

LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 1 December 2021, at 10.00 am in the Washington Hall, Service Training Centre, Euxton.

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Councillors

T Williams (Chairman)
D O'Toole (Vice-Chair)
L Beavers
J Mein
G Mirfin
M Pattison
S Serridge
R Woollam

Officers

S Healey, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (LFRS)
K Mattinson, Director of Corporate Services (LFRS)
B Warren, Director of People and Development (LFRS)
J Baines, Head of Finance (LFRS)
B Ford, Safety, Health and Environment Advisor (LFRS)
D Brooks, Principal Member Services Officer (LFRS)
L Barr, Member Services Officer (LFRS)

In attendance

D Shaw, FBU

29-20/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from County Councillors Keith Iddon and Stuart Morris.

30-20/21 DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS

None received.

31-20/21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: - That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32-20/21 FINANCIAL MONITORING 2021/22

The Director of Corporate Services presented the report which set out the

current budget position in respect of the 2021/22 revenue and capital budgets and performance against savings targets.

The overall position at the end of September was an underspend of £0.2m, with a forecast outturn position of an underspend of £0.4m. Both were a combination of the level of staffing vacancies, the slow return to business-as-usual spending activities, less the funding gap identified at budget setting and the unbudgeted pay awards.

The year to date and forecast positions within individual departments were set out in the report with major variances relating to non-pay spends and variances on the pay budget being shown separately in the table below: -

Area	Overspend/ (Under spend)		Reason
	30 Sept 2021	Forecast	
	£'000		
Service Delivery	(51)	(104)	<p>The underspend for both the first six months, and the year-end forecast, largely related to the reduced activity levels in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke detectors, in addition recent difficulties in the supply chain for smoke alarms were partially resolved, however a potential increase in costs had been identified which may impact final spend in year; • Travel budgets, were significantly underspent, it was expected that changing working practices for non-operational staff would mean reduced usage in the future
Covid-19	-	-	<p>We have received total funding of £1.6m since March 2020. In addition, as previously reported, we have transferred £0.2m of travel/mileage budgets into this reserve to reflect savings in respect of differing working practices during the pandemic, resulting in total funding of £1.8m.</p> <p>We have spent £1.7m to the end of September, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional staff costs £0.5m • Additional cleaning £0.1m • Consumable items £0.2m • Remote working and video conferencing equipment £0.2m • PPE £0.7m <p>With effect from 1 September, LFRS</p>

			<p>reduced the level of support offered to the large vaccination centres, handing over control back to the NHS. The remaining had been partially utilised during October, with some staff overtime and the order for personal issue P3 masks costing £21k, leaving an estimated balance of £50k for use in November/December.</p>
TOR	(44)	(209)	<p>The current and forecast underspend largely related to the position with apprentice levy income for wholetime recruits. At the time of setting the budget it was anticipated that the recruit numbers would fully utilise the balance in the levy account, therefore the income budget was set at £0.2m. During the year, levy drawdown forecasts had been updated as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a nationwide review of the wholetime fire-fighter apprenticeship programme, which LFRS participated in, the government apprentice levy setting body agreed an uplift to the funding for each apprentice starting after January 2021 from £12k to £14k over the 24 month apprenticeship, resulting in additional income circa £46k in 2021/22; • levy account shortfalls would be met by 95% funding (known as co-investment) from the Government, which meant we will benefit from £163k additional levy income in the financial year. <p>TOR had been catching up on training during the year and spend on external training was currently in line with budget.</p>
Property	(203)	(148)	<p>Whilst non-essential maintenance was re-instated prior to the end of the last financial year, departmental capacity due to a vacant surveyor post, and the ongoing situation meant that there was an underspend to date. The post was filled from the start of November; therefore the outturn forecast assumed that there would be some catch up spend for the final few months, reducing the current level of underspend.</p>

