

34. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members of Rhondda Cynon Taf advised of their personal interest and intention to abstain from voting on agenda item 38.6 - A4119 Coedely Dualling Compulsory Purchase Order.

Cllr G Holmes declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as a chartered surveyor in relation to comments in the Chairs announcements on building regulation changes.

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

35. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences

On behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authority, the Chair expressed condolences to the Treasurer, on the passing of his father.

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Councillor Glynne Holmes to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Youth Worker, Workshop Apprentice & Chief Officer Pay Award

Members noted that following the update at the last FA meeting that the grey and green book pay award had been received, the three additional pay awards for youth worker, workshop apprentice and chief officers had been nationally agreed and would be implemented accordingly by the Service.

Meeting with Deputy Minister

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the meeting with the Deputy Minister and her officials held on 23 November 2020, attended by the Chairs and Chief Fire Officers of the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities. The areas covered were:

a) Tripartite agreement

In relation to the Tripartite Agreement between employers and the FBU, confirmation of the continuation of the Services support, in line with national guidelines was given. Over 186 instances of assistance had been given in line with the agreement in South Wales.

An NHS/Fire and Rescue Service working group has been set up, the ACFO-Service Delivery will lead.

Councillor Brown queried the current situation within health boards, stating that advice being given on twitter is to attend Grange hospital only if urgent, and that there is a possibility of a 19 hour wait.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service has individuals who have been trained and inoculated and have been deployed to assist local health boards. There is significant pressure on NHS Wales and the local health boards and the Service continues to support the NHS Trust.

b) Building Safety

Also discussed at the meeting were safety and building failures across parts of South Wales and the recent Welsh Government statement on Building Safety recognising the direction of travel around the safety order and the environment.

Councillor Glynn advised of his Chartered Surveyors background and declared a personal interest.

Chairs MBE

The Deputy Chair congratulated the Chair on his award of an MBE in the recent Queen's Birthday Honours recognising the work that the Chair does for the Authority.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Chair, commenting that it is a team effort with Members and officers, and it is an honour to serve as Chair of the Authority.

36. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the Fire & Rescue Authority held on 28 September 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the Finance, Asset & Performance Management Scrutiny Group held 13 January 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the Local Pension Board held 6 July 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the HR and Equalities Committee held 20 July 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the Finance Audit & Performance Management Committee held 21 September 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

37. UPDATE ON ACTIONS

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that all outstanding actions had been completed.

In relation to New Inn, pre-planning application advice has been received and this would be fully considered prior to an offer being put forward to the owners of the land.

RESOLVED THAT:

Members noted the update on actions.

38. REPORTS FOR DECISION

38.1 TO ELECT A NEW LABOUR MEMBER WITHIN THE LOCAL PENSION BOARD COMMITTEE FOR THE REMAINDER OF MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that Councillor Drake has taken up the role of Chair to the HR and Equalities Committee, thus she will represent this Committee on the Welsh Government Pensions Board.

A new labour member is now required to sit on the Local Pensions Board Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2020/21.

Councillor White was nominated. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED THAT:

Councillor White was nominated to sit on the Local Pension Board and unanimously accepted.

38.2 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-TERM REVIEW REPORT 2020/21

The Treasurer presented the Treasury Management Mid-Term Review Report which updated Members on the Authority's treasury activities for the period 1 April – 30 September 2020. The Treasurer advised that there had been some lower capital activity on the capital programme due to Covid, but generally activity had been lower. He confirmed all indicators are satisfactory.

He drew Members attention to paragraph 4.4., regards new borrowing. He reassured Members that this is the normal course of action, and advised that this new borrowing was being actioned at a time when interest rates are low and therefore would not have an adverse impact.

RESOLVED THAT:

Members noted the report and treasury activity for the period 1 April – 30 September 2020.

38.3 REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

The Treasurer presented the report on the Revenue Budget for 2021/22 which included the conclusion of preparatory work on the 2021/2022 revenue budget for consultation, based on the FAPM recommendation made at its meeting in November and provided an update to a number of key budgets where work was still in progress.

Regards pay, a 3% increase was indicated for next year but government has now put constraints on public sector pay for next year. This posed significant risk particularly amongst emergency services dealing with the Covid pandemic, plus the potential for strikes. The report recommended including provision for pay awards.

Regards premises, a 2.2% increase was envisaged, but on further inspection, this has been reduced to 1.6%.

A number of cost increases for supplies and services were included, also provision for some replacement of operational equipment, but there were identified savings to offset this.

The Draft budget was due in the few days following the meeting, as were population numbers from Welsh Government, which would be included in the draft budget received from Welsh Government.

The consultation period commenced on the day of the meeting, until 18 January 2021, but the Treasurer advised that responses will be accepted up until the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority taking place 8 February 2021.

The Treasurer advised that as soon as figures have been received from Welsh Government, Fire and Rescue Authority members will be emailed with the information.

Councillor Shaw commented that it was interesting to see as a Service that 80% of costs are people based and that managing this is applaudable. He suggested when taking to local authorities, cost per person could be beneficial.

RESOLVED THAT

Members agreed the report content as the basis for the 2021/22 budget consultation exercise.

38.4 OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY SOFTWARE AND SERVICES PROJECT

The ACFO, Technical Services advised that the current Office productivity suite will reach end of support in 2023 and so it was necessary to commence work to replace it. This presented an opportunity to further enhance ICT provision and other essential digital services.

He presented the five options: Do Nothing, 'On Premises' licencing (current method), 'On Premises' licencing (Software Assurance), Hybrid, Full Cloud Based Licencing, plus a cost comparison of the options.

Of the five options, the preferred option is Hybrid, the ACFO, Technical Services outlined the benefits to this option.

