

13 February 2019

Present: Councillors Butters, Davies (D) (Chair), Davis (arrived at 10.50 am), Eddy, Garner, Goggin (left at 1.05 pm), Hale, Jackson (left at 1.15 pm), Johnson (arrived at 10.43 am), Lake, Pomfret, Scott, Shelford, Wilton and Windows (arrived at 10.50 am).

The meeting began at 10.30 am.

70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ashe, Davies (C), Phipps and Morris. Cllr Williams was not present.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that the meeting was being filmed and would be available on the Fire Authority's YouTube channel.

71. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES - the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive (CFO) outlined the arrangements.

72. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - the Chair drew attention to the requirements of the code of conduct as set out in the Agenda. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) (ACFO SD) declared an interest in Item 16 (Confidential minutes of the Employment Committee held on 8 November 2018) but the Chair had indicated he could remain in the meeting.

73. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Fleur Lombard Memorial Service

The ACFO (SD) informed Members that the Fire Authority had recently commemorated the death of Fleur Lombard, a female firefighter who had died at Leo's Superstore in Staple Hill on 4 February 1996. Fleur was serving with Blue Watch at Speedwell Fire Station at the time of the incident and was 21 years of age. Fleur was awarded the Queens Gallantry Medal, posthumously. Fleur's colleague, Robert Seaman was awarded the George Medal for bravery for returning to the burning building to rescue Fleur along with another firefighter, Pat Foley, who also went into the blazing supermarket to help, was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Bravery.

Cllr Hale said that he had attended in previous years and would have done so this year if he had known of the date.

The Chair asked all present to observe one minute's silence in Fleur's memory.

Interim Director of Corporate Services

Members were informed that the Interim Director of Corporate Services would be leaving the Fire Authority on 18 February 2019. Discussions were ongoing

with the current Deputy of Corporate Services to cover the role on an interim basis. Cllr Hale asked for information about the duration of any interim appointment. The CFO confirmed that the appointment would be for three months initially.

74. MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 20 DECEMBER 2018

Cllr Butters noted an error on page 12 of the agenda pack, asking that the word Herefordshire should be replaced with Hertfordshire to read as follows:

“Cllr Butters said that in Hertfordshire he believed that establishments were “allowed” up to eight false alarms per annum...”

Cllr Wilton was concerned about Minute 55, stating that he had written five pages of objections about the New Constitution and that these were not adequately reflected in the minutes which mentioned only his concerns about “disposals and Employment Committee structures”.

RESOLVED with the amendment above that the minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Fire Authority held on 20 December 2018 should be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

75. PUBLIC ACCESS – None

76. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY

76.1 Ordinary Meeting of the Employment Committee held on 8 November 2019

RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Employment Committee held on 8 November 2018.

76.2 Ordinary Meeting of the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality Committee held on 6 December 2018

RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality Committee held on 6 December 2018.

76.3 Notes of the Inquorate Ordinary Meeting of the Audit, Governance and Ethics Committee held on 7 December 2018

RESOLVED to note the notes of the inquorate Audit, Governance and Ethics Committee held on 7 December 2018.

77. URGENT ACTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 5.1

RESOLVED to note that the Clerk, at the request of the Temporary Interim Treasurer, and in consultation with the Chair, had approved a response to the consultation on the Provisional Financial Settlement 2019/20 for submission to the Government by the deadline of 10 January 2019.

78. REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX LEVELS FOR 2019/20, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2019-23 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019-23.

The Temporary Interim Treasurer (Treasurer) explained that the main purpose of the report was to enable Members to make a decision about Council Tax levels for 2019/20. He also stated that the report would look at the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2019-23 and the Capital Programme for 2019-23. The Treasurer made the following points in his presentation to Members:

- Two options for Council Tax levels had been presented to Members for their consideration in December. Option 1 was for an increase in Council Tax of 2.99% in line with the Government's latest announced referendum limit, and Option 2 was for an increase of 2% in line with the Government's previously announced referendum limit.
- These two options had been presented to the business community (a compulsory consultation requirement) and to the public (a discretionary consultation). Unfortunately, no responses had been received.
- Avon and Somerset Police had been able to make a 12% increase in their Council Tax levy due to a change in Government policy which enabled them to increase Council Tax by a cash figure of up to £24. This level of flexibility was not available to the Fire Authority.
- The Fire Authority had sent a response to Government regarding the restrictive nature of the Council Tax limit, as did the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and others, but there had been no change in policy and therefore a 3% increase was the maximum which the Fire Authority was allowed to demand without a Council Tax Referendum.
- Option 1 would increase the Council Tax on a Band D property from £71.35 in 2018/19 to £73.48 in 2019/20, whereas Option 2 would increase the Council Tax on a Band D property from £71.35 in 2018/19 to £72.77 in 2019/20.
- The Fire Authority was currently in the fourth year of the Four Year Plan. Earlier in the Plan, 2% had been set by Government as the maximum increase, although this had since been raised to 3%, 2% continued to be the planned-for option, therefore a real choice was presented to Members.
- The Government had made recent announcements about rises in Core Spending. These rises included 3% rises in Council Tax by Fire Authorities and therefore the Government appeared to assume that Fire Authorities would apply the maximum rate of increase allowed.
- The Fire Authority's response to the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2019-20 was attached to the report as Appendix 2.
- Since the Fire Authority's December meeting, notification had been received from the Unitary Authorities (UAs) of the following changes to previous estimates of council tax and business rates. The net impact of these changes was that the amount of funding available to the Authority for 2019/20 had gone up by £305,000.

- The increase in tax base reflects an increased number of properties in Avon. The Fire Authority has also been allocated a share of the net surplus of the Collection Funds.
- The Formula Grant Settlement for the Fire Authority in 2019/20 represents a reduction of £396,000 in comparison to 2018/19. These figures were in line with expectations indicated in the four-year settlement and included in the MTFP.
- The 50% Business Rates Retention Scheme means that the Fire Authority is entitled to a share of the locally retained business rates. From 2020/21 the Business Rates Retention Scheme will retain 75% of local business rates.
- A combination of the Fair Funding Formula Review, introduction of the Business Rates Retention Scheme and other changes had created financial uncertainty which made planning difficult.
- The budget for 2019/20 had been revised and was presented again to Members. A 3% pay award effective from July 2019 had been assumed. The other assumptions made in devising the budget were indicated to Members and included in the written report.
- Assumptions included a reduction in capital financing charges and a number of ear-marked reserves, and the impact of new Technical Fire Safety posts and other changes.
- There was ongoing uncertainty about Firefighters Pension Scheme employer contributions. An uplift in employers' contributions from 17% to 30% was imminent for 2019/20 with a potential for further rise in subsequent years. For 2019/20 the uplift has been partly offset by a Government contribution of £2.035m (90% offset) and therefore the cost to the Fire Authority for 2019/20 would be £247,000. Legal challenges to the changes to the Firefighters Pension Scheme were ongoing and a Government contribution in future years was not assured. It was therefore difficult to assess the full impact of the pension changes at this stage.

Cllr Jackson asked who would cover the costs of the pension scheme changes, noting that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had won its case against the Government. Cllr Jackson said that the cost of a successful action would be huge, and he was concerned if the Fire Authority would be required to pay this bill.

The Treasurer said that he was not able to answer this question at this stage, but agreed that if the Fire Authority had to absorb the cost of pension scheme changes it would do huge damage to the base budget of the Fire Authority. Cllr Garner stated that all present should remember that Government money came from the public.

The CFO felt that the pension funding issue might be dealt with through the Comprehensive Spending Review using the mechanism of a change to the accrual rates.

Cllr Jackson observed that the Government appeal may fail and that there was much uncertainty with regard to this matter.

The Treasurer continued to present the report, drawing the following matters to Members' attention:

- Savings of £359,000 had been identified. If Members opted for the 2% increase in Council Tax a further £264,000 would be required and the Treasurer suggested that this amount could be funded from Reserves initially.
- Graphics illustrating the sources of funding and expenditure were presented to Members.
- Tables illustrating the impact of Option 1 and Option 2 rates of Council Tax increase on the Medium Term Financial Plan were presented to Members. A 2% Pay Award had been assumed and a Council Tax increase of 2% each year had also been assumed.
- Although austerity had been declared to be over by the Prime Minister in October 2018 no increases in funding for the Fire Authority were anticipated. Indications from the Treasury were that funding would stand still or be subject to further reductions.

