

Public Document Pack

FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the FIRE AUTHORITY held at Council Chamber, County Hall, East Sussex County Council, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes at 10.30 am on Thursday, 15 June 2023.

Present: Councillors Galley (Chairman), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Asaduzzaman, Azad, Dowling, Evans, Geary, Hollidge, Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, McNair, Muten, Osborne, Redstone, Scott, Ungar and West

Also present: D Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive), D Norris (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Matthews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), A Ghebre-Ghiorghis (Monitoring Officer), D Savage (AD Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (AD Planning & Improvement), H Scott Youldon (AD Operational Support & Resilience), J King (AD People Services), M Lloyd (AD Safer Communities), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), E Curtis (Communications & Marketing Manager), R Smith (Democratic Services Officer) and A Blanshard (Democratic Services Manager)

144 Declarations of Interest

There were none

145 Election of Chairperson

The Fire Authority considered the report of the Monitoring Officer inviting the Fire Authority to elect a Chairperson and to request, once elected that they advise on their preferred title.

The Combination Order for the creation of the East Sussex Fire Authority set down the procedures for the election of the Chairperson of the Authority.

The Standing Orders of the Fire Authority required a Chairperson to be elected from its Members as the first items of business at the Annual meeting.

Councillor Lambert nominated Councillor Roy Galley to be the Chairperson of the Fire Authority, seconded by Councillor Redstone. The Fire Authority voted with 11 For, and 6 Abstentions.

RESOLVED – That the Fire Authority:

- i. appointed Councillor Roy Galley as Chairperson of the Authority; and
- ii. the Chairperson advised that their preferred title was that of 'Chairman.'

146 Election of Vice-Chairperson

The Fire Authority considered the report of the Monitoring Officer inviting them to elect a Vice-Chairperson for the forthcoming year and, once elected to ask the Vice Chairperson to advise of their preferred title.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

The Authority were reminded that Standing Order 9.3 asks them to consider that, unless the Fire Authority specifically determines otherwise, the Vice-Chairperson should be a Member from the other constituent authority to that of the newly elected Chairperson.

Councillor Galley proposed Councillor Carolyn Lambert, seconded by Councillor Osborne.

Councillor Scott proposed Councillor Amanda Evans, seconded by Councillor Muten.

Both nominees were invited to give a brief statement as to why they felt they were the best candidate for the role. As the position was contested a recorded vote was held with each member declaring their choice for the role. The results were as follows:

Cllr Evans	6 votes	(Cllrs Asaduzzaman, Evans, Maples, Muten, Scott, West)
Cllr Lambert	11 votes	(Cllrs Azad, Dowling, Galley, Geary, Hollidge, Lambert, Marlow-Eastwood, McNair, Osborne, Redstone, Ungar)

RESOLVED – That the Fire Authority:

- i. appointed Councillor Carolyn Lambert as Vice-Chairperson of the Authority; and
- ii. the Vice-Chairperson advised that their preferred title was that of ‘Vice-Chair.’

147 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Goddard and Theobald. Councillors McNair and Hollidge had been appointed to attend as substitutes for this meeting.

148 Notification of items which the Chairman considers urgent and proposes to take at the end of the agenda/Chairman's business items

The Chairman of the Fire Authority introduced all Members and Officers in attendance.

Following the Brighton & Hove City Council elections the Chairman welcomed the newly appointed Members of the Fire Authority, namely Cllr Mohammed Asaduzzaman, Cllr Ty Goddard and Cllr Trevor Muten.

The Chairman also welcomed back Cllr Amanda Evans, Cllr Carol Theobald and Cllr Pete West who have been reappointed by Brighton & Hove City Council.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

The Fire Authority recorded its condolences following the sudden and sad death of Councillor Barry Taylor, a well-respected Councillor who had been a dedicated Fire Authority Member for ten years. All those present stood for a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

The Chairman formally recorded the thanks of the Fire Authority to former colleagues from Brighton & Hove City Council, namely Cllr Les Hamilton, Robert Nemeth and Steph Powell. The Authority thanked them for their dedicated service during their time as Members of the Fire Authority. We are grateful for their contributions to the Fire Authority's work and wish them well in the future.

