

BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

held on 24 March 2022 at 10.00am

PRESENT

Councillors J Chatterley (Chair), J Burnett, K Choudhry, P Duckett, D Franks, M Headley, D McVicar and Y Waheed

Chief Fire Officer Hopkinson, Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Kibblewhite, Assistant Chief Officer Chambers, Mr J Atkinson and Mr S Frank were also present

Councillors C Atkins and J Gambold, Area Commander I Evans, Area Commander S Auger and Craig Carter of the FBU observed the meeting via Teams

21-22/FRA/100 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Berry and Shingler and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

21-22/FRA/101 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

21-22/FRA/102 Communications

The Chair stated that he had circulated all communications to Members as was his standard practice. These included conformation of the new NJC pay rates and the subsequent Green Book pay award and a letter that Andrew Selous, MP had written to the Minister regarding the Fire Services Reform White Paper.

Decarbonisation Grant

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer advised that the Service had been awarded a grant of circa £594,000 from the Government's decarbonisation fund. This would fund the replacement of the boilers at the Northern Area Office, Southern Area Office and Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill and Stopsley Community Fire Stations with ground source heat pumps, including all project management costs. The projects need to be completed by 31 March 2023.

Successful Fire Safety Prosecution

Area Commander Evans, Head of Prevention and Protection, reported on a successful prosecution on 18 March 2022 of the responsible person of Broadway House, Bedford. Following the issuing of an Enforcement Notice, the responsible person had not made the improvements required and therefore this was progressed to prosecution. Guilty pleas had been made in relation to four separate offences, with fines of £40,000 and full costs awarded to the service.

A fire safety audit conducted in 2019 had identified a number of failings at the four-storey property, which was used as a multi-occupancy office building, as the fire warning system was inadequate and the means of external escape was extremely compromised (this was confirmed by an image shared with Members). Unfortunately, improvement works to the external staircase had still not been carried out. There had been delays in this case being heard as there was a backlog of court cases as the result of COVID, and it was recognised that this was a very resource intensive process.

In response to questions, Area Commander Evans advised that Prohibition Notices, which prohibited the use of the building until the required fire safety improvements were made, were usually only issued where there was a sleeping risk, for example, in cases of Houses in Multiple Occupation.

A written response to a query relating to whether the tenants of the building had been kept informed of the situation and were aware of the fire safety risks would be provided to Members following the meeting.

To date, the Service had issued 20 Prohibition Notices and 3 Enforcement Notices this year. The majority of formal action had been taken in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation, or where sleeping accommodation was found being provided within shops or above shops with no separate external escape routes. This was a significant increase from the number of Notices issued in previous years.

21-22/FRA/103 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

21-22/FRA/104 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/105 Executive Committee meeting 18 March 2022

The Chair introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 March 2022. At the meeting, the Executive had received a report of the Secretary and Monitoring Officer following his review of the Scheme of Delegation. The proposed minor changes recommended had been agreed subject to the inclusion of the following being retained for Member decision: Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy; Treasury Management Strategy; Asset Management Strategy/Plans; and Decision of closure and/or relocation of fire stations.

It was acknowledged that a further review would most likely be required following the publication of the White Paper on Fire Service Reform.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 March 2022 be received.
2. That the revised scheme of delegation be adopted as submitted by the Executive, which included the following items being included at Paragraph 1.4:
 - Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - Treasury Management Strategy;
 - Asset Management Strategy/Plans; and
 - Decision of closure and/or relocation of fire stations.

21-22/FRA/106 Audit & Standards Committee meeting 3 March 2022

Councillor Atkins introduced the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 3 March 2022. In doing so, she highlighted that the Authority would have to ratify the decisions made at the meeting, particularly in relation to the following:

- The audit fees proposed by Ernst & Young (EY) had not been accepted by the Committee and the Committee had recommended that the Authority refer this to Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA), as had been done the previous year for the 2019/2020 accounts. It was noted that the intervention of PSAA had resulted in a saving of £20,000 to the Authority, as PSAA had approved a £13,000 fee increase against the £33,000 originally proposed by the external auditors.