Non DFM	273	582	<p>Both the year to date and outturn overspend position reflected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the £0.3m funding gap identified at the time of setting the budget in February • additional RCCO for the capital programme STC workshop and South Shore refurbishment previously approved, plus • the request for the approval of additional £0.1m RCCO in relation to the purchase of a second Haglund vehicle (see capital budget below).
Wholetime Pay (including associate trainer costs)	114	66	<p>As previously reported there had been significantly more early leavers than allowed for in the budget. At the end of September, we had 10 fewer wholetime members of staff than budgeted, resulting in an underspend of circa £200k against budgeted establishment levels. It was extremely hard to predict leavers for the remainder of the year, however assuming that early leavers slowed down in the second half of the year, we anticipated an underspend against establishment of approx. £0.5m. In addition, as previously reported, there was a shortfall in recruit numbers this year, with 35 recruits compared with a budgeted 48, which lead to a further underspend of £130k.</p> <p>Broadly speaking these were offset by:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the unbudgeted grey book pay award of 1.5%, at a cost of £0.4m, as previously reported. • increased overtime costs, associated with covering vacancies, and staff absences,. (As the May recruits were posted to station in September the reliance on overtime should reduce during the second half of the year.) <p>The net of all the above factors was the forecast overspend of £66k, however it should be noted that if we continued to experience higher than expected early leavers this overspend may reduce or, in all probability, become an underspend.</p>

On Call Pay	(42)	(49)	The position within On-call staffing was slightly underspent, with the unbudgeted pay award being more than offset by higher staff vacancies than budgeted.
Support staff (less agency staff)	(228)	(239)	The underspend related to vacant posts across various departments, circa 12% of the establishment in early October, far in excess of the 3.75% vacancy factor built into the budget. This was partly offset by spend on agency staff, which amounted to £41k in the period. Although recruitment activity had now recommenced the labour market had become more challenging and we were experiencing difficulties in filling posts. As such we anticipated the high level of vacancies remaining throughout the year. This would be partly offset by the eventual pay award for green book staff. This had not yet been agreed, but the pay offer has been increased to 1.75%, which had been reflected in the forecast outturn position which would be updated as we progressed through the year.
Apprentice Levy	(9)	(23)	The apprentice levy was payable at 0.5% of each months payroll costs, the budget for this was set at anticipated establishment levels, hence the underspend against this budget reflected the various pay budget underspends reported above.

It was noted that significant cost increases across various supply chains, and in particular in construction projects was being seen and this may affect the final outturn expenditure levels. This would continue to be monitored, and other trends, to ensure that they were reflected in future year's budgets, as well as being reported to Resources Committee.

Grant Funding

The Authority receives specific grants from the Government in respect of various new initiatives. These were included in the revenue budget position but were shown separately in the report. The forecast outturn assumed that all grant was spent in year, but any that was not would be carried forward as an earmarked reserve to use in the new year.

Capital Budget

The approved capital budget for 2021/22 stood at £4.4m.

It was noted that following discussions with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee the budget had been increased to allow for the purchase of a

second Haglund to enhance operational response to emergencies in remote/inaccessible locations. These machines were ex-military machines which used rubber tracks instead of wheels, had low ground pressure, despite their size, and could cross soft ground with relative ease. This capability enabled the Service to provide year-round emergency cover in response to natural disasters across the County, especially flooding, which was becoming more severe and intense. The original capital budget allowed for the purchase of one such machine, and a Climate Change Operational Response Plan was currently being drafted which would recommend the purchase of a second machine. Initially it had been planned to include this in next year's capital programme, but the supplier confirmed that buying both at the same time would generate a saving of £9k across both machines.

