

At a **meeting** of the **Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington** held in **remotely**, on **Friday 19 February 2021** at 10.00 am.

Present:

Durham County Councillors:

Councillors B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, J Bell, R Bell, D Freeman, D Hicks, A Laing, L Maddison, J Maitland, R Manchester, L Marshall, C Potts, G Richardson, J Robinson, E Scott, J Shuttleworth, D Stoker, F Tinsley and J Turnbull.

Darlington Borough Councillors:

Councillor H Crumby, B Jones, G Lee and A Scott

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Carr.

Independent Person:

A Simpson

The Chair asked Cllr Batey to pass on the Authority's good wishes to Cllr Carr and passed thoughts and good wishes to all staff and their families who were suffering with COVID-19 at this time.

A1 Declarations of Interest

Cllr J Robinson declared an interest in item 11 Estates Update.

A2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 December 2020 and 19 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 and 19 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair (for copy see file of minutes).

A3 Current Correspondence

The Authority received an update from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer in relation to current correspondence received from government and other bodies relevant to the Authority and the status of each (for copy see file of minutes).

A4 Notes of the Finance Committee

The Authority considered a report of the Chair of the Finance Committee which provided an update on the discussions at the meeting held on 3 February 2021 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

A5 Budget 2021/22 Report under Section 25 of Local Government Act 2003

The Authority considered a report of the Treasurer which provided information on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of reserves, so that members have authoritative advice available when making their budget decisions (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

- a) The Treasurer's assessment of the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves be noted.
- b) When approving the budget and the level of council tax for 2021/22 members have regard to this report.

A6 2021/22 Revenue Budget and Council Tax, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Authority considered a report of the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer which set out the revised revenue budget for 2020/21 and proposals for the 2021/22 budget and medium-term financial plan, the capital budgets for 2021/22 to 2024/25 and the Authority's council tax requirement (for copy see file of minutes).

The Treasurer took the Authority through each section of the report providing an outline of the key information and proposals.

Councillor A Batey, as Chair of the Finance Committee confirmed support for the recommendations of the report and thanked Tony Hope and the team for the work that had gone into the financial planning.

Councillor Shuttleworth noted the rise in council tax and whilst this was not an easy decision agreed it had to be raised.

Resolved:

SECTION B – Consultation

That Members take into account the views of those consulted as they consider the budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan proposals.

SECTION C – Local Government Finance Settlement

That the Authority notes the 2021/22 settlement funding assessment and the uncertainty around the funding position from 2022/23 onwards.

SECTION D – Reserves Strategy

That the Authority agrees to the policy for reserves, that the Authority will:

- i. Set aside sufficient sums in earmarked reserves as it considers prudent to do so.
- ii. Aim to maintain a general reserve of 5% of the net expenditure, currently £1.45m.

SECTION E – Medium-Term Financial Plan

That the Authority:

- (a) Agrees the Medium-Term Financial Plan.
- (b) Notes the Treasurer's comments on the robustness of the estimates, the adequacy of reserves and the risks in the budget, as set out in the separate report under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

SECTION F – Revenue Budget

That the Authority adopts the following resolutions:

- (a) That the revised revenue budget for 2020/21, as set out in Appendix A be approved.
- (b) That the Treasurer be authorised to make any proper accounting transactions that would be in the interests of the Authority in relation to the accounts for 2020/21.
- (c) That the revenue budget for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix A be approved.

SECTION G – Capital Strategy 20120/21 to 2024/25

That the Authority approves the revised capital budget for 2020/21 and the capital budgets for 2021/22 to 2024/25.

SECTION H – Fire Authority Council Tax Requirement

- (a) That the Authority determine the level of Council Tax for 2021/22.
- (b) Based on the Net Expenditure of £29,337,855 and a Band D Council Tax of £107.55 the Authority adopts the following resolutions for the year ending 31 March 2022:
 - i. That the 'council tax base' for the whole of the Authority's area be £175,102.80.
 - ii. That there be no Authority expenses relating to a part only of the Authority's area.
 - iii. That the 'basic amount of council tax' be £18,832,306.14 and the amount of council tax for each category of dwelling be as set out in table 15.
 - iv. That the Net Expenditure be £29,337,885 and that, after taking into account revenue support grant of £3,499,067 business rates income of £1,431,840, top up grant of £5,691,126, and a surplus on the collection fund of £116,484, precepts totalling £18,832,306.14 be issued to Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council.

SECTION I – Prudential Code

- (a) That the Authority notes the prudential indicators.
- (b) That the Authority approves the MRP Statement.
- (c) That the Authority approves the following limits for external debt in 2021/22:
 - i. Authorised Limit of £15.327m
 - ii. Operational Boundary of £13.934m

SECTION J – Treasury Management 2021/22

- (a) That the Authority continues to adopt the key recommendations of the CIPFA code.

- (b) That the Authority notes the Annual Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex K3.
- (c) That the Authority sets an upper limit on its fixed interest rate exposures for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 of 100% of its net outstanding principal sum.
- (d) That the Authority sets an upper limit on its variable interest rate exposures for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 of 30% of its net outstanding principal sums.

A7 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Update

The Authority considered a report of the Area Manager Assets and Assurance which provided members with an update on the COVID-19 thematic inspection of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the contents of the report were noted, and further reports received as appropriate.

A8 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

A9 Exclusion of the public

That under Section 100A(4) 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 paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

B 10 COVID-19: Issue between the Fire Brigades Union and the National Employers

The Authority considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer which provided an update on the issue that arose during January between the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the National Employers relating to the governance of additional activity undertaken to support COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Fire Office asked the Area Manager Assets and Assurance to provide an update on the numbers of staff volunteering at community testing sites, vaccination centres and local contact tracing.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report were noted, and a verbal update at the meeting was given in relation to the additional activities being undertaken.

B11 Estates Update

The Authority considered a report of the Head of Corporate Resources to provide members with an update on the latest position in relation to the Estates Improvement Programme (EIP).

Members passed on their thanks to those involved with the build.

Resolved:

The report was noted.

Any Other Business

There was no other business

CLOSE OF MEETING