149 To consider any public questions

There were none

150 To receive any petitions

There were none

151 Non-confidential Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

152 Callover

Members reserved the following items for debate:

- 216 Political Representation on the Panels of the Fire Authority
- 218 Treasury Management – Stewardship Report for 2022/23
- 219 Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 4 Update Report

RESOLVED – The Fire Authority agreed that all other reports on this Agenda be approved in full.

153 Political Representation on the Panels of the Fire Authority

The Fire Authority received the report of the Monitoring Officer (MO) seeking to secure political balance on Panels in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 and agree the resultant memberships to the Panels of the Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority was required to keep under review the allocations of seats on Committees and other bodies to ensure, so far as practicable, that they reflected the political groups on the Authority. The rules governing this representation were outlined in the report. Following the Brighton and Hove City Council elections there continued to be four political groups on the Fire Authority but there had been a change in size:

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

Conservatives	8
Labour	5
Liberal Democrat	3
Green	2

The Panels are the Authority's committees set up in accordance with Standing Order 41 and their terms of reference are shown in the Constitution. The size of each Panel is not constituted and could be agreed by the Fire Authority. To ensure that each Panel was properly representative of the overall membership of the Fire Authority it was agreed that the size of each Panel be increased to 7 Members from the current 6, to allow for representative membership of each Panel.

The Membership of each Panel was confirmed to the meeting, and it was agreed that the Authority would elect a Chairperson to the Scrutiny & Audit and Policy & Resources Panels and to the Pension Board at this meeting. The remaining Panels will elect a Chairperson as the first item of business when they hold their first meeting.

There were two nominations for the Chairperson of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel:

Councillor Geary was nominated by Cllr Galley, seconded by Cllr Azad
Councillor Scott was nominated by Cllr Evans, seconded by Cllr Lambert

As the position was contested a recorded vote was held with each Member declaring their choice for the role. The results were as follows:

Cllr Geary	8 votes	(Cllrs Azad, Dowling, Galley, Geary, Hollidge, Marlow-Eastwood, McNair, Redstone)
Cllr Scott	9 votes	(Cllrs Asaduzzaman, Evans, Lambert, Maples, Muten, Osborne, Scott, Ungar, West)

Cllr Scott was duly appointed as Chairperson of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel.

Councillor Evans was nominated as Chairperson of the Policy & Resources Panel by Cllr Galley, seconded by Cllr Lambert. The nomination was uncontested and passed by the Authority with 15 Members voting For and 2 abstaining.

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrats	Green
SCRUTINY & AUDIT (7)	3 Azad Geary Theobald	2 Evans Scott (Ch)	1 Osborne	1 West
POLICY & RESOURCES (7)	3 Galley Redstone <i>Vacant tbc</i>	2 Evans (Ch) Goddard	1 Ungar	1 Maples

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

HUMAN RESOURCES (7) <i>(Chair to be appointed at first meeting)</i>	3 Azad Geary Marlow-Eastwood	2 Scott Vacant tbc	1 Lambert	1 West
URGENCY (7) <i>(Chair to be appointed at first meeting)</i>	3 Dowling Galley Geary	2 Asaduzzaman Muten	1 Lambert	1 Maples
PRINCIPAL OFFICER APPOINTMENTS PANEL (5)	2 Galley (Ch) Theobald	1 Evans	1 Lambert	1 Maples
PENSIONS BOARD (4)	Redstone (Ch), Dowling, 2 vacancies tbc			

The Fire Authority also agreed the appointment of the following Lead Member roles:

Health & Safety	- Cllrs Dowling & Muten
Assurance & Peer Review	- Cllr Geary
Inclusion & Diversity	- Cllr Asaduzzaman
IT	- Cllr Redstone
Environment & Sustainability	- Cllr West
Estates	- Cllr Theobald

RESOLVED – That the Fire Authority:

- i. confirmed the Panel arrangements and political representation as set out in the report and authorised the Monitoring Officer to make and publish the consequential amendments to the constitution;
- ii. agreed (with no Member voting against) that the political balance provisions shall not apply to the membership of the Principal Officer Appointments Panel; and
- iii. appointed the Chairperson of the Scrutiny & Audit (Councillor Scott) and Policy & Resources (Councillor Evans) Panels in accordance with Standing Order 41.13. The Authority agreed that the remaining Panels (Human Resources and Urgency) would appoint a Chairperson at their first meeting under Standing Order 41.14.