To date £2.7m of the programme had been committed, with an anticipated year end spend of £4.0m, as set out below: -

	Spend to 30 Sept 2021 £m	
Other vehicles	0.2	This budget allowed for the replacement of various operational support vehicles. Whilst some of the operational support vehicles had been ordered and delivered, others were still being reviewed and it appeared increasingly unlikely that the budget would be fully utilised in year.
Operational Equipment / Future Firefighting	0.1	This budget allowed for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • replacement of capital items from the equipment replacement plan, namely defibrillators and a replacement drone which had been delivered • replacement of light portable pumps, which had yet to be ordered • progression of CCTV on pumping appliances, where it was proposed trialling this in the first instance and hence the project would not be complete by year end <p>The anticipated slippage relating to the latter two programmes</p>
Building Modifications	2.4	This budget allowed for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a new workshop, BA Recovery and Trainer facility at STC. Committed spend to date was £2.4m. Work had been completed and the building was handed over to the Authority at the end of October 2021. A contact variation of £42k had been agreed for Compressor and furniture items that ISG

		<p>had manufactured and installed;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced station facilities comprising the final payment in respect of South Shore refurbishment and extension, and changes at Hyndburn fire station, where final designs were being reviewed prior to moving to the procurement phase, but where budget seems likely to slip into 2022/23; Replacement drill towers where a partner contractor had been appointed to take the project forward, with a view to commencing construction prior to the year end; Fees associated with progressing the business case for a SHQ relocation, which were unlikely to be spent in year. <p>As with the revenue budget, current departmental capacity to progress these was previously limited, hence the slippage indicated in Appendix 2.</p>
IT systems	-	The budget related to the replacement of various systems and ICT hardware, in line with the ICT asset management plan. Whilst initial scoping work was on-going to facilitate the replacement of some of these systems, utilising the budget in the current year was still forecast.

The committed costs to date would be met by revenue contributions (£2.4m) and capital reserves (£0.3m). With the remaining in year spend being funded from a further £1.3m use of capital reserves.

As highlighted earlier significant cost increases were being seen across various supply chains, and in particular in construction projects and this may affect some of the capital projects as they progressed through the procurement stage.

Delivery against savings targets

The performance to date was already ahead of the annual target, largely due to staffing vacancies.

In response to a question raised by County Councillor Pattison regarding whether the apprentice scheme had an age limit the Director of People and Development confirmed that the Service recruited apprentices at the start of their career with the fire service which could be aged 18 or much older. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that apprentice operational firefighters had a minimum age of 18. The Service also recruited apprentices for green book staff from the age of 16.

In response to a question raised by County Councillor Beavers regarding continued provision of covid support monies, the Director of Corporate Services advised that the Government had previously issued funding in tranches. The

Service was currently awaiting a decision on the ongoing level of funding in light of the recent new covid-19 variant (Omicron) and any potential impact on the Service given the pace of its support to the vaccination programme had slowed in recent months.

Councillor Williams commented that nationally, businesses appeared to be experiencing recruitment problems. He expressed concern regarding firefighters leaving before their pensionable age and the challenge of recruiting back-office staff.

RESOLVED: - That the Committee:

- i) Noted and endorsed the financial position; and
- ii) Approved the virement to transfer £68k RCCO into the capital programme to fund the purchase of an all-terrain vehicle.

33-20/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REPORT 2021/22

In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice and to strengthen Members' oversight of the Authority's treasury management activities, the Resources Committee received a treasury management mid-year report and a final outturn report. Reports on treasury activity were discussed on a quarterly basis with Lancashire County Council Treasury Management Team and the Authority's Director of Corporate Services and were used as a basis for this report to the Committee.

Economic Overview

The economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic continued to dominate the first half of the financial year both in the UK and many other parts of the world. However, in its September 2021 policy announcement, the Bank of England (BoE) noted it now expected the UK economy to grow at a slower pace than was predicted in August, as the pace of the global recovery had shown signs of slowing and there were concerns inflationary pressures may be more persistent. Bank expectations for GDP growth for the third (calendar) quarter were revised down to 2.1% (from 2.9%), in part reflecting tighter supply conditions.

The BoE held Bank Rate at 0.1% and maintained its Quantitative Easing programme at £895 billion throughout the first half of the year. However, there were some concerns around inflation with the CPI inflation now expected to rise slightly above 4% in the last three months of 2021, due to higher energy prices and core goods inflation. Therefore, although policy rates had remained unchanged there was a greater expectation that rates may increase in late 2021 or early 2022.

