

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2021**

Present: Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, D Franks, J Gambold, M Headley, S Khurshid, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

DCFO A Hopkinson, ACO G Chambers, T/ACFO A Peckham, AC D Cook, AC I McLaren, Mr J Atkinson, Ms S Fecondi, Ms S Green and Mr P Hughes

20-21/FRA/110 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P Duckett. The Chief Fire Officer was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

20-21/FRA/111 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

20-21/FRA/112 Communications

Duke of Edinburgh's Memorial Service

The Chair reported that he and the Chief Fire Officer had represented the Service at a service in memory of the late Duke of Edinburgh.

Invitation to meet new Director of Fire

The Chair advised that, as previously reported, he had been invited to meet the new Director of Fire & Resilience at the Home Office, Rachel Atkinson. This meeting had been postponed until after the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be held on 6 May 2021.

Fire Commission Meeting

The Chair, Councillor Atkins and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had attended the recent meeting of the Fire Commission. The main areas of discussion related to governance around the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner, with the view being expressed that it should not be mandated that the Commissioner be given responsibility for the governance of fire and rescue services where this was not supported locally.

It was noted that a White Paper on Police and Crime Commissioners was expected imminently.

Recognition of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service by the Home Office

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, following the Home Office visit to the Service in 2020 to discuss its collaborative work with the Ambulance Service, the Service continued to build on and develop this relationship and had recently hosted a virtual session for members of Home Office staff providing an induction to the fire service and this had been both well attended and well received. It was hoped that this would become a regular event.

The session had been recorded and would be shared with Members at an upcoming Member Development Day.

Retirement of the Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer Andy Peckham

The Chair thanked the Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer for his many years of exceptional service to the local communities of Bedfordshire, having joined the Service in 1990 as a fire fighter and moved up the ranks to his current position of Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer from January 2020.

20-21/FRA/113 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2021 be confirmed as a true record.

20-21/FRA/114 Public Participation

Members noted that no questions had been received in accordance with the public participation scheme approved at the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 5 April 2000 (Minute 99/fa/94 refers).

It was noted that a member of staff, Mark Woodworth, was present as an observer but had not intended to put any questions to the Authority.

20-21/FRA/115 Executive Committee meeting 15 April 2021

The Chair introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15 April 2021. The main item of discussion at the meeting had been succession planning.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided an update following the approval of a single national recruitment process for the posts of Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer by the Executive Committee. An advertisement for the posts would be published on 7 May 2021, with the expectation that the successful candidates would be presented for ratification to those posts at the meeting of the Authority on 15 July 2021.

In the interim period, it was intended to offer the post of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer as a secondment opportunity, and a number of expressions of interest had already been received. It was hoped that an offer of secondment would be made during the following week, so that an individual would be in place prior to the retirement of the T/ACFO on 31 May 2021.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15 April 2021 be received.

20-21/FRA/116 Virtual Meetings after 6 May 2021

Mr J Atkinson, the Secretary and Monitoring Officer, provided an update on virtual meetings being held after 6 May 2021. The High Court case considering whether existing legislation allowed for the continuation of virtual meetings following this date had been dismissed and therefore, from 7 May 2021, all public meetings of the Authority would have to be held in person.

Members of the Authority expressed their disappointment in the outcome of the case for a number of reasons, not least the public health implications, the higher level of engagement from Members and members of the public in the democratic process during the period in which virtual meetings were held and the difficulty of identifying venues that would be COVID compliant, given the space and ventilation requirements. Many Members also expressed the view that they would not feel safe attending meetings in person and it was suggested that the forthcoming Annual General Meeting be postponed until late June 2021, when the position would be clearer.

Members supported the continuation of Member Development Days and other informal events virtually.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update be received.
2. That the Secretary and Monitoring Officer and the Democratic and Regulatory Services Supervisor identify a suitable date at the end of June on which to hold a postponed Annual General Meeting.