- The Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement would need to be agreed prior to a letter of representation being signed by the Chair of the Committee and the Treasurer at the conclusion of the audit.
- The Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 needed to be approved.

Councillor Atkins further reported that Neil Harris, who had been leading the audit of the Authority's accounts for a number of years for EY, had recently been appointed as the Director of Local Audit for the Financial Reporting Council and offered her congratulations to Neil Harris on this appointment.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer advised that the audit of the 2020/2021 Statement of Accounts had not been completed, therefore the letter of representation could not be signed at this stage. It was hoped that the audit would be concluded prior to the end of the month and Members would be kept advised of progress.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer confirmed that the delay in the completion of the audit had been impacted by well-discussed capacity issues within the external audit sector. Over half of all local government audits relating to the Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 had not yet been completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022 be received and all the decisions made by the Committee, informally, be ratified.

21-22/FRA/107 Treasury Management Strategy and Practices

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer submitted his report on the review the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Treasury Management Policies. There were no material changes being proposed. The Authority currently had a total borrowing of £9.987 million, short-term investments of up to £6.75 million (£16.7 million if including short term notice accounts (95 to 180 day notice)) and budgeted interest of £65,000 in 2022/23 from investments.

Further consideration of ESG (environmental, social and governance) issues, and if these should be referred to specifically in the Treasury Management Strategy, would take place later in the year.

Members were asked to express a view as to whether they would like to receive training from Link Asset Services, the Authority's treasury management advisors, on treasury management during 2022/23.

In response to a question on the Authority's borrowing, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer confirmed that, as reported previously, the penalties to restructure the debt or pay it off early remained prohibitive.

The Authority was advised that it held no direct investments in Russia, Belarus or Ukraine, or some of the more volatile emerging markets.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following documents be approved, noting that ESG considerations would be examined during the year:

- i. Treasury Management Strategy Statement
- ii. Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Annual Investment Strategy
- iii. Treasury Management Practices

2. That Treasury Management training be provided to Members of the Authority in 2022/23.

21-22/FRA/108 Q3 2021/22 Performance Report Update (Sept - Dec)

The Authority received the report of the Chief Fire Officer which provided a summary of organisational performance at the end of the third quarter of the financial year. In introducing the report, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred to the charts which provided a summary of overall performance. These illustrated that 63% of the indicators were meeting or exceeding target levels, 21% were below target and 16% were within a small percentage of their target levels. 52% of indicators illustrated improved performance when compared to the previous reporting year.

Prevention

Area Commander Ian Evans provided an update on indicators in the prevention area as follows:

- The total number of primary fires had decreased and was currently reporting at 20% below the five year average.
- Accidental dwelling fires were 26% below the five year average and it was anticipated that this indicator would achieve its lowest level at year end.
- Unfortunately, there had been five fire fatalities to date. Three of these related to fires resulting from vehicle collisions, with the remaining two relating to a dwelling fire and a fire arising from an outdoor waste fire. Performance against this indicator varied throughout the years.
- There had been an increase in the number of primary fire fatalities where the casualty was taken to hospital with injuries. Analysis was being undertaken to identify the reason for the increase in the context of the reduction in the number of primary fires. It could be that more accurate data was being captured, as historically the Service had one of the lowest levels of primary fire fatalities in England, with this years' performance closer to the average.

- The number of Safe and Well Visits conducted had not reached its target level. It was noted that this was set as a stretch target and the Service was on track to deliver more than the previous year, which itself was the highest number on record. The continued reduction in dwelling fires demonstrated the positive impact of this stretch target. However, the Service also used ACORN data to target vulnerable individuals who were more likely to experience accidental dwelling fires.
- The target for deliberate dwelling fires had been missed by 2.3%. The Service was liaising with the Police on repeat locations.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that there was a regional trend of increasing numbers of fire fatalities arising from road traffic collisions.

Members discussed whether it would be possible to report fire fatalities from road traffic collisions separately, as the Service had no control over these incidents. The CFO noted the review of the Service KPI suite would disaggregate preventable fire deaths from the total number.

