

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

31 October 2024

Present:

Councillors Coles (Chair), Biederman (Vice-Chair), Atkinson, Brazil, Carter, Chesterton, Clayton, Cook-Woodman, Gilmour, Hendy, Kendall, Kerley, Lugger, Randall-Johnson, Peart, Power, Radford, Prowse, Sellis, Sproston and Sully

Apologies:

Councillors Best, Fellows, Roome and Trail BEM

DSFRA/24/29 Minutes

RESOLVED that, subject to an amendment on page 4 under Minute DSFRA/24/22 in the fourth paragraph to correct the typographical error “Gren” to “Green”, the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2024 be signed as a correct record.

DSFRA/24/30 Minutes of Committees

a Community Safety Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Hendy, **MOVED** the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- A report on performance as at Quarter 1 of the current (2024-245) financial year against those Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) falling within the remit of the Committee and aligned to Authority-approved Strategic Priorities 1 and 2;
- A review of the performance target setting measures for 2024-25 to provide an assurance that the Service had appropriate and challenging measures in place;
- An update on the position with regard to the backlog in the number of Home Fire Safety Visits completed;
- An update on the project underway in respect of the response to automatic fire alarms which was aimed at improving efficiency and reducing costs; and
- A report on progress against the Action Plan to address Areas for Improvement falling within the remit of this Committee and as identified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services following its last inspection of the Service.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

b **Audit & Governance Committee**

The Vice Chair of the Committee, Councillor Kerley, **MOVED** the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 30 September 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- The Fraud and Corruption Strategy and Annual Review of cases 2023-24;
- The annual review of the Authority's Policy for the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000; and
- The Local Pension Board Annual report 2023-24.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

c **Resources Committee**

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Peart, **MOVED** the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- A report on Treasury Management performance for quarter 1 of the current (2024-25) financial year together with a summary of annual performance as compared to the treasury management strategy;
- The financial performance for quarter 1 of 2023-24 as measured against the agreed performance indicators together with details of forecast spending to the year end (31 March 2025) and explanations of any major variations against budget;
- An update on the progress being made towards key aspects of the Environmental Strategy and associated Action Plan.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

d **Appointments & Disciplinary Committee**

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Coles, **MOVED** the Minutes of the meetings held on 15 October 2024 which had considered matters relating to the appointment of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

e **Shareholder Committee**

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Cook-Woodman, **MOVED** the public Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- the financial performance of Red One Ltd. during Quarter 2 of the 2023-24 financial year (to 31 August 2024); and

- A report on Red One Ltd and future options.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

NB. Minute DSFRA/24/38 below also refers.

f **People Committee**

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Clayton, **MOVED** the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- A report as at Quarter 2 of the 2024-25 financial year on performance against those Key Performance Indicators agreed by the Committee against its three strategic priorities as approved by the Authority, and specifically an in-depth review of performance on:
 - Operational core competencies;
 - Health and safety issues, including reportable incidents under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR), accidents, personal injuries, vehicle incidents and near misses;
 - Sickness and the main reasons for absence with a focus on mental health and musculoskeletal issues;
 - Strategic workforce planning including staff turnover and attrition for all staff categories; and
 - An overview of the People Services System project.

RESOLVED that the Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

DSFRA/24/31 Medium Term Financial Plan Update: Quarter 2 2024-25

The Authority received for information a report of the Treasurer (DSFRA/24/33) which provided an update against the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the Authority's funding, income and expenditure forecasts for the next five years (2024-25 to 2028-29), as required by the Fire & Rescue National Framework for England.

The Treasurer advised upon the impact of the recent announcement by Government as part of its Autumn budget statement of an increase in employers' national insurance contributions. Employers' contributions would increase by 1.2% to 15% from 1 April 2025, coupled with a drop in the threshold from which businesses were required to pay national insurance from £9,100 to £5,000. This would result in an additional burden of £1m taking the forecast budget gap in 2025-26 to £2.9m.

The Authority sought confirmation of the likely burden of pay pressures in 2025-26. The Treasurer responded that the budget assumptions for 2025-26 included a 2% pay increase for all staff groups. He added that the Extended Leadership Team would be meeting on 4 November 2024 to discuss budget proposals for 2025-26 and the impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan. In response to a point raised, the Treasurer also advised that an assumption had been made for budget purposes of the receipt of an additional £1.5m as a result of the council tax on second homes. He clarified that such income was unlikely to be utilised for the provision of housing in Devon and Somerset since the powers to do this extended to other local authorities did not apply to fire and rescue authorities.

DSFRA/24/32 Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority Performance Report: Quarter 1 2024-25

The Authority received for information a report of the Director of Service Delivery (DSFRA/24/34) on performance to the end of Quarter 1 of the 2024-25 financial year against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) aligned to Authority-approved Strategic Policy Objectives.

In particular, the report focussed on those measures in exception (i.e. requiring improvement) and the outcome of scrutiny undertaken by the respective committees in relation to these.

The Authority sought an assurance that the issues that had been experienced in respect of the backlog on home fire safety visits (KPI. 1.4) had been resolved. The Director of Service Delivery advised that, whilst this matter had been in exception in quarter 1 of 2024-25 as set out within the report circulated, this had moved back on target in quarter 2. The team had been supported with the provision of additional resources which had assisted in moving this back on track and the instigation of a new information technology system should ensure that this did not regress again in future.

In respect of KPI 1.10. - number of fire safety checks completed - the target for checks reported had not been met due to an administration review which resulted in two of the geographical operational groups, Taunton and Bridgwater, not being issued Fire Safety Checks. This had since been resolved and the Authority noted the figures were now back on target.

In relation to KPI 2.2. (percentage of level four operational risk sites in date for revalidation) which had also been in exception in quarter 1, the Director of Service Delivery reported that performance in this area had improved in quarter 2 and this measure was no longer in exception.

