

# HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY

FRIDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2021

## PRESENT:

### Members

#### **Representing East Riding of Yorkshire Council:**

Councillors Davison, Dennis, Jefferson and Smith

#### **Representing Hull City Council:**

Councillors Chambers, Dad, North and Singh

#### **Representing North East Lincolnshire Council:**

Councillors Lindley, Patrick and Shepherd

#### **Representing North Lincolnshire Council:**

Councillors Briggs (*Chairperson*) and Grant

### Officers of Humberside Fire & Rescue Service

Chris Blacksell - Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive, Niall McKiniry - Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Kevin Wilson - Executive Director of Corporate Services/Section 151 Officer, Jason Kirby - Temporary Director of People and Development, Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Steve Topham - Director of Service Delivery Support, Simon Rhodes - Temporary Director of Service Improvement, Lisa Nicholson - Deputy 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 121/21 and 122/21) and Andrew Smith were in attendance as observers.

#### **External Auditor**

Gavin Barker - Director - Public Services (Mazars) (presented Minute 123/21)

The meeting was held at The Mercure Hull Grange Park Hotel, Willerby.

**115/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** - Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Belcher, Chadwick, Fox, Green, Healing, Randall, Sherwood, Swinburn and Waltham MBE, and from Jonathan Evison - Police and Crime Commissioner.

**116/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** - None.

**117/21 MINUTES - Resolved** - That the minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 23 July 2021 be received as a correct record.

**118/21 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS** - There were no questions.

**119/21 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS** - None received.

**120/21 COMMUNICATIONS** - The following communications were reported:

- (i) **Long Service and Good Conduct Ceremony** - The Service held its annual Long Service and Good Conduct Ceremony at The Guildhall on Friday 17 September, to recognise long serving staff, who had reached their 20 and 30 years in Service. The evening also applauded two members of staff (Cathy Latham and Steve Smith) who received Commendations from the Chief Fire Officer for their outstanding performance of duty and high standard of professionalism towards the Service and its community. The Chair of the Authority also awarded all Service staff with a Humberside Fire Authority Commendation for their exemplary work during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (ii) **Executive Director of HR post** - the post for the Executive Director of HR was now out for advert and following the shortlisting process, the Appointment Committee would be convened.

**121/21 DRAFT MINUTES OF GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY (GAS) COMMITTEE - 6 SEPTEMBER 2021** - Doug Chapman, Chairperson of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee, presented the draft minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 September 2021.

**Resolved** - That the draft minutes of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) Committee held on 6 September 2021 be received.

**122/21 GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY (GAS) COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE** - Doug Chapman, Chairperson of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee presented a report detailing a summary of the recommendations made by the Committee and the progress made to date against those recommendations by the Service.

**Resolved** - That the report be received.

**123/21 EXTERNAL AUDIT - AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT - YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2021** - External Audit (Mazars) presented its Audit Completion Report for the year ending 31 March 2021.

- Audit Opinion - it was anticipated to issue an unqualified opinion, without modification, on the financial statements.
- Value for Money - auditors were yet to complete their work on the Authority's value for money arrangements but it was anticipated to report no significant weaknesses in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) - auditors had not yet received group instructions from the National Audit Office in respect of its work on the Authority's WGA submission. It would be unable to commence its work in this area until such instructions had been received.
- Pension Fund Audit - auditors were awaiting assurance from the pension fund auditor. The pension fund audit was still in progress, which meant that Mazars were unable to conclude its work to address the significant risk in respect of the defined benefit pension liability valuation at this stage.

The 2020 Code of Audit Practice required auditors to issue its Auditor's Annual Report, which included commentary on the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (VFM commentary) within 3 months of issuing its opinion on the financial statements, and before 30th September. Where this is not possible, auditors were required to write to the Authority setting out the reasons for the delay in an 'audit letter'. It was envisaged this would be received by 30 September 2021.

As a result of the ongoing pandemic, the National Audit Office updated its guidance to auditors in April 2021 to allow auditors to delay the completion of their work on VFM arrangements. The revised guidance required auditors to complete their work and issue their Auditor's Annual Report no more than three months after the date of the opinion on the financial statements. In line with the National Audit Office guidance, Mazars had not yet issued its Auditor's Annual Report including the VFM commentary. It was expected to publish the Auditor's Annual Report no later than 31 December 2021.

