

Minutes of the **meeting** of the **Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington** held at **Fire and Rescue HQ, Durham** on **16 February 2024** at **10.00 am**.

**Present:**

**Durham County Councillors:**

Councillors J Atkinson, R Bell, J Blakey, J Cairns, C Hampson, N Jones, B Kellett, C Martin, E Peeke, J Quinn, S Quinn, G Richardson, K Rooney, P Sexton, K Shaw, J Shuttleworth and S Zair.

**Darlington Borough Councillors:**

Councillor G Lee and D Ray.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Anderson, A Batey, R Manchester and M Snedker.

**Independent Persons:**

Apologies received from A Fletcher and C Hugill.

**A1 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**A2 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2024 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).

**A4 Minor Amendment to the Constitution**

The Authority received a report seeking approval for proposed minor amendments to the delegated powers and functions of the Appointments Committee.

It is proposed to extend the terms of reference to give the Appointments Panel delegated authority to appoint to all Director posts in addition to the Principal Officer posts as defined by the constitution.

Members **noted** the contents of the report and the revised responsibilities and functions of the Appointments Committee.

Members **approved** the amendment to the constitution as set out in the report and Appendix A.

## **A5 Notes of the Audit and Finance Committee held on the 23 January 2024**

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 23 January 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

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

## **A6 Corporate Risk Management Plan 2024/2027**

The Authority received a report updating members with details of the 2024-2027 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the proposals contained within the plan and the public consultation on it.

The consultation for 2024/25 will begin on 16 February 2024 and will run for 12 weeks. To ensure that a wide range of views can be gathered, a consultation document containing the specific questions regarding the future plans of the Service will be disseminated.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that more face-to-face engagement will be carried out by going back into marketplaces and running events in communities around the County.

Members **noted** the contents of the report the 2024-2027 CRMP summary provided.

Members **approved** the questions to be put to the public in the Consultation Document.

## **A7 Budget 2024/25 Report under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003**

The Authority received a report providing members with information on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of reserves, so that Members have authoritative advice available when they make their budget decisions.

Members **noted** the Treasurer's assessment of the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves

Members **agreed** to have regard to this report when approving the budget and the level of council tax for 2024/25.

## **A8 2024/25 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 2023/24, proposed revenue budget for 2024/25, the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the capital budgets for 2024/25 to 2027/28 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.

## **SECTION C - Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement**

### **Resolved:**

That the Authority notes the 2024/25 settlement and the uncertainty around the funding position from 2025/26 onwards.

## **SECTION D – Reserves Strategy**

### **Resolved:**

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

- (a) Set aside sufficient sums in earmarked reserves as it considers prudent to do so.
- (b) Aim to maintain a general reserve of 5% of the net expenditure, currently £1.6m.

## **SECTION E – Medium Term Financial Plan**

Cllr Sexton raised that separate budget information should be added to the report to inform members of the public of running costs for the Combined Fire Authority including Member Allowances.

The Clerk noted that Member allowances are accessible to the public on both Durham County Council, Darlington Borough Council and the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service websites. The Clerk explained that there were limits to the scope of motions that could be moved without notice and that any motion on notice would need to be brought to a future meeting.

Cllr Lee asked whether the potential increase in Council Tax revenues raised through increased housing development have been factored into the assumptions of the MTFP. It was confirmed that the council tax base figures used in the medium-term financial plan are supplied by the constituent authorities and are based on the Durham and Darlington Local Plans.

Cllr Atkinson raised the matter of the cost of a local referendum should the percentage increase required be higher than the cap. Cllr Bell advised that the cost of running such a referendum may be greater than any amount intended to be raised by implementing a proposed increase.

### **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 2023/24 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 2023/24.
- (c) That the revenue budget for 2024/25 totalling £35,447,496 as set out in Appendix A be approved.

## **SECTION G - Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2027/28**

### **Resolved:**

That the Authority approves the Capital Strategy, the revised capital budget for 2023/24 and the capital budgets for 2024/25 to 2027/28

## **SECTION H - Fire Authority Council Tax Requirement**

### **Resolved:**

Based on the net expenditure of £35,447,496 and a Band D Council Tax of £118.12 it is recommended that the Authority adopts the following resolution for the year ended 31 March 2025.

- (a) That the 'council tax base' for the whole of the Authority's area be 181,924.80.
- (b) There be no Authority expenses relating to a part only of the Authority's area.
- (c) The 'basic amount of council tax' be £21,488,957.38 and the amount of the council tax for each category of dwelling be as set out in Table 19.
- (d) The Net Expenditure be £35,447,496 and that, after taking into account revenue support grant of £5,795,326 business rates income of £1,549,164, top up grant of £6,166,680, funding guarantee grant of £529,909, services grant of £49,732 and a deficit on the collection funds of £132,272, precepts totalling £21,488,957.38 be issued to Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council.

## **SECTION I - Prudential Code**

### **Resolved:**

That the Authority:

- (a) Notes the prudential indicators.
- (b) Approves the MRP Statement.
- (c) Approves the following limits for external debt in 2024/25:
  - i. Authorised Limit of £15.601m
  - ii. Operational Boundary of £14.183m

## **SECTION J - Treasury Management 2024/25**

### **Resolved:**

That the Authority:

- (a) Continues to adopt the key recommendations of the CIPFA code.
- (b) Notes the Annual Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex J3.
- (c) Agrees to set an upper limit on the Authority's fixed interest rate exposures for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 of 100% of its net outstanding principal sum.
- (d) Agrees to set an upper limit on the Authority's variable interest rate exposures for 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 of 30% of its net outstanding principal sums.

## **A9 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.

## **A10 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**

### **B11 Fire Fatality Presentation**

The Authority received a presentation by the DCFO Keith Carruthers regarding an incident on 15 January 2024.

Cllr Atkinson asked if there were any patterns or trends linked to the recent fire fatalities. DCFO Keith Carruthers explained there are some commonalities, for example, living alone, reduced mobility and smoking.

**ACTION:** DCFO Keith Carruthers to share a table of vulnerable factors with Members.

### **Any Other Business**

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

### **CLOSE OF MEETING**