154 Fire Authority and Panel Meetings 2023-2024

The Fire Authority received the report of the Democratic Services Manager informing Members of the dates of meetings of the Fire Authority and Panels for the remainder of 2023 and 2024.

RESOLVED – The Fire Authority noted the dates of meetings of the Fire Authority and Panels for the next 18 months.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

155 Treasury Management - Stewardship Report for 2022/23

The Fire Authority received the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T), the Annual Treasury Management Stewardship Report is a requirement of the Fire Authority's reporting procedures and informed Members of Treasury Management performance and compliance with Prudential Indicators for 2022/23. The ADR/T confirmed that the Authority had complied with its approved Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators for the year.

The Authority were reminded that the Bank of England (BoE) Base Rate had increased on eight consecutive occasions, rising from 0.75% in April 2022 to a closing rate of 4.25% by March 2023. The BoE had taken this action to help mitigate inflationary pressures during the year. The average rate of interest received in 2022/23 through Treasury Management activity was 2.19%. This reflected the Fire Authority's continued prioritisation of security and liquidity over yield.

The ADR/T added that no new borrowing had been undertaken and two loans totaling £0.481m were repaid during the year. Decisions on investment had been taken in the context of the prevailing economic climate, the current approved capital programme and the requirement to fund it over the medium term. No investment in longer duration funds had been made during the year. The economic climate was evolving rapidly, and opportunities were being explored to secure investment returns within the accepted risk parameters set out in the Authority's agreed strategy.

During the year the Authority had invested in Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) funds that meet its policy criteria for security and liquidity and offer comparable or better returns than similar or non ESG funds.

Members referred to para. 3.7.2 of the report and asked for some context on the global supply chain disruption and whether this considered Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the climate crisis. The ADR/T confirmed that it did and that all these issues were reflected on the Corporate Risk Register and the impacts were wider than those of a Treasury Management nature. They had all had a significant impact on the international supply chains and the Service had undertaken analysis of them. There had been noticeable impacts on the cost of fleet, utilities, fuel, catering and wood for Live Fire Training. Also, the Estates elements of the Capital Programme had been affected with regards to the cost of both labour and supplies.

The ADR/T explained that the Finance team were undertaking budget forecasting, including the impact of supply chain and inflation for both 2023/24 and 2024/25. They would continue to monitor supply chain issues on both business as usual and investments.

The Authority were informed that this was also being monitored nationally and the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) were coordinating a survey on supply chain risk to the fire sector and were feeding back to the Home Office, in an effort to influence the settlement for 2024/25.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

Members asked whether the inflationary pressures on the cost of materials would mean a review of Capital Projects. The ADR/T confirmed that there were challenges to the Estates Strategy that the Fire Authority had approved 3 years ago. The Estates Team was reviewing the remaining estates capital projects to reflect both increased costs and the request from SLT to develop options to reduce the overall cost of the Estates Strategy. The key drivers would continue to include management of contaminants, provision of gender appropriate facilities, sleeping facilities and reduction in running costs / CO2. At individual project level inflationary pressures were picked up as we progressed through RIBA Gateways. The renovation of Preston Circus and updating of live fire training provisions were the biggest commitments. The Estates team continued to meet with local workgroups and the FBU to discuss any changes to individual projects.

The ADR/T added that when the 2024/25 budget had been set the funding gap was £721,000 but had the potential to increase to between £1m and £1.5m following pay awards and other emerging pressures. The Service remained committed to addressing the key objectives of the Estates Strategy to ensure that Fire Stations were fit for purpose. Members asked about reviewing the use of reserves. The ADR/T reminded the Authority that they review the use of reserves on an annual basis as part of setting the budget and that they had committed the majority to be used for Estates, Fleet and IT projects. The Authority's reserves were reducing significantly and were expected to be below £5m in the next year which left very little wriggle room. The Authority were reminded that they had decided to use £633,000 of reserves to balance this year's budget.

