

## **SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**

### **MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 1030 HOURS IN MEETING ROOM AND REMOTELY VIA TEAMS**

#### **45. PRESENT**

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Authority</b>
Cllr C Elsbury (Chair)	Caerphilly
Cllr K Carr	Cardiff
Cllr M Hughes	Bridgend
Cllr C Wright	Caerphilly
Cllr T Watkins	Newport

#### **APOLOGIES:**

Cllr A Best	Torfaen
Cllr A Hussey	Caerphilly

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** ACO G Thomas, Monitoring Officer; Mr C Barton, Treasurer, Mrs S Watkins, Deputy Monitoring Officer.

#### **46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

#### **47. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no Chair's announcements to record.

#### **48. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2023 were received and accepted as a true record.

#### **49. CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23**

The Treasurer presented the Capital Outturn Report for 2022/23 which provided the position for the year ended 31 March 2023, the financing arrangements and the budget slippage required to complete capital schemes in 2023/24.

The Treasurer explained the key messages provided within the report which presented the total budget (2021/22 slippage plus 2022/23 budget), the outturn budget overspend and slippage as £12 million, £7.9 million, £1.9 million and

£6.1 million respectively. He provided detail which supported this position plus the funding analysis on how the investment is financed.

In response to Members' queries, the Treasurer agreed that additional narrative would be included in future reports presented to the Finance, Performance and Management Committee.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

Members scrutinised the report and following challenge and clarification of its contents, noted the capital outturn and associated funding for 2022/23.

### **50. REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23**

The Treasurer presented Members with an outline of the revenue outturn position for the financial year end 2022/23 and the resultant impact on reserves. It was noted that the revenue outturn position was subject to the external audit process.

The Treasurer clarified aspects of the report and in response to Members' requests, again agreed to provide additional narrative in future reports and to consider how they are presented to ensure consistency across all budgetary reports.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

Members received and noted the outturn position and consequent transfer to usable reserves of the revenue surplus.

### **51. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND REVENUE BUDGET UPDATE**

The Treasurer presented Members with the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 to 2026/27 for approval. It includes budget projections based on the Authority's plans and strategies informed by the general financial and operational environment in which services are provided.

The Strategy indicates that the Authority's cost base will continue to increase over the currently approved budget in response to the general inflationary pressures in the UK economy. These cost pressures are compounded by unforeseen under-provision in the current financial year. This will present a challenge to the Fire Authority and potentially to our funding councils next year.

The Strategy is drawn up in the light of rapidly changing economic projections and few firm resource commitments beyond the current year. This background introduces significant financial risks to the Strategy. Whilst it is tempting to

consider the information in this report a worst-case scenario, this is far from reality given the current volatility in the UK economy and public finances.

The Finance, Audit and Performance Management Committee considers the Strategy each year throughout its budget planning cycle.

The Treasurer provided clarity on Members' queries arising from the report including those relating to budgetary provisions for unsettled pay awards, the process for grant applications and reserves. The Treasurer undertook to include additional narrative in the upcoming report to the Finance, Audit and Performance Management Committee.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

Members considered the Strategy and associated financial challenges in light of the information and projections contained within it.

## **52. OVERVIEW OF FIRE AUTHORITY AND COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES FOR 2023/24**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented Members with an overview of Fire Authority and Committee Work Programmes and requested Members to identify the areas of scrutiny they may wish to pursue for the 2023/24 municipal year.

The Chair noted that the Committee has been committed to scrutinise the progress made by the Unwanted Fire Signals Working Group against the recent Audit Wales Review. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that a progress report would be received by the Scrutiny Committee at its 5 February 2024 meeting.

The Deputy Chair queried whether other Committees may wish to refer particular areas for additional scrutiny by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided clarification on the complaints process, including the number and complaints profiles, which is received by the HR & Equalities Committee. If Members wished, a precis of that report could be brought to future Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Members were mindful of not overloading the Forward Work Programme bearing in mind the importance of the Scrutiny Committee's role and preparation for the outcome of the impending Culture Review report.

Additional areas that Members wished to consider included sight of overarching schemes such as Biodiversity, Wellbeing Objectives and Public Service Boards and areas relating to capital spends and projects, including possible templates for station redesigns. It was also noted that Member Champions could be a

conduit for specific areas where they might identify a degree of attention is necessary.

Members suggested that holding meetings of the Fire Authority at fire stations would be useful to provide an opportunity to liaise with staff on the fireground and to view premises. The Monitoring Officer advised that the Member Development Programme which is in its early stages of development includes visits to fire stations and the Joint Fire Control.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

Members noted and considered the Forward Work Programmes for each body of the Authority with a view to identifying areas of scrutiny for review during the 2023/24 municipal year.

Members agreed to email the Chair and Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers of additional areas of scrutiny they would like included on the Forward Work Programme for review during the 2023/24 municipal year.

## **53. CONSULTATION RESPONSE ACTIVITY**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided the Scrutiny Committee with assurance that the Service is actively engaging in consultations from other bodies to provide support and actively open democracy to ensure that the views and opinions of the Service help shape both public and sector specific activity.

Members were grateful for the feedback and it was suggested that individual responses be made available as an embedded document in an agreed format. The Monitoring Officer noted that at the Committee is very much in development so all feedback is gratefully received to assist in deciding how the Committee progresses.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that all the Welsh Government consultations that the Service engages in are fully publicised along with all consultation responses and outcomes on the Welsh Government website.

## **RESOLVED THAT**

Members noted the consultation process within the Service and took assurance that the Service plays an active role in both public and sector specific consultations.

## **54. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

The Monitoring Officer provided Members with the current Forward Work Programme for 2023/24 which he confirmed remains flexible. Members were

reminded to email any additional areas they would like included on the Forward Work programme to the Chair and Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers.

**RESOLVED THAT**

Members noted the Forward Work Programme for 2023/34.

**55. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT (PART 1 OR 2)**

There were no items of business that the Chair deemed urgent.