

Tyne Port Health Authority Minutes of the Meeting of the Joint Board

At the meeting of the Joint Board of the Tyne Port Health Authority duly convened and held on Tuesday 2nd February 2016 at 10am in Quadrant (East), The Silverlink North, Cobalt Business Park, North Tyneside at which a quorum of Members were present, that is to say:-

Present:

North Tyneside Council:	Councillor B Burdis (Chair) Councillor T Mulvenna
Newcastle City Council:	Councillor G Bell
South Tyneside Council:	Councillor Ken Stephenson Councillor F Cunningham Councillor A Walsh

Officers in Attendance:

Stephen Taggart, Chief Port Health Officer
Colin MacDonald, Clerk to the Authority
Richard Gray, Senior Finance Officer, North Tyneside Council
Frances McClen, North Tyneside Council
Paul Sanderson Read, North Tyneside Council
David Jamieson, South Tyneside Council

JB01/02/2016 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Ronan, Gateshead Council.

The Chair announced to the Joint Board that this would be Chief Port Health Officer Steve Taggart's last meeting as he was due to leave the host council at the end of February. On behalf of the Joint Board the Chair thanked Mr Taggart for his contribution to the Authority over the years and wished him well for the future.

JB02/02/2016 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

JB03/02/2016 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 October 2015 were circulated.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2015 be confirmed.

JB04/02/2016 Operational Summary 1 September 2015 – 31 December 2015

The Chief Port Health Officer presented the report. It was highlighted to Members that shipping traffic had reduced but food imports had largely remained stable in comparison to the same period the previous year and this was reflected in activity for the period.

It was reported that the number of Ship Sanitation Control Certificates was significantly down over the same period the previous year but it was explained that there can be unexplained peaks and troughs. The total number of certificates issued for 2015 was roughly in line with expectations.

The officer explained that a number of issues were recorded during the period relating to inadequate ship provisions. A number of vessels were found to have inadequate fresh food to last until the next port of call and were required to take on board extra provisions at the port. No matters required referral to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency or the next port of call for follow up action.

Sampling activity of water supplies from ships and hydrants revealed a number of unsatisfactory results during the period but all re-samples were satisfactory and no further action was required. There were no incidents of infectious disease to report.

During the period results of sampling organic tea found traces of pesticide and whilst the levels were not deemed to be harmful, members were informed that the tea cannot be marketed as organic with any traces of pesticide. The consignment is detained awaiting a decision by the importer to either market the tea as non-organic, or possibly to re-export.

Members were informed of a visit from the European Union Food & Veterinary Office to the fish market and two processing establishments in North Shields in December as part of a week long fact finding mission in the UK to evaluate the application and enforcement of regulations relating to the traceability and labelling of fishery products.

Environmental Health Officers from North Tyneside Council representing both the Council and the Tyne Port Health Authority accompanied the officials on the visits and were questioned in depth on policies and procedures for carrying out inspections of premises and fishery products from first landing to retail sale. Representatives from the Food Standard Agency and Marine Management Agency were also in attendance.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

JB05/02/2016 Budget for 2015-2016

Richard Gray, representing the Responsible Financial Officer for the Authority presented the report and took Members through the proposals for 2016/17, and the key changes from the previous year's budget as outlined.

The key movements noted were:

- Pension provision has been reduced due to additional former employees having deceased.
- The port & river inspection budget has been reinstated for 2016/17 to meet the bi-annual constitutional commitment.
- The support services budget is included as an estimated allocation. Support service allocations have not been completed by the host Authority however these will either remain unchanged or will reduce.
- Since the strategic partnering arrangements with Capita commenced on 1 November 2012 salary budgets and car mileage are include within the Tyne Port Health Authority budget as a third party payment.
- The Audit fee has been reduced in line with current expenditure levels.

The balances of the Authority budget are held in reserve. The forecast balance held in reserve as at 31 March 2016 is forecast to be £121,768. The draft budget for 2016/17 is financed using a contribution from reserve of £21,768 in line with the plan to reduce the reserve to £100,000 by the end of financial year 2016/17 which is considered to be a reasonable level given the profile of the budget.