Reference was made to the target for the percentage of risk dependent pumping appliances (KPI. 2.8) which was also in exception and had been for some time. The Director of Service Delivery responded that, whilst this measure was in exception, this was likely to continue in future due to the issues experienced with the availability of On Call staff. The point was made that, despite not hitting this target, the Service was responding with first and second appliances and had not had any fire deaths for almost 12 months which was significant.

DSFRA/24/33 Proposed Amendments to Scheme of Delegations & Terms of Reference of Appointments & Disciplinary Committee

The Authority considered a joint report of the Chief Fire Officer and Clerk to the Authority (& Monitoring Officer) (DSFRA/24/35) proposing amendments to both the Scheme of Delegations (for the Chief Fire Officer) and Terms of Reference for the Appointments & Disciplinary Committee as set out within Appendix A of the report circulated.

The Clerk to the Authority advised that the proposed amendments, which involved delegating chief officer appointments to the roles of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (operational), Director and Assistant Director (non-operational) within the new Executive Board structure endorsed by the Authority on 31 July 2024 (Minute DSFRA/24/22 refers) to the Chief Fire Officer, subject to consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair on the preferred candidate. Research had been undertaken into the level of delegation in place for chief officer appointments at other fire and rescue authorities, including Avon, Dorset & Wiltshire, Hampshire & Isle of Wight and Kent & Medway as also indicated in the report circulated. The Clerk advised that the recommendation set out in the report provided a pragmatic and efficient way forward for this Authority in light of the need to align with the move towards operational independence as elicited within the White Paper on Fire Reform issued in 2023.

During a lengthy debate on the proposed delegation to the Chief Fire Officer, the Authority questioned whether this was the right approach to be taking at this time and whether an element of favouritism could be inferred by a candidate should this recommendation be approved. During this debate, the following points were made:

- That it was recognised that every effort needed to be made to encourage applications from women and appointment thereof to senior roles within the organisation and to avoid discrimination in any way;
- that the Chief Fire Officer had the utmost integrity in his approach to all aspects of his role; and
- that, despite the White Paper on Fire Reform not having moved forward into legislation at this point, the Home Office was expecting to see fire & rescue authorities move towards operational independence for their Chief Fire Officer.

It was noted that the Authority had an opportunity through the appraisal of its Chief Fire Officer (undertaken by a panel of the Appointments & Disciplinary Committee) to both set clear objectives and to measure performance accordingly. Issues regarding performance in any area, including that of recruitment, should be raised via this mechanism.

RESOLVED

- (a). That authority be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer to determine the appointments of Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Director and Assistant Director roles (non-operational) subject to consultation with the Authority Chair and Vice Chair on the preferred candidate for appointment; and
- (b). that the Clerk to the Authority (& Monitoring Officer) be authorised to make the requisite changes to both the Scheme of Delegations and the Terms of Reference for the Appointments & Disciplinary Committee accordingly as set out at Appendix A of report DSFRA/24/35.

DSFRA/24/34 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Action Plan Update

The Authority received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (DSFRA/24/36) on the progress that had been made against the 14 Areas for Improvement (AFIs) and one Cause of Concern highlighted by HMICFRS in its inspection report of July 2022.

Since the inspection report, two national thematic reports had been published by HMICFRS. The first, published on 31 March 2023, examined the values and culture in fire and rescue services. The second, published on 1 August 2024, examined standards of behaviour and the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services.

A new approach had been implemented for all remaining AFIs from the 2021/22 inspection report and national recommendation from HMICFRS. This approach aligned the actions from each improvement area with the relevant Fire Standards criteria. This would provide continued assurance of the outcomes over time.

The key highlights of the report were:

- All actions under the Cause of Concern have now been marked as completed. The recommendation for closure was approved by the Executive Board on 19/03/2024. The Cause of Concern has now been transitioned into Service business as usual. Progress on improving organisational culture will continue to be an area of focus.
- Three areas for improvement were currently marked as 'In Progress – Off Track'. This was due to the recruitment policy which was now out for consultation and expected to be published by 30 November 2024.

DSFRA/24/35 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Review/Emergency Fire Cover Review 2024

The Authority received for information a report of the Assistant Director, Corporate Services (DSFRA/24/37) on the work undertaken to refresh the Community Risk Management Plan for 2024 together with an overview of the Emergency Fire Cover Review which was underway and a timeline for the review of these important elements of work to April 2027.

DSFRA/24/36 Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED that the press and public, with the exception of Officers of Red One Ltd., be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Local Government Act 1972, namely:

- information relating to an individual;
- information likely to reveal the identity of an individual; and
- the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

DSFRA/24/37 Restricted Minutes of the Authority held on 31 July 2024

(An item taken in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded from the meeting).

Councillors Brazil and Radford each declared a non-pecuniary interest in this matter by virtue of being Authority-appointed non-executive directors on the Board of Red One Ltd. and neither spoke nor voted thereon.

RESOLVED that the Restricted Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 July 2024 be signed as a correct record.

DSFRA/24/38 Restricted Minutes of the Shareholder Committee held on 17 October 2024

(An item taken in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded from the meeting).

Councillors Brazil and Radford each declared a non-pecuniary interest in this matter by virtue of being Authority-appointed non-executive directors on the Board of Red One Ltd. and neither spoke nor voted thereon.

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Cook-Woodman, **MOVED** the Restricted Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 which had considered, amongst other things:

- the financial performance of Red One Ltd. during Quarter 2 of the 2024-25 financial year (to 31 August 2024); and
- a report on Red One Ltd. future options.

RESOLVED that the Restricted Minutes be adopted in accordance with Standing Orders.

NB. Minute DSFRA/24/30e above also refers.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

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