

## MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors J Burnett, R Berry, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, D Franks, M Headley, D McVicar, and Y Waheed

Councillors C Atkins and I Shingler were present via Teams

CFO A Hopkinson, ACFO A Kibblewhite, ACO G Chambers, Mr J Atkinson, Mr S Frank, Ms S Fecondi, Mr P Hughes and AC J Tai

### 21-22/FRA/45 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Duckett and J Gambold. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer had also tendered his apologies for the meeting.

### 21-22/FRA/46 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

### 21-22/FRA/47 Communications

#### **Immediate Detriment**

The Chief Fire Officer reported that, following the meeting of the Executive where it had been agreed to apply the Home Office guidance in relation to immediate detriment, the Local Government Association and the Fire Brigades Union had released a Memorandum of Understanding stating that immediate detriment should not only be applied to future cases, but also retrospectively to all retirements following the change in pension schemes in 2015. The impact of this was currently being assessed and a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive on a proposed way forward.

#### **Service of Thanksgiving for the late Paul Fuller**

The Chief Fire Officer reported on the Thanksgiving Service for the late Paul Fuller that was held on 28 October 2021. Over 200 individuals had attended the event and positive feedback had been received from Mr Fuller's family and friends. The Chief Fire Officer requested that his thanks to all those involved in organising the event be recorded.

Members who attended the Service also commented that it was a fitting tribute to the late Mr Fuller.

### **Asian Fire Service Association and Excellence in Fire Awards**

The Service had been shortlisted as finalists in multiple categories by both the Asian Fire Service Association and the Excellence in Fire Awards.

The Asian Fire Service Association Awards Evening was being held on 25 November 2021, with the Excellence in Fire Awards being held on 3 December 2021.

### **National Black Police Association Conference**

The Chief Fire Officer advised that he had attended the National Black Police Association Conference with Chief Constable Forsyth, as it was acknowledged this was an area in which the Services could work more closely together.

### **Lord Lieutenant's Commissioning Ceremony**

The Chief Fire Officer attended the commissioning ceremony for the Lord Lieutenant's Cadets held on 1 November 2021 at Bedford Modern School.

### 21-22/FRA/48 Minutes

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2021 be confirmed as a true record.

### 21-22/FRA/49 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/50 Executive Committee Minutes from 7 October 2021

The Chair introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 7 October 2021.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 7 October 2021 be received.

#### 21-22/FRA/51 ASC Minutes from 21 September 2021

Councillor Atkins introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 21 September 2021 for ratification by the full Authority as the Committee continued to meet remotely.

The Statement of Assurance required the approval of Members so that it could be signed by the Chair and Chief Fire Officer. The Committee had also agreed two extension requests.

The Committee received updates on the Internal Audit programme, Cyber Security, the Pensions Board and the Corporate Risk Register.

In relation to the Cyber Security Update, Mr P Hughes, the Head of ICT and Programmes, stated that the threat landscape was constantly changing. The Service had both external and internal defences but there were still threats that made it imperative that staff were trained on and had knowledge of cyber security. He commented that defence must be focused on people, process and technology. The Cyber Awareness Course from the National Cyber Security Centre had been made available on LearnPro and was mandatory for all Service staff. Members could also be provided with access to the course.

In response to questions, the Head of ICT and Programmes confirmed that the Service held a copy of all its data and that it had a reciprocal arrangement with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue for back-up, as well as back-up generators to ensure that data was not impacted by a loss of power.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the submitted Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 be received and the decisions made by the Committee informally be ratified.

#### 21-22/FRA/52 2021/22 Budget Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer presented his report informing the Authority of the forecast year-end budget monitoring position as at 30 September 2021. A three year settlement is anticipated as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review and this would assist with future budget-setting.

At 30 September, there was a forecast non-salary underspend on £281,000 as a result of a review of business rates paid which had led to a significant refund. There was a small overspend of £15,000 in the area managed by the Head of ICT and mitigations were being put in place to ensure that this was addressed before year-end.

Councillor Headley, as Portfolio Lead for Digital and Data, expressed the view that any additional expenditure on ICT must be justified in terms of creating efficiencies or other benefits to the Service.

It was noted that additional investment in ICT had been required during the pandemic to support remote working and this could not have been foreseen. This expenditure had been funded through the Covid grant.

The implementation of the firefighter pay award of 1.5% had resulted in a forecast salary overspend of £302,000. The pay award for non-operational staff had not yet been agreed.

The Assistant Chief Officer report on the Capital Programme. The slippage of the BA Set, Cylinders and Apparatus project into 2022/23 had previously been agreed.

Urgent works to the smoke house, originally to the value of £82,000 but now driven down to a value of £70,000, were required to improve the health and safety of users and to allow additional burn rooms to enable the rotation of usage and heat intensity. If approved, the works would be undertaken imminently.

