

**GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL
MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2022 AT THE
BOARDROOM, GMCA OFFICES**

PRESENT:

Councillor Janet Emsley	Rochdale Council (Chair)
Councillor Rabnawaz Akbar	Manchester City Council
Councillor Russell Bernstein	Bury Council
Councillor Dylan Butt	Trafford Council
Councillor Richard Gold	Bury Council
Councillor Rabiya Jiva	Bolton Council
Councillor David Lancaster	Salford Council
Councillor Tom McGee	Stockport Council
Councillor Tom Morrison	Stockport Council
Councillor Adele Warren	Bolton Council
Councillor Graham Whitham	Trafford Council
Councillor Steve Williams	Oldham Council (Vice-Chair)
Majid Hussain	Independent Member

Also in attendance: Dame Beverley Hughes, GM Deputy Mayor

Officers Present:

Clare Monaghan	Director, Police, Crime, Criminal Justice and Fire, GMCA
CFO Dave Russel	GMFRS
Jeanette Staley	Head of Community Safety, Resilience & Neighbourhoods, Salford CC
Lee Teasdale	Senior Governance & Scrutiny Officer, Governance and Scrutiny, GMCA
Gwynne Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer, GMCA
Steve Wilson	Treasurer, GMCA

PFCP/16/22 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Alison Gwynne, Councillor Kevin Anderson, Councillor Amanda Peers and Councillor Mudasir Dean.

Councillor Tom McGee attended the meeting as Stockport Council's nominated substitute. Councillor Adele Warren attended as Bolton Council's nominated substitute.

PFCP/17/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

**PFCP/18/22 GREATER MANCHESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2022/23**

The Chair invited Baroness Beverly Hughes (Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester) to introduce the report, which informed Panel members of the proposed budget for Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) for 2022/23 and the updated medium term financial plan (MTFP). The precept proposals would form part of the Mayoral general budget and the precept proposals report due to be presented to the GMCA on 11th February 2022.

The Panel were advised that the provisional Local Government Settlement had been published in December 2021 and the MTFP had been updated based on this. As part of the Spending Review in December 2021, the Chancellor announced a one-year settlement as part of the three-year government spending review. For Fire & Rescue Services this would cover the following:

- A 4.7% increase in core spending power.
- A £24m share of an £822m Services Grant
- Flexibility on council tax precept for the lowest quartile Fire Services of £5 for a one-year period.
- Pension Grant to be paid at current rate.

As part of the above, GM had received a one-off service grant of £2.2m. Whilst this could not be factored into subsequent years, it had made a considerable difference in terms of balancing the budget. This was helpful in the short-term but was a concern in regard to medium term planning.

The Programme for Change was highlighted. Whilst the Programme had completed, there was still a focus upon continued improvement and efficiencies. As such, a savings target of £1.5m had been put forward across two financial years.

It was advised that a process was ongoing with regard to embedding the capability to cope with marauding terrorist attacks. The Fire Brigades Union had balloted on this, the outcome of which was not yet known. If successful, £1.3m had been earmarked in the budget to allow for that capability.

In terms of overall training. A full-scale review of the Training Needs Assessment, and the capacity to deliver and associated external costs had recently been undertaken. This had been costed and raised a budget pressure of £751,000.

In terms of capital funding. No funding was provided by government for this, so provision had to be made from the revenue budget. The Deputy Mayor had approved phase 1 of a long-term Estates Strategy for the refurbishment and modernisation of the GMFRS estate. Phase 1 would address the most pressing issues within the estate, this included works underway at the Bury Training and Safety Centre.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Mayor for the introduction and invited the GMCA Treasurer to provide further detail.

The proposed precept increase was for £5 per year in Band D properties, and £3 per year in Band A properties (which made up 47% of GM properties).

In addition to the works highlighted by the deputy mayor, this would also take into account the budget pressures arising due to pay awards for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

It was confirmed that the budget did not propose any changes in the role of firefighters, or the number of firefighters, stations or pumps.

