

SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, AUDIT & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2021
VIA STARLEAF**

80. PRESENT

Councillor	Arrived	Left
S Evans (Chair)		Torfaen
M Colbran		Merthyr Tydfil
D White		Bridgend
P Drake		Vale of Glamorgan
A Hussey		Caerphilly
V Smith		Monmouthshire
M Spencer		Newport
S Morgans		Bridgend
W Hodgins		Blaenau Gwent

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

NON ATTENDANCE

S Ebrahim Cardiff

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Mr G Thomas - Temporary Director of Corporate Services; Mr C Barton – Treasurer; Mrs L Mullan – Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement; Mrs S Watkins – Head of Corporate Support; Mr Jason Evans – Head of Risk Reduction, Ms H Cargill – TIAA;

81. UNITED KINGDOM RESCUE ORGANISATION FESTIVAL OF RESCUE 2021

The Head of Risk Reduction was pleased to advise of the success of the teams who took part in the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation Festival of Rescue 2021 held at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service over the weekend. The team from Bridgend were once again overall winners of the extrication challenge, with other teams/individuals also achieving the Best incident commander in the extrications challenge; 3rd best medic in the extrication challenge; Winners of the rope rescue challenge; Best incident commander in the rope rescue challenge; Best medic in the rope rescue challenge; Best

technical team; 2nd in the trauma challenge and 3rd in the heavy rescue challenge.

82. SMOKE ALARM QUERY

The Chair advised of a query he had received from a constituent regards the installation of smoke alarms requesting that they be screwed into place rather than stuck with tape. The Chair to forward the query to Mr Evans who will make contact with the constituent.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Each Member declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in each agenda item which affected their Authority.

Cllr Hodges declared an interest advising that, on occasion, his firm provides transport services to one of the Authority's procured suppliers.

The Chair declared an interest advising he is on the Planning Committee for Torfaen County Borough Council.

84. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements.

85. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the Finance, Audit & Performance Management Committee meeting held on 26 July 2021 were read and accepted as a true record of proceedings.

Further to Councillor Smith's query regards number of rescue dogs the Service has, the Head of Risk Reduction confirmed that the provision of rescue dogs is part of national resilience and are an All Wales asset. He believes there are two rescue dogs that can be called upon by the three Welsh fire and rescue services, these dogs are accommodated with their handler who is an officer with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

86. REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement presented the Revenue Monitoring report 2021/22 which details the annual revenue budget and associated information for the year ending 31 March 2022, advising of the

projected £1.037m underspend which comprises of a £865k underspend on employee budget and £171k against non-employee related spending, which includes within these figures the overspend on grant funded initiatives which is currently forecast at £133k. She provided a detailed explanation of the most significant changes since the previous report.

Councillor Hodgins commented on the Welsh Government (WG) statement advising Authorities that they are required to utilise any spare funding to cover PPE costs.

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement advised that there are Covid directly related savings being achieved such as the reduction in travel costs and accommodation, it is an expectation from WG that the Authority would utilise these underspends in others areas of overspend.

Councillor White commented on the six month commitment from WG, querying whether WG can be approached to provide further commitment and support. The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement advised that Covid related spending has reduced considerably, WG may extend although no commitment has been made as yet. She assured Members that this is not an area of concern and confirmed that regular contact is kept with WG in relation to continuation of funding.

The Temporary Director of Corporate Services confirmed that regular meetings are held between the Chair, Chief Fire Officer and WG officials where funding is discussed.

The Chair queried whether the rise in costs of equipment will have an impact on the training budget underspend. The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement advised that the underspend within the Training budget is due to the reduction in training courses being delivered and the funds being re-directed elsewhere such as fuel. She confirmed that, although not currently a concern, if prices continue to rise then this could have an impact on the final year projection.

Councillor Smith queried apprentice attendance at Cardiff and Vale College.

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement advised that certain conditions need to be reached before some grants can be accessed. The Head of Risk Reduction added that there is a recall of costs from the apprentice levy, advising that firefighters commence as apprentices and the Service claims back costs from the provider. Cardiff and the Vale College provide some technical aspects of the role.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted and agreed the content of the report.

87. CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement presented the Capital Monitoring Report for 2021/22 which provides details of the capital budget, transactions to date and the forecast year end position.