An increase in gas prices in the UK and EU, supply shortages and a dearth of HGV and lorry drivers with companies willing to pay more to secure their services, had caused problems for a range of industries and, in some instance, will likely lead to higher prices.

Treasury Management position and Policy

The underlying need to borrow for capital purposes was measured by the

Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), while usable reserves and working capital were the underlying resources available for investment. The treasury management activity was influenced both by the position at the beginning of the year and the plans in year. The position at the start of the financial year was summarised in the report indicating that the level of loans was above the borrowing requirement. This was the result of the Authority adopting a policy of setting aside additional Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) in order to generate the cash to repay loans either on maturity or as an early repayment. This had resulted in the CFR being reduced but due to early repayment charges it had not been financially beneficial to repay the existing loans.

It was not anticipated that the new capital expenditure would be funded from borrowing in the year while it was anticipated that there may be some reduction in the level of reserves held.

Borrowing

There had been no new borrowing in the first six months of the financial year. This was consistent with the position that the current borrowing was already above the CFR and that the capital programme did not include any expenditure to be financed from borrowing.

The long-term debt outstanding of £2m was from the Public Works Loan Board. The maturity profile of the Authority's borrowings, along with the interest rate paid was summarised in the report. It was noted that consideration had been given to the early repayment of the loans. However, these would be subject to an early repayment (premium) charge. It was not considered to be financially beneficial to repay the loans with the estimated premium charge to repay the three loans being £1.180m.

Whilst there was no need to borrow at the present time it was worth highlighting that a key source for long term borrowing was the PWLB. The PWLB lending was offered at a fixed rate of 1% above the gilt yields. For most authorities which qualify for the certainty rate, including the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority, this meant a 0.2% reduction on these standard rates so equated to 0.80% above the gilt yields.

Current PWLB maturity loan rates were at extremely low levels of 1.81% for 10 years, 2.19% for 25 years and 2.06% for 40 years.

Investments

Both the CIPFA Code and the MHCLG Guidance required the Authority to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest rate of return, or yield. The Authority's objective when investing money was to strike an appropriate balance between risk and return, minimising the risk of incurring losses from defaults and the risk of receiving low investment returns and having the value of reserves eroded by inflation.

The Authority principally invested in a call account provided by Lancashire County Council which paid the base rate. Each working day the balance on the Authority's Current Account was invested in this to ensure that interest was received on surplus balances within an acceptable risk framework. During the

period all new investments were placed with the County Council via this arrangement. At 30th September there was a balance of £31.900m invested in LCC while the average for the period was £26.115m.

In addition, in order to increase the rate earned on current balances, the authority have placed fixed investments with other local authorities. To attract a higher rate of interest than is available on the call account these investments will need to be fixed for a longer period of time. The report identified the investments that had been in place during the year. At 30 September there was £10m fixed term investment in place, therefore the total investment held at 30 September was £41.900m. The overall the rate of interest earned during this period was 0.51% which compared favourably with the benchmark 7 day index which averaged 0.14% over the same period.

All investments were made in accordance with the current Treasury Management Strategy and the CIPFA treasury management code of practice.

Prudential Indicators

In order to control and monitor the Authority's treasury management functions a number of prudential indicators were determined against which performance may be measured. At its meeting on 22 February 2021 the Authority approved the indicators for 2021/22 which were detailed in the report alongside the current actual.

Revenue Budget Implications

The 2021/22 revenue budget for treasury management activity showed that anticipated income exceeded expenditure by £36k. Taking into account the activity for the first six months of the year and estimated cash-flow for the remainder of the year the latest forecast was as shown below:

	Budget	Forecast	Variation
	£m	£m	£m
Interest Payable	0.090	0.090	-
Minimum revenue provision	0.010	0.010	-
Interest receivable	(0.136)	(0.193)	(0.057)
Net budget	(0.036)	(0.093)	(0.057)

The interest receivable was above budget as the balances were slightly higher than anticipated when setting the budget. The forecast assumed interest rates remained constant for the remainder of the financial year.

