

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Resources Committee

Wednesday, 25 September 2024, at 10.00 am in the Main Conference Room, Service Headquarters, Fulwood.

Minutes

Present:	
Councillors	
R Woollam	
F De Molfetta	
T Hurn	
M Pattison (Vice-Chair)	
S Serridge (Chair)	
B Yates	

Officers
S Brown, Director of Corporate Services (LFRS) E Sandiford, Director of People and Development (LFRS) B Warren, HR Lead - Pensions and NWFC (LFRS) J Meadows, Head of Finance (LFRS) S Hunter, Member Services Manager (LFRS) L Barr, Member Services Officer (LFRS)

In attendance

16/24	Apologies for Absence
	Apologies were received from County Councillor David O'Toole and Councillors Graham Baker and Zamir Khan. Vice-Chair Margaret Pattison chaired the meeting as the Chair had been delayed.
17/24	Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests
	None received.
18/24	Minutes of the Previous Meeting
	Resolved: That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 3 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19/24

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report

The Director of People and Development (DoPD) presented the report. The report was one of the ways the service demonstrated its compliance with the Equality Duty, which was created under the Equality Act 2010. The report supported the delivery of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's (LFRS's) People Strategy.

Key areas covered within the report included;

Accessibility

LFRS Corporate Communications Department ensured that information was made available in a variety of formats and using multiple channels to best reach Lancashire's diverse communities.

During 2023-24, the service published a new website that was compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.2 AA standard, which was an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

Fire safety advice was available in 26 additional languages on the website to make the information more accessible to people whose first language was not English. In addition, a series of fire safety videos were available in British Sign Language. All videos were produced with subtitles, including public safety videos from emergency incidents.

The Corporate Communications Department actively supported the prevention work of LFRS working with prevention, community fire safety, and operational teams. A campaign planning process was in place for the effective planning, delivery, and evaluation of prevention campaigns.

Recruitment and Selection

LFRS continued its journey to improve the diversity of the workforce to ensure that it represented the community it served. Positive action was delivered to attract a diversity of candidates to fill the Wholetime firefighter apprenticeship courses. The service had taken an integrated approach in relation to delivering positive action and promoting LFRS as an employer of choice; colleagues from human resources, prevention and operational staff worked together to deliver attraction events supported by other colleagues from the service's employee voice groups. Eight "Have a Go" events were delivered by project members, at various stations and at our Leadership and Development Centre.

The events were supported by Corporate Communications who delivered an integrated targeted social media campaign utilising Facebook 'Events' and Instagram Posts, and Twitter 'Tweets' were also utilised to reach almost 1,200,000 people. Social media was targeted at under-represented groups of people.

Wholetime firefighter applications opened on 7 August 2023 and closed on 16 August 2023 with 956 valid applications received. Of the 956 who applied the demographic profile of applicants was as follows:

Total Applications	Male % of total	Female % of total	BME % of total	LGBT+% of total	Disabled % of total
956	87	13	11	9	5

The outcome further to a robust recruitment process was as follows:

Total Selected	Male % of total	Female % of total	BME % of total	LGBT+% of total	Disabled % of total
35	60	40	17	29	6

Firefighter Apprenticeships

LFRS was an employer provider of firefighter operational apprenticeships. As at 31 March 2024 the Service had 88 firefighter apprentices who had all successfully completed their end point assessment. Of the 88 passes, 8 gained distinctions. In addition to those, the Service had 90 apprentices who were working through their apprenticeship programme.

Flexible Working Policy

During 2023/2024, the flexible working policy was updated to make the right to request flexible working a 'day one' right, and for individuals to have the right to make two requests per year rather than one.

Anonymous Reporting Line – Safe Call

The anonymous reporting line 'Safe Call' had been established where volunteers, members of staff and cadets could raise issues of concern anonymously. This had resulted in 7 reports which had resulted in investigation, training and action depending on the set of circumstances.

Workforce Profile

Employment monitoring data was collected and reported annually in relation to all protected groups apart from gender reassignment due to the sensitive confidential nature of this data. Since 2022/23 there had been a slight increase in the number of women LFRS employed from 18.9% to 19.7% continuing the upward trend. There had been a slight increase in the number of people who were BME from 3.2% to 3.7%, back to the same level as 2021/22 and a slight increase in the number of people LFRS employed who declared a disability from 2.6% to 2.9%. The number of people who identified as LGBT+ had stayed the same at 3.7%.

Disciplinary cases

There were 28 disciplinary investigations during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 which was an increase of 9 compared to the previous year.

The outcomes of these cases where:

- Two dismissals*
- Three final written warnings
- Eight formal written warnings
- Seven management letters
- Five no case to answer

*Three people resigned or retired prior to the hearing. In two cases the investigations continued and reached a decision to dismiss and in the third case, the individual would likely have been dismissed had the evidence available been proven at hearing.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group

The EDI Steering Group was chaired by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and was responsible for monitoring the development and delivery of the EDI Annual Report. During 2024, recognising the impact that EDI had on a positive organisational culture, LFRS broadened the role of the EDI Steering Group to monitoring the services activity and progress in developing an organisational culture where everyone could thrive, and consequently the Steering Group was renamed the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Culture Board.

Appendix 2 of the report included progress against the actions the Service was taking in response to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) March 2023, Values and Culture recommendations and the National Fire Chief Council's (NFCC) subsequent recommendations.

The DoPD provided an update in relation to recommendation 9, that 93% of Grey Book members of staff had now had their DBS check completed and where appropriate, a risk assessment completed.

The DoPD confirmed that most actions within the report had been completed.

Further to the HMICFRS report on Standards of Behaviour and the Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services August 2024, a second set of recommendations were published and progress against those recommendations was included at Appendix 3. The DoPD confirmed that the service was working through the recommendations with many already launched.

In relation to recommendation 3 the DoPD provided an update that individuals would be moved when there were concerns in relation to performance and individuals may be encouraged to move and volunteer to move for development purposes. There were challenges in compulsory changing contracts of employment to enforce a move. The service was currently exploring the implications of changing the Promotions Policy which was in the process of being updated. However, there were challenges with Flexible Day Crewing (FDC) and On Call as individuals must live within 5 mins of their station.

The role of the Service Solicitor had been expanded to Legal Services and Standards Manager, they would be responsible for overseeing cases and making sure they were investigated in a fair and transparent way. This work was currently being scoped.

In response to a question from County Councillor Woollam in relation to checks completed prior to recruitment, the DoPD confirmed that the service conformed to Safer Recruitment Standards, which required two satisfactory references, one of which needed to be from a previous employer. Additionally, any gaps in employment history were identified as part of the application process. Although the service did not check social media, social media was covered as part of the

induction process. The DoPD confirmed that some roles did have enhanced checks, this included Station Managers and above and roles within the Princes Trust.

County Councillor Woollam asked a further question in relation to the conditions around flexible working and working from home. The DoPD confirmed that the Service had a flexible working policy in place and employees have the right to request flexible working. Agreement to the request was dependent upon the needs of the service. She confirmed that a flexible working policy was also available for support staff which allowed staff to start later, finish earlier and accrue time which could be taken at a later date. In relation to working from home the DoPD confirmed that hybrid (home) working was available to some members of staff within the Service and this was dependent on the role and at the Head of Departments discretion.

In response to a question from County Councillor Terry Hurn in relation to promoted firefighters being moved to a different station, the DoPD confirmed that HMICFRS had identified that when firefighters were promoted to the same watch there could be some cultural issues. It was not a requirement within LFRS for newly promoted firefighters to move within the service but it was encouraged to aid the development of new skills.

In response to a question from the Chair in relation to Firefighter apprenticeships the DoPD confirmed that Maths and English GCSE qualifications were not essential but could be completed as part of the apprenticeship qualification. She advised that due to the high number of applicants there were some selection tests in place and potential applicants were encouraged to complete their Functional Skills qualification which could be completed for free at college to improve their level of attainment within the tests.

In response to a further question from the Chair, the DoPD advised that the number of applicants could vary with the highest being 1200 and the lowest 670.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

20/24

Financial Monitoring

Councillor Sean Serridge joined the meeting.

The Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) advised that this report set out the current budget position in respect of the 2024/25 revenue and capital budgets.

Revenue Budget

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's 2024/5 revenue budget was set at £74.149m. The budget profiled to the end of May 2024 was £25.307m and expenditure for the same period was £25.172m, resulting in a year-to-date underspend of £0.129m.

The overall underspend position was further broken down between pay and non-pay budgets; there was an underspend of £0.209 on pay and a £0.080m overspend on non-pay activities.

Adjustments had been made to the forecasts to reflect known changes, but in headline terms the forecast for the year was a small overspend of £0.173m, which was 0.2% of the net budget.