RESOLVED – The Fire Authority agreed to note the Treasury Management performance for 2022/23.

156 Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 4 Update Report

The Fire Authority received the report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) providing Members with a brief initial overview of the options analysis that had been carried out through the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Tranche 4 (the East Review) and to inform them that a wider list of potential savings would need to be considered in relation to the forecast potential shortfall in funding for 2024/25. The financial environment remained both uncertain and challenging. The current funding settlement was for one year only with limited policy guidance available for 2024/25 it was expected that a further one-year settlement for 2024/25 would be announced in December.

At the time the MTFP was agreed by the Authority the potential funding gap for 2024/25 was forecast at £721,000. Since then, a two year Grey Book pay offer of 12% (over 2023/24 and 2024/25) had been agreed and a Green Book pay offer of £1,925 had been rejected, both were above the Authority's budgeted figure. Further work to assess the future financial position continued but the current assessment was that the Fire Authority should plan to identify savings options of between £1m -£1.5m for delivery by April 2023.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

The ACFO reminded Members that Tranches 1-3 were targeted to deliver savings of £923,000, there was high confidence that Tranches 1 and 2 would deliver £293,000 but it was too early to say if Tranche 3 would be able to deliver targeted savings of £630,000.

The Authority had agreed that to bridge any funding gap it would consider a wider set of options for Tranche 4, these were set out at para. 3.7 of the report. The ACFO explained that these were high level at this stage and that there would be more information provided to the Policy & Resources Panel, probably at its meeting on 20 July 2023 with the Fire Authority being asked to make decisions when it met later in the year, as it was essential that they have a plan in place in order to meet the deadline of April 2024. The ACFO added that the list of options would not require public consultation and that the East options were the least preferred at this stage but until the final funding for 2024/25 was determined they could not be ruled out.

Members asked how confident Officers were that savings would be achieved and how confident they were that they would meet the deadlines. The ADR/T responded that they were following the normal budget setting process, and that a provisional outturn report for 2022/23 and a budget monitoring report setting out the position at Month 2 would be presented to the Policy & Resources Panel in July. Whilst there was no further information on Government funding provisions, officers were working with other local authorities to improve forecasting and continued to lobby MPs.

The ADR/T added that the financial risks remained the same as they had for the past couple of years with a reliance on a one-year settlement and one off specific grants. There was some suggestion that the Government may not continue to provide the Protection Surge Grant at the same level or in the same form. The ADR/T would provide updates in July and September, but it was unlikely that there would be any certainty until December.

The CFO echoed the update provided by the ADR/T particularly how difficult it was to run an emergency service when reliant on one-year settlements and one-off grants. Officers were trying to create as much assurance and safeguarding as possible to avoid too great a shock to the organisation, but it was not a good position to be in. The CFO hoped that Members would support the continued lobbying of MPs, impressing on Government and the Home Office how much the sector needed longer-term settlements. It was agreed that even a two-year settlement would provide more stability.

A discussion followed and Members agreed that one-year settlements were not sustainable, and the sector needed to be adequately funded on a national level. There were concerns about the ongoing and increasing impact of global warming on the Fire sector. The risks faced by the Service were not just greater, they were changing.

The CFO agreed that these were of concern but reminded the Authority that of the Revenue Budget around 80% was spent on salaries and therefore pay, pensions and absence management must be focused on. Also, the costs relating to fleet and estates in particular fuel, maintenance, and utilities. The

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Authority

focus of lobbying to MPs would be one-year settlements and the continuity of the protection grant, this was critically important.

RESOLVED – The Fire Authority agreed to:

- i. note the increase in estimated savings that may be required to balance the 2024/25 budget, from £721,000 forecast last year to up to £1,500,000; and
- ii. note that the progress under the Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 4 on the wider options analysis will be presented to a future meeting of the Policy & Resources Panel and to future meeting of the Fire Authority once further work on updating the MTFP for 2024/25 has been carried out.

The meeting concluded at 12.02 pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

2023

This page is intentionally left blank