RESOLVED: - That the Committee noted and endorsed the report.

34-20/21 PEOPLE STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

The Director of People and Development presented the People Strategy 2021 – 2024 which set out the strategic direction over the next 3 years, setting out the areas of priority that were required to ensure the development of a Service that was capable of continuous improvement and which responded positively to change. It sought to recruit and deliver a workforce that was resilient, highly skilled, flexible, diverse and which could deliver the aim of keeping the people of Lancashire safer.

The report set out the current position, its values and ethics and aspirations. The delivery of the strategy would be achieved through the delivery of the plans for: Organisational Development, Training, Equality Action, Workforce and Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

RESOLVED: - That the Committee noted and endorsed the report.

35-20/21 WELLBEING AND WELLNESS INITIATIVES

The Director of People and Development introduced Bekki Ford, Safety, Health and Environment Advisor who presented Members with the various opportunities that the Service had enabled to address the wellbeing and wellness agenda. The support resources included: -

- Employee Assistance Programme – short-term solution focussed counselling and advise;
- Engine House – Library of information;
- Mental Health First Aiders – courses on an ad hoc basis predominantly for Community Fire Safety;
- Occupational Health – in-house provision available on a referral basis for all staff;
- Pre-retirement course – information from a financial, psychological and physical point of view;
- Personal Training Instructors and Service Fitness Advisor – to support operational staff to maintain levels of required fitness;
- Signposting Peer Support Pocketbook – to help individuals signpost colleagues or choose the most appropriate support for themselves;
- Social Events – to foster positive relationships
- Sports Events – to encourage all members of staff to be more active therefore improving and maintaining both physical and mental health and wellbeing;
- Trauma Risk Management – intervention to support staff to be able to reflect on a traumatic event without emotion and be able to ‘file’ the experience away as a memory to refer back to if needed;
- Wellbeing Support Dogs – to improve wellbeing, build self-esteem / confidence and help someone open up about their feelings and provide signposting;
- Workplace Wellbeing Toolbox Talks – initiative started in July 2019, in the first instance delivered to all stations and groups of staff across the whole of the Service to support crews with a range of wellbeing related topics during face-to-face sessions.

In addition, as a responsible and considerate employer the Service also provided day-to-day support via:

- Ageing Workforce Task & Finish Group
- Apprenticeship Health and Wellbeing Session
- CFA Member Health and Wellbeing Champion
- Coaching and Mentoring/Pastoral Care
- Distress Management and Self Care course

- Flexible Working Arrangements
- Healthy Eating Choices (at STC)
- Leadership Visits
- Leave Entitlement
- Oscar Kilo Blue Light Wellbeing Framework
- Personal Training Instructors/Service Fitness Advisor
- Routine Bulletins
- Service Orders/Standard Operating Procedures
- Time to Change Employer
- Top Management 'buy-in'
- Wellness Events Calendar
- Workplace Wellbeing Toolbox Talks

In response to a question raised by County Councillor O'Toole regarding the arrangements in place to deal with any allegations of harassment, bullying or racism the Director of People and Development advised that all allegations were taken very seriously, were recorded and investigated. Individuals could raise their concerns with their line manager, senior manager, HR or use the whistleblowing policy.

In response to a further question raised by County Councillor O'Toole, regarding how involved the Service was with the Firefighters Charity, the Safety, Health & Environment Advisor confirmed that the Service remained heavily involved and undertook a lot of fundraising either in groups or individual firefighters set their own challenges. The Service had also collaborated with the Firefighters Charity during the pandemic which was hoped would be developed further.

In response to a further question raised by County Councillor O'Toole regarding how well attended were the social and sports events the Director of People and Development advised that this was dependent on the event however, attendance was encouraged.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Authority Chairman had attended an awards event the previous week (which celebrated long service, good conduct, commendations, staff who had received academic qualifications and staff nominated by their peers for demonstrating the Service STRIVE values). The event was followed by the Firefighters Charity Ball which was attended by over 300 people. He advised that for the year 2020/21 a total of circa £120k had been raised by staff across the Service.