Cllr Wilton stated that the budget remained in deficit but that rates of increase in the National Debt had slowed. He felt that too many people did not understand this distinction. The Chair was concerned that the discussion was straying into political philosophy. It was agreed to move the discussion on and the Treasurer presented the following information to Members:

- Based on the uncertainty of finances in the future, the Fire Authority should look at further on-going savings of £2.6m by 2022/23. The key areas of uncertainty are the future levels of government funding, pay awards, and employer contributions to the Firefighter Pension Scheme.
- The Capital Programme for 2019/20 to 2022/23 was included in Appendix 5. A net receipt for the former HQ site at Temple Back of £17.856m had been included. £14m was to be utilised to fund the reinvestment in three sites at Avonmouth, Bath and Weston and the residue of £3.856m would be used to reduce future prudential borrowing requirements.
- The Capital Programme was summarised in a table presented to Members.
- A new project included on the proposed programme related to the major refurbishment works at Bedminster Fire Station. Critical failure of timber floor joists had occurred necessitating the removal of the floor and all internals. Funding would be provided to reinstate the quiet room and dormitory block whilst the recovery of costs progressed.
- The cost of the Bedminster refurbishment (which would include a number of other refurbishment works which had been put on hold due to the floor issue) was estimated at £1.5m over the next three years. This would be partly offset by a reduction of £1m in the General Estates Programme.
- With regards to fleet, there will be significant slippage against the Fleet Capital Budget due to a number of factors including the need to

identify a new supplier of fire appliances and to engage in a new procurement process.

- It was proposed that this slippage of £1.8m was carried forward to the revised Capital Programme and ring fenced to support plans to invest in digital technologies as part of the stated aim to transform the Service to a smarter way of working. This funding had been initially allocated over the next three years at £600,000 per annum.
- With regard to the Review of Charges, from 1 April 2019 it was proposed that charges were increased in line with the Consumer Prices Index, as is customary.
- The Section 25 Report written by the Treasurer was pointed out to Members. The Treasurer stated that he was confident that the budget proposed was sufficiently robust for 2019/20 and that reserve levels were adequate. Members' attention was drawn to the revised statement of reserves at Appendix 7.

Cllr Shelford was concerned about two areas of the report:

- 1) He wanted to have the total borrowing requirement identified with the interest costs separated out. The Treasurer said that it might be helpful to discuss this further with the next agenda item.
- 2) He was concerned to learn that £1.8m had been removed from the Fleet Capital Budget and redirected to investment in digital technologies.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery Support) (ACFO (SDS)) gave further information as follows:

- The underspend reflected the fact that there were no orders with the previous supplier of fire appliances outstanding due to their announcement that they closing down their business for building fire appliances.
- It would be necessary to establish a new framework for the supply of fire appliances and bodywork.
- Some capital projects have not come to fruition due to staff vacancies.
- A Fleet Strategic Review would take place and more appliances would be ordered later this year, from a new supplier.
- The underspend has been identified as an opportunity to develop and invest in smarter ways of working.

Cllr Shelford responded that he was concerned to learn that the Fire Authority had stopped buying fire appliances for a year, and asked if Members had been briefed about this. Although he was supportive of investment in smart technology he felt that Members should have been briefed about the proposal, rather than hearing about it for the first time in a budget report.

The CFO stated that the Fire Authority needed to modernise and that digitisation, along with associated investment, was an important part of that process. Business process re-engineering would also be necessary. Plans for investment in digital technology had been included in the Fire Authority's

Draft Service Plan. This investment would improve efficiency and also assist in keeping firefighters safe on the fire ground.

The Chair summarised, saying that he now understood that the underspend had been identified as an opportunity and that no decision had yet been made about the investment in digital technologies. The ACFO (SDS) confirmed this was correct and stated that any investment decision would return to the Fire Authority for approval.

Cllr Shelford asked what would happen if the Fire Authority did not replace fire appliances this year. In response the ACFO (SDS) stated that it would be necessary to replace appliances during the forthcoming year to avoid a long-term impact on the operational ability of the Fire Authority.

Cllr Shelford stated that four years ago, when he had first joined the Fire Authority he had asked the same question, querying why the Fire Authority replaced “so many” fire appliances each year. He had been informed that operational ability would “fall off a cliff”. However, now suddenly Members had been informed that no new fire appliances had been purchased and no crisis had apparently occurred. Cllr Shelford felt that a risk briefing should have taken place.

The ACFO (SDS) said that new appliances had been purchased in 2018, however, so far, in 2019 no order had been placed for further new appliances. He reported that it always took some time for new appliances to be received by the Fire Authority once an order was placed. Officers were currently involved in going through a risk profile of different weight vehicles, in particular the purchase and use of 10 tonne vehicles in inner city areas was being explored.