Members were assured that the Service was providing quality and timely financial information to the auditors.

**Resolved** - That the report be received.

**124/21 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2020/21** - The Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted the annual accounts for 2020/21 for approval.

The Statement of Accounts summarised the financial performance of the Authority for year ended 31 March 2021. The accounts had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting 2020/21 published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

**Resolved** - That the Annual Accounts 2020/21 be approved.

**125/21 FINANCIAL OUTLOOK 2022/23** - The Executive Director of Corporate Services/S.151 Officer submitted a report that considered the Authority's financial prospects for the years 2022/23 to 2025/26 and the rationale for a Prudent Minimum level of General Reserves (PMGR).

The Authority's outturn for 2020/21 delivered an underspend of £571k and a closing level of total Revenue Reserves of £13.7m. The Authority had set a balanced budget for 2021/22 and the last budget monitoring to 30 June 2021 set out a £232k projected underspend.

The current financial projections for 2022/23 to 2025/26 had been updated based on the latest assumptions and information and were shown in Appendix A of this report.

The Authority's financial projections had been updated to incorporate all previous decisions relating to efficiencies. Members noted from Appendix A that over the medium-term the MTFP was balanced. This would be challenged if the Service faced higher cost increases than those set out in the table. Most notable would be pay increases above 2 percent which were not funded by Government. Each 1 percent on pay added £300,000 to the pay bill and therefore a need to find a further similar level of efficiencies.

Reserves were held by the Authority to meet general financial risks and costs that might materialise (General Reserve) and also to meet specific project costs or financial liabilities (Earmarked Reserves). Appendix B of the report set out the projection of the Authority's General and Earmarked Reserves over the period 2022/23 to 2025/26. Appendix C of the report set out the analysis that had been undertaken to underpin the need to now maintain a General Reserve of circa £5.9m. More generally, financial risks at a macroeconomic level were likely to be volatile over the medium-term and the reserves position was robust and reasonable and underlined the need to maintain an operating General Reserve of circa £5.9m which was the projected position for the Service shown in Appendix B through to 2025/26.

**Resolved** - That the Prudent Minimum level of General Reserves (PMGR), as set out in the report, be approved.

**126/21 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21** - The Temporary Director of People and Development submitted a report that provided an overview of the wide range of activities, outcomes and progress made by the Service during 2020 in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

During the unprecedented events of 2020/21 the Service had used this time to reflect, review and adapt to new ways of working, including re-evaluating its approach to EDI. At the same time, the Service remained mindful of its legal equality duties under the Equality Act 2010, in particular the Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) which had general and specific duties which were outlined below:

- General equality duty (section 149 Equality Act 2010).
  - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups.
  - (c) Foster good relations between different groups.

- Specific duties (Schedule 19 Equality Act) - listed public authorities must publish:
  - (a) Information on employees (if 150 staff or more) and people affected by policies and practices to demonstrate compliance with the equality duty, at least annually.
  - (b) Specific and measurable equality objectives, at least every four years.

The Service's five PSED priorities were:

- (i) Leading by example on equality
- (ii) Increasing diversity throughout our workforce
- (iii) Ensuring a safe and fair workplace for all staff
- (iv) Continuing to improve our knowledge of our diverse communities and how we engage with them
- (v) Identifying the fire and other emergency risks linked to multiple disadvantage and discrimination

Members were assured of the Service's continued progress in the EDI arena and endorsed the work being undertaken. The Authority acknowledged the excellent work being undertaken by the Senior Equality Ambassadors and the Ambassadors for Race, Age and Religion and Belief.

**Resolved** - That the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report 2020/21 be approved for publication.

**127/21 INCIDENT NO. 13246 (GOOLE) SECOND WORLD WAR UNEXPLODED BOMB** - The Director of Service Delivery submitted a report that summarised the Service's response to an unexploded bomb in Goole during July 2021.

