

SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING

14 JUNE 2019

PRESENT: Councillor C Lamb (Chair)
Councillor A Atkin (Vice-Chair)
Councillors: R Taylor, S Ayris, T Damms, P Haith, C Hogarth,
T Cave, S M Richards, P Price and Dr A Billings

CFO J Courtney, QFSM, DCFO A Johnson and S Booth
(South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service)

A Frosdick, N Copley, M McCarthy and M McCoole
(Barnsley MBC)

M Buttery
(Office of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Ross,
Councillor C Ransome, L Noble and T/ACO T Carlin

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were noted as above.

2 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Lamb welcomed Councillors Price, Richards and Cave to the meeting as new Members to the Authority, following the appointments made at their respective local authorities' AGM's held in early/mid May 2019. Ordinarily such appointments would commence from the Authority's AGM, however in specific circumstances, when an Elected Member has resigned or was no longer a councillor, the appointed Member could commence on the Authority with immediate effect.

Councillor Damms queried whether consideration could be given for the Authority's AGM's to be held at the end of May/early June, to coincide with the local authorities' AGM's.

M McCarthy stated that historically the local authorities' AGM's had been held over a 5 week period. Therefore, the Authority's AGM's had been held at the end of June each year, to ensure that all of the local authorities' AGM's had taken place and appointments to the Authority had been made. He would ensure that this would be brought in line within the Authority's meeting cycle for next year.

Councillor Lamb provided Members with the background and rationale for the Extra Ordinary Authority meeting. Members recalled the funding reductions brought about by austerity since 2010/11, which over the ensuing years had led to an approximate 20% cut to the Authority's budget. The situation had been further

exacerbated by the Government's funding formula for fire and rescue services, which paid premiums for both population density and population sparsity, neither of which benefitted South Yorkshire. The Service and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had made numerous representations to Government, without achieving any degree of success. The Authority had a legal responsibility to deliver a balanced budget, which had led to significant cuts in managers and management costs within SYFR, year on year reductions in non-pay budgets and cuts to back office functions i.e. HR, IT, Health and Safety and support services.

Members recalled that Close Proximity Crewing (CPC) had been introduced in SYFR approximately 4/5 years ago. CPC was a completely voluntary crewing system which provided a 24 hour presence on four SYFR fire stations, resulting in a total saving of £1.4m per year and which had protected the immediate response to the residents of South Yorkshire.

In 2018, the FBU had brought a judicial review which determined that CPC was unlawful in the absence of a collective agreement. Following instruction by the Authority, Councillor Lamb had met with the FBU in September 2018 in order to seek a collective agreement. The FBU had been unable to accede to his request, which had resulted in £1.4m funding deficit. Later in 2018, the Government had advised that the actuarial calculations within the public sector pension scheme, which included firefighter, police and teacher pension schemes, had been wrongly calculated and had resulted in a £2.5m deficit in funding for SYFR. The Government had agreed to cover 90% of the shortfall for the current financial year, but had not provided any assurances for subsequent years.

Councillor Lamb referred to the current Brexit situation, a consequence of which is that a comprehensive spending review had not been undertaken to date. He suggested that it could be difficult to ascertain the shortfall in firefighter pension schemes. The Authority needed to plan for a £4m shortfall in the budget.

At the Authority meeting held on 11 February 2019, Members had agreed to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), in order to balance the budget and reconfirm the capital projects upon which the reserves, which had been accrued over the years specifically for such purposes, would be spent. In order to achieve the savings, the Authority would need to determine whether to remove the immediate response on numerous night time appliances; to be replaced by retained firefighters which would result in a significant delay to the night time response times, or to move to four person crewing of fire appliances, as undertaken in 17 other fire and rescue services nationally. At the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, Members had been informed that the implementation of four person crewing of fire appliances would only go as far as the finances required it to do so. Members had agreed at that meeting to consult on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). At that meeting, Councillor Lamb had urged all consultees to utilise the consultation process to submit alternative ideas and/or suggestions on how the Authority could deliver a balanced budget in the future. There had been a significant disquiet over the past 6/7 weeks with suggestions made that the consultation was flawed and was not what had been agreed at the meeting.

Councillor Lamb had therefore convened the Extra Ordinary Authority meeting in order to check the understanding of what Members had agreed at the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, with a view to offering absolute clarity to CFO Courtney and his team to enable them to carry out the consultation in the manner that the Authority had expected at that particular time. He considered that the consultation was both genuine and meaningful, and he expected written representations and presentations to the consultation process to be made by the FBU, Unison, FOA, local MP's, local authorities, members of the public, agencies and charities which represented the most disadvantaged individuals within the local communities. All submissions would be fully considered by the Authority, at the end of the consultation period, at which point Members would make the final decisions when the results of the consultation had been pulled together.

3 URGENT ITEMS

None.

4 ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

None.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS IN RELATION TO ANY ITEM OF BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA

None.

6 REPORTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Richards referred to a recent article in the Sheffield Star Newspaper which had alleged that the new Parkway Fire Station had not fulfilled its environmental commitments to protect the wildlife around the fire station, which had been promised when the building had originally been built. She requested that a report be submitted to the Authority meeting in September 2019 to provide an update on the position, with a view to remedying the situation if the allegation was correct.

Councillor Atkin had attended the recent Dearne Fire Station open day which had been well attended by the public. He expressed his thanks to those that had organised and attended the event, and he hoped that further events would be held in the future.