The Treasurer clarified that in terms of financial implications, this would be provided via a phased approach over a two year period.

Councillor White welcomed the report and queried whether, once the pandemic is controlled, will current working practices be brought in, such as working from home. It was confirmed that this will be the case.

Councillor Shaw queried the location of the cloud and also commented that there are a number of systems outside of Microsoft that will need to be integrated of which he had concerns. He added that he agreed with the approach, but would advise caution.

ACFO, Technical Services confirmed that some systems were bespoke related to certain areas, these required greater security so would probably not be integrated into the cloud.

Councillor Naughton queried, with the move to Teams and the hybrid model, could a further report be brought to the Fire and Rescue Authority for decision in the future. This was agreed.

The Head of ICT confirmed that, in relation to infrastructure costs, capital costs should decrease slightly due to Microsoft running the system and the Service not having to replace the existing servers used for that purpose. He also confirmed that there would not be any additional infrastructure costs moving into the Microsoft arena, but there would be some expenditure for projects that need to be put in place before the move.

RESOLVED THAT

- 38.4.1 Members approved the move to a Hybrid model of providing the Office productivity suite and utilise cloud based services such as email and MS Teams; and
- 38.4.2 Members endorsed the procurement of MS Office licenses through the National Procurement Service Lot 3 Direct award.

38.5 LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE 2015 PENSION REFORM

ACO People Services gave the background and provided Members with information relating to the current position with regard to the remedy to the McCloud/Sargeant judgement which followed a successful legal challenge from the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) on behalf of its members on the grounds of discrimination.

She outlined one aspect of the discussion and debate which was whether fire and rescue authorities have the legal powers to implement the ruling. A case was currently being heard which would determine whether fire and rescue services have the legal power to implement the remedy. Whilst awaiting the outcome of this hearing, talks were taking place with the other fire and rescue authorities in Wales to agree an implementation phase and a cost model. Talks were also taking place with Welsh Government in relation to what the future of pensions will look like, with the new pension scheme coming into place in 2022.

RESOLVED THAT

- 38.5.1 Members noted and acknowledged the current position with regards to the McCloud / Sargeant judgement and the pensions remedy; and
- 38.5.2 Members to remain alert to the potential financial implications of the pensions remedy on the Authority.

38.6 A4119 COEDELV DUALLING COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council were in the process of making a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) which affected land in the ownership of the Fire and Rescue Authority. Negotiations in respect of the land were already in progress and although these discussions were taking place under the threat of CPO it was hoped that the matter would be resolved by agreement with a compensation amount payable.

The proposal impacts a small area of land outside of the physical boundary to the Headquarters site, but within the legal boundary, and consists of

predominantly undeveloped land adjoining the highway. There would be no impact on the use of existing access.

Councillor Brown raised concerns regards the maintenance of the land if it becomes an adopted highway, advising that there could be issues if the land is not maintained to an acceptable standard.

The Deputy Chief Officer confirmed that discussions are ongoing, and this issue will be addressed within these discussions.

Members of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council Borough Council abstained from the vote.

RESOLVED THAT

- 38.6.1 Members agreed to proceed with the appointment of an independent valuer to ensure best value is achieved in respect of compensation claims submitted in respect of the CPO and authorise the DCO to agree the disposal of the subject land; and
- 38.6.2 To seek further clarification from RCT in respect of Plot 20B and ensure the proposals do not impact any future development potential in relation to our access.

39. REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

39.1 HALF YEARLY CHECK OF PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW OF STRATEGIC THEMES

The Deputy Chief Officer gave a review of performance against the Strategic themes for 2020/21 Quarter 2. She noted that there have been some delays and postponements due to Covid, as would be expected.

The ACFO, Service Delivery gave a brief overview of performance against the key performance indicators for 2020/21 Quarter 2. It could be seen that Covid had influenced performance for this quarter. Of note were the changes that had been introduced to ensure the Service delivered vital services to local communities. Home safety checks had continued on a modified approach to ensure the most vulnerable receive checks, also Business Fire Safety audits had continued, particularly with high risk premises. Youth work had recommenced, with the Cadet programme being revived.

Strategic Indicators showed a positive illustration of performance, although Covid has had an impact, there had been a reduction in the number of RTCs, and the Service had attended more special assistance calls (home to hospital).

There had been an increase in total false alarms, this was somewhat due to change of behaviours in grass fires, with individuals undertaking their own burning rather than going to public sites.

The Service continued to work with the health boards to reduce automatic fire alarms.

Councillor Spencer queried whether there had been any successful prosecutions in relation to deliberate fires and false alarms.

The ACFO confirmed that assistance was given to the Police early in the year, but he was unaware of any prosecutions taking place.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the Half Yearly Check of Performance and Review of Strategic Themes.

39.2 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT – FEBRUARY 2021

The Deputy Chief Officer drew Members' attention to the relevant sections of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales' draft Report that related to payments to Members of Welsh fire and rescue authorities, which recommended an uplift of 2.5%. The proposed changes in relation to carers allowance were also highlighted and members were advised that further clarification had been sought from the Panel on the changes.

RESOLVED THAT

Members noted the extract of the Independent Remuneration Panel's draft Annual report, which provided details of payments to Members of the Welsh fire and rescue authorities.

39.3 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY 2020/2021

The Deputy Chief Officer presented the Forward Work Programme for 2020/21 and confirmed all items are on schedule to complete the Work Programme.

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

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

41. MERRY CHRISTMAS AND THANKS

The Chair wished all a merry Christmas and a happy new year, and thanked Members for their support through the year. He thanked officers for their support which has been second to none, and the fantastic work that they have achieved under unimaginable circumstances.