Cllr Shelford asked what the risk was, both currently and in the future, to not having ordered new appliances.

The CFO said that there was a risk because the lifecycle of an appliance could not be extended indefinitely. He explained that the current paradigm of fleet management within the Fire Authority was that vehicles were brought into the fleet, used for 12 years (moving them between different Fire Stations to even out wear) and then allocated to the reserve fleet for a further three years. Appliances were removed from the fleet after a total of 15 years’ service. Other Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have extended the lifecycle of appliances and this option is now being explored within the Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority’s previous supplier was no longer making fire appliances, however the CFO felt that the most important aspect of reviewing the framework of fleet management was the consideration of whether the right vehicles were being purchased for use in the Avon area. It was acknowledged that 12, 15 and 18 tonne vehicles had access problems in central Bristol and it was therefore sensible to use this opportunity to reconsider the vehicle framework. As set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), risk should be matched with appropriate resources, to provide the right-sized vehicles with appropriately-equipped crews. The CFO stated that this was an opportunity for the Fire Authority to review its vehicle strategy as well as the supplier of fire appliances, and also

to modernise through smarter working, this plan would come with the low risk of not have replaced appliances in 2019. The CFO confirmed that any projects brought forward would be presented to the Fire Authority for approval.

The Chair stated that it was good to hear that the choice of vehicles was being thoroughly considered to ensure that the Fire Authority purchased the right vehicles for the future.

The ACFO (SDS) stated that there was a plan in place for year-on-year replacement of vehicles, at the rate of three per year. Therefore, scope to replace vehicles remained if the risk for the Fire Authority became too great as funding was in place.

Cllr Wilton said that it was good to challenge paradigms, he had asked questions about response times in the past and been told that was a question he could not ask, this had been surprising. He was pleased to acknowledge a different mind-set today, and felt that a process akin to the Government's strategic defence review would be helpful. Cllr Wilton said it was good to hear that smaller fire appliances were being considered, and that the Fire Authority was considering what it was trying to achieve and what equipment it needed to do it. He agreed that the Fire Authority should use technology to get more out of the fleet, it was sensible to undertake capacity planning and deploy the resources available more effectively.

It was proposed by Cllr Eddy and seconded by Cllr Scott that Option 1 for the Council Tax should be approved. This was agreed with 13 in favour and one against and no abstentions. The remaining recommendations were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the information contained in the report and note the high level of unidentified savings for future years ie 2020 to 2023 as forecast by the revised Medium Term Financial Plan.
- b) Agree the Revenue Budget as presented by the Treasurer.
- c) Agree the Capital Programme as presented by the Treasurer.
- d) Make the statutory determinations which were set out by the Treasurer.
- e) Agree that the Fire Authority's basic amount of Council Tax (i.e. precept per Band D property) for 2019/20 should be increased to £73.48, an increase of £2.13 (2.99%) equivalent to four pence per week.
- f) Agree that precepts be issued to the Unitary Authorities in the Avon Fire Authority area in proportion to the tax base determined by them and set out in the Treasurer's report.
- g) Note the amount of Council Tax for 2019/20 for properties in each tax band.
- h) Instruct the Treasurer to forward precept details to the Unitary Authorities as the billing authorities.

- i) Approve the charging structure set out by the Treasurer, with effect from 1 April 2019. The charges to be levied in full in all cases but power be delegated to the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive to remit the whole or part of the charge in, in all the circumstances, he considers it appropriate to do so in any case.

79. TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019-2013

The Treasurer presented the Treasury Management and Capital Programme 2019-13 to Members. He particularly drew Members' attention to the following:

- The underlying Capital Borrowing requirement. This is one of the prudential indicators, and indicates the borrowing requirement over the next four years based on Capital Programme requirements. The underlying Capital Borrowing requirement was expected to rise from £16.565m in 2019/20 to £22.204m in 2022/23.
- Currently there was £7m of external borrowing and £9m of internal borrowing. Projected analysis of borrowing was presented to Members illustrating the likely position in 2022/23, with £15m of external borrowing and £7m of internal borrowing.
- It was expected that the financing cost will remain below 3% throughout the 2019 - 23 period. It should be noted that the Fire Authority had a self-imposed limit of 6% as the maximum financing cost, and it was projected to stay comfortably within this limit.
- The Treasurer would need an authorised limit for external debt to rise from £19m in 2019/20 to £24m in 2022/23.
- The Treasury Management report had been prepared by Bristol City Council (BCC) 12 months ago and this was unchanged from that time.
- The Fire Authority has an increased cash balance at present and could look to increase revenue from investments. Currently cash balances are invested with BCC and the equivalent of the seven day Libor rate is received from them. This is a no-risk investment, with guaranteed income from BCC, and for this reason at this time no change is recommended. The Fire Authority could look to change this policy in the future, when any increase in risk must be reflected in increased reward.
- £7m borrowing is currently fixed for 20 years, through the Public Works Loan Board so there is no risk associated with changing interest rates.