20-21/FRA/117 Fire Prevention Statistics - National Benchmarking Comparison

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer submitted his report which presented a comparative analysis of national prevention statistics, as published by the Home Office, against local Service performance for the period up to the end of March 2020. This was the first in a series of reports which would provide Members with greater insight into the Service's performance when compared to other fire and rescue services and demonstrated the Service's improved use of data and analytics to evidence the impact of Service actions and interventions. It was important that the work undertaken by the Service was underpinned by data as the improvement shown would motivate and focus staff.

Members were advised that the Service's comparator authorities were shown in green, with those in the Eastern region shown as yellow.

It was estimated that 9% of households did not have a working smoking alarm and that 25% of dwelling fires and 26% of fire fatalities took place in properties without a working smoke alarm. The likelihood of dying in a fire increased with age, with those aged 80 and over much more likely to die in fire. Men were twice as likely to be victim to fatal fires as women. Smoking was the biggest ignition category.

There was a low rate of non-fatal injuries in Bedfordshire. This may be as a result of the increase in Safe and Well visits and associated prevention work. The statistics showed that the number of accidental dwelling fires had decreased as the number of Safe and Well visits increased. The Service had moved from 39th to 24th in the league table in terms of Safe and Well visits delivered and from 5th to 9th highest for accidental dwelling fires.

Members commented on the leaflets made available to individuals attending vaccination centres that were attended by many individuals from vulnerable groups. It was suggested that these leaflets or other information be provided to Members so that they could be distributed locally through parish and town newsletters and using their other extensive contacts.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he would ask the Head of the Prevention Team to contact all Members to discuss how fire safety information could be more widely distributed.

In response to a question about accidental dwelling fires, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the majority were cooking related incidents and mainly involved older individuals. This vulnerable group was often visited by the Service's Falls Team, and was supported by Safe and Well visits and hot strikes being undertaken in the local area.

The Service was working with local Safeguarding Teams to enable them to spot key words and phrases that should result in a referral to the Service being made. It was anticipated that referrals should increase as the training was rolled out, with thousands of referrals expected during the next year.

Members were advised that, as part of the inspection process, the Home Office had already requested the latest data return, as this would inform the judgement.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

20-21/FRA/118 Annual Update of Programmes and Projects

Mr P Hughes, the Head of ICT and Programmes, presented his report detailing the progress and status of the Service Strategic Programme and Projects during the 2020/21 reporting year. Of a total of 31 corporate projects, 24 were rated Green, 2 were rated Amber and five had been completed during 2020/21. The programmes reporting as Amber were subject to exception reports that were attached as an appendix to the report.

The progress of projects was monitored by the Corporate Programme Board, chaired by the Assistant Chief Officer. The Manager of the Programme Office provided regular updates to the Board and this could result in certain projects being called in or downgraded if evidence of sufficient progress could not be demonstrated.

The Head of ICT and Programmes highlighted a number of the programmes that were demonstrating good levels of progress, including the Replacement Mobilising System. The Service was the first in the region to go on to the Emergency Services Network, which was the replacement for Airwave. The project had a dedicated project manager and various gateways would have to be reached before the project was signed off for go live in the autumn, with a significant amount of testing being undertaken.

The Safe and Well online referral form had been introduced for use from July 2020. This enabled multiple ways for individuals to be referred to the Service, including self-referral. The form was also available on Service tablets and mobile phones so that paperless working could be achieved.

Other successes included the implementation of Office 365 and the rollout of Digital Champions and the roll out of Mobile Data Terminals to all appliances.

Members acknowledged the strong performance against the strategic projects. The Head of ICT and Programmes assured Members that all projects were assessed on budget, quality and time and as such, although the RAG ratings were an accurate reflection of performance at this point in time, ratings could and did change if progress could not be evidenced.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on Strategic Programmes and Projects over 2020/21 be acknowledged.

20-21/FRA/119 Community Risk Management Plan (2021/22 Action Plan)

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the final publication version of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) covering the period 2019-2023, refreshed for 2021/22.

