

Minutes of the **meeting** of the **Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington** held at **Fire and Rescue HQ, Durham** on **5 January 2024** at **10.00 am**.

Present:

Durham County Councillors:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Batey, R Bell, J Blakey, C Hampson, N Jones, B Kellett, C Marshall, C Martin, I McLean, E Peeke, J Quinn, S Quinn, K Rooney, P Sexton, J Shuttleworth and S Zair.

Darlington Borough Councillors:

Councillor A Anderson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cairns, G Lee, R Manchester, D Ray, G Richardson and K Shaw

Independent Persons:

C Hugill.

Apologies received from A Fletcher and S Winder

A1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A2 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2023 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 received from government and other bodies relevant to the Authority (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chair noted that a further letter has been sent to Lee Rowley MP regarding funding for the service.

T Hope updated Members regarding the provisional funding settlement received in December. The £5 precept has not been granted therefore limiting Council Tax to below 3%. Funding has increased by 4% overall with no further reductions in budget over the next financial year.

A4 Annual Report

The Authority were provided with the 2022-2023 Annual Report covering a number of key areas of focus. This is the 2nd year the report has been produced and which helps to inform our communities of the work both the service and Combined Fire Authority undertake, the annual report provides further transparency and will be part of evidence

submitted to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) as part of the service's Inspection process.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A5 Notes of the Human Resources Committee held on the 21 November 2023

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 21 November (for copy see file of minutes).

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A6 Notes of the Audit and Finance Committee held on 30 November 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 30 November 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Cllr R Bell updated Members that the financial position has moved on in terms of government grant funding and the precept. Cllr R Bell noted that although external audits are complete, we are still awaiting formal final sign for 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts. A letter has been sent to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP on behalf of the Authority outlining our concerns.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A7 Notes of the Performance Committee held on 7 December 2023

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 7 December 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

Members discussed the performance data attached as an appendix and agreed that, although the data was discussed at the Performance Committee, it was still beneficial for the full authority to have an overview of the information contained within the Appendix.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A8 Appointment of Independent Persons to the Combined Fire Authority

The Authority received a report of the Clerk of the Authority which provided an update on the outcome of the Appointments Panel on the 9th and 25th October and the appointment of three new Independent Persons.

C Hugill, S Winder and A Fletcher were unanimously appointed, all of whom are currently engaged with the same role within Durham County Council, bringing experience and knowledge. The appointment is for a four year term.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A9 Bonfire Report 2023

The Authority were provided with a summary of the outcomes of the Joint Bonfire Delivery Plan 2023 and an overview of activities conducted by the service and their partners during the Bonfire Period, 25 October to the 7 November 2023.

A review of the Joint Bonfire Delivery Plan across the various agencies and partners will be carried out to understand what worked well and what can be improved upon for future campaigns.

Cllr C Marshall thanked the service for the enormous amount of work done in terms of planning for the bonfire period and thanked crews for their really good work on the front line.

Cllr S Quinn asked if the cancelled firework displays were rescheduled; raising concerns regarding the storage of unused fireworks. Cllr Sexton explained that the Local Authority will follow this up as part of the planning process through the Safety Advisory Group.

ACTION: K Carruthers to discuss the storage of surplus fireworks with Trading Standards, DCC.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A10 Control System Award Contract

The Authority was provided with an update on the award of contract for the supply and maintenance of the Emergency Mobilising and Communications System for the Control Room.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A11 Government Consultation Response to the Fire Reform White Paper

The Authority received an update regarding the Government's response to the Consultation on the Fire Reform Paper.

Members discussed the proposed funding to made available to support and widen the direct entry system. Cllr R Bell and Cllr J Quinn raised concerns that managerial and incident command posts may be compromised as there appears to be a lack of recognition of professionalisms required for specific roles within the Fire Service.

CFO Steve Helps explained that the proposal aims to broaden diversity across the sectors, bringing experience from previous roles, and the direct entry scheme is just one way of trying to achieve this.

Cllr C Marshall conveyed that the fire service has been under-resourced over the last 10 years and an increase in funding would help to alleviate or address a lot of problems across the service.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

A12 Any Other Business

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

The Chair confirmed that there was no other business.

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.

Part B

B14 Fire Fatality Presentation

The Authority received a presentation by the Director of Emergency Response regarding an incident on 25 November 2023.

Cllr A Anderson thanked the service for the communications received following the incident.

B15 Strategic Planning Day – 16 November 2023

The Authority received a report summarising the areas explored, debated and agreed at the Combined Fire Authority Strategic Planning Day which took place on Thursday 16 November 2023.

Members **noted** the contents of the report.

B16 Appointment of Deputy Chief Fire Officer

The Authority received a report seeking the approval to appoint Keith Carruthers as the next Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO).

Members approved the recommendation from the Authority's Appointment Panel and appoint Keith Carruthers as substantive DCFO, commencing on 8th January 2024.

Any Other Business

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

The Chair reminded the Authority of the next Strategic Planning Day which is taking place on 24 May 2024 and encouraged everyone to attend.

CLOSE OF MEETING