Councillor Taylor expressed his thanks to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service for the hospitality shown to a number of Authority Members during a recent visit regarding the IRMP.

RESOLVED – That Members agreed that a report regarding the new Parkway Fire Station's environmental outcomes be submitted to the Authority meeting to be held on 16 September 2019.

7 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

M McCarthy had taken receipt of a petition from the FBU on 11 June 2019, which had contained 10,429 names in relation to the IRMP consultation process. The petition would be presented to Members at the conclusion of the consultation phase, which would form part of the evidence to be submitted to assist Members in deliberating the outcome of the IRMP.

8 TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC, OR COMMUNICATIONS SUBMITTED BY THE CHAIR OR THE CLERK AND TO PASS SUCH RESOLUTIONS THEREON AS THE STANDING ORDERS PERMIT AND AS MAY BE DEEMED EXPEDIENT

M McCarthy had received two questions from the FBU, one of which was in direct relation to the IRMP, and would form part of the submission for Members' consideration at the conclusion of the consultation period. The second question had related to the extent to which the Authority had lobbied Central Government regarding the pensions' shortfall, which at the discretion of the Chair, could be considered at a future ordinary Authority meeting.

9 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

CFO Courtney stated that at the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, SYFR officers had left the meeting with the understanding that Members had given authority for SYFR to commence the IRMP consultation process based upon the document presented at that meeting; subject to the amendment of some wording within the document. The document was a binary choice in terms of SYFR's professional guidance in respect of the potential shortfalls in finance arising from the CPC situation and the pensions' deficit. The consultation process had now commenced.

CFO Courtney referred to the communications made with a number of parties, who had suggested that SYFR was not consulting upon what the Authority had instructed, and that other options should have been included within the IRMP consultation. On numerous occasions, SYFR officers had viewed the webcast from the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, to determine whether the conversations that had taken place had been misunderstood; they did not consider this to have been the case. CFO Courtney sought clarity from Members as to whether SYFR was consulting upon the IRMP that Members had authorised to be consulted upon.

Councillor Ayris suggested that it would have been useful for the new Members onto the Authority to have been presented with sections of the original draft of the IRMP which had been agreed following the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, to inform the discussion held today.

Councillor Lamb queried whether any alterations had been made to the draft IRMP that had been considered at the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, in comparison to the final consultation document.

CFO Courtney stated that materially this was the same document. At the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019, SYFR's Head of Communications had made a number of observations in order to provide additional information for clarity, which may have been included within the draft IRMP document; such changes would not alter the essence of the document.

Dr Billings suggested that Members should discuss the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) at a Corporate Advisory Group or similar group, to enable free flowing conversation in order to determine the best solutions for the SYFR workforce.

Councillor Taylor referred to the recent visit made to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service by a number of Members, where he had observed that they had been riding with 4 person crews for several years having consulted upon IRMP proposals that were almost identical to that of SYFR, together with a similar consultation process.

Councillor Richards did not consider that the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the IRMP consultation document addressed those issues that were pertinent to members of the public. She requested that the FAQ section be revisited to ensure that it was fit for purpose and user friendly. She expressed her thanks to Councillor Atkin for his service to the Authority, together with Councillor Lamb as Chair of the Authority.

CFO Courtney stated that the FAQ section was based on actual FAQ. The section would be revisited to ensure that it did not reference that SYFR 'aimed' to have four person crewing on fire appliances. He confirmed that the appliance would not be available with fewer than four riders.

Councillor Damms considered that the level of reserves had become a problem. He suggested that the reserves be utilised for the first year only, in order to provide an opportunity to investigate other potential savings that could be made. He also suggested that regular meetings be held with Members and the FBU, and for those minutes to be presented to Authority meetings.

Councillor Lamb suggested that Members would need to consider the impact that utilising the reserves for the first year would have on the overall level of reserves, together with the impact on those capital projects that the Authority had already committed to as part of the MTFS. He suggested that the Joint Liaison Forum (JLF) was a suitable forum to provide Members with an opportunity to discuss issues with the FBU and other representative bodies, and that it should meet on a more frequent basis to enable the continuance of such discussions.

CFO Courtney advised that the service could not envisage what a one year temporary solution might be and looked forward to receiving suggestions as to how this might work.

Members noted that the JLF meetings had been regularly scheduled, but had been cancelled due to the lack of agenda items.

Councillor Lamb summarised the discussions that had ensued during the meeting. The Authority had restated its commitment that the IRMP consultation was both an open and meaningful consultation, to which the Authority genuinely sought responses from local authorities, MP's, trade unions, charitable organisations, together with other parts of society. Members agreed that CFO Courtney and his team did have the correct understanding of what had been agreed at the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019. The Authority would consider all responses and suggestions that had been received at the conclusion of the consultation period, and as part of those considerations the Authority would consider the use of reserves for a one year transitional period in order to ease change. Members had also agreed to utilise the JLF as an effective means of communication between the Authority and the trades unions.

RESOLVED – That Members agreed:-

- i) CFO Courtney and his team had the correct understanding of what had been agreed at the Authority meeting held on 8 April 2019.
- ii) The Authority would consider all responses and suggestions received at the conclusion of the consultation period.
- iii) The Authority would consider the use of reserves for a one year transitional period as part of the considerations at the conclusion of the consultation period.
- iv) To utilise the JLF as an effective means of communication between the Authority and the trades unions to discuss the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and for the minutes of those meetings to be presented to Authority meetings.

CHAIR