At 17:57hrs on the 22 July 2021 the Service was notified that an unexploded world war two bomb had been unearthed on a housing development site located in the town of Goole. The device was identified as a '500-pound ADW' (Air Drop Weapon) and was reported to the Police, who in turn reported the finding to the military Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD). EOD team's from across the country attended and made an initial assessment of the risk in conjunction with on scene Police commanders (image of ADW below).

The report outlined the role of the National Interagency Liaison Officer (NILO) and the deployment of the shared Service and Humberside Police Drone capability. The report concluded with a look forward and the importance of the long-term development, investment and retention of training and knowledge relating to the deployment of specialist assets to assist in multi-agency incidents.

Members extended their thanks to all involved and acknowledged the complexity of this type of incident and the key role of the Service's National Interagency Liaison Officer (NILO) in bringing about a safe multi-agency resolution. Also noted was the operational return upon the joint Police and Fire investments in the provision in drone capability that were available to support and influence the safe resolution of hazardous operations.

**Resolved** - That all personnel involved in the multi-agency response be congratulated in bringing about a safe resolution to the incident.

**128/21 HMICFRS UPDATE** - The Temporary 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).

Pre-inspection work continued ahead of the next HMICFRS inspection at the end of the year. In particular 57 questions had been requested by the inspectorate, resulting in 136 documents being sent to the Home Office.

The Chief Inspector of HMICFRS had written to the Chief requesting his views of the Service, a response of which had now been circulated to Members.

Gareth Bradbury, the new Service Liaison Lead (Merseyside FRS, Humberside FRS and Durham & Darlington FRS) had undertaken an informal engagement visit of the Service to familiarise himself with the Service.

Targeted communications with staff was being undertaken as well as maintaining a presence across all directorates. The first formal planning meeting with the HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead would take place on 1 October.

The Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee and Internal Audit had focussed their work programmes on the previous inspection improvement findings.

Work was underway to re-energise Member champion roles and attendance of champions at district forums to ensure Members were fully informed of work being undertaken in preparation for the inspection.

**Resolved** - That the update be noted.

**129/21 COVID-19 UPDATE** - The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive submitted a report providing an update on the impact of Covid-19 on the Service.

There were a number of areas that would, or were likely to, see change in the medium to long term.

- Incident Command arrangements had already been introduced as a permanent arrangement but would be subject to review in line with future Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP).
- Incident Command structures at middle manager level, as a result of both learning during the pandemic and the Incident Command Review, linked to the IRMP, were currently under review with a particular view to improve resilience at Group Manager level. This was likely to include a negotiation to change shift patterns and operational availability.
- Agile working, with greater flexibilities in terms of shift patterns and work location, had worked well, within frameworks required for each team or staff member. This was now becoming more normal, and the Service had decided to enable more agile working going forward. Already that had enabled the Service to draw on a wider pool of staff during recruitment with staff who lived further away applying for roles with the Service due to that flexibility. This had the potential to better enable underrepresented groups, including those with disabilities and caring responsibilities, to be employed with us. A wider pool to draw on would also mean the Service was able to employ the best staff available. Whilst there was an expectation that the vast majority of staff would work at Service premises regularly, it was also anticipated that many might also work in an agile way, including from home if appropriate, regularly as well if they wished to.
- Vehicle usage, in non-emergency situations, had reduced significantly during the pandemic due to a reduction in face-to-face meetings with colleagues and partners, locally, regionally, and nationally, due to an increase in video conferencing. It was felt too early to change the fleet at present until the extent of those arrangements were known to be permanently in place. However, it was likely to be able to reduce the size of the non-emergency fleet, or extend its lifespan, as a result in future years.
- There was also potential to review the Estate when new arrangements had been reviewed and determined as a final position. However, it was too early to make decisions and needed to consider the scale of potential change and whether or not that might free entire buildings, or only space within existing offices or buildings, and how beneficial or otherwise that might be.

A further detailed report would be provided at the next Member Day.

Members discussed venue options for future Authority meetings and it was agreed to consider this on a meeting by meeting basis given the current Covid-19 situation.

**Resolved** - That Members endorse the planned future changes.