In response to a question about variances to the salary budget, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that the next monitoring report would highlight a forecast salary underspend in the retained category. The full-year effect of the firefighter pay award would not be felt until 2022/23 as the increase was implemented in July 2021.

The Chair requested confirmation that there were no long-term agency staff being employed by the Service.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the updates provided within the report be acknowledged.
2. That the refund of Rates from 2017 to 2021 payable on the Authority's properties be allocated to the Transformation Reserve as recommended in paragraph 2.3.4 of the report.
3. That the Capital expenditure addition on the smoke house urgent repairs as set out in paragraph 3.4.2 be approved.

### 21-22/FRA/53 Mid-Year Treasury Update

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer introduced his report which provided an update on the Authority's Treasury Management to 30 September 2021. There were no items or changes to highlight. The anticipated income from interest on investments was £50,000.

Self-funding, or borrowing from the Authority's own reserves, would be considered in future if it was more advantageous than borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB).

The forecast increase in interest rates could affect the Authority if the rates charged by the PWLB increased, and the Authority wanted to take out a new loan.

Lending to other local authorities and participation in the overnight money market may be considered in future.

In response to a question about property investment, the Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the Service owned all of its premises and that income was generated from the rental of seven residential properties. Opportunities to generate income, e.g. sharing facilities with other partners such as the Ambulance or Police Service, were always being investigated.

The Chair expressed concern that the Service was responding to non-emergency incidents for which a charge should be levied.

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that, in some instances, special service charges were applied as deemed appropriate. Some of these converted into bad debt which was pursued through the small claims court, but these were not high values.

The Chief Fire Officer suggested that a summary of the Service's special charges policy be prepared for Members, including a breakdown of costs levied and debts outstanding.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the report be received.

### 21-22/FRA/54 Portfolio Leads Update: Workforce & OD/Digital & Data

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Members of the Executive, having been appointed as Portfolio Leads for specific areas, would be presenting to the Authority at regular intervals from this meeting onwards. The two updates to be received at this meeting related to Workforce & OD and Digital & Data. The slides presented at the meeting would be circulated to Members for information.

## **Workforce & OD**

Councillor Waheed gave a presentation on Workforce and OD. This included highlighting the various events that the Service had engaged in to promote awareness and understanding, including Black History Month and World Mental Health Day.

Councillor Waheed also reported that:

- A large piece of work was being undertaken in relation to neurodiversity to identify reasonable adjustments and guidance. Benchmarking with regional colleagues to investigate best practice was ongoing. Health surveillance work that had been paused at the beginning of the pandemic had now recommenced, with the backlog being tackled by Officers in Occupational Health and HR.
- A recruitment campaign for whole-time firefighters was currently in the interview stage. Two “have a go” events had been held in July; the recruitment vehicle had been used for the first time in support of these and had been well-received.
- The Service had also supported a two day Eid event in Luton, both virtually and in person.
- As previously mentioned, the Service had been shortlisted for three awards from the Asian Fire Service Association. The Chair and Vice-Chair would be attending the awards event on 25 November 2021. The Service had also been shortlisted for five Excellence in Fire awards, including the shortlisting of Chris Page as Young People Supporter of the Year.
- The Service was also currently updating its People Impact Assessments.
- The impact of the new guidance on immediate detriment was also being worked through as discussed earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Waheed referred to the MTA live event that had been held at RAF Henlow which she had attended with Councillors Choudhry and McVicar.

Area Commander J Tai, Head of Training & Assurance, reported on the tendering process for BA sets. He also explained that the training package for BA usage was being revised and instead of three separate courses, a new tactical firefighting course would be provided to improve firefighter safety.

Members would be provided with an opportunity to visit London Luton Airport. This had not yet been arranged.

The Authority was advised of the on-call passing out parade on 19 November 2021. All Members were invited to attend.

## **Digital and Data**

Councillor Headley gave a presentation on digital and data, acknowledging that many of the topics that were going to be covered in the presentation, such as cyber security, had already been discussed.

Councillor Headley highlighted the following:

- The Digital and Data Strategy was going to be refreshed, with an updated Strategy being submitted to a future meeting of the Authority for approval.
- The Chief Fire Officer had been appointed as the National Fire Chief Council's Digital and Data Lead.
- The Service's data management arrangements had been updated and Councillor Headley expressed the view that good processes were now in place.
- An e-form had been developed on the Mobile Data Terminals to allow direct input into the system following Safe and Well visits.
- A Wi-Fi upgrade had been installed throughout the Service estate.

Councillor Headley reported on the Replacement Mobilising System project. This had gone live on 1 November 2021 with no major incidents. The Service was the first to implement a fully cloud-based system, using the ESCMP for dispatch and integrating with the Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs). Significant interest from the Home Office and others had been generated by this. A legacy system was being maintained as a backup for the first few months of the new RMS's operation.

**RESOLVED:**

That the updates be received.