The draft budget for 2016/17 would result in no increase in the precepts paid by the riparian authorities.

Resolved: that (1) the draft budget as presented be approved including the contributions for the financial year 2016/17 from the four riparian authorities, and (2) the Responsible Financial Officer be authorised to call for payment of the contributions.

JB06/02/2016 Schedule of Fees and Charges for 2016-17

The Chief Port Health Officer presented the report. The Officer explained to members the scope of statutory and non-statutory duties that the Authority undertook and the approach to recovering certain costs.

In relation to ship sanitation charges, it was explained that the Association of Port Health Authorities (APHA) sets a scale of fees that it recommends to its members and in line with previous years, the Authority was being recommended to adopt the APHA scale of fees. The officer explained that the recommended fees for 2016/17 had not been published at the time the report was circulated, but had just been received from APHA prior to the meeting. The revised fees were circulated for information but members were advised that the recommendation in the report would allow the Chief Port Health Officer to revise the fees on 1 April under delegated powers.

In relation to fees for verification and countersigning of Common Entry Documents (CEDs), it was explained that DEFRA had produced 'harmonised charges' which are periodically reviewed. The Authority was being recommended to adopt the DEFRA harmonised charges for CEDs and to delegate authority to the Chief Port Health Officer to vary CED charges in line with any variation in harmonised charges published by DEFRA. There had been no announcement from DEFRA of any intention to revise charges.

It was proposed that a nominal increase in the hourly rate used to calculate the remaining fees and charges be approved to take account of recent increases in officer salary and ancillary costs. Members were informed that nominal salary increases in 2014/15 had not been passed on with an increase in charges that year, so the increase proposed for 2016/17 was to take account of the last two years salary increases.

Resolved to (1) approve the Schedule of Fees and Charges in Appendix 1 and (2) delegate authority to the Chief Port Health Officer to vary any of the fees and charges in line with any recommendations subsequently made by the Association of Port Health Authorities or changes to DEFRA harmonised charges.

Action: Chief Port Health Officer

JB07/02/2016 Reorganisation and New Appointments to the Authority

The Clerk presented the report and explained that the Authority appoints a number of key officers, including the position of Chief Port Health Officer, at its annual general meeting in June each year.

Members were informed that the host authority is currently redefining, reshaping and redesigning how it delivers services and their outcomes through a new Target Operating Model. As part of this programme its Public Protection services, which delivers the Port Health function, is undergoing change. As part of these changes, the current Chief Port Health Officer, Stephen Taggart, Principal Environmental Health Officer is leaving the host authority in February 2016 and therefore it is necessary to appoint a successor.

Other impacts of the host authority changes are that some other staff currently working within Port Health will be given redefined roles. Others will be given port health responsibilities for the first time and this will require the authorisation of those additional staff. The overall impact of the changes will be positive. The host authority will ensure the same level of resource is maintained within port health and the changes will lead to more staff maintaining competences in port health work which provides added resilience. The new appointments can be made by the Chief Port Health Officer under delegated powers.

On 9 February 1993, the Joint Board resolved that the most senior Environmental Health Officer (EHO) of the host authority should be appointed Chief Port Health Officer. Under the new structure at North Tyneside Council, the most senior EHO will be Frances McClen, Environmental Health Group Leader.

Resolved:

- a) That the organisational changes to the host authority including the measures being taken to ensure continuity of the level of resource and service committed to the Tyne Port Health Authority be noted; and
- b) To appoint Frances McClen, Environmental Health Group Leader from North Tyneside Council to act as Chief Port Health Officer.

JB08/02/2016 Association of Port Health Authorities Annual Conference

The Chief Port Health Officer gave an update following the resolution at the previous meeting of the Joint Board that a report be presented to this meeting to consider a request from APHA for the Authority to host the APHA Annual Conference in 2017.