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement provided an update on some changes since the budget was set, including the Pontypridd project which will see an overspend of £212,000. There are also some additional works by Western Power to take place at Tonypany Station and there are delays being experienced at Penarth Station and Monmouth Station. She noted that, although the build of the Whitchurch USAR Centre of Excellence looks like an overspend, in fact it is being wholly funded by a grant from WG.

The purchase of land at New Inn is going ahead, possibly before Christmas. The Temporary Director of Corporate Services added that site investigations have been held at New Inn and all have come back satisfactory. Purchase is now underway which will likely take up to two months of negotiations and formal offer.

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement advised of the £696,000 overspend in relation to the vehicle Replacement Programme which is the highest ever known, adding that this is primarily due to the purchase of Prime Movers and rescue tenders.

The Chair commented on the rising costs of equipment and rescue tenders, which is out of the control of the Service.

RESOLVED THAT

Resolved that Members

- 87.1 note the budget and progress of capital schemes; and
- 87.2 approve the alterations and associated movements in funding.

88. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/22 – 2026/27

The Treasurer presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 – 2026/27, for Members' approval. He advised that the report includes budget projections based on the Authority's plans and strategies informed by the general financial and operational environment in which services are provided,

and confirmed that the Strategy indicates the Authority's cost base will increase by approximately 2% per annum.

The Treasurer commented on the recent government announcement advising of their intention to increase funding for social care and old age issues. This will see an increase in employee costs. Other projects affecting the budget include Job Evaluation, increase in training requirements, and increased rates for premises.

The Chair thanked the Treasurer for the comprehensive report, adding there are lots of lots of uncertainty and unknowns.

Councillor White queried pay rises and the impact these will have.

The Treasurer advised that when setting the budget last year, it was anticipated that uniformed staff would see an increase of 2.75%, the increase came in at 1.5% so there is a saving in the current budget. A 2% pay award was included for support staff, this is yet to be confirmed. He advised that currently the Authority pays the living wage and is considering the 'real living wage' as a potential issue, discussions will continue in the coming months.

Councillor Smith made reference to grants advising that South Wales Police do not make any contributions. The Treasurer confirmed there are no cross funding agreements in place with South Wales Police, but the Service works closely on a number of projects such as the Joint Control Room.

RESOLVED THAT

Members approved the Strategy as the basis for financial planning over the Strategy period.

REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

89. HEALTH CHECK OF PRIORITY ACTIONS AND Q1 PROGRESS AGAINST THE STATUTORY PI'S

The Head of Risk Reduction presented the report setting out a health check of priority actions and Q1 progress against the statutory performance indicators, advising that it has been an uncertain time for service delivery during the Covid pandemic.

He reported on the eight strategic themes that all have one or more objectives that the Service works toward. The Strategic Themes are: Keeping you safe; Responding to your emergency; Using technology well; Working with our

partners; Engaging and communicating; Valuing our people; Protecting our environment and Continuing to work effectively.

He advised there is a notable difference in types of incidents being attended, with the Service seeing an increase in assisting other agencies. This is an area that has been identified as not achieving target, but he added that attending these incidents is the right thing to do during such a difficult period so should be seen as a positive rather than negative.

The Chair thanked the Head of Risk Reduction for an excellent very informative report and explanation.

Councillor Smith made reference to applications that are currently with Monmouthshire County Borough Council. One relates to the Reservoir (water safety) and the other relates to an extension of licences to 12am at night, adding that she would like to see the Fire and Rescue Service being consulted.

She also commented on the high number of extrication incidents in the Monmouthshire area and queried whether they are occurring in any specific localities.

The Head of Risk Reduction advised that if fire and rescue services were consulted then an opinion would gladly be given. He advised that in relation to water safety, the Authority has a statutory duty for rescues from water. He advised of an event being held this month where Coroners have asked about water related deaths and injuries and what remit the fire and rescue services have. He confirmed that the statutory duty only covers certain activities, but confirmed the Service is proactive with its preventative activities adding that Road Practitioners are also training as Water Practitioners.

Regards extrication incidents in Monmouthshire, he did not have the specifics to hand but would say the Service has seen an increase as lockdown has eased. Also, whilst the number of Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) decreased, support to victims of abuse increased.

The Chair queried whether collaboration with the Home Safety Team could take place, with them handing out leaflets for the food banks, etc. He also raised liaising with communities to get home safety visits up and running.

