICATIONS - The following communication was reported:

(i) **Television Documentaries** - The Service had been featured in a documentary about attacks on emergency service personnel due to be aired on 30 September 2020. Subsequently, the Service had also been contacted in relation to the production of

another documentary focussed on the work of emergency services at night and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

94/20 DRAFT MINUTES OF GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY (GAS) COMMITTEE OF 13 JULY 2020 - Doug Chapman, Chairperson of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee, presented the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 September 2020, drawing Members' attention to the following item:

- (i) Health, Safety and Environment - First Quarter 2020/21 (Minute 69/20 refers).
- (ii) Absence Management - First Quarter 2020/21 (Minute 72/20 refers).
- (iii) Effectiveness of the Risk-Based Targeting Strategy (Minute 77/20 refers).

Resolved - That the minutes of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee held on 9 September 2020 be received.

95/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT - FOLLOW UP LETTER TO OUR AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT IN RELATION TO THE 2019/20 AUDIT - Mazars submitted a letter summarising the progress of the external audit.

The external audit for 2019/20 had not yet been concluded as it required the Pension Fund Account audit to have been undertaken. The audit of the Pension Fund Account had been delayed and, in the meantime, the McCloud judgement and proposed remedy had been subject to consultation, which would result in material change to the Service's accounts. The audit of the Pension Fund Account was expected to be completed by the end of October 2020 but, if there were any further material changes before the 2019/20 audit had closed, amended Annual Accounts would need to be approved again. In future years, Mazars would endeavour to have the Pension Fund Account audited earlier in the external audit process.

Resolved - That the letter be received

96/20 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20 - The Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted a report that included the audited version of the Fire Authority's Accounts for the financial year 2019/20.

While the Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/20 had been approved by the Authority at its previous meeting (Minute 79/20 refers), it had been necessary to amend it due to the fact that the Pension Fund Account had not yet been audited (Minute 95/20 refers). It was suggested that, if any further, minor amendments needed to be made to the Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/20 in order to conclude the external audit of 2019/20, the authority to approve them could be delegated to the Chairperson.

Resolved - (a) That the audited Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be approved and signed by the Chairperson of the Authority;

(b) that the authority to approve any subsequent, minor amendments to the Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be delegated to the Chairperson, and

(c) that the Authority's thanks to the Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer and his service area for their hard work during the 2019/20 financial year be noted.

97/20 FINANCIAL OUTLOOK 2021/22 ONWARDS - Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted a report that summarised the financial outlook for the Authority in 2021/22 and onwards.

The Authority's outturn for 2019/20 had delivered an underspend of £120,000 and a closing level of total revenue reserves of £10.9m. The Authority had set a balanced budget for 2020/21, but the latest budget monitoring projected a minor overspend of £108,000. The UK's exit from the

European Unions, the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2021 onwards and the ongoing financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had created significant uncertainty with regard to the future of public finances. The Authority had made the following key assumptions in order to plan for 2021/22 to 2024/25:

	2021/22	2022/233	2023/24	2024/25
Pay Awards	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%
External Grant	1.00%	1.50%	1.50%	1.50%
Precept Increase	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%
• Rates	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
• Utilities/Fuel	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
• Insurance	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%

The broad movements in between the Authority’s financial position in February 2020 and September 2020 with regard to the 2021/22 financial year were summarised as follows:

2021/22 Financial Year		
2021/22 Projection - February 2020	£89k	Deficit predicted for 2021/22 before COVID-19
Changes made to our assumptions since February 2020		
Grant Funding Reduction	£85k	Assuming a 1.0% increase now rather than 1.5% due to likely Government austerity in CSR 2021
Business Rates Reduction	£120k	Assuming no growth in our share of locally collected business rates (revised from 3% down to 0%)
Business Rates Deficit from 2020/21	£140k	Assuming a 12% deficit in the current 2020/21 year that will be spread over 2021/22 to 2023/24 inclusive (total impact is £420k)
Council Tax Deficit from 2020/21	£240k	Assuming a 3% deficit in the current 2020/21 year that will be spread over 2021/22 to 2023/24 inclusive (total impact is £720k)
Council Tax Base	£356k	Cautious to assume little or no increase in the Council Tax Base for 2021/22 (revised base growth down from 1.5% to 0%)
Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)	£200k	Additional MRP due to applying less Revenue Contributions to Capital in 2019/20 than originally planned.
Insurance Premiums	£105k	Casualty premiums have increased due to a hardening in the Insurance market. The Casualty cover was retendered in August 2020 to ensure we achieved value for money.
2021/22 Projection - September 2020	£1.34M	Current deficit predicted for 2021/22

The report also summarised five potential measures that the Authority could take to set a balanced budget for 2021/22, which would require savings of around £1m. These measures presented as options included:

- Reducing the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) budget line which is the Authority's revenue budget contribution to funding the Capital Programme. Any reduced RCCO does have a knock-on effect to the Authority's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) and therefore would increase the Authority's underlying need to borrow to fund capital expenditure. When this borrowing is taken there is clearly a cost of carry which will feed into the Authority's revenue budget;
- A scheduled review of the Authority's method for calculating the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) was signaled in the Treasury Management Strategy report for 2020/21. This work will use the annuity method for the calculation and bring the Authority's approach in line with other local authorities. It will likely result in a reduced MRP for the Authority in the short to medium-term. Again, a reduction in the MRP would increase the Authority's underlying need to borrow to fund capital expenditure. When this borrowing is taken there is clearly a cost of carry which will feed into the Authority's revenue budget;
- Non-pay efficiencies – work will be undertaken to assess the possibility of making further efficiencies in the Authority's discretionary non-pay budgets;
- Service-wide efficiencies may also need to be considered which may affect the service we are able to deliver to our communities. These efficiencies are likely to have a longer lead-in time and therefore would need to be agreed so that any benefits could be achieved for the 2022/23 year from 1 April 2022. Assessing the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the next few months will give a better picture of whether these measures may be required. In the short-term across the Service we will continue our practice of challenging vacant posts when they arise and will only fill roles when there is a clear organizational need to do so;
- Reserves – the Authority's reserves remain in a solid position and some application of reserves could be appropriate to ease the Authority through the short to medium-term financial turbulence created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also of note was the fact that the Fire Funding Formula Review remained in abeyance, with no further communication having been received by the Service since the Authority approved its comments on the associated consultation. Members considered the Prudent Minimum General Reserve (PMGR) set out within the report and the recommendation to increase it to £6.3m. In order to achieve this, it was proposed that the Capital Programme reserve of £3m be reduced by £700,000 and that this amount be added to the General Reserve. The Authority was advised that an increase in the PMGR would be prudent in the light of the volatility of financial risks at a macroeconomic level in the medium-term.

Resolved - (a) That the financial outlook for the Service through to 2024/25 be noted, and (b) that the Prudent Minimum Level of General Reserves, as set out in the report, be approved.

98/20 CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE STANDARD 2020 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Service's achievement of the Customer Service Excellence Standard in 2019/20.

The assessment for the Customer Service Excellence Standard had been due to be conducted in March 2020, but had been delayed as a result of COVID-19. The assessment had, instead, been conducted remotely in July 2020. This was an assessment against all criteria within

the standard, and the Service was assessed as fully compliant. Nine areas of good practice had been identified during the assessment, which was two more than had been identified during the previous assessment and three areas had been judged as 'compliance plus'.

Resolved - (a) That the Authority acknowledge the retention of the Standard and take assurance from our ongoing commitment to Customer Service Excellence, and

(b) that the Authority congratulate the Service on achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard for the eleventh year in succession.

99/20 PERFORMANCE REPORTING UPDATE - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising updates to the Service's performance reporting measures.

Throughout the previous 12-months significant effort had been put into the development of 'Power BI' performance and management dashboards, with the intention that this new approach would start to be used to support reporting of performance data to Members of HFA and GAS, from October 2020. The Service had developed a revised quarterly performance report that highlights how performance is tracked using the new software. Before presenting the revised Quarter One Report to Members it was proposed that a presentation of the new methodology and report format be made at the Member Day 2 October 2020.

Resolved - (a) That Members receive a presentation in relation to the Service's new performance reporting measures at the Member Day due to be held on 2 October 2020, and

(b) that, for 2020 only, the Authority receive the Quarter 1 Performance and Risk Report at its meeting due to be held on 30 October 2020.

100/20 HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT - QUARTER 1 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Service's performance with regard to health, safety and environment during the first quarter of 2020/21.

The Covid-19 pandemic had reached a peak during the report period, which had reduced the Service's activity and resulted in a reduction in reported health and safety incidents. The Service had recorded 14 accidents that had resulted in some form of personal injury compared to 22 during the same period in 2019/20 and the three-year rolling average of 20. In accordance with the Service's staffing structure and duties, 71 percent of injuries or episodes of ill-health were sustained by full-time firefighters. Overall, incidents had continued to decline in comparison to the three-year rolling average. Accidents resulting from training exercises had reduced by 88 percent compared to the same period in 2019/20. Near miss reporting had decreased by more than 50 percent but the 15 reported had outnumbered reported accidents (14) for the quarter.

Resolved - That the Authority take assurance from the Service's proactive management of health, safety and environmental outcomes.

101/20 OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE REPORT - QUARTER 1 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Operational Assurance Report covering the first quarter of 2020/21.

The Service had seen a reduction in all activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the reporting period and in comparison to the same period in 2019/20: Safety Critical Reporting had reduced to zero; Area of Concern reporting had reduced by 79 percent (from 58 to 12); and Exceptional Practice reporting had fallen by 78 percent (from 372 to 80). In the previous quarter, the Service had addressed a large-scale flooding incident and the subsequent tactical debrief had been undertaken on 28 July 2020, meaning that the incident would feature in the second quarter report.