Members were informed that since that decision, there had been a meeting of the APHA Executive when the future of APHA conferences was discussed. The Executive recognised that few other professional bodies still held annual conferences running over a number of days and that shorter formats were now the norm. The next conference was scheduled for September 2016 but APHA had recently announced that this years conference would be cancelled. Cllr Bell informed the meeting that he had attended a recent APHA Executive meeting and that no firm decisions about the future of the conference programme had been decided.

PHA had previously sought confirmation from Tyne Port Health Authority that it would be willing to host the 2017 conference, after which a formal nomination process would have ensued. In light of the recent APHA announcement and no firm plans around conference for the future, members were told that there was no longer a need to consider hosting conference at this time.

Members were asked to note the developments and requested that officers report back at the appropriate time when the future of the APHA conference programme has been decided.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

JB09/02/2016: Draft Service Plan for 2016

The Chief Port Health Officer presented the report and explained that it was good practice for the Authority to have in place an Annual Service Plan that was considered and approved by the Joint Board. This was acknowledged as an important control measure in the Authority's approved Risk Register to ensure that failure of the Authority to discharge statutory functions does not occur.

The Officer led members through the service plan and highlighted progress in 2015 together with key service developments and challenges for 2016 as outlined.

The ship inspection programme was explained and it was pointed out that officers continue to use a risk based approach to ship inspection. It was reported that the numbers of ship inspections in 2015 were slightly down on the previous year but this was commensurate with a downturn in ship arrivals at the port over the year.

Members were informed that activity levels on Imported Food Control were stable in 2015 and no significant changes were anticipated in 2016 as most of the activity centres around longstanding contracts.

Performance targets were explained. Response times are used rather than inspection targets due to the unpredictable nature of shipping and it was reported that all targets were achieved in 2015.

It was explained that Port of Tyne recently reported that a combination of Government energy policy and other external factors created uncertainty for power generation using wood pellet, coal and offshore wind. During 2015 this led to delays in renewable energy investment and significant reductions in the level of coal imports handled by the port. This has partly accounted for the downturn in shipping arrivals at the port in 2015 with the outlook for 2016 described by Port of Tyne as challenging. Despite this, work is still on track to complete the Riverside Quay extension in early 2016.

The reduced activity at the port is expected to have a marginal impact on the Authority in that income from Ship Sanitation Inspections may fall in 2016. Tea and other food imports are expected to be largely unaffected so imported food activity should remain stable.

In 2015, the Authority dealt with two Norovirus incidents on cruise ships. In 2016, a record number of cruise ships are scheduled to visit the port and it has also been announced that Fred Olsens 'Balmoral' will use Port of Tyne as it's home port for the 2016 season. This potentially may lead to increased activity dealing with cruise ships.

Members were informed of further progress made during the year to improve IT systems, and the use of technology to support officers. Portable devices had been purchased to enable officers to electronically record and instantly issue Ship Sanitation certification on board vessels.

The intention is to introduce further improvements in 2016 to allow real time electronic recording of all activities on site. Progress will be dependant on software development by two third party companies and the process has been slow to date due to some technical challenges. The Authority is believed to be one of the first port health authorities in the UK to introduce the use of mobile devices albeit on a limited basis at present.

Re-organisation within the host authority at the beginning of 2016 has resulted in a number of staffing changes. The impact of these changes on the Authority has been minimal due to a sufficient period of transition allowing effective handover of responsibilities. New structures to be introduced in the host authority will build on recent work to improve the resilience of the Authority by involving more officers in the carrying out of port health duties.

Resolved: that the Service Plan be approved.

JB010/02/2016 Any Other Business

Cllr Cunningham noted that the Port of Tyne are in the process of introducing a voluntary levy on vessels which will be held by the Merchant Navy Welfare Board. Organisations will be able to apply for grants and such an initiative was to be commended.

The Clerk highlighted that it the Chief Executive of the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (NIFCA) has agreed to attend the next Joint Board meeting in June to speak about his organisation's work.

The Board noted that the next meeting of the Authority was on the 7 June 2016. Members were also asked to think about what they might want to see as part of the bi-annual inspection of the port and river scheduled for September 2016.