

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY

26 JUNE 2020

PRESENT:

Members

Representing East Riding of Yorkshire Council:

Councillors Chadwick, Davison, Fox, Green, Jefferson, Smith and West

Representing Hull City Council:

Councillors Chambers, McMurray, Nicola, Randall and Singh

Representing North East Lincolnshire Council:

Councillors, Shepherd and Swinburn

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, Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Steve Topham - Director of Service Delivery Support, Niall McKiniry - Director of Service Improvement, Christine Cooper - Temporary Director of People and Development, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary and Gareth Naidoo - Committee Manager

Also in attendance:

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

Doug Chapman (presented Minute 61/20), Andrew Smith, Mandy Thomlinson 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).

55/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Barfield, Dad, James and Keith Hunter - Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside Police.

56/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - No declarations were made.

57/20 MINUTES - Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 15 May 2020 be received as a correct record.

58/20 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS - None

59/20 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS - No petitions or requests for a deputation had been received under Rule 13, Part 4 of the Constitution.

60/20 COMMUNICATIONS - The following communication was reported:

- (i) **Response to Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Communities** - A draft copy of response to Lord Greenhalgh, Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Communities had been circulated to Members for approval in response to the Minister's letter dated 14 May 2020 regarding seeking the views of Fire Authorities on the recommendations made in the HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services' State of Fire And Rescue Report 2019.

Resolved - That the response to be approved for submission to Lord Greenhalgh, Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Communities.

61/20 DRAFT MINUTES OF GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY (GAS) COMMITTEE OF 15 JUNE 2020 - Doug Chapman, Chairperson of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee, presented the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2020, drawing Members' attention to the following item:

- (i) External Audit Update (Minute 35/20 refers).
- (ii) HMICFRS Inspection Update (Minute 39/20 refers).

Resolved - That the minutes of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee held on 15 June 2020 be received.

62/20 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20 - UNAUDITED - The Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted a report that contained the Authority's full unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 (see Appendix 1) and also highlighted below the key aspects of revenue and capital outturn for the year.

The Accounts as set out at Appendix 1 of the report were subject to audit by Mazars in their role as the Authority's external auditor. The draft unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 was signed and published on the Authority's website on 12 June 2020, an excellent achievement given the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The intention was that the audited Statement of Accounts would be submitted to the Authority for approval at its next meeting of 24 July 2020.

Members commended the work of finance officers in preparing the accounts by the deadline in light of the challenging circumstances brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Resolved - (a) That the Capital Programme Rephasing as set out at paragraph 9 of the report be approved, and

(b) that the work of officers in preparing the accounts be commended.

63/20 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 - The Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted a report that provided a review of the Authority's Treasury Management activity and Prudential Indicators for the year 2019/20.

The Authority's temporary investments totalled £5.0m as at 31 March 2020. Interest earned during 2019/20 was £19,000 higher than originally budgeted for in respect of investment activity for the year, due to more favourable interest rates than anticipated.

The Authority sought to minimise the use of short-term borrowing to fund temporary cash shortfalls and did not undertake any short-term borrowing during the course of the year.

Long-term loans were taken out either to replace existing loans which had matured or to fund capital expenditure. Under the Prudential Regime there were no longer centrally imposed limits on borrowing, but individual Authorities were required to determine themselves what was a sustainable and affordable level of borrowing as an integral part of their Medium-Term Financial Planning processes.

The Authority's average level of borrowing was £14.2m for 2019/20, on which £598,000 of interest was payable. The Authority repaid £1.4m of Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) debt upon maturity and didn't take any new borrowing during the year. Closing PWLB debt at 31 March 2020 was £13.5m.

Appendix 1 of the report detailed the agreed Prudential Indicators for 2019/20 and the actual figures for 2019/20. During the financial year the Authority had operated wholly within the limits approved.

The Section 151 Officer considered the current capital programme to be affordable and sustainable with the revenue effects of capital investment built into the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Through the Medium-Term Financial Planning Process, the Authority had aligned its resources to key strategic priorities.

Based on the Operational Boundary definition, external debt at 31 March 2020 was £10.6m below the agreed Operational Boundary for 2019/20 and the maturity structure for both borrowing and investments remained within the approved upper and lower limits. Subsequent borrowing or re-scheduling during 2020/21 would take into account prevailing interest rates on offer from the PWLB, the current maturity structure of loans, balanced with the need to reduce capital risk by keeping down cash-balances.

Members took assurance from the treasury management activities undertaken during 2019/20 and the Prudential Indicators as outlined in paragraphs 14 and 15 and detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.

Resolved - That the report be approved.

64/20 ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STATEMENT 2019/20 - The Director of Service Improvement and the Secretary/Monitoring Officer submitted the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement for 2019/20 (as set out at Appendix 1 of the report).

In response to a recommendation within the Internal Audit Report 'Counter Fraud Arrangements 2016/17' conducted during the third quarter of 2016/17, the Authority produced and made publicly available an annual Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement. The statement covered key actions taken throughout the year, provided an assurance of the processes in place and provided links to key documents.

The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement for 2019/20 had been considered by the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee at its meeting of 15 June 2020.

Resolved - That the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement for 2019/20 as set out at Appendix 1 of the report be approved.

65/20 USE OF DELEGATED POWERS UNDER FIRE AUTHORITY CONSTITUTION BY THE CHIEF OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer/Secretary submitted a report that provided details of the decisions taken by the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive during 2019/20 to vary the establishment, under his delegated powers within the Fire Authority's Constitution.

In the year 2019/20 the following substantive establishment changes (not including temporary changes or those approved by the Authority as part of a report) had been approved under the delegated authority given to the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive:

- Increase 1 x 37 hours Grade 12 HMICFRS Officer

Members took assurance that the Scheme of Delegation had been properly exercised.

Resolved - That the report be received.

66/20 HMICFRS UPDATE - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a verbal update on the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) following the HMICFRS inspection report of the Service.

The Director of Service Improvement and the Head of Corporate Assurance had regular communications (every 3 - 4 weeks) with the Service Liaison Lead from HMICFRS. The Service was due to receive its next inspection from HMICFRS in February 2021 but due to Covid-19 all inspections had been suspended until further notice. In the interim HMICFRS was looking to implement a thematic assessment of all Fire & Rescue Services' response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The assessment would not be graded but take the form of a narrative text base assessment.

Resolved - That the update be received.

67/20 THE PUBLIC SAFETY REDESIGN PROGRAMME (SRP) 2017 - 2020 - POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW - The Director of Service Delivery Support submitted a report that outlined the post implementation review conducted following the conclusion of the Public Safety Service Redesign Programme (SRP) for the period 2017-2020.

The Public Safety SRP commenced in July 2016 and was approved for implementation by the Authority on 17 March 2017. The timeline for implementation of the restructure was agreed as a phased programme over a three-year period, concluding at the end of 2019/20.

This report identified the progress made during the SRP timespan and across all areas of the Public Safety SRP, summarising progress against 9 specific recommendations identified within the original Public Safety SRP report and updated to a timeline of structural changes (as set out at Appendix 2 of the report).

The parameters of the Public Safety SRP included delivering an outcome of flexibility within the resourcing model of between 83 and 73 posts. The current establishment was 74.5, achieving the originally approved SRP outcome. The flexible budget had been reinvested into public safety areas such as funding for volunteer operations (Blue Light Brigade), investment in flexible contracts for Service leavers with business safety competence and investment into Information Communication Technology (ICT) to advance software and hardware across public safety delivery. Further investment had been progressed within the Business Safety areas of the Service such as increased capacity to engage with businesses by operational crews and the flexibility continued to be a feature of effective delivery.

The progression of the Public Safety SRP had been significantly impacted upon by several influences. This had led to a need to make a series of structural and staff changes using the flexibility in the resourcing model. The influences had been hugely impacting, not least of all the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in 2017 and the COVID-19 crisis of 2020.

Whilst the flexibility had been used to some effect, the combination of influences now led to a position of needing to revisit the original parameters and objectives of the Public Safety SRP. It was now intended to conduct a new review of Public Safety. The efficiencies and savings associated to the Public Safety SRP and identified to Authority in March 2017 had been achieved.

The Authority requested a future update on the implications for the Authority at a future Member Day.

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

(b) that a further update be provided at a future Member Day.

67/20 COVID-19 HUB ACTIVITY AND IMPACT ON SAFE AND WELL DELIVERY - The Director of Service Delivery submitted a report that provided a summary of activity undertaken by the Service in connection to the local authority based Shielding Hubs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Service Delivery Directorate Public Safety activity workstreams were refocussed from delivering normal prevention activities to support the local authority based Shielding Hubs, to support members of the public that had been identified as vulnerable and advised to 'Shield at home'.

This localised response to an unprecedented national emergency had seen Service staff supporting district localities through the provision of essential food deliveries, prescription and medication deliveries, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) distribution for partner agencies and the co-ordination of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) PPE and Business Donation cells.

As a consequence of this work, together with restrictions across public spaces, businesses, homes and workplaces, Public Safety delivery had been diverted from its usual channels of public engagements, to support LRF responses. The teams had also used the opportunity to commence the reconfiguring of engagement practises to accommodate the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Replacement systems had been introduced to support reconfigured methods of service delivery, using technology, in place of physical visits. Business Safety and Community Safety practises had adapted in response to the imposed lockdown and social distancing rules and legislation.

During the period of 1 April to 10 June 2020, in excess of 2,700 COVID-19 related activities had been delivered across public safety, with over 1,200 having been local authority shielding hub related activities. Expenditure had been met using Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government COVID-19 Grant Allocation funding.

The Director of Service Delivery wished to place on record his personal thanks to all Service personnel for their hard work and dedication to supporting residents and communities during this extremely challenging and unprecedented period.

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

(b) that the Authority places on record its thanks to all Service personnel for their dedication and hard work in responding to the Covid-19 challenges and the support provided to all communities across the four constituent authorities whilst continuing to maintain essential core business.

68/20 COVID-19 UPDATE - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive provided a verbal update on the Service's internal workings during this period and future planning arrangements.

The Service was slowly returning to more normal operational activity with business safety work now starting to be undertaken and an increase in fire fighters on fire engines.

Absence levels recorded for the Service were lower than the national Fire & Rescue Service average, largely due to proactive measures the Service took early on, even before lockdown commenced.

The Transition Group, chaired by the Director of Service Delivery Support and the Director of Service Improvement, continued to make preparations for the return of staff to fire stations or office buildings in the future and was assessing operational activity as to whether new operations undertaken during Covid-19 should continue and likewise if there was a need for work put on hold during the pandemic to recommence. Once such example was distance learning, training and assessments which had been operating virtually since lockdown, showing great benefits and proven such a success with staff that it might continue to be delivered virtually in the future, even if social distancing was lifted entirely.

A full risk assessment had been undertaken with all staff to assess their wellbeing and occupational needs in advance of them returning to fire stations or office buildings in the future. The Service had seen an increase in referrals to occupational health and for mental health and wellbeing support. Particular thanks was paid to Lisa Smith - Head of Occupational Health and Pete Allman - Head of Health and Safety for the work they have undertaken during this challenging period in supporting and planning for the return of staff to Service buildings.

The Service continued to prepare for a second wave of the virus, should one occur. It was felt that the Service was well placed, with improved infrastructure and remote working arrangements in place, should subsequent peaks present themselves.

Tribute was paid to all Service staff involved in the storing and delivery of over 1 million pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to care homes across the Authority area.

Members requested that virtual meetings now commence across the four constituent authorities for Members to understand the specific operational activity being undertaken by the Service in their respective areas. Likewise it was felt that Member Champion days could commence again virtually.

Members queried if the Authority would be receiving an update on Brexit and its implications for the Service in the future. It was proposed that such an update would be provided at a future meeting or Member Day in due course and that it was currently on the Local Resilience Forum's next agenda for discussion.

Tribute was again paid by Members to the Service and all its staff for the immense work undertaken across all four authorities in a different capacity in supporting local communities whilst also continuing core business.

Resolved - That the update be received.