The Head of Risk Reduction advised that the Service is thankful for foodbank support, and confirmed that discussions are taking place regards ways to reach out to all within the communities. He added that the Community Safety team are in direct contact with the Elderly Persons Commissioner for Wales in relation to reaching the most vulnerable within our communities. He confirmed that partnership working has been discussed at G10 and local Group Managers are taking to PSBs to discuss partnership working.

The Chair also requested that all Fire and Rescue Authority members have sight of the statistics relevant to their authorities. The Head of Corporate Support agreed to share the information with all Fire and Rescue Authority Members.

The Chair queried whether the pantomime in relation to grass fires could be reinstated to schools. The Head of Risk Reduction confirmed that this will be reintroduced as the lockdown eases and Community Safety are allowed to visit schools.

Councillor Smith queried the wearing of body cameras and also a CD that had been produced some years ago by a number of teenagers in relation to the setting of refuse fires. The Head of Risk Reduction advised that the wearing of body cameras had been a trial although they are still worn for training purposes, adding that there had been considerable impact around data capture and storage. He confirmed that there are CCTV on appliances and the Service also has access to drones utilised for preventative and enforcement activities. He confirmed that he would investigate the redistribution of the CD.

Councillor White raised the issue of domestic abuse incidents within the Kenfig Hill area.

The Head of Risk Reduction advised that there is an on-call function within the Community Safety Team to protect properties that are fire targeted by abusive partners. He gave detail of the Momentum Programme which links in with refuges across the unitary authorities. The eight week programme is aimed at those who have suffered domestic abuse and seeks to build self-esteem and to provide positive male role models. The programme has seen some very positive results, with some individuals becoming fire cadets and also volunteers.

Councillor White advised that it has been enlightening over the last few years to learn what the Service does as well as attending fires and RTC's.

RESOLVED THAT

- 89.1 Members noted the Health Check of Priority Actions and Q1 Progress Against the Statutory Pi's;
- 89.2 the statistics be circulated to all Fire and Rescue Authority members; and
- 89.3 the Head of Risk Reduction investigate the redistribution of the Refuse Fire Setting CD as mentioned by Councillor Smith.

90. 2020/21 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW

The Temporary Head of Finance & Procurement presented the 2020/21 Annual Treasury Management Review and the results of treasury management activities for the ending 31 March 2021. She gave a detailed overview of the report, including capital expenditure and borrowing.

RESOLVED THAT

Members resolved to recommend that the Fire and Rescue Authority note the annual Treasury Management Review for 2020/21 and approve the actual 2021/21 prudential and treasury indicators.

91. AUDIT WALES FINAL AUDIT LETTER

The Temporary Director of Corporate Services presented the 'Notice of Certification of Completion of the Audit' from Audit Wales.

The Treasurer confirmed that the Auditor was experiencing issues with connecting to the meeting, but confirmed that they did not wish to raise any issues.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the contents of the Notice of Certification of Completion of the Audit' from Audit Wales.

92. CORPORATE RESILIENCE REPORT – SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

The Temporary Director of Corporate Services presented the Corporate Resilience Report from Audit Wales.

He gave an overview of the contents of the report, particularly around Governance of the Fire and Rescue Authority, advising that Audit Wales are looking at resilience over the next five years around governance, collaboration, workforce and overall business continuity plans. He advised that there are a lot of positives to reflect on, unfortunately the report focussed more on the negative aspects. The auditors were not available for today's meeting, they will be in attendance at the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting taking place Monday 27th September 2021 where Members will have the opportunity to ask questions.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the content of the Corporate Resilience Report.

93. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Ms H Cargill, Auditor from TIAA presented the Internal Audit Report which updates Members on progress being made against the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22.

She was pleased to advise the report is positive, with just some low priority recommendations relating to payment cards, and some minor suggestions in relation to performance management.

She confirmed that there are a further two reports currently in draft relating to Planning and Safeguarding, the reports on the Core/HR system is also being finalised. One change to the plan relates to a Death in Service audit that has been requested by senior management.

The Chair was pleased to note the positive reports, adding that this shows the due diligence of staff.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the internal audit recommendations and work completed to date on the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2021/2022.

94. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Corporate Support presented the Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the Forward work Programme for 2021/22.

95. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN DEEMS URGENT (PART 1 OR 2)

There were no items of business that the Chairman deemed urgent (Part 1 or 2)