This was supported by the Authority, with Members recognising the work undertaken to improve the safety of the diverse communities residing in Bedfordshire.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the 2019-2023 Community Risk Management Plan be noted.

20-21/FRA/120 Firefighters Pension Scheme – Remedy/Immediate Detriment

The Assistant Chief Officer introduced the report which set out the options available to the Service regarding those fire fighters who were due to be transitioned to the 2015 scheme, and those fire fighters who were due for retirement before the new pension regulations are implemented.

Members were advised that the two main issues for consideration were whether to apply tapering from the legacy scheme to the 2015 scheme and whether to apply immediate detriment.

It was noted that this issue had been flagged as a Contingent Liability in the Authority's Statement of Accounts since 2015/16 and included as part of the Risk/Uncertainties in the Authority's annual budget setting papers since 2016/17.

In relation to the application of immediate detriment, the Immediate Detriment Guidance Note issued by the Home Office did not have legal status and reliance on it would not provide the Authority with any legal protection or indemnify it against any claim or costs arising from acting on the guidance, therefore it was being recommended to the Authority that this not be applied. Additional guidance was being sought and a member of the HR Team attended fortnightly LGA meetings at which any updates would be provided. The next meeting was due to be held on 6 May 2021 and a further update was awaited.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that this was a fast-moving situation and that Members would be kept advised as additional guidance and/or legislation was issued.

The view was expressed that it was important for the Authority to adopt a consistent approach so that none of the individuals accessing their pensions through these schemes was penalised. Concern was expressed that the first recommendation was in contravention of Home Office guidance and that this should not be supported.

A lengthy discussion was held about the fairness or otherwise of not transitioning individuals to the 2015 scheme, with Members requesting additional information, acknowledging that this issue may be discussed further at the LGA meeting on 6 May 2021.

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that a decision was required as the first of the affected individuals would be due to taper within the next month.

Ms S Green added that the current information available did not clarify why tapering should be applied if this was to the disadvantage of the individuals concerned. The recommendation proposed was to offer individuals the option to taper if they would benefit by doing so, and if not, for them to remain in the legacy scheme. She also commented that this would be the first individual out of nearly 200 individuals affected not to be transitioned if the Authority was minded not to accept the recommendation.

Members requested that a recorded vote be taken for the purposes of the Minutes. The recommendations were put to the meeting and the votes recorded thereon were as follows:

For Recommendation 1 (2)	Councillors D McVicar and I Shingler
Against Recommendation 1 (6)	Councillors C Atkins, K Choudhry, D Franks, S Khurshid, M Headley and Y Waheed
Abstained (3)	Councillors R Berry, J Chatterley and J Gambold
For Recommendation 2 (11)	Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley, K Choudhry, D Franks, J Gambold, S Khurshid, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed
For Recommendation 3 (11)	Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley, K Choudhry, D Franks, J Gambold, M Headley, S Khurshid, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

As a result of recommendation 1 being rejected, it was agreed that this would be referred to the Executive Committee for further discussion, with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer being given delegated authority to take a decision following consultation with the Chair, the Executive Committee and the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the recommendation that all fire fighters who are currently taper protected in their legacy scheme (FPS 1992 or NFPS 2006) and are due to be transitioned to the 2015 scheme, shall remain in their legacy scheme and are not transitioned on their due date to the 2015 scheme, unless an individual specifically requests to be transitioned due to certain benefits, be referred to the Executive Committee for further discussion, with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (as CFO Designate) being given delegated authority to take a decision following consultation with the Chair, the Executive Committee and the Chair of the Audit and Standards committee.
2. That it be agreed to not apply the interim Home Office Immediate Detriment Guidance Note, and not revert Firefighters into their legacy scheme, until the pension legislation has been implemented with the necessary detail to mitigate the risk of claims and/or sufficient further legal advice or HMT guidance is made available.

3. That support be given to further work being undertaken by officers, in conjunction with the Authority's Pension Administrator, to ensure that the Authority provides as much support as possible to employees affected by this situation.

