

Minutes of a **meeting** of the **Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington** held at **Fire and Rescue HQ, Durham** on **15 February 2022** at **10.00 am**.

Present:

Durham County Councillors:

Councillors J Atkinson, R Bell, J Blakey, J Cosslett (Substitute for M McGaun), T Duffy, C Hampson, N Jones, B Kellet, R Manchester, L Mavin, I McLean, J Quinn, S Quinn, G Richardson, K Rooney, J Shuttleworth, A Watson (Substitute for J Cairns), S Zair

Darlington Borough Councillors:

Councillors B Jones, G Lee, C McEwan, A Scott

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cairns and M McGaun.

Independent Persons:

No independent persons present.

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and provided an update from the recent Pass Out event held on 10th February 2023 for the firefighters of cohort 6. The event was well attended, and the new Firefighters were all allocated stations for the next stage of their development.

A1 Declarations of Interest

The Clerk noted that all Durham Members would have a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to item 15.

A2 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2022 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 Director of Emergency Response in relation to current correspondence between the Service and government and other bodies relevant to the Authority and the status of each (for copy see file of minutes).

A4 Notes of the Audit and Finance Committee 30 November 2022

The Authority received a report of the Chair of the Audit and Finance Committee which provided an update on the discussions and recommendations of the Committee held on the 30 November 2022 (for copy see file for minutes).

Members **noted** the report.

A5 Notes of the Audit and Finance Committee 26 January 2023

The Authority received a report of the Chair of the Audit and Finance Committee which provided an update on the discussions and recommendations of the Committee held on the 26 January 2023 (for copy see file for minutes).

Members **noted** the report.

A6 Notes of the Human Resources Committee 2 December 2022

The Authority received a report of the Chair of the Human Resources Committee which provided an update on the discussions and recommendations of the Committee held on the 2 December 2022 (for copy see file for minutes).

Members **noted** the report.

A7 Notes of the Performance Committee 6 December 2022

The Authority received a report of the Chair of the Performance Committee which provided an update on the discussions and recommendations of the Committee held on the 6 December 2022 (for copy see file for minutes).

Members **noted** the report.

A8 Report under Section 25 of Local Government Act 2003

The Authority considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive and 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).

Members

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 2023/24 members have regard to this report.

A9 2023/24 Revenue Budget and Council Tax, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Chair noted that Members and Officers had continuously lobbied regarding the financial position and asked Members to consider this throughout the report. Thanks were noted to the Treasurer, Finance Team, Members and MP's for the work that had gone into the financial planning.

The Authority considered a report of the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer which set out the revised revenue budget for 2022/23, proposed revenue budget for 2023/24, the

medium-term financial plan, the capital budgets for 2023/24 to 2026/27 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.

SECTION B – Consultation

Resolved:

That Members note the consultation arrangements and the results of the online survey on a potential increase in council tax of £5.

SECTION C – Local Government Finance Settlement

Resolved:

That the Authority notes the 2023/24 settlement funding assessment and the uncertainty around the funding position from 2024/25 onwards.

SECTION D – Reserves Strategy

Members commented on the financial uncertainty after the 1 year settlement.

Resolved:

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 £1.5m.

SECTION E – Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Treasurer provided a verbal update noting a revised pay award offer of 7% and 5% for firefighters.

Cllr Bell confirmed that the Audit and Finance Committee recommended the £5 increase in Band D council tax in 2024/25.

Resolved:

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

Resolved:

That the Authority adopts the following resolutions:

- (a) That the revised revenue budget for 2022/23, 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 2022/23.
- (c) That the revenue budget for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix A be approved.

SECTION G – Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27

Discussion took place around monitoring interest rates.

Resolved:

That the Authority approves the Capital strategy, the revised capital budget for 2022/23 and the capital budgets for 2023/24 to 2026/27.

SECTION H – Fire Authority Council Tax Requirement**Resolved:**

Based on the Net Expenditure of £32,101,282 and a Band D Council Tax of £114.69 the Authority adopts the following resolutions for the year ending 31st March 2024:

- i. That the 'council tax base' for the whole of the Authority's area be £180,490.40.
- 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 £20,700,443.98 and the amount of council tax for each category of dwelling be as set out in table 18.
- iv. That the Net Expenditure be £32,101,282 and that, after taking into account revenue support grant of £3,971,774 business rates income of £1,459,488, top up grant of £5,924,705, services grant of £288,083 and a deficit on the collection fund of £243,212, precepts totalling £20,700,443.98 be issued to Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council.

SECTION I – Prudential Code

Members queried the difference between the authorised limit and operational boundary. The Treasurer confirmed authorised limit was worst case and operational boundary was a more likely case.

Resolved:

- (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 2023/24:
 - i. Authorised Limit of £15.976m
 - ii. Operational Boundary of £14.523m

SECTION J – Treasury Management 2023/24**Resolved:**

- (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 J3.
- (c) That the Authority sets an upper limit on its fixed interest rate exposures for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 of 100% of its net outstanding principal sum.
- (d) That the Authority sets an upper limit on its variable interest rate exposures for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 of 30% of its net outstanding principal sums.

A10 Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2026

The Authority received a report of the Chief Fire Officer which provided details of the 2023-2026 Community Risk Management Plan, the proposals contained within the plan and the public consultation on it (for copy see file of minutes).

Cllr Bell queried whether background material would be provided for each of the questions. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the full CRMP was attached as an appendix and a shortened version had been prepared to circulate throughout the consultation.

Cllr Watson questioned whether riding with 4 was a minimum requirement. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service would not operate with less than 4.

Members commented on the importance of fire safety education for members of the public.

Members

Resolved:

- (a) That the Authority notes the 2023-2026 CRMP summary provided.
- (b) That the Authority approves the questions to put to the public in the consultation document as shown at paragraph 16.

A11 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Update

The Authority received a report of the Director of Community Risk Management which provided an update on the current position and next steps of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (for copy see file of minutes).

Members **resolved to note** the report and **receive** further reports as appropriate.

A12 Any other Business

Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

A13 Exclusion to 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.

Part B

B14 Review of London Fire Brigade Culture Report

The Authority considered a report of the Director of People and Organisational Development which informed members of the outcomes of the Culture Review of London Fire Brigade and the internal review of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Services practices against the recommendations made (for copy see file of minutes).

Members discussed ongoing work within the sector, historical culture, opportunities for employee feedback and the need to impact assess everything the Service does.

Members **noted** the report.

B15 Estates Update

The Authority received a report of the Director of Corporate Resources, Keith Lazzari which informed members of the latest position in relation to the Estates Improvement Programme and other matters relating to service wide estates (for copy see file of minutes). Matters within the report, which engaged the disclosable pecuniary interests of the Durham County Council interests were not considered but delegated to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Darlington Borough Council Members to consider and resolve.

The Clerk proposed a change to the recommendations for this item due to Durham Members having a disclosable pecuniary interest. If Durham Members were withdrawn from the discussion and vote the meeting would not be quorate.

Members **noted** the report.

Resolved:

The recommendations in the report were agreed. In addition, it was resolved that the proposed disposals of day crewing plus accommodation would be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with Darlington Members.

B16 Update on Pay and Industrial Action

The Authority received a report of the Chief Fire Officer which informed members of the latest position in relation to the Fire Brigades Union pay claim and the possibility of industrial action (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update noting a revised pay award offer of 7% and 5%.

Members

Resolved:

- a) The recommendations in the report were noted and agreed.

B17 Fire Fatality

The Authority received a presentation from the Director of Community Risk Management regarding a recent fire fatality.

Members discussed and noted the presentation.

CLOSE OF MEETING