21-22/FRA/55 Programme Board Update

Mr P Hughes, the Head of ICT and Programmes, submitted his report covering Quarter 2 of the 2021/22 financial year, detailing progress and status of the Service Strategic Programme and Projects to date. Of the 23 projects currently being reported on, 19 were RAG rated as green, 3 were rated as amber and 1 was being closed down.

The Head of ICT and Programmes highlighted the following:

- The RMS project had been shortlisted for an Excellence in Fire Service award.
- The E-signatures module of the HR and Payroll iTrent system was successfully implemented at the end of August 2021, reducing reliance on paper.
- Collaborative procurement was underway as part of the Station End Equipment Project, led by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. The chosen supplier was currently being evaluated.
- The business management system had been procured and a project manager appointed.

In response to questions, the Head of ICT and Programmes provided an update on the three amber rated projects. The safe and well project had been moved from green to amber as there had been some issues arising from the e-form testing and potential license costs.

The fleet and asset management project was progressing, with good progress on asset tracking. Gaps in the fleet side of project had been identified and the Service was working with the supplier to implement a solution.

The final project related to the retained duty system. The whole project was being refreshed and the targets would then be re-scoped which could lead to the RAG rating being changed to green.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that a workshop had been held on 7 October 2021 to assist in the review of the retained duty system.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress made on Strategic Programmes and Projects over Quarter 2 in 2021/22 be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/56 Collaboration Update

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Authority that collaboration work was currently focused on three areas:

- The tri-service estates strategy: the new Police and Crime Commissioner had expressed his support to sign up to the principles previously agreed by the three emergency services. There was to be a renewed emphasis on progressing the joint workshops project. Local Authority Chief Executives had also expressed interest in a Bedfordshire wide estates strategy in future.
- Support of Covid-19 response: the Service had reached agreement with the Clinical Commissioning Group to provide staff for the vaccination centres. This would be provided on a full cost recovery basis.
- Support to East of England Ambulance Service: a meeting was being held between the Chief Executive of the Ambulance Service NHS Trust to ensure that the Service's support was put on a more sustainable footing now that Covid grant funding was no longer available to support these activities.

In response to questions about the ongoing impact of Covid and the need for vaccination programmes to continue, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that, as the support to the vaccination programme was being provided on a full cost recovery basis, there was no time limit as to how long this support could continue.

The Service was currently undertaking a survey of its own staff regarding vaccination status, the outcomes of which would be considered by the Covid Recovery adaptation Group. There were currently no plans for a national vaccination mandate for fire and rescue service staff.

**RESOLVED:**

That the update be received.



### 21-22/FRA/57 Horizon Scanning Workshop Update

Mr S Frank, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance provided an update following the Horizon Scanning Workshop that had taken place earlier in the year, where Members of the Authority, staff from the Service and stakeholders from partner organisations had met to develop priorities and feedback relating to the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

243 pieces of feedback had been received and these had been grouped into categories using Microsoft Planner. The findings would inform the next version of the CRMP and the associated action plans.

It was intended to hold similar workshops annually and the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance suggested that local authority managers be invited to future events.

In response to concerns raised about flooding and land management issues, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance confirmed that these issues were being considered and the Service was working with its local partners and other fire and rescue services with similar flood profiles. This may lead to a different type of flood boat being purchased which would be safer and easier to manoeuvre in faster moving waters.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the update be received.

### 21-22/FRA/58 Procurement Policy and Contract Procedures

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented her report providing an update on the progress of implementation and utilisation of the Procurement Policy and Contract Procedures which were presented to Members in November 2019.

A new Procurement Manager had been in post since August 2021 and was currently conducting a review of the procurement process, starting with investigating how to streamline and digitise procurement projects of less than £25,000, which had been delegated to the relevant managers to progress. The Procurement Team would still be responsible for undertaking larger procurement processes.

A virtual contracts register would be maintained to avoid duplication of contracts and facilitate any bulk purchases.

In response to comments from Members, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that no changes would be made to the Procurement Policy which had been approved by the Authority in November 2019 without first being agreed by the Authority.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the contents of the paper and the progress made on implementing the policy and procedure be acknowledged.

## 21-22/FRA/59 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, in future, Member Development Days and budget workshops would also be included on the Work Programme.

Members were reminded that they were able to request items for inclusion in the Work Programme and any suggestions would be gratefully received.

The timings of the budget meetings were discussed. The Assistant Chief Officer stated that, although the settlement was not due before the end of December, a meeting earlier in the month was required to consider the draft budget and CRMP Action Plan for consultation.

An additional meeting had been arranged for 11 January 2022 following the settlement announcement at which any amendments could be made.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be received.

## 21-22/FRA/60 HMICFRS Inspection Update

### **RESOLVED:**

That, pursuant to Sections 100A(2) and 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the discussion of the following item on the grounds that the matters to be discussed involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

### Item

60. HMICFRS Inspection Update

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm