

North Somerset Council

12 January 2021

Report on the Avon Fire Authority

Councillor Richard Tucker

Major incidents

Members will be aware of the tragic incident that took place at the waste water treatment works in Avonmouth on 3rd December, causing four fatalities. Very sadly I report that two lived in North Somerset and one was an apprentice who attended Weston College. An incredibly sad day for our area and devastating for the families, colleagues and friends of those involved. Fire Authority members held a minute's silence in honour and memory of the three Wessex Water employees and contractor.

Crews were in attendance within five minutes of mobilisation and immediately set about search and rescue operations as well as securing the scene and preventing further escalation of the incident. It was a multi-agency response albeit the Fire Authority took primacy during the search, rescue and treatment of casualties' phase. After the initial operational phase the scene was handed over to the Police so that they could begin their investigation into the cause along with the HSE. Our crews, control room staff, officers and corporate communications staff conducted themselves in the highly professional and impressive way to which we are accustomed.

Crews from Portishead and Nailsea were mobilised to a scrap metal fire in Avonmouth on 4th October. Over three days, firefighters used two 70mm and two 45mm jets to extinguish the fire involving 20,000 tonnes of scrap metal.

Financial update

The updated annual income budget is reported at £50.885m. Expenditure budget forecasts an underspend of £431k.

The Fire Authority has a statutory requirement to inform Local Authorities of our proposed precept by 1st March. The referendum limit set for Fire Authority precepts is 1.99%.

Financial statements for year ended March 2020 were approved by Audit, Governance & Ethics Committee and signed-off by Treasurer and Authority Chair.

A cost pressures /Covid-19 corporate contingency reserve is being developed.

Police & Crime Commissioner AFA application

At the full Authority meeting of 16th December, a majority of members eventually agreed the application of the Police & Crime Commissioner to become a permanent and voting member of the Fire Authority, in accordance with Government recommendation. A separate application must be submitted by each future PCC at the commencement of their term.

Weston Fire Station

A Projects Working Group is considering future locations or re-builds of fire stations at Weston-super-Mare, Bath and Bedminster. Options for Weston for improved access and updated buildings and facilities are centred on investigation of possible sites along the primary distributor road. Remaining at the current site off Milton Road / Earlham Grove is still retained as a possibility.

International assistance

Avon Fire Authority specialist crews assisted in the international emergency rescue and recovery operation in Lebanon following the Beirut explosion.

Richard Tucker