It was noted that a deliberate fire did not have the same definition of arson and so these incidents would not always be reported to the Police.

Protection

Area Commander Evans reported on exceptions as follows:

- A national shortage of qualified Fire Safety Inspectors, and a 40% vacancy rate to these posts in the Service, coupled with the volume and complexity of those received, had resulted in the Service being unable to meet its target relating to the percentage of building regulations consultations completed on time.
- The Service was achieving its target for the number of fire safety audits and inspections completed, in part as operational staff had been conducting some of the lower risk audits.
- There had been an increase in the number of Automatic Fire Detector false alarms in non-domestic properties. The largest percentage of alarms related to care/retirement homes. Attempts had been made to reduce this through call-handling. Analysis of call handling to try to understand why the number of attendances to AFD false alarms appeared to be rising and how this might be reduced had been delayed as a result of the changeover to the new mobilising system.

Response

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided an update on indicators in the response area as follows:

- The number of fires attended had decreased, whilst the number of special services had increased, leading to an overall increase in the number of incidents attended.

- Reporting against the indicator measuring call-handling time had been impacted by the changeover to the new mobilising system.
- RDS availability of first pump - primary available or alternate available continued to be a challenge, with a refreshed on-call project to improve recruitment and retention commencing shortly.
- The percentage of time whole-time global crewing availability enabled 9 riders on 2 pump responses remained a challenge as staff continued to isolate during the pandemic and the Service had also lost 39 drivers through retirement or leaving. However, global crewing levels remained at 94%.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that his top priority was to improve appliance availability.

Empowering

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported on the empowering indicators as follows:

- Both Human Resource indicators were on target.
- The impact on training due to the pandemic continued to be monitored, with a few of the training indicators reporting as Amber for the quarter. There had been a particular impact in relation to the training courses run at London-Luton Airport.
- All of the health and safety indicators were reporting as red for the quarter.
- The number of serious accidents equated to three injuries which resulted in the individual being off for over 28 days. Two of these injuries were sustained during training exercises. All three incidents had been subject to an accident investigation.
- The number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees (excluding On Call (RDS) employees) was due primarily to an additional 75.5 working days/shifts lost in the quarter, with 29.5 of these days the result of three workplace accidents within this category.
- The number of 24 hour cover periods lost to accidents per 1,000 RDS employees was reporting as red as a number of these cover period were associated with long-term sickness following and injury sustained in 2019 during hot fire training, with the individual remaining off work. In 2022-23 the figure would be split for reporting for an accurate comparison.

Fleet

It was noted that all indicators were on track to achieve their target.

Finance

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer reported that only one indicator was reporting as amber, which was the percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days. There had been an improvement in performance from quarter two, with budget managers continuing to be advised that valid purchase orders must be in place.

RESOLVED:

That Members consider the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) at the end of Quarter 3 and consider any issues arising.

21-22/FRA/109 Portfolio Leads Updates: Prevention & Protection and Operational Response and Resilience

Prevention & Protection

Area Commander Evans provided an update on key prevention and protection workstreams, including:

- The Prevention Team was currently undergoing a cost-neutral restructure. New posts included a Safeguarding Advisor and Volunteer Manager. The Service already had a great deal of experience in managing volunteers but it was hoped that by providing a distinct post, the level of volunteers would increase, recognising that there would always be a high level of attrition.
- A new Home Fire Safety Visit e-Form was being developed to improve data collection and to align to the new NFCC Person Centred Framework.
- The Service had been leading in respect of the Pan-Bedfordshire Hoarding Panel. This was being well supported by partner organisations.
- As a result of the pandemic, a number of school visits had been cancelled and the Service had identified a new way of providing these. Staff based at Dunstable Community Fire Station, supported by the Prevention team, trialled a virtual Year 2 visit to deliver virtual lessons for schools. As this had been very successful, this was now being rolled out to all whole time and on call stations.
- Work continued against the Grenfell Tower Action Plan, with all inspections of high-rise residential accommodation initiated by the Government formally concluded.
- Operational crews had utilised during 2021 to undertake basic fire safety checks on low and medium rise residential accommodation, with a total of 906 inspections completed. This had resulted in a number of Prohibition Notices, and three Enforcement Notices, being issued as reported earlier in the meeting.
- The successful prosecution had also been reported earlier in the meeting.
- The Service had received £264,000 in grant funding to uplift capacity and competency in protection work. The final instalment of the grant, £86,000, had recently been received. The grant had funded additional Fire Safety Adviser posts, training and professional development for staff, and improvements in software and IT. It was anticipated that the Service would receive another grant for 2022/23.

- The Service had received funding from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to develop a virtual reality vehicle to address road safety issues. This would be targeted at younger drivers.

Operational Response & Resilience

The Chair, as the Portfolio Lead in this area, introduced the report submitted by Area Commander Auger, the Head of Response. He also provided an update on the recent Corporate Management Team away day, which included discussions on the CFO's key priorities of appliance availability; leadership and culture; resources; collaboration and the strategic planning. Work needed to develop the next 4 year CRMP.

The Head of Response added that:

- Two middle management promotion gateway were ongoing to fill vacancies at Station and Group Manager level. This would assist in the ongoing project work, including the on call improvement project.
- Business cases were being developed for two proposed pilots: the move of one appliance from Luton to Leagrave to improve response times in the northern part of Luton Borough; and the placement of an additional appliance within the Eastern part of the County during specific time periods to examine the impact of mobilising from various locations on response times and response standards.
- The Service was leading a piece of work to produce an Emergency Medical Response Concept of Operations playbook setting out the processes needed to assist for Fire and Rescue Services in introducing an emergency medical response capability in support of the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST). This would serve as a basis for consistent adoption by the six Fire and Rescue Services which form the Eastern Region.
- Projects that had completed and become business as usual included Gartan phase 2 and Airbus Command support.

It was noted that additional information on the pilot projects would be presented to the Authority at a future meeting in and prior to implementation to alleviate Members potential concerns about the impact of these changes.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that EEAST had already committed to a payment of £140,000 for the provision of this support by the regional Fire and Rescue Services. The Service no longer has any staff seconded to EEAST. Staff undertaking co-responding duties were covered by the Service's public liability insurance up to the point when they touched a patient, at which point they were covered by the NHS public liability insurance.

RESOLVED:

That the Portfolio Lead updates on prevention & protection and operational response & resilience be acknowledged

21-22/FRA/110 Community Risk Management Plan Pre-Publication Report

Mr S Frank, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, presented the final version of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Annual Action Plan for 2022-23. This was the final year of the four year CRMP.

Members were advised that, following its approval by the Authority, the Action Plan had been subject to extensive public consultation and as a result of the responses received, a number of changes had been made which were marked in red font throughout the document. There had been a new focus on environmental and community issues, the safety and wellbeing of staff, and ethical and accountability issues.

There were six priority areas leading to 19 actions for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/111 Proposed Indicators and Targets for 2022/23

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report briefing Members on the proposed targets for the range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the financial year 2022/23 which underpinned delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). In presenting the report, the Chief Fire Officer advised that a report would be presented to a future meeting of the Authority setting out proposals for a revised performance report that contained a more informative suite of key performance indicators.

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance then led Members through the proposed indicators and targets for 2022/23, highlighting the following:

- A 15% reduction on the five year average was being proposed for the total number of primary dwelling fires as there had been a downward trend in these incidents.
- Similarly, a 10% reduction on the five year average was being proposed in relation to accidental dwelling fires and deliberate fires, both primary and secondary.
- A new indicator measuring the number of accidental fire deaths was being introduced and it was suggested that the target be zero.
- The target for the number of primary fire injuries was proposed to remain the same as the current year.
- The target for Safe and Well Visits to be delivered would remain at 10,000. Whilst this was a stretch target, it was considered that this was achievable.

- The targets for the percentage of Building Regulations consultations completed on time (within 15 working days) and total number of fire safety audits/inspections completed were proposed to remain the same due to capacity issues within the Service.
- A 10% reduction on the five year average was being proposed in relation to total number of primary fires in non-domestic buildings.
- A 5% reduction on the five year average was being proposed in relation to the number of automatic fire detector false alarms attended in non-domestic properties.
- No changes were currently being proposed to the targets for the response indicators. It was noted that some of these indicators were set out in the CRMP and could not be changed.
- The target for the percentage of new whole time entrants who were women was proposed to increase from 10% to 20%.
- A new stretch target of 20% was being set for the percentage of new starters (all staff groups) from ethnic minority backgrounds across the whole organisation.
- Some new indicators were being introduced for monitoring purposes only.
- It was proposed that the sickness absence indicators remain the same.
- An increase from 4% to 7% relating to the turnover of staff was being proposed as there was likely to be an increase in staff leaving the Service.
- There was a proposed increase from 87% to 90% of appraisal documents returned to HR within 3 months of reporting year.
- As an ongoing impact of COVID lockdowns and the imminent departure of the Occupational Health Manager, it was proposed to reduce the targets for the percentage of personnel in operational roles who had completed an annual fitness assessment in the past 12 months (excluding secondments) from 98% to 85% and the percentage of medicals completed from 85% to 50%, with the other targets in this area remaining the same.
- The targets for the training, health and safety, fleet and finance indicators were proposed to remain the same.
- The targets for the ICT indicators measuring the Number of Incidents on Mission Critical services resolved within one hour and Number of Incidents on Business Operations services resolved within four hours would be increased slightly.

In relation to the EDI indicators, it was suggested that current members of staff who were women or from ethnic minority backgrounds could be asked to act as mentors for new staff to share their “lived experience”, and this should be recognised in some way.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed KPI targets for 2022/23 be agreed for inclusion in the Service Performance Management Framework.
2. That a report be presented to a future Authority meeting during Quarter 1 of 2022/23, outlining proposals for presenting Members with a revised performance report that contains a more balanced and informative suite of strategic KPIs to better enable effective oversight and scrutiny of organisational performance.

21-22/FRA/112 Levelling up the UK and Reforming the Fire Service White Papers - Briefing

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance presented a report summarising the HM Government Levelling Up the United Kingdom White paper and identifying potential impacts on Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. It was noted that there was no update regarding the Fire Service Reform White Paper as this was still awaiting publication.

A Member expressed concern about the level of awareness of the different positions of the constituent local authorities, with particular mention of the Central Area Growth Board.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that he had invited the Chief Executives of the local authorities and emergency services to come together and present their views "Towards 2050" so that the organisations increased their awareness of plans for the medium to long term.

The Chair suggested that a Member workshop be arranged following the publication of the Fire Services Reform White Paper to consider and start developing a consultation response.

RESOLVED:

That the paper and the implications for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/113 Collaboration Update

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report on key activities that Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) was engaged in to deliver its Community Risk Management Plan actions for 2019-23 through developing its collaborations.

A significant amount of work had been to work towards the full adoption of National Operational Guidance. This included the embedding of new policies, equipment notes, training packs and operational assurance.

As previously reported, the Service was leading on the delivery of regional Memorandum of Understanding to simplify the relationship between fire and ambulance services. In addition to this regional work, the Service was also supporting EEAST with tests and trials of electric vehicles.

The Service was actively involved in the Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum, with the Chief Fire Officer now holding the role of Chair and Deputy Chief Fire Officer acting as the Chair of the COVID Sub-Group and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer acting as the Chair of the Recovery coordination Group.

The Service was also involved in providing leadership with other projects such as Bedfordshire Youth United, driver training and the Bedfordshire Tri-Service Estates Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

21-22/FRA/114 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Executive, at its meeting on 18 March 2022, had suggested items for inclusion in the Work Programme and that these would be added accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be received.

21-22/FRA/115 Business Continuity Annual Review

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

115. Business Continuity Annual Review

The meeting ended at 1.32pm

