



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 26 June 2024 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors Stef Nelson (Chair), Gina Lewis, Sherin Akhtar, Rachel Bailey, David Brown, John Bird, Peter Coan, Steve Collings, Laura Crane, Razia Daniels, Phil Harris, Nick Mannion, Phil Marshall, Karen Mundry, Rob Polhill, Tim Price, Phil Rimmer, Geoff Smith, Mick Warren, Peter Wheeler and Sagheer Zaman

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B Fire Authority Membership 2024-25

Members were asked to note the Fire Authority Membership for 2024-25. The new Members and returning Members were welcomed.

C Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Margaret Simon and Peter Walker.

D Election of Chair

The Director of Governance asked for nominations from Members for the position of Chair.

Councillor Stef Nelson was nominated and seconded. As there were no other nominations he was duly appointed Chair of the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Stef Nelson be appointed as Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority until the Annual Meeting in June 2025.

On taking the Chair Councillor Stef Nelson thanked Members for their support.

E Election of Deputy Chair

The Chair invited nominations for the position of Deputy Chair.

Councillors Rachel Bailey and Gina Lewis were nominated. A secret ballot was conducted and Councillor Gina Lewis was duly elected Deputy Chair.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Gina Lewis be appointed as Deputy Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority until the Annual Meeting in June 2025.

F Appointment of Group Spokespersons

A political group may appoint a Group Spokesperson. Three political groups exist for 2024-25, Labour (13 members); Conservative (7 members), and Independent (2 members).

RESOLVED:

That the following appointments of Group Spokespersons be noted:

Labour: Councillor Stef Nelson
Conservative: Councillor Rachel Bailey
Independent: Councillor Mick Warren

G Appointment of Lead Members

Each constituent authority may appoint a Lead Member.

RESOLVED:

That the following appointments of Lead Members be noted:

Cheshire East: Councillor Nick Mannion
Cheshire West and Chester: Councillor Steve Collings
Halton: Councillor Stef Nelson
Warrington: Councillor Sagheer Zaman

H Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of Authority achievements and events Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chair on behalf of the Authority took the opportunity to welcome new Members, Councillors Laura Crane, Geoff Smith and Mick Warren appointed by Cheshire East Council, Councillors Phil Marshall and Phil Rimmer appointed by Cheshire West and Chester Council and Councillors Tim Price and Sagheer Zaman appointed by Warrington Council.

The Chair, on behalf of the Authority thanked former Members of the Fire Authority, Councillors Stuart Parker MBE and Norman Wright from Cheshire West and Chester

Council, Councillors Marilyn Houston, Rob Moreton and Laura Smith from Cheshire East Council and Councillors Kath Buckley and Brian Gallagher from Warrington Council for their commitment and support to the Fire Authority over the years and wished them all the best for the future.

The Chair and Councillor Rachel Bailey on behalf of the Authority took the opportunity to recognise and thank former Councillor Brian Gallagher for the work he had undertaken at both a national and local level to promote the implementation of sprinklers in commercial and residential properties both in Cheshire and across the country.

The Chair advised that on 11 July 2024, Councillor Rob Polhill would have achieved 26 years' service as a Member on Cheshire Fire Authority. The Chair took the opportunity to thank Councillor Rob Polhill for the hard work and commitment he had given the Service over the years.

The Chair advised that Crew Manager Ian Ball had sadly passed away at the age of 52 after a period of illness. Ian joined the Service in 1998 and served at Warrington and Widnes Fire Stations. Members observed a minute's silence.

I Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

J Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

K Minutes of Fire Authority

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 24th April 2024 be approved as a correct record.

L Notes of the Local Pension Board - Firefighters' Pension Scheme

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Local Pension Board – Firefighters' Pension Scheme held on 26th April 2024 be noted.

M Adoption of Fire Authority Constitution for 2024-25 Following Review

The Director of Governance presented a report that sought adoption of the Constitution for 2024-25, following a review by the Governance and Constitution Committee.

The Constitution was attached as Appendix 2 to the report. The Constitution incorporated the changes that were recommended by the Committee. As there were only minor changes made to many of the Sections, only the changes to the body of Sections 2 and 3 of the Constitution were shown 'tracked'. The Table at Page 51 of the Agenda Pack showed a reduced list of plans, strategies and policies that would, in future, be considered/approved by the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the recommendations from the Governance and Constitution Committee be noted; and

[2] the Constitution for 2024-25 be adopted.

N Appointment of Committees etc., Outside Bodies and Member Champion Roles 2024-25

The Director of Governance introduced the report that covered the following items:

- a) Political proportions on the Fire Authority;
- b) Political proportionality rules (where they apply and where they do not and their affect upon the allocation of seats on committees etc.);
- c) Appointment of Members to available seats on committees etc.;
- d) Involvement of independent (non-elected) member;
- e) Appointments to outside bodies;
- f) Appointment of Member Champions; and
- g) Continuation of Member/officer buddy arrangements.

Completed versions of Appendices 2, 3 and 4 were provided to all Members during the meeting for them to check the documents for accuracy prior to approval.

A complete list of the appointments made at the Fire Authority meeting, incorporating some changes that have taken place since the meeting) (Appendices 2, 3 and 4) are attached as an Annex to these minutes.

NOTE: Warrington Borough Council replaced Councillor Tim Proce with Councillor Mo Hussain on 2nd July 2024.

Councillor Mo Hussain took the following positions:-

Member of Performance and Overview Committee
Substitute on Phoenix Boxing Club Board
Member Champion for Performance Management

RESOLVED That:

[1] the political proportions on the Fire Authority set out in paragraph 4 of the paper be agreed;

- [2] the approach to the allocation of seats explained in paragraphs 5 to 8 of the paper and the revised copy of Appendix 1 be agreed;
- [3] the appointments required as set out in Appendix 2 be agreed (see Annex);
- [6] the involvement of independent (non-elected) member (to act in an advisory capacity) as set out in paragraph 10 of the report and reflected in Appendix 2 be agreed (see Annex);
- [7] the appointments to outside bodies set out in Appendix 3 be agreed (see Annex);
- [8] the appointments of Member Champions set out in Appendix 4 be agreed (see Annex); and
- [9] the continuation of the Member/officer buddy arrangements be agreed.

O Programme of Member Meetings 2024-25

That the Programme of Member Meetings for 2024-25 be noted.

2 FINANCE REPORT END OF YEAR 2023-24

The Treasurer introduced the report which provided a review of the Service's revenue outturn financial position and reported on progress against the capital programme at the end of the 2023-24 financial year.

The Treasurer referred Members to the summary of the estimated revenue outturn for 2023-24 shown in Table 1 of the report. There was an underspend against the revenue budget of £1,192k. Appendix 2 showed the estimated capital outturn against the capital programme. There was an estimated overspend of £23k.

The audit of the Authority's accounts was planned to commence in July and should be completed in time for the accounts to be approved at the Authority meeting on 25th September 2024. Any changes to the outturn position as a result of the audit would be reported to that meeting.

The Treasurer drew Members' attention to the noted underspend against financing costs £1,159k, this was the result of a combination of two factors: savings against budgeted interest charges from proposed PWLB loans and higher than budgeted interest receipts from cash on deposit. Whilst the Authority was committed to a large capital programme that was partly supported through taking PWLB loans, due to the current high fixed interest rates available on long term loans the current policy was to utilise 'internal borrowing' by drawing on cash reserves in the short term to fund the capital financing requirement and thus mitigate the exposure to higher than necessary interest expense.

As the benefit of the underspend was in relation to the management of capital and treasury investments the resulting surplus in effect belongs to the capital reserve.

In addition, there was underspend on the revenue budget of £1,192k. A total of £2.3m would be moved to reserves.

The Treasurer referred to the section of the report containing information on the Authority's Capital Programme. At the end of 2023-24, the Authority's capital programme showed an outturn spend of £27.886m, an overspend of £23k. The main driver of this overspend had been the vehicle replacement programme.

Councillor Phil Marshall noted the total reserve movement was £5.4m. In response, the Treasurer advised this was a presentational matter, the surpluses created in the year were £ 2.3m, the difference was due to other items previously identified as movement in and out of reserves for spend in the year. The Treasurer advised he was planning to improve the transparency and clarity of reporting although was at times constrained by CIPFA guidance.

Officers took account of variances from budget for 2023-24 (£1,192k underspend) as they monitored the budget for 2024-25 and prepared the budget for 2025-26. The settlement of the pay award for firefighters for 2024-25 had been confirmed at 4%, in line with budget. The Green Book pay rise had yet to be agreed.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the outturn position on revenue and capital expenditure (subject to audit) be noted;**
- [2] the movement in reserves as set out in Table 1 and Appendix 1 be approved; and**
- [3] the transfer of the net underspend for 2023-24 (which is subject to audit) to the capital reserve be approved.**

3 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

The Treasurer presented a report which provided a review of the Authority's treasury management activities during the 2023-24 financial year. The report also provided information about compliance with the Authority's Treasury Management Practices during the year.

The Treasurer highlighted the key areas of the report which provided details on the following:

- a) the Authority's loans portfolio position at 31st March 2024;
- b) the Authority's investment portfolio position at 31st March 2024;
- c) a summary of performance for the year 2023-24; and
- d) the Authority's performance in 2023-24 against the key Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

The Treasurer advised that whilst all investments remained within the confines of the Treasury Management Strategy and policies, the increase in the Bank Interest rates along with proactive investment placements had enabled the Authority to secure improved returns.

It was reported that borrowing rates remained high and in excess of 5%. The Authority had previously committed to taking on loans to fund major estates projects at Crewe and Wilmslow. However, through cash management the Treasurer was delaying the need to take on the loans for as long as reasonably possible. Current cash reserves were being utilised (internal borrowing) in the short term. However, current cashflow projections indicated that there would be the need to take out some loans in the second half of the year. The Treasurer explained that he would look to take on shorter term loans until interest rates had reduced.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report on treasury management activity for 2023-24 be noted;**
- [2] the performance against the Prudential and Treasury Indicators be noted; and**
- [3] the ongoing strategy to avoid committing to long term high interest loans by temporarily funding the capital financing requirement through internal borrowing be noted.**

4 AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Councillor Peter Wheeler presented the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2023-24. The report summarised the work of the Audit Committee in providing assurance about Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's governance, risk management, financial and business controls.

Councillor Peter Wheeler, Chair of the Audit Committee thanked officers and Members of the Audit Committee for their attendance and contributions throughout the year.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2023-24 be noted.**

5 FIRE SERVICE MODERNISATION PROGRAMME PHASE FIVE

The Head of Service Improvement presented a report that provided an overview of the Fire Station Modernisation Programme (the Programme) to date and information about Phase 5 of the Programme, that was scheduled to commence during summer 2024. The report sought approval to proceed with Phase 5 of the Programme.

Members were advised that the works that were required at Knutsford Fire Station had been developed alongside the contractor as a priority. The modernisation of this

fire station was important prior to the changes to the duty system, which come into effect from 1st April 2025 (Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2028, Response Project – Proposal 3). In addition to the establishment of the day-crewing duty system, the Technical Line Rescue Unit would also move to Knutsford Fire Station from Lymm Fire Station during 2025.

A Member requested reassurance that staff had been consulted on the proposal to move the Technical Line Rescue Unit to Knutsford Fire Station from Lymm Fire Station and that the new drill tower at Knutsford Fire Station would be fit for purpose. In response, the Head of Service Improvement confirmed that consultation with all effected stakeholders had taken place and that the new drill tower would be suitable for the technical rescue training that would be taking place at Knutsford in the future.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the progress that had been made in delivering the Programme and current funding position be noted;**
- [2] Officers be authorised to proceed with the modernisation works at Knutsford Fire Station; and**
- [3] Officers be authorised to proceed with the pre-construction works required for Frodsham and Winsford Fire Stations and subject to: costs falling within the remaining budget for the Programme; and scrutiny by the Estates and Property Committee, to proceed with the modernisations work at Frodsham and Winsford.**

6 CREATION OF NEW HEAD OF DEPARTMENT POST

This item had been deferred.