Cllr Wilton said that £24m of borrowing for an organisation with revenue of £44m felt like a lot, so he asked the Treasurer to compare this with other organisations. The Treasurer replied that he felt this was favourable to many other organisations.

Cllr Wilton was concerned about the organisation's ability to service the financing cost of 2.84%, and queried whether the £6.9m was regarded as "free" money.

The Treasurer replied that there was no requirement to make an interest charge to itself in the accounts, and that a zero charge had been made for the internal loan. If the Fire Authority had to borrow £9.5m externally there would be a cost therefore the internal loan arrangement was advantageous to the Fire Authority.

Cllr Wilton was concerned that 2.84% was a low financing charge and sought reassurance that it would not rise. He was concerned because interest rates were at an historically low rate and Brexit was imminent.

The Treasurer advised that BCC had advised the projected interest rates to us going forward. He added that the 2.84% was an internal ratio to indicate serviceability of finance.

Cllr Wilton was keen to understand how likely the ratio was to fluctuate with other external economic factors.

The Treasurer said that the bulk of the interest was as charged by the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) with long-term fixed rates of interest. Therefore, significant changes to interest would only arise from any future borrowing which the Fire Authority might undertake. The Treasurer added that it was of course likely that rates of interest would change, however volatility based on the programme presented today was relatively low and he felt that the 2.84% ratio was not likely to rise significantly.

Cllr Shelford asked which table showed the total borrowing and the total interest. He wanted to see this information presented in a straight forward way. The Treasurer confirmed that the total borrowing at present was £7m. £9.5m had been borrowed internally to fund spending; this meant that the Fire Authority did not have to borrow a further £9.5m externally. The cost of borrowing the £7m was £1.2m.

Cllr Shelford asked where the £1.2m cost of servicing that loan was included in the report. The Treasurer confirmed that "Other Costs" in the table on page 87 of the agenda pack included approximately £1m of debt repayment and £200,000 of interest.

Cllr Shelford asked where the breakdown of this information was included in the report. The Treasurer confirmed that this breakdown was not included in the report. Cllr Shelford said that it would be really helpful to better understand the cost of borrowing, and therefore requested that total borrowing and the costs of borrowing were explicitly set out in the future. Cllr Shelford stated that he had asked for this information in the past. He felt that this information would help Members be sure that they were not spending money that the Fire Authority did not have.

Referring to page 98 of the agenda pack the Treasurer pointed out that the total financing costs were included in the Prudential Indicators' table. Cllr Shelford stated that the way that the figures were set out at present suggested that borrowing was larger than it really was. The Treasurer said he was happy to change the presentation of this aspect of the accounts in the future to make it easier to understand.

Cllr Wilton said that the accounts should provide an accurate and true picture of the finances of the organisation. He was therefore concerned that the accounts showed that the Fire Authority was lending itself its own cash for free and stated that this was a deceptive picture. Cllr Wilton said that he would like the accounts to show the true cost of any projects. This would help Members understand what charges the Fire Authority would be open to if it had to seek a loan for this amount from the financial markets (rather than using its own money). His concern was that the accounts were effectively suppressing the costs of borrowing which the Fire Authority could be subject to.

The Treasurer said that the Fire Authority's advisors had suggested that the environment was relatively stable. Cllr Wilton said that taking advice from the Treasury at BCC brought risks, saying that Members were not trained accountants and therefore a clear picture was needed.

The Chair noted the Member training session on Treasury Management matters which was being organised by BCC and hoped that all Members would be able to attend.

It was proposed by Cllr Hale and seconded by Cllr Butters that the recommendations in the report should be approved. This was carried.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Approve the Treasury Management Strategy and Plan 2019-23, including approving the relevant limits and indicators as set out in the executive summary.
- b) Approve the Treasury Management Policy Statement.
- c) Approve the Prudential Indicators reflecting the four year Capital Programme 2019/20 to 2022/23.
- d) Note the Capital Programme 2019-23, including slippage, and proposed funding.