Comments and Questions

- Members queried if there was an indication of how increased costs would be covered in future years if the Services Grant was a one-off. It was advised that the understanding was funding would be provided to the Home Office in future, and there would be a need to monitor how that developed as a funding stream in 2023/24. Continued national lobbying on certainty around this took place. If the funding did not materialise, there would be a need to provide cover through either further efficiencies or a review of the precept.
- Members sought clarity on the capital financing charges. Noting that another £30m of capital spend was planned for up to 2027/28 and pointing out that the era of low interest rates was ending. It was advised that the revenue budget reflected the increased revenue cost of capital and was factored into the programme with an assumption of external borrowing. The budget included the latest forecasts for interest rates. It was agreed that the GMCA Treasurer would feedback further detail on the figures post 2024/25.
- Members referenced the Programme for Change and asked for confirmation around the cost of implementation. It was advised that there had been costs related to this in previous years via reserves, but investment was not required in 2022/23. This historic information would be fed back.
- Members sought further clarity around capability to respond to a marauding attack requiring the agreement of the Fire Brigades Union. CFO Dave Russel explained that GMFRS did not have this capability at the time of his appointment, and work had taken place to provide this across a small number of stations in GM. However, this was a short-term position, and work had been taking place with the Fire Brigades Union to negotiate and agree a way forward that would establish a full ability to respond to any attack across the region, as there was disagreement as to whether this activity was within the role of a regular firefighter. Both GM and the London Fire Brigade had been working in tandem to advance this, and a proposal had been made that GM firefighters receive a skills-based payment supplement of 2% to be trained to

respond to a marauding terrorist attack. It was hoped that this would be confirmed by the ballot and that training could commence from 1st April 2022.

- Members asked if government contributions to the pension fund were expected to be ongoing. It was advised that this was expected to be rolled into baseline funding from next year onwards.
- Members referenced the McCloud/Sargeant Remedy and asked if this had implications in terms of retrospective financial judgements. It was advised that it was hard to predict future judgements on this front, as this was an area that was subject to ongoing potential impacts from individual case law.
- Members welcomed the commitment to training and development, but asked for further detail on transformation, integration and prevention. There was an increased focus on boroughs working together across GM, and delivering in a different way – was this being factored in? The Deputy Mayor advised that arising from the Fire Plan were four detailed strategies that would sit underneath. The fourth of these was focussed on integrated place-based working, that it was planned that all GM services would move towards. There was enormous latent potential in the Fire Service to support this, and there had already been some good practice seen on this front. CFO Russel confirmed that blue light collaboration was a key priority.
- Panel Members stated that they would welcome comparators with other authorities beyond GM, in terms of monitoring good performance and the development of best practice. It was agreed that such information would be woven into future reports where appropriate.
- Members asked if there was confidence that the savings target would be delivered, and if there were contingencies in place if not. It was advised that there was a high level of confidence that the savings would be delivered. If they were not able to be covered, in the short-term it would require the use of

reserves, in the longer term it would require a further review of savings and/or the precept.

- Members expressed their admiration that GM had managed to maintain 41 fire stations throughout the region in the face of significant austerity. However, there was a concern that a reduction in the now 50 pumps could be seen in future. CFO Russel advised that the maintaining of the existing 50 pumps was important, as the city region was increasing exponentially and pressures upon the service would only increase going forward.
- Members referenced pay awards and wished it to be noted that despite the pay increases, given the current state of inflation, this still made for a real terms pay cut. It was therefore imperative that all public sector employers ensure their staff maintain financial wellbeing and are able to access support and financial advice where needed.

The Chair thanked the Panel for their contributions, highlighted the committee recommendations and drew the item to a close.

RESOLVED/-

1. That the overall budget proposed for GMFRS be noted by the Panel.
2. That the use of reserves to support the revenue and capital budgets be noted by the Panel.
3. That the proposed fire service capital programme and proposals for funding be noted by the Panel.
4. That the medium-term financial position for GMFRS covered by the Mayoral precept be noted by the Panel.
5. That the GMCA Treasurer feed back information to members providing further detail on capital financing post 2024/25 and historic implementation costs of the Programme for Change.
6. That comparator information with other Fire Authorities be incorporated into future GMFRS reports where appropriate.