

Report on Avon Fire Authority to the meeting of North Somerset Council, 12 November 2019

The Fire Authority held its full meeting on 25th September 2019 at Filwood Community Centre in Bristol. Some of the key points of the meeting were as follows:

1. A member of the public living in Bath addressed the authority calling for the tightening up of planning and building control rules in the development of waste sites to reduce fire risks. The authority is committed to prevention and the Chief Fire Officer is providing support to this resident.
2. The constitution of the authority has been amended and updated, and the new revised version was approved. The main change is the restructuring of the committees and reduction to three committees. This should provide better efficiency. There was also the inclusion of an equality statement and a statement of the service's mission, values and vision.

The constitution in full can be viewed on the authority's website:

<https://www.avonfire.gov.uk/fire-authority-home/corporate-governance>

3. An update on the budget and MTFP was provided. As with all local authorities, the Fire Authority has a challenging funding gap. Detailed work on the 2020/21 budget is now being developed and it's identified that additional savings of nearly £2 million need to be found. However, there is uncertainty over central Government's funding beyond the current year. There is a particular pressure arising from increasing pension scheme contributions, and there is an expectation that there could be an increased pay award to firefighters in line with other public sector workers. It has been agreed that up to £1 million pounds in reserves can be allocated to financial pressures arising as a result of Brexit and uncertainties around it. The revenue budget is forecast to be underspent by £181,000 at year end, primarily due to savings in staff costs.
4. The capital programme for the year is £7.7million, but it is estimated that over £2million of this will slip into the following year, due to the protracted procurement process for a new supplier of fire appliances. The authority will be acquiring seven new appliances, and there are also four projects for upgrading operational equipment.
5. The authority received an update on the work of the Risk Reduction Department. They have been working with education specialists to improve awareness by young people of issues such as water safety. They have also been working with vulnerable adults to improve their safety.
6. Within the report on significant fires and incidents was the fire at the Premier Inn at Cribbs Causeway. This was a major incident which called on crews from across the service area. At its height 70 firefighters were on the scene alongside officers from the police and other agencies. The cause of the fire is currently unknown and a fire investigation is still ongoing. Thankfully there were no casualties, but the building was destroyed.

The incidents of note within North Somerset, which were reported to the authority were a barn fire at Lower Langford and a hovercraft rescue in Weston-super-Mare, both in August.

7. The authority approved the renewal of the BT (Wide Area Network) contract.
8. The authority approved the redevelopment of Bath and Weston-super-Mare Fire Stations. The cost of this is principally funded by the sale of land in central Bristol. Weston Station is likely to move to a more suitable location. The location is yet to be decided, but a key factor in choosing a site will be the expected response times, as well as financial factors such as land values. As Weston members, Cllrs Richard Tucker and Robert Payne will sit in a working party about the location of a new Weston Fire Station.

This and all full meetings of the authority can be watched in full on Avon Fire & Rescue's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AvonFireService/videos>