80. HMICFRS INSPECTION REPORT – Action Planning

The CFO introduced the report which detailed the response of the Fire Authority to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report.

The Fire Authority had to produce a full action plan as a formal response to the HMICFRS report, the development of a full action plan was underway. The deadline for the response to the HMICFRS inspection report was 12 March and the action plan would be brought to Members for approval.

Cllr Scott was concerned about training and asked when staff would complete diversity training. The ACFO (SDS) said that 95% of staff had completed the training. Cllr Scott said that the existing training was not adequate and he wanted to know when 100% of staff would have completed the new improved training. The CFO said that for each area identified in the report the action plan would give detailed plan including a timeline.

Cllr Jackson felt that Officers and Members should receive annual equalities training. The ACFO (SDS) said that diversity, equality and inclusion training would be delivered throughout the organisation in the next year. He reported that Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) had been invited to take part. Cllr Jackson felt it was hypocritical of the Fire Authority Members to not undertake equalities training when it was required of staff.

Cllr Scott said that face-to-face training rather than online training would be best. The CFO agreed, saying that the programme would be workshop based. He was conscious that there was much to achieve.

Cllr Shelford noted that there had been a number of inspections in a relatively short period of time and that a number of points had been duplicated across the findings of the various inspections. The CFO agreed, the improvement journey was well underway and it would be necessary to cross-map the results of the inspections to ensure that all aspects were covered and duplication removed. Cllr Shelford said that he had confidence that this would be achieved.

Cllr Shelford then considered the part of the HMICFRS report which referred to the wellbeing and mental health of staff. He felt that it would be helpful if the Fire Authority employed its own physiotherapist and mental health nurse, as part of the staff, to assist in the promotion of staff wellbeing. He said that people working within the organisation would be more approachable and a better-used resource than the outsourced healthcare options which were currently available.

The ACFO (SDS) reported that the Fire Authority had just released an advertisement to recruit a Health and Well-Being Advisor. Cllr Jackson commented that there had been a mental health nurse on the staff in the past, but this role had been removed as a result of austerity and was pleased this role was being reintroduced. The CFO replied that the health and wellbeing of staff was a priority.

Cllr Hale referred to the visit with SARI as he was concerned that the Christian faith was not considered in the tour. The Chair said that he had spoken to SARI and would report to Cllr Hale after the meeting.

Cllr Butters said that he was looking forward to the cultural awareness visit he would be undertaking on the day after the meeting, along with other Members of the Fire Authority. He hoped that other Members would be able to attend future events. The ACFO (SDS) confirmed that five Members were signed up for the visit on the next day.

Cllr Johnson stated that culture and diversity involved more than religion, and reflected the whole person. She felt that the organisation needed to look after its people and to look like its people too. Cllr Jackson responded that recent recruits were more reflective of the population, however there had been little recruitment for many years and this had held back efforts to improve diversity.

The ACFO (SDS) reported that a further selection event was taking place simultaneously with the Fire Authority meeting. This would involve 54 candidates who were competing for 16 firefighter posts. The applicants in this

cohort had been 22% female and 11% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and this ratio had remained relatively constant at all stages of the process. The ACFO (SDS) reported that there had not been a huge increase in applicants in this year, however he felt that the quality of applicants had been better. In turn this would help deliver improved diversity at the end of the process. It was anticipated that the next recruit school would be towards the end of 2020 or in early in 2021.

Cllr Lake noted that the report (on page 141 of the agenda pack) stated that cultural change should be complete by 31 March 2019. The CFO confirmed that this was the date by which detailed plans would be presented to HMICFRS with regard to the implementation of improvements identified in the cultural review. Cllr Lake said that the Employment Committee could refer cases to the Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equalities Committee.

Cllr Davis asked that atheists were also considered when cultural matters were being considered. He agreed with Cllr Johnson that culture was often more important than religion.

Cllr Jackson said that he was keen to get other disadvantaged groups to apply for jobs within the fire service. He stated that residents of deprived areas often do not look for employment with the Fire Authority. The ACFO (SDS) agreed and said that it was hoped that apprenticeships which would be offered in the future may provide additional routes for recruiting staff from different parts of the community into the Fire Authority.

Cllr Hale stated that more recently he had noted more diversity amongst new firefighters. The CFO replied that the Fire Authority was working very hard to improve the diversity in the organisation, and to promote the Fire Authority as the employer of choice amongst young people in the full range of roles. He reported that there was a Service Level Agreement with SARI. He wanted to ensure that each cohort coming into the Fire Authority was representative of the people of Avon and he felt this this was improving. The CFO reported that managers and staff were learning all the time how to improve the situation.

Cllr Butters asked how diversity was being improved amongst on-call staff. The ACFO (SD) replied that there were three training schools each year for on-call firefighters. Recruits must live within five minutes from the relevant on-call fire station and two contracts are offered - 120 hours cover each week and 84 hours cover each week. It was acknowledged that these hours are limiting for some potential applicants and the Fire Authority is currently exploring offering school-hours on-call contracts which would attract additional candidates and also help meet staffing issues which often caused fire appliances to be off-the-run.

Cllr Wilton was disappointed with the quality of the HMICFRS report, he felt that it was very tick-box and top down. There seemed to be no acknowledgement that cultural change, which would ultimately pay dividends, was very hard to deliver and could not be delivered in a few weeks. Cllr Wilton reported that he had enjoyed a tour of a Sikh Temple in the past and regretted the attitudes of some people towards inclusivity. Cllr Wilton noted that culturally diverse regions are typically much more tolerant and that human beings tend to fear the unknown. He recommended that all cultural

training should avoid a top-down approach and encouraged the Fire Authority to encourage the subtle promotion of mutual understanding.

Cllr Johnson said that individuals should not have to take responsibility for explaining what it means to be part of a group they belonged to, noting that individuals experiences may be very different. Cllr Johnson said that cultural change needed to come from the top down and also from the bottom up, but said she was nervous about people from particular groups being put in the spotlight. She noted that it was the responsibility of the Fire Authority to make space to listen to people and encourage sharing of experiences.

Cllr Hale recalled that early black police officers had become fed up with being selected on a tokenistic basis to attend specific events due to their race.

Cllr Garner was not happy with the criticism of the succession plan. He stated that every job was available when advertised. The HMICFRS report was a nonsense in this regard because the days of succession plans, when no-one moved employer, were in the past. He felt that there were likely to be other nonsenses in the report.

Cllr Lake stated that culture covers how everyone interacts, including white people with each other.

RESOLVED to note the report.

81. FORWARD PLAN 2018/19

Cllr Scott noted that after elections in early May, three of the four Local Authorities (LAs) of the Fire Authority were likely to be sending new Members to the Fire Authority. He also commented that long-served Members with more than eight years' service would have to leave the Fire Authority at the same time. He therefore asked that the new constitution should be agreed by the new Fire Authority Members in the new Municipal Year and not by the current group of Members.

The Chair said that the next meeting of the Constitution Working Group would consider this point and report back to the Fire Authority meeting in March.

RESOLVED unanimously to approve the revised Forward Plan 2018/19.

82. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Tuesday 26 March 2019 at 10.30 am (The Space, Keynsham).

83. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following items of business on the grounds that they contained exempt information pursuant to Schedule 12A, Part I of the Local Government Act 1972 and that in accordance with Schedule 12A, Part II, paragraph 10 of the Local Government Act 1972 the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

84. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF AVON FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON 20 DECEMBER 2018

RESOLVED that the confidential minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Fire Authority held on 20 December 2018 should be signed by the Chair as an accurate record of the meeting.

85. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2019

RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Employment Committee held on 8 November 2018.

86. CONFIDENTIAL NOTES OF THE INQUORATE ORDINARY MEETING OF THE AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2018

RESOLVED to note the confidential notes of the inquorate Audit, Governance and Ethics Committee held on 7 December 2018.

87. PREMISES CLEANING AND WASHROOM SERVICES – AWARD OF CONTRACT

The ACFO (SD) and the Supplies and Facilities Officer presented the report to Members.

It was proposed by Cllr Hale and seconded by Cllr Shelford that the recommendation in the report should be approved.

RESOLVED unanimously to approve the award of contract for the provision of the premises cleaning and washroom services to Tenon FM.

88. AUDITORS’ DUTIES AND LIABILITIES – NEXT STEPS

The Chair confirmed that a letter to Grant Thornton, the former auditor of the Fire Authority, had been sent as agreed.

Meeting closed at 1.30 pm.

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Chair