Councillor Williams advised that he had attended a Prince's Trust event the previous week held in Blackpool which had been a fabulous opportunity to see the young people at the end of the programme become focussed, to have worked as a team and gain additional skills.

In response to a query from Councillor Williams regarding the provision of support to staff regarding domestic abuse and suicide prevention the Safety, Health & Environment Advisor advised that although there was nothing specific for domestic abuse Trauma Risk Management support was available for traumatic events occurring at home and work.

The level of training provided for those supporting individuals was dependent on the role e.g. the Wellbeing Support Dog Handler 3 day peer support programme was developed in-house by the Safety, Health & Environment Advisor, mental health first aid was provided by an external training provider, LFRS had a bespoke mental health course developed by Lancashire MIND – Distress Management and Self-care, collaboration with Fire Fighters Charity to deliver mental health and wellbeing sessions jointly between Safety, Health & Environment Advisor and the charity's Wellbeing coaches.

The Director of People and Development added that there was an array of interventions and activities which ranged from talking to a friend through to medical interventions dependent upon the situation. He reassured Members that where staff needed training the Service was careful to monitor activity. There was no expectation to go beyond their knowledge base. He confirmed that the Service was also involved in safeguarding issues if required.

In response to a further question from Councillor Williams the Safety, Health & Environment Advisor confirmed that she had quarterly account meetings with providers to review their services. She also reviewed the signposting directory at least every 6 months which included at the last update Frontline Assistance for Stress and Trauma.

County Councillor Mein queried the availability of support resources for staff, how much support was delivered face-to face and who could access the Trauma Risk Management counselling including who determined the referral. In response the Safety, Health and Environment Advisor advised that it was not possible to measure every interaction with the wellbeing resources. The Service received usage data from EAP. This was a mini citizens advice service that covered a lot of information. It was independent to the Service, providing short-term counselling and advice to staff and their immediate family. She confirmed that the Service was above benchmark re: usage. She advised that the Trauma Risk Management intervention team were volunteers who could meet at any time. The requests to the TRIM team would be made by the individual concerned so that they would be engaged. She also confirmed that wellbeing visits were instigated by the individual with their watch or crew manager and line managers made referrals to occupational health. She also confirmed that the idea of wellbeing dogs was scientifically proven to lower blood pressure, stress and anxiety levels and various interventions were available.

RESOLVED: - That the report and comprehensive nature of interventions available to assist staff be noted.

36-20/21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 30 March 2022 at 1000 hours Washington Hall, Service Headquarters, Euxton.

Further meeting dates were noted for 6 July 2022 and 28 September 2022 and agreed for 30 November 2022.

37-20/21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: - That the press and members of the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that there would be a likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the appropriate paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, indicated under the heading to the item.

38-20/21 PENSIONS UPDATE

(Paragraphs 4 and 5)

Members considered a report that provided an update on the various issues which had arisen in respect of the changes to the pension schemes applying to the uniformed members of the Fire Sector.

RESOLVED: - That the report be noted.

39-20/21 PFI CONTRACT - RE-FINANCING OF THE SENIOR DEBT

(Paragraph 3)

Members considered a report concerning the refinancing of the senior debt within the PFI Contract.

RESOLVED: - That the recommendations outlined in the report be agreed including that the agreeing and signing and sealing of any re-financing deal and associated documentation be delegated to the Treasurer, following consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and Chairman of the Authority.

40-20/21 HIGH VALUE PROCUREMENT PROJECTS

(Paragraph 3)

Members considered a report that provided an update on all contracts for one-off purchases valued in excess of £100,000 and high value procurement projects in excess of £100,000 including: new contract awards, progress of ongoing projects and details of new projects.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted and endorsed the report.

M NOLAN
Clerk to CFA