Resolved - That the Authority take assurance from the Service's proactive management of operational assurance.

102/20 ABSENCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 1 2020/21 - The Temporary Director of People and Development submitted a report summarising absence management during the first quarter of 2020/21.

Absence management had continued to be monitored closely by the Service. During the reporting period and in comparison to the same period in 2019/20, the combined number of days of absence had reduced by 56 percent (656 days). During the Covid-19 national lockdown, many employees had worked from home and the improved hygiene promoted to minimise the risks posed by Covid-19 had had the effect of reducing the number of other illnesses. However, the Control Room team's absence figures continued to be affected by long-term absences. The Service had continued to improve its provision in relation to mental health by offering psychotherapy, counselling, relationship advice and legal advice. Musculoskeletal issues continue to feature highly as a result of the physical nature of many roles in the Service. Among all staff there had been four confirmed cases of Covid-19, 68 members of staff had isolated due to symptoms within their households and 53 had isolated due to symptoms within their teams.

Resolved - That the Authority take assurance that absence was being managed fairly, consistently and appropriately in the Service, and that necessary follow up actions were taken to address short and long term absence issues.

103/20 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 - The Director of Service Delivery submitted a report summarising the annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report for 2019/20.

The report, which had been circulated to the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee and addressed at Member Day, explained how the Service met industry standards in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion as set out in the Local Government Association's (LGA) Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and the Equality Act (2010).

The Service managed equality, diversity and inclusion through five priorities:

1. Leading by example on equality.
2. Increasing diversity throughout our workforce.
3. Ensuring a safe and fair workplace for all staff.
4. Continue to improve our knowledge of our diverse communities and how we engage with them.
5. Identifying the fire and other emergency risks linked to multiple disadvantage and discrimination.

Resolved - That the report be approved.

104/20 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY - PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON EQUALITY OBJECTIVES - The Director of Service Delivery submitted a report outlining the Service's request for approval to engage in a six-week public consultation in relation to its equality objectives.

Resolved - (a) That the Service's request to undertake a six-week public consultation on equality objectives be approved, and

(b) that the results of the consultation be reported to the meeting of the Authority due to be held on 7 December 2020.

105/20 HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE - The Director of Service Improvement provided the Authority with a verbal update in relation to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service's (HMICFRS).

HMICFRS had recently been commissioned to undertake a series of thematic inspections in relation to Covid-19. The Service had been preparing in anticipation of this thematic inspection, which was due to be undertaken during the week commencing 12 October 2020. While the thematic

inspections would not result in an official grade, the Service expected them to be referred to when the Inspectorate resumed its normal programme of inspections in 2021.

Resolved - That the update be received.

106/20 COVID-19 UPDATE - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive provided a verbal update on the Service's response to and future plans relating to Covid-19.

The number of positive Covid-19 tests had been increasing nationally since the Authority's previous meeting. While the number of Covid-19 cases was not as high in Humberside as it was in other areas, nor as high as the national average, cases had been increasing locally and laboratory capacity for processing tests was a problem nationally. There were some local testing arrangements in place which were separate from the national scheme.

The Strategic Co-ordination and Tactical Co-ordination Groups had been stood down having, at one point, been meeting daily. However, the groups had begun to meet at least weekly again and the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive was due to begin attending national meetings of Local Resilience Forum chairs on a weekly basis.

The NHS's Track and Trace mobile application had been launched on 24 September 2020 and had been downloaded more than one million times on the first day. Widespread use of the application would result in an increase in the number of people self-isolating, which would have an impact on the availability of fire crews and other staff. The Service had considered practical issues such as the phones of two crews being left in adjacent lockers; in this case, the application would register a contact despite the two crews not actually being in contact with one another.

Resolved - (a) That the update be received, and

(b) that the Authority's thanks for the diligent work of the Service's staff during the pandemic be noted.

107/20 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS/PUBLIC - Resolved - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

In making its decision the Authority confirmed that having regard to all the circumstances it was satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. In addition, all members of staff, except for the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, the Temporary Director of People and Development, the Monitoring Officer/Secretary and the Committee Manager left the meeting.

108/20 SUCCESSION PLANNING - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive submitted a report detailing issues of succession planning and, in particular, the role of Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

While the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had not yet formally submitted his intention to retire, the Authority was asked to consider three options for filling the post when it became vacant. Option A in the report was moved, seconded and subjected to a recorded vote.

Resolved - That the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, following his retirement, be re-appointed on a fixed-term basis until April 2024.

Voting was by way of a recorded vote as follows:

For - Councillors Barfield, Briggs, Chadwick, Chambers, Dad, Davison, Dennis, James, Jefferson, McMurray, Nicola, Randall, Shepherd, Smith and West

Against - Councillor Grant

Abstentions - Councillor Waltham MBE

For - 15

Against - 1

Abstentions - 1