

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
MEETING HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 10.00 AM AT DUNSTABLE COMMUNITY FIRE STATION**

Present: Councillors R Berry, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler, Y Waheed

Councillor C Atkins was present via MS Teams

Chief Fire Officer A Hopkinson, Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer D Norris, Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Kibblewhite, Assistant Chief Officer Chambers and Mr J Atkinson were also present

21-22/FRA/30 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Burnett, P Duckett and D Franks.

21-22/FRA/31 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

21-22/FRA/32 Communications

**Memorial Service for the late Paul Fuller**

The Chair advised that the memorial service for the late Paul Fuller would be held on 28 October 2021 at 1830hrs at Woburn Church. Invitations were due to be sent out shortly.

**Appointment of new Inspector for Fire and Police Services**

Roy Wilsher, most recently Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council and former Chief Fire Officer at Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, had recently been appointed as a new inspector for the police and fire services at HMICFRS.

## **Consultation giving Police and Crime Commissioners greater powers of competence**

A targeted consultation on giving Police and Crime Commissioners a general power of competence was being conducted. The Chair reported that the response from the Authority would reiterate the previous views of Members in support of maintaining the independence of the Fire and Rescue Service and its governance arrangements from the Police and Crime Commissioner.

## **Fit for the Future – Next Steps**

The Chief Fire Officer reported on progress made in relation to the work of the National Fire Chiefs Council to establish a common vision for the future of fire and rescue services in England.

## **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks in New York**

The Chair encouraged Members to attend their local whole-time Community Fire Stations to observe a minute's silence at 13.46 on Saturday, 11 September in remembrance of the firefighters who lost their lives in the terror attacks.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that on-call stations had also been encouraged to hold a minute's silence but that this was dependent on availability.

## **Additional Information on the work of the Service**

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service Communications and Engagement Team was preparing a summary of media coverage for submission to future Authority meetings.

Following discussion with the Chair, it had also been agreed that a summary of core messages from each Authority meeting would be prepared to be circulated with the Record of Decisions to the constituent authorities.

## **Police and Crime Commissioner Visit**

The newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, Mr Festus Akinbusoye, would be visiting Fire and Rescue Headquarters on 14 September 2021.

21-22/FRA/33 Minutes

## **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2021 be confirmed as a true record.

### 21-22/FRA/34 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).

### 21-22/FRA/35 Audit and Standards Committee 14 July 2021

In response to the Chair's query as to whether the Audit and Standards Committee was still able to meet remotely, the Secretary and Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Committee could meet remotely if it was an informal meeting as there was a requirement for in person meetings if decisions were being made on behalf of the Authority. Therefore, in addition to receiving the Minutes of the meeting, as was standard practice, the Authority would also have to ratify the decisions made at the meeting of this or any other Committee meeting held remotely before they could be implemented.

Councillor Atkins introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 14 July 2021 for information and highlighted a number of areas including the following:

- Thanks had been recorded for the work of the previous Chair of the Committee, Councillor M Headley.
- The audit of the accounts had been delayed by EY from September to November 2021. It was not anticipated that any significant value for money risks would be identified during the audit as the Authority had demonstrated a good level of financial control.
- The external audit fees were discussed and it had been noted that the contract with EY, which had been agreed through the PSAA, was in place until 2023.
- The internal auditors had issued an overall positive audit opinion although there had been some areas for enhancements to the framework of risk management.
- The follow-up audit had identified that 14 of the 19 actions had been implemented, 3 were in progress and 1 had not yet been implemented.
- A review of the Corporate Risk Register had been undertaken at the meeting.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that in most cases, fees required for additional audit work were agreed beforehand in principle, as the final fee was often not known until the work was completed. In relation to the annual audit fee, the fee increase proposed by EY for the previous year had still not been agreed and representations had been made to PSAA accordingly.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the submitted Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 be received and the decisions made by the Committee informally be ratified.

### 21-22/FRA/36 Executive Committee meeting 15 July 2021

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15 July 2021 for information. The Chair reported that the main item of business had been the allocation of areas of responsibility to Members of the Executive and these were set out in the Minutes. The Committee had also received an update on the firefighters' pensions immediate detriment position and a further report on this matter would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

There was no further update on the abatement discussion.

#### **RESOLVED:**

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

### 21-22/FRA/37 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax Setting

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer presented his report outlining the current planning arrangements for the 2022/23 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.

The programme included two Member Budget Workshops on 23 November 2021 and 25 January 2022.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer suggested it was unlikely that the provisional settlement would be made before the end of December. An additional budget meeting may therefore be required in January 2022. He also expressed concern that a one-year settlement would be made again, which makes medium-term planning much more difficult.