20-21/FRA/121 HMICFRS State of Fire & Rescue 2020 Report

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced a report setting out the key findings from the report by Sir Thomas Winsor: State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue services in England 2020. The 2020 report provided an update on the six national recommendations from 2019 and discussed the key findings from the COVID inspections and other inspection activity. It also set out their plans for the Round 2 inspections.

Issues of note included improving equality, diversity and inclusion in the fire and rescue service, which had been recognised as a key priority of the Service, the recruitment and retention of on-call fire fighters, building safety resulting from the Grenfell Tower inquiry and resulting recommendations and prevention work.

Members were advised that a significant amount of work had been undertaken in relation to building safety in Bedfordshire and that the Service continued to work with the owners of the small number of high rise properties with ACM cladding.

As discussed earlier in the meeting, the Service's prevention activity was starting to have a very positive impact on the reduction in accidental dwelling fires.

In response to a comment from the Chair, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the Home Office had recently announced that an additional £40 million was being made available to fire and rescue services to fund protection work. Initial indications were that each service would receive a minimum of £80,000, but it would be difficult to increase headcount with one-year grant funding. Further details would be shared as soon as they were available.

Although Members had previously received information on the high rise buildings in Bedfordshire post-Grenfell, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that he would circulate an updated briefing note to Members outlining the current position.

RESOLVED:

That the report be acknowledged.

20-21/FRA/122 Disposal of Assets under the Scheme of Delegated Authority

Members received a report providing an update on the disposal of obsolete vehicles and equipment assets.

Area Commander D Cook reported that there were three assets with a value in excess of £10,000 for disposal requiring the approval of the

Authority. There had been five vehicle assets disposed of with a value below £10,000 and one vehicle above £10,000. The total income generated from the sale of these assets was £45,500 which was being used to support the Capital Budget for the replacement of future assets.

RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the report be acknowledged.
2. That the disposal of the 3 assets detailed in the report which individually have the potential to achieve income over the £10,000 threshold under the scheme of delegated authority be authorised.

20-21/FRA/123 Covid 19: Mass Vaccination Presentation

Area Commander I McLaren gave a presentation on the Service's work during the pandemic to support other statutory partners, culminating in assistance in managing mass vaccination centres.

The Service had received and responded to a number of requests of assistance from partners including the Local Resilience Forum in relation to the temporary mortuary at RAF Henlow, at which three Service staff had assisted full time and the Clinical Commissioning Group to help manage the mass vaccination centres in Bedfordshire from January 2021, including pilot mobile sites.

The Service's assistance at the mortuary had been recognised as the facility would not have been able to be activated without the assistance from the Service.

A number of Service staff had been seconded to the mass vaccination site on Manton Lane, Bedford, and to the five other sites that had been opened in Bedfordshire from 1 February 2021 to 8 March 2021. Over 100,000 residents had been vaccinated at these centres.

The Service had also been heavily involved piloting the provision of walk-in centres in Luton which had targeted vulnerable populations including those aged 50+ during the weekend of 25 March 2021. Over 2000 residents were vaccinated over the weekend. These sites had also been attended by the Prevention Teams so that fire safety advice could be provided.

A further pop-up site had been assisted on the same weekend with over 1700 vaccinations provided, and it was anticipated that further walk-in centres would be provided in the future.

Members expressed appreciation for the Service's efforts in supporting the vaccination campaign and in keeping residents of Bedfordshire safe. The accessibility of some of the pop-up vaccination sites was praised.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

20-21/FRA/124 Information Bulletin (Jan-Mar)

Members received the information bulletin for the period January to March 2021 for information.

20-21/FRA/125 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme. It was noted that additional reports providing benchmarking information against other fire and rescue services would be submitted to future meetings of the Authority.

Members would be presented with an update on the Emergency Cover Review Programme at a forthcoming Member Development Day.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received.

The meeting ended at 12.55 pm