The year-to-date and forecast positions within all departmental budgets were set out in Appendix 1, with the major variances of note shown separately in the table below.

Area	Year to Date	Forecast	Reason
Service Delivery - Pay	£0.019m	£0.279m	The pay award of 4% was agreed effective July 2024, this was 1% above the services budgeted assumptions which largely accounted for the forecast variance.
Prevention and Protection - Pay	(£0.168m)	(£0.361m)	Several vacant posts existed in the current staffing establishment for which recruitment was planned long term. It was anticipated that 3 posts would be recruited to in year, with a few vacancies to persist for the duration of the financial year. Challenges persisted in recruitment and retention due to competition from the private sector.
Fleet – Non Pay	£0.103m	£0.223m	Vehicle repair and maintenance costs remained high due to inflationary pressures and demand for parts across the industry.
Bank Interest	(£0.068m)	(£0.196m)	Favourable interest rates and new fixed term investment opportunities indicated an early forecast of additional income on budget.

Future Pressures

Green book pay award negotiations were ongoing and were budgeted at 3%. Unison had put the current offer of a flat £1290 pay increase to ballot for industrial action among its members. Current pay projections used the 3% budgeted rate.

Additionally, the employer's contribution rate to the 2015 Firefighters' pension scheme as determined by the scheme actuary was increased from 28.8% to 37.6%. Additional grant funding was assumed to offset this pressure.

Capital Budget

The revised Capital Programme for 2024/25 approved by the Resources Committee was £12m. To date £0.984m had been spent predominantly on operational equipment for cutting and extraction. A summary of the programme was set out in Appendix 2.

A summary of the programme is set out below: -

Area	Budgeted Items	Budget	Year to Date
Operational Vehicles Budget	The budget included initial costs of two water towers, two climate change vehicles and an aerial appliance from previous programmes. It also included three pumping appliances for the 2024/25 programme. A number of other vehicles were on course for delivery at budget in year, including two water towers, a prime mover, plus a foam pod and an All-Terraine Vehicle.	£2.943m	£0.139m
Other vehicles Budget	This budget allowed for the replacement of various operational support vehicles including several cars, vans and a beavertail lorry.	£0.948m	£0.066m
Operational Equipment Budget	This budget allowed for operational equipment purchases including CCTV cameras for appliances and cutting and extrication equipment.	£1.846m	£0.639
Building Modifications Budget	This budget included the continued programme of Drill Tower Replacements and budget for the initial works to support the upgrade to Preston station.	£3.639m	£0.094
IT systems Budget	This budget included various projects including upgraded Firewalls, network upgrades and replacement of pooled PPE and stock management systems.	£2.593m	£0.046

A detailed review of the Capital Programme had identified a number of areas where expenditure would slip into 2025/26, the table below sets out the main items of slippage:

Area	Slippage to 2025/26	Reason

Operational Vehicles	(£1.501)	Delivery times on operational vehicles post COVID and Brexit were still much longer than anticipated across the sector resulting in delays; a number of pumping appliances, an Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) and climate change vehicle were delayed to early 2025/26.
Other vehicles	(£0.388)	The useful remaining life of a number of operational support vehicles had been extended resulting in slippage to the following year.
Building Modifications	(£0.962)	The project to enhance facilities at W30 (Blackpool) had incurred some initial costs and would continue to deliver in year, but would see final completion in 2025/26. Similarly, Drill Tower replacement works would see part delivery in year.
IT systems	(£0.544)	A review of the IT systems capital programme had identified a number of projects that would likely slip into 2025/26; in particular the replacement systems for the management of stock, assets and pooled PPE. Existing contracts had been extended.
	(£3.404)	

The report had included slippage of £250k for Operational Equipment which the DoCS had requested be removed.

Resolved: That the Committee noted and endorsed the financial position and approved slippage in the capital programme of £3.404m to 2025/26.

21/24

Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday **27 November 2024** at 1000 hours in the Main Conference Room at Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Fulwood.

Further meeting dates were noted for 26 March 2025 and 2 July 2025.

22/24

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.

23/24

Pensions Update (Standing Item)

(Paragraphs 4 and 5)

	<p>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.</p> <p>Resolved: That the report be noted.</p>
24/24	<p>High Value Procurement Projects</p>
	<p>(Paragraph 3)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Resolved: That the Committee noted and endorsed the report.</p>

M Nolan
Clerk to CFA

LFRS HQ
Fulwood