The Chair proposed that the 14 December FRA meeting be brought forward to earlier in December to follow the first Member Budget Workshop and allow more time for public consultation.

The view was expressed that any additional dates should be circulated to Members as far in advance as possible.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the report, and timescales within it, be agreed, subject to consideration being given to changing the dates of the meetings of the Authority in December 2021 and January 2022 as a result of the likely delay of the local government settlement announcement.

## 21-22/FRA/38 2020/21 Annual Report

The Chief Fire Officer commented that this was the first time an annual report of the Service's work had been produced for several years.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer introduced the Annual Report which set out a summary of activities across the organisation from 1 April 2020 to 1 April 2021.

The report included a tribute to the late Paul Fuller and set out the achievements of the Service on a month-by-month basis and Members attention was drawn to the following:

- The Service had completed 6,835 Safe and Well visits during the year. This was the highest number of visits recorded and was in the context of a national pandemic.
- The Service ran active safety campaigns during the year with topics including safeguarding, arson reduction, road safety and water safety. This was important risk reduction activity designed to keep local residents safe.
- Virtual visits to schools had been developed to continue to engage with children and young people in a Covid secure way.
- Additional posts had been recruited to in order to expand the Fire Safety Team so that more audits and other building safety work could be completed in accordance with the audit programme.
- 92% of the Service's programme and projects for the year had been completed or were on course to meet targets.
- The work to support the East of England Ambulance Service was highlighted.

Members praised the layout of the report and the high level of performance achieved. It was noted that not all the charts displayed the years in the same order and it would be easier to compare performance if these were presented in the same way. It was suggested that the Annual Report should be circulated to the Service's partners for information.

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the activities and performance that have contributed to the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan in the previous year be acknowledged.
2. That the publication of the report on the Service's website be approved, subject to the charts being amended so that the order of the years was consistent throughout the report.

## 21-22/FRA/39 Fire Protection Statistics - National Benchmarking Comparison

The Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer submitted a comparative analysis of national fire protection statistics, as published by the Home Office, against local Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service performance for the period up to the end of March 2020.

Members were reminded that a Member Development Day had been arranged on 17 September 2021 which would cover building safety and that they should advise the Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer of any topics in this area that they wished to be explored in more detail.

It was noted that nationally, there had been a reduction in the number of fire safety audits completed since 2010/11 as resources were directed to other areas of work. This was gradually changing post-Grenfell and additional funding was being made available for building safety which would result in a corresponding increase in the number of fire safety audits completed. Grant funding had recently been provided by the Government to support protection activity and three Fire Safety Advisers had been employed by the Service with the intention of providing them with the required training to enable them to become qualified Fire Safety Inspectors in due course.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service took a “firm but fair” approach and sought to work with landlords and partners in order to improve compliance rather than rely solely on enforcement activity.

At present, there were eleven active enforcement cases open. These were predominately related to housing. Cases could be very complex and the Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer referred to one case in which the landlord was responsible for more than 20 properties with differing levels of non-compliance across several fire and rescue service areas. The Service often had to work across boundaries in relation to these cases and case studies would be provided to Members at the workshop on 17 September.

Fires in non-domestic buildings continued to reduce and the number of these incidents was below the national average. There were two areas within the County where there were spikes of incidents. One of these was at HMP Bedford, and the Service was working closely with the management there to improve fire safety standards.

Fire related casualties also remained relatively low.

In response to a question, the Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, due to the large number of cases, these were risk assessed to prioritise those cases involving the highest risk, for example, where there were blocked means of escape or dangerous cooking arrangements. Many of these were in Houses of Multiple Occupation.

The Chief Fire Officer added that the Service was working closely with its partners with the intent of strengthening data and intelligence sharing arrangements towards developing a pan-Bedfordshire data hub, as many individuals were known to a number of partner organisations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the contents of the report be noted.

## 21-22/FRA/40 Q1 2021/22 Performance Report Quarter 1 2021/22

Members received a summary of organisational performance at the end of the first quarter of the financial year 2021/22. The majority of targets were being met despite the challenging circumstances. The Principal Officers provided updates for their areas of responsibility as follows:

### Prevention

The Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service had undertaken over 2,600 Safe and Well visits during the quarter. As there had been a number of incidents relating to cooking activities, the Prevention Team had emphasised cooking safety in their campaigns.

The total number of fires in other buildings had only marginally missed its target. This was subject to seasonal variation and it was anticipated that performance would improve over the reporting year. As previously discussed, there were two repeat locations with six of the fires having occurred at Bedford Prison and two fires in derelict buildings on a site in Barton Le Clay. Work was ongoing to improve fire safety at these locations.

The total number of secondary fires had also missed its target but was subject to seasonal variation and the target was anticipated to be met by year end.

### Response

The Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that a refreshed project to improve on-call availability would commence this year, with more innovative solutions to recruitment and retention being considered, acknowledging that there was not a “one size fits all” solution and different methods would need to be developed for the different stations.

The whole-time global crewing availability target had been missed by 2.2% due to several factors including extra leave to be taken after a carry-over of annual leave, people shielding or isolating and providing EEAST with Ambulance drivers. This was being addressed by additional recruitment and the secondment of drivers to EEAST was coming to an end.

Improvements were anticipated to the call handling time following the introduction of a new mobilising system by the end of October 2021 with up-to-date mapping, gazetteer and advanced mobile location which would further reduce response times and allow the Service to provide a more efficient response.

In response to a question, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the call handling time target was due to be reviewed as it was not in line with other fire and rescue services. The intention was to set a target for 2022/23 following the implementation of the new system.

## Empowering

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that the trauma care training target had not been met as these courses had only just resumed and, due to the practical nature of the course requiring close physical contact, courses have only been able to resume at 50% of the normal class size. Improvements were expected in future quarters as national restrictions relaxed.

The delivery of Working at Height training had been impacted by cancellations of courses as instructors had been required to self-isolate.

The 3 health and safety indicators were RAG rated as Red against target at the end of the first quarter. There had been one serious accident that resulted in an over 28 day injury. The 60 working days/shifts lost related to seven workplace accidents. However, 56 days of these were as a result of accidents occurring in the previous reporting year.

The number of 24 hour periods lost to accidents for on-call personnel was still being impacted by the long-term injury of one individual who had sustained a burn injury during hot fire training in October 2019 as previously reported to the Authority.

## Utilising

All the fleet indicators were green. Members were reminded that this was in the context of the Service providing additional support to EEAST through the servicing of its vehicles.

## Maximising

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer advised that all finance and ICT indicators were meeting their targets with the exception of the percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days. The Finance Team continued to work with budget managers in areas where there had been delays in payment.

## **RESOLVED:**

That the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan at the end of Quarter 1 be acknowledged.

## 21-22/FRA/41 Return on Investment Analysis - BRFS support to East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST) during the Covid 19 Pandemic

The Chief Fire Officer submitted the return on investment analysis of the Service's support to the Ambulance Service in 2020-21. The Service had been the second in the country, following London Fire Brigade, to second firefighters in support to the local Ambulance Service. No other fire and rescue service had undertaken a return on investment analysis of this support. The analysis completed indicated that



there was a return on investment of £5.09 million in social value, or £7 for every £1 invested. EEAST had also achieved its target for responding to the most serious Category 1 incidents for the first time on record during this period.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised that, as this was not mainstream activity, and had been funded largely through Covid grants, it was important that the value of the activity was demonstrated. Now that this had been completed, the Service was liaising with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), as the commissioners of the Ambulance Service, to determine how this could be taken forward following the cessation of Government grant funding. Meetings with the new Chief Executive of EEAST are also planned.

In response to a question relating to the Service's support of vaccination centres, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service had been involved in running the vaccination centres. The Service had offered to train its staff to administer the vaccines themselves and was awaiting a response from the CCG on whether this offer would be accepted.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report and how this type of activity can positively raise the profile of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service nationally be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/42 Collaboration Update

The Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, following the cancellation of the Blue Light Collaboration Strategic Board meeting, a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Authority.

21-22/FRA/43 Member Development Programme

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the proposed arrangements for Member Development in 2021/22. Two additional Member Development days had been added to the programme, one on 17 September 2021 on building safety and one on 29 October 2021 on the Code of Conduct and Fire Standards Board Core Codes.

In addition, following discussions between the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer, a showcase event had been arranged on 22 September 2021 at Dunstable Community Fire Station to which the local MP and local Councillors would be invited. If successful, similar events would be hosted at other stations, with the MPs and Councillors local to the station invited to attend.

There had been no notification of a Combined Fire Authorities Conference. This was usually held in October and Members would be advised if any communications were received in this respect.

Members agreed that the Development Days should be held as hybrid events for the foreseeable future.

**RESOLVED:**

That the arrangements for Member development in 2021/22 be approved.

21-22/FRA/44 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be received.

The meeting ended at 11.36 am.