

Minutes of **the meeting of the Combined Fire Authority for County Durham and Darlington held at Fire and Rescue HQ, Durham on 17 February 2025 at 10.00 am.**

**Present:**

**Durham County Councillors:**

Councillors J Atkinson, A Batey, J Charlton, C Hampson, B Kellett, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Martin, L Mavin, E Peeke, S Quinn, G Richardson, K Rooney, K Shaw, J Shuttleworth D Sutton-Lloyd and S Zair.

**Darlington Borough Councillors:**

Councillors A Anderson, G Lee and M Snedker

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bell, J Cairns, A Fletcher (Independent Person), C Marshall, I McLean, D Ray.

**Members of the public:**

None in attendance

The Chair updated the Authority that an announcement was imminent with regard to Fire and Rescue Services moving from Home Office to MHCLG.

**A1 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**A2 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2025**

**Item A10 PCC Request to join the Combined Fire Authority**

Cllr S Quinn requested clarity of the process for recording the names of Councillors following the vote regarding the PCC request to join the CFA. The Senior Lawyer explained the process outlined in the constitution; the Committee agreed to reflect in the minutes those members who wished to be named.

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting of the 20 January 2025 subject to the changes agreed in respect of the vote for the PCC request to join the CFA (for copy file see copy see file minutes).

**A3 Current Correspondence**

There was no current correspondence for review.

**A4 Notes of the Audit and Finance Committee held on 24 January 2025**

The Authority received a report which provided an update on discussions and recommendations from the Audit and Finance Committee held on the 27 November 2024 (for copy see file of minutes).

Members **noted** the content of the report.

### **A5 Budget 2025/26 Report under Section 25 of 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 2025/26.

### **A6 Community Risk Management Plan including consultation proposals**

The Authority received a report updating members with details of the 2025-2028 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the proposals contained within the plan and the public consultation on it.

The consultation for 2025/26 will begin on 19 February 2025 and will run for 12 weeks closing on 14 May 2025. To ensure that a wide range of views can be gathered the Communications and Engagement Team will lead on all consultation activity, with the assistance of crews and other departments.

The consultation questions (as set out in paragraph 35) will be available to the public to answer in two formats, via an online survey created on Smart Survey and via a questionnaire style booklet.

A Communications and Engagement Plan has been created to assist with the consultation process.

Members **noted** the contents of the report the 2025-2028 CRMP summary provided.

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

### **A7 2025/26 Revenue Budget and Council Tax, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

The Authority considered a joint report of the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer which set out the revised revenue budget for 2024/25, proposed revenue budget for 2025/26, the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the capital budgets for 2025/26 to 2028/29 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 - Local Government Finance Settlement**

The Authority notes the 2025/26 settlement and the uncertainty around the funding position from 2026/27 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 £1.8m.

Cllr J Atkinson commented that 5% seemed low compared to others. The Treasurer confirmed that 5% is what is deemed reasonable within the national framework across other fire and rescue services.

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

### **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 2024/25 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 2024/25.
- (c) That the revenue budget for 2025/26 totalling £36,585,979 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 2024/25 and the capital budgets for 2025/26 to 2028/29.

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

### **Resolved:**

Based on the net expenditure of £36,585,979 and a Band D Council Tax of £123.12 it is recommended that the Authority adopts the following resolution for the year ended 31 March 2026:

- (a) That the 'council tax base' for the whole of the Authority's area be 184,665.10.
- (b) There be no Authority expenses relating to a part only of the Authority's area.
- (c) The 'basic amount of council tax' be £22,735,967.11 and the amount of the council tax for each category of dwelling be as set out in Table 19.
- d) the Net Expenditure be £36,585,979 and that, after taking into account revenue support grant of £5,899,594 business rates income of £1,634,183, top up grant of £6,231,987 and a surplus on the collection funds of £84,248, precepts totalling £22,735,967.11 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 2025/26:
  - i. Authorised Limit of £20.498m
  - ii. Operational Boundary of £18.635m

## **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 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 of 100% of its net outstanding principal sum.
- (d) Agrees to set an upper limit on the Authority's variable interest rate exposures for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 of 30% of its net outstanding principal sums.

### **A8 Localism Act – Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 - Report of the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Authority of the pay policy statement for 2025/26.

Members **approved** the 2025/26 pay policy statement as set out at Appendix A.

Members **noted** that the statement will be published on the Authority's website.

### **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 as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of the schedule 12A of the said Act.

## **PART B**

### **A11 Serious Fire Learning Review**

The Authority received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer regarding a recent fire fatality in West Auckland.

Members discussed the presentation with officers and agreed to **note** the presentation.

### **A17 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.

## **CLOSE OF MEETING**