



Report on Avon Fire Authority to the meeting of North Somerset Council, July 2021

The Fire Authority met on 30th June 2021 for the AGM. It took place at Hick's Gate Fire Station, near Keynsham, and was the first face-to-face meeting of the full authority since the start of the pandemic. We welcomed some new members of the authority, mainly due to the council elections in Bristol in May, along with some other changes. The political balance has changed slightly with the Green Party having an additional member and Labour one fewer. The authority as a whole now has appointed from its constituent councils 7 Conservative, 5 Liberal Democrat, 5 Labour, 2 Green and 1 Independent members. Cllr Brenda Massey from Bristol was elected as the new Chair of the authority, with Cllr Don Davies as Vice-Chair. Thanks were given to Cllr Davies for his term as the chair which was effective through difficult times.

The following strategies were agreed and adopted:

The Reserves Strategy. The authority has reserves at 20% of core spending, against a national average of 39%. General Reserves have been held at £1.5million, or about 3% of the revenue budget for some years. This is considered to be a good position.

The Treasury Management Strategy. The treasury management service is carried out under a Service Level Agreement by Bristol City Council. This covers matters such as cash flow, borrowings and investments. There has been no external borrowing for some years, due to the level of internal resources from the disposal of the former HQ in central Bristol. The strategy ensures that we have value-for-money and affordability.

Copies of these strategies are available on request.

We reviewed the charges which the Fire & Rescue service can apply. These are for certain services which are not fire or emergency related, such as hiring out of equipment, certain types of inspections, removal of water, dealing with hazardous materials, removal of unsafe structures and so on. These are charged on a cost recovery basis, and will be remaining the same as last year.

The scheme of members' allowances were considered. These have been increasing at the same rate as employees' pay since 2018, and will be fully reviewed by an independent remuneration panel in advance of the 2022-23 financial year.

The authority dealt with an application from the newly-elected Police & Crime Commissioner to join the Fire Authority. This is a controversial matter for some members, and it was decided to put back the decision to the next meeting, when the PCC could be invited to set out what he can bring to the authority.

In other news, the fire service is expecting an increase this summer in wild water swimming, particularly with the possibility of more staycations. So it is launching a new summer water safety campaign, highlighting the hidden dangers beneath the water. The campaign will seek to raise awareness of these hazards, along with cold water shock and water currents, and to inform the public how to keep safe and of what to do in an emergency.

The service has welcomed 14 new recruits in June, including 8 on-call firefighters some of whom will be based in Weston-super-Mare and Portishead, and 6 control staff answering 999 calls.

Staff are providing volunteer support for the vaccination programme at Ashton Gate and some other locations; and are continuing to provide volunteers to drive ambulances to support the NHS where there is still pressure due to the pandemic.

We were saddened by the news of the death of Watch Manager Steve Angell of Bath On-Call, who died following a motocross accident. He had been with the service since 1988. Our thoughts and condolences go to his family.

Cllr Robert Payne