

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2023**

Present: Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Burnett, J Chatterley, K Choudhry, P Duckett (Chair), D Franks, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

CFO A Hopkinson, DCFO C Bigland, ACFO A Kibblewhite, ACO G Chambers, Mr G Britten (MO), Mr S Frank, Ms L Fair and Mrs N Upton

22-23/FRA/60 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Gambold.

Councillor Atkins joined the meeting remotely via Teams.

An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Franks, who joined the meeting remotely via Teams at 10.52am.

22-23/FRA/61 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

22-23/FRA/62 Communications

**Response to Ministry of Defence**

The Chair referred to the late item of urgent business that had been circulated to Members earlier in the week. This would be discussed under the final item on the agenda, in private session.

**Luton Festival**

The Chair reported that Councillors Choudhry and Waheed would be attending Luton Festival as representatives of the Authority.

## **High Sheriff Visit**

Members were advised that the High Sheriff had recently visited Fire and Rescue Headquarters and had sent a letter of thanks following this.

## **Recommencement of Station Visits**

Following a hiatus on Member Station Visits during the COVID pandemic, the Chair advised that these visits would be resumed.

## **State of Fire Report**

State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2022 had been published on 20 January 2023, as had the reports of tranche 3 of the second round of inspections.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service was currently in the process of finalising its self-assessment for its latest inspection.

## **Fire Service Minister Visit**

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the new Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire, the Right Honourable Chris Philp, MP, had expressed an interest in visiting the Service to discuss its collaboration with East of England Ambulance Service. It was anticipated that a visit to Dunstable Community Fire Station would be arranged.

## 22-23/FRA/63 Minutes

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 31 October 2023 be confirmed as a true record.

## 22-23/FRA/64 Public Participation

Notification of a question had been received from Mr Graham Tranquada.

Mr Tranquada asked for the availability of retained appliances based at Ampthill, Shefford, Toddington and Woburn stations during daytime hours without the provision of whole-time personnel and appliances to make up crewing.

In putting this question, Mr Tranquada recognised that the availability of retained staff was a long-standing issue.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer replied that the crewing availability for the previous year was as follows: Ampthill 65.2%, Toddington 55.3%, Woburn 68% and Shefford 65.2%. During the first month of 2023, these figures had increased to: Ampthill 76.1%, Toddington 62.2%, Woburn 68% and Shefford 76.48%. This data did not include a breakdown of whether the availability had been influenced by the inclusion of whole-time staff at a station to make an appliance operational. On call availability remained a challenge for the Service, but also for other fire and rescue services both regionally and nationally.

Additional resources had been allocated to On Call Management and three On Call recruitment courses were planned for the calendar year, so it was expected that availability would improve.

The Chief Fire Officer added that the figures quoted related to global crewing availability rather than availability during day time hours. He volunteered to meet with Mr Tranquada to discuss his concerns further.

Mr Tranquada asked a further question on whether the introduction of a whole-time station in that area of the County was being considered. He also asked if there had been occasions when the Service had moved whole-time staff into an on-call station to enable an appliance to be available for mobilisation during the day and how this impacted on the availability of specialist equipment and crewing levels at both whole-time and on call stations.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service would not allow “riding with three” as this was specifically against policy for safety reasons.

As part of the Service’s Community Risk Management Plan, station locations and designations were reviewed on a regular basis in light of performance against attendance standards. The Service used its staff flexibly in order to maximise its appliance availability and ability to respond to incidents. Therefore, firefighters may be moved between whole-time and on call stations, including those with specialist appliances, to improve response capability.

A further detailed written response including the relevant data would be provided to Mr Tranquada and published via the Service’s governance processes.

Mr Tranquada thanked the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer for their responses but reiterated his concern that the lack of available personnel and appliances could result in limited response to incidents in that area of the County.

The Chair commented that the Service was aware of the challenges around the recruitment and retention of on call staff and that measures were being implemented to address this. He thanked Mr Tranquada for sharing his concerns with the Authority.

#### 22-23/FRA/65 Executive Committee Minutes from 15.11.22

The Chair presented the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15 November 2022.

#### RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 15 November 2022 be received.

#### 22-23/FRA/66 Executive Committee Minutes 10.01.23

The Chair presented the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10 January 2023.

#### RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 10 January 2023 be received.

#### 22-23/FRA/67 Audit and Standards Committee 12.01.23

Councillor Atkins submitted the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 12 January 2023.

In doing so, she highlighted the following three areas:

- Through the PSAA arrangements, it had been recommended that the Authority change its external auditors from Ernst & Young to KPMG with effect from 2023/24 for a five year period concluding in 2027/2028.
- Members were reminded to clearly record any gifts or hospitality they had received as a result of being a Member of the Authority.
- An extension request in relation to asset tracking had been received. This had been supported by the Committee and would need to be formally approved by the full Authority.

#### RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 be received and the decisions made by the Committee, informally, be ratified.
2. That the extension request for Asset Management – Asset Tracking from December 2022 to March 2023 be approved.

## 22-23/FRA/68 CRMP 2023-27 Update including consultation responses

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, due to the recent publication of the State of Fire report, the draft of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) would be updated in terms of its presentation in response to the report and as such, it was not being presented to this meeting of the Authority.

An updated draft of the CRMP would be shared with Members at the forthcoming Member Development Day on 23 February 2023 from 10am – 1.00pm, with the final version being submitted to the next meeting of the Authority on 30 March 2023.

Mr S Frank, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, introduced the report on the consultation results and advised that a total of 439 responses had been received to the survey. As survey respondents had taken longer to complete the survey than in previous years, it was suggested that this had resulted in more informed responses.

It was noted that 88% of respondents had agreed with proposals to increase the Service's Council Tax precept by £5.

In response to questions, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance reminded Members that, in addition to the recent CRMP/budget survey, the Service had held a number of consultation/engagement events throughout the year that had generated an additional 787 responses. There had been an increase in the percentage of responses received from younger people, with specific engagement in school settings.

### RESOLVED:

1. That the progress in developing the Authority's next four year Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) covering the period 2023-27, be noted.
2. That the results of public consultation and community engagement on the Authority's 2023-24 Budget and the 2023-27 CRMP be approved.

## 22-23/FRA/69 2022/23 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer submitted his report providing an update on the forecast year-end budget monitoring position as at 31 December 2022.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer reported on the following:

- There were in-year inflationary costs in relation to fuel, contracts and pay.

- Additional business rate income through Section 31 reconciliation payments that had recently been announced. The Service had been awarded £400,000 across January and February 2023. It was being proposed that this be allocated to the pay and pensions reserve.
- The proposed pay award for firefighters of 5% would be funded in part through the saving derived from the reverse of an increase in employer's NI contributions and there was also an offsetting of the Green Book staff pay award through the vacancy factor and NI contributions reversal.
- The costs of replacement Breathing Apparatus and Fire Ground radios had increased, and the Authority was being asked to approve additional expenditure.

In relation to the Breathing Apparatus, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the new equipment was much safer, more comfortable and more technologically advanced than the current Breathing Apparatus, and this had been brought to the meeting for Members to inspect.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the current Breathing Apparatus relied on a number of manual processes. The new sets, in addition to electronically monitoring factors such as intake of breath and environmental conditions, allowed the location of users to be accurately identified within the fire ground. The new radios used both digital and analogue and GPS tracking, which would improve communication.

The Breathing Apparatus had last been changed around 10 years ago. The old equipment would either be resold at auction or donated to charity for use in other countries.

#### RESOLVED:

1. That the updates provided within the report be acknowledged.
2. That the request to fund the expected additional spend on Breathing Apparatus equipment at £308,000 and Fire Ground Radios at £50,000 be approved.
3. That the allocation of the new Business Rates receipts to the Pay/Pension reserve be approved.

#### 22-23/FRA/70 The 2023/24 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme and Council Tax setting

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer introduced his report on the proposed budget for 2023/24.

As part of his introduction, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer reminded Members that they had previously discussed the proposed budget and accompanying documents at two specific Member Budget Workshops.

Members were being asked to agree a revenue budget requirement of £34.78 million with a Council Tax precept of £25.043 million, which equated to a £5 increase for a Band D property up to £109.45, or £2.10 per week. Two Medium Term Revenue Plans were being presented

for consideration, with different assumptions on the pay increase to be awarded. An updated Capital programme, Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Treasurer's report on the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves were also presented for consideration.

No new borrowing was being proposed as part of the budget, and any business cases for new investment would be presented to Members in future as they arose.

It was noted that Members had agreed earlier in the meeting to allocate any underspend from 2022/23 to the pay and pensions reserves to top up these reserves as they were being used to balance the budget over the medium term. Previous discussions had identified the need for a contaminants reserve and £200,000 had been allocated accordingly.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the cost of five new rescue pumps was being divided into stage payments, with the first stage payment in 2023/24 and the second and third stage payments in 2024/25. ICT and property projects were currently being funded from reserves.

The golden thread linking projects in the Capital Programme to the Community Risk Management Plan priorities was highlighted.

In discussing the two proposals for the budgeting for the pay increase, and public sector pay more generally, Members supported budgeting for the increase as set out in Appendix 1, as this appeared to be the more prudent option. The impact of a larger pay increase could be dealt with during the year if required.

The high level of uncertainty around the settlement was recognised, as was the impact of possible future changes to business rates, and concern was expressed about the budget gap over the medium term. This would have to be addressed in future budgets.

The recommendations relating to the revenue budget requirement of £34.784 million, with a corresponding precept of £25.043 million and a Council Tax increase of up to £5 were put to the meeting, as well as the associated recommendations, and the votes recorded thereon were as follows:

For the Recommendations (9)            Councillors R Berry, J Burnett, J Chatterley, K Choudhry, P Duckett, M Headley, I Shingler, D McVicar and Y Waheed

Therefore, these recommendations were carried unanimously.

Councillor Atkins commented that if she had been present at the meeting, she would have voted in favour of the budget proposals.

## RESOLVED:

1. That the report be considered and it be determined that for 2023/24:
  - a. A Revenue Budget requirement is set at £34.748m, met as indicated in paragraph 3.7 of the report.
  - b. In meeting this budget requirement, the Authority's Precept be set at £25.043m and that consequently, a Council Tax increase of £5 up to £109.45 per Band D equivalent property, calculated as shown in Paragraph 3.7 of the report be approved.
  - c. In order to meet the Precept requirement, the Treasurer be authorised to issue Precepts in the necessary form to each of the Unitary Councils and for the amounts indicated in Paragraph 3.10 of the report.
2. That the Medium-Term Revenue Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved, and that the allocation of the £1 million Pay Reserve to be used within 2023/24, as well as the 2023/24 savings and efficiencies detailed at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.
3. That the Medium-Term Capital Programme attached at Appendix 3 to the report be approved, and the use of the £555,000 capital reserve over the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 be supported.
4. That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy attached at Appendix 4 and the Reserves Strategy at Appendix 5 to the report be approved.
5. That in considering the above recommendations, the Treasurer's statement on the robustness of estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides, attached at Appendix 6 to the report, be noted.
6. That any budget amendments, following receipt of the final settlement figures, be delegated to the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer.

## 22-23/FRA/71 Q2 2022/23 Performance Report (July to September)

Members received the summary or organisational performance at the end of the second quarter of the financial year 2022-2023.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided a general introduction and advised that there were some areas of performance that had caused concern, especially in Response, and that Officers had been charged with identifying how improvements could be made moving forward. A Performance Board had been created to form an additional level of challenge and a new Performance and Insight Manager had been appointed to monitor and challenge the data.

## Prevention

Areas of note included:

- The number of Safe and Well visits continued to increase against the five year average.
- The number of fires had increased, most likely as a result of the very hot temperatures experienced over the summer period.
- Deliberate primary dwelling fires had increased. Strategic Operational Commander Ian Evans advised that these were potential arson incidents and the Service worked closely with Bedfordshire Police to catch perpetrators, as it was suspected that certain



individuals were responsible for multiple incidents. There had been a reduction of these incidents in Quarter 3. The five year trend was relatively flat, with no significant increase or reduction.

- Secondary fires had seen a significant reduction.
- In general, the number of overall incidents attended had increased, with more incidents attended up to Quarter 3 than in the previous full performance year.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that the Redwood Grove fire had been classed as a deliberate fire and that there were a number of repeat offenders in specific parts of the County.

### Protection

Overall, there was a positive level of performance, although there were some areas to note, including:

- The number of fire safety audit/inspections was under target as, although new members of staff had been recruited, they had not reached their competency so were restricted in what work they could undertake. There had also been a number of complex enforcement cases, which impacted on the overall number of audits completed.
- Additional call challenge had been introduced around response to Automatic Fire Detectors (AFDs).
- A high level of enforcement had been undertaken in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and sleeping areas above retail premises. To date, 29 prohibition notices, 9 enforcement notices and 1 caution had been issued by the team.

In response to a question, Members were advised that a high level of enforcement activity was focused in the Luton area, with hot spots including Leagrave Road.

The Chief Fire Officer suggested that at a forthcoming Member Development Day, Members could be provided with a map of enforcement activity, which would provide an overview of hot spot areas.

In response to a further question, Strategic Operational Commander Ian Evans advised that AFD calls from care homes were always responded to, as these were high risk premises with significant risk to life, as were hospitals. He referred to an incident in Hertfordshire where it was thought that there was a false alarm at a care home, however, this was not the case and the attendance of the Fire and Rescue Service prevented the possible loss of life.

In addition to call-handling challenge, interventions would also be carried out by the Protection Team if there were multiple false alarms to one premises. An “excessive” amount was defined as more than four false alarms per year. It was noted that the 80/20 rule applied, with the majority of incidents having 1 false alarm per year, with a proportion of others with numerous false alarms. These were normally large sites with many detectors.

The Authority was advised that the total number of false alarms attended was in line with the national average.

### Response

Areas of concern were highlighted as follows:

- The percentage availability of the first on-call pump: there had been an increase from the previous year but improvement was still required. The On Call Improvement programme had been developed to address this. A recruitment campaign was being run, including three on call recruit trainee courses during the current calendar year and it was anticipated that this would help improve on call availability.
- The percentage availability of whole-time global crewing availability enabled 9 riders on two pump responses: the Service had taken a conscious decision to maximise the number of appliances available by deploying the fifth person on a two pump station to increase pump availability at On Call stations in key strategic locations. An example of this was the response to the recent high rise fire at Green Court, when two firefighters were moved to Toddington to help provide a response. The on call improvement project should therefore have a direct impact on performance against this measure.
- The percentage of occasions global whole-time crewing met minimum level (4 riders) remained slightly below target but the data was being challenged as it was thought that whole-time pumps taken off the run for mechanical issues were being counted against this indicator as the Service was not aware of any occasions when this indicator had not been met.
- In relation to call-handling, consideration was being given to reporting of separate indicators for calls where the location was known and for calls where the location was not identifiable, as this could considerably increase the length of the call and time of response, eg if a call was received and the location was given as the M1 without any location data such as the What3Words location.
- The percentage of primary fires attended within 10 minutes, which was a key indicator, was not meeting its target, with the current time being 10 minutes and 30 seconds. This was due to the unseasonably hot weather, increased number of incidents requiring a response and on call availability. It was hoped that the Luton pump relocation trial would improve performance against this indicator.

It was noted that a scrutiny group was being created to examine performance around the response targets as it was acknowledged by all that the performance was not as high as it should be.

### Empowering

Some training indicators had been affected during the summer period when firefighters were called out to attend the high number of incidents. It was important that the Service was flexible in mobilising its resources in order to respond to incidents.

In relation to the health and safety indicators, there had been no serious accidents reported during the year to date.

### Utilising

All the indicators in this area were green with the exception of Grade A defect response time (within 2 hours). The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that there was one person working in this area out of hours. A change in ordering of parts was being discussed to increase the availability of spares.

### Maximising

Performance against the indicator measuring the percentage of outstanding debt over 90 days old was down. One of the invoices had been settled and payment for the others was currently being chased.

The Finance Team continued to work with budget managers to ensure that purchase orders were in place to improve performance against the indicator measuring the percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days.

In concluding this item, the Chief Fire Officer reported that the percentage of primary fires attended within 10 minutes had increased to 72.73% in January 2023. Work was ongoing to develop the scrutiny call-in process so that non-Executive Members could better scrutinise performance in this area.

### RESOLVED:

That the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) at the end of the second quarter 2022-23 and the issues arising be acknowledged.

### 22-23/FRA/72 Public Sector Equality Duty Report

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the Public Sector Equality Duty Report (2021/22) for consideration and approval to publish in accordance with the Service's statutory duty to do so. The report covered the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022, which included part of

the pandemic period. The report included data relating to the characteristics of staff, of which there were 287 whole-time firefighters, 150 on call firefighters and 165 support staff.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the highlights of the report, which included the following:

- Flexible working arrangements that had been implemented during the pandemic continued to be in place.
- The percentage of on call female firefighters, at 10.7%, was higher than the national average of 7.3%.
- 17.2% of the joiners during the year identified as having a disability.
- A higher percentage of younger people were applying to join the Service.
- There had been a 9.6% increase in applications from individuals from a minority ethnic background.
- The gender pay gap was narrowing.
- 22 new fire cadets had been recruited.

Councillor Burnett requested that the ethnicity information be categorised in accordance with the most recent Census data and asked whether the Service had appointed a permanent Equalities and Diversity Officer.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the post had been appointed to on 6 January 2023 and that the data could be categorised as requested.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Public Sector Equality Duty Report (2021/22) report in Appendix 1 be noted and the publication approved.

#### 22-23/FRA/73 Localism Act 2011 - Pay Policy Statement 2023

Members received the annual pay policy statement and its constituent parts for the financial year 2023/24. The pay multiple between the lowest salary and the Chief Fire Officer was 1: 7.94. The average pay multiple of the Fire and Rescue Services in the region listed above was 1:7.89. The Service's pay multiple was slightly above the average of the region's Fire Services but remained lower than the public sector averages.

It was noted that those on the lowest pay grades, who were all Green Book staff, had received a pay award of £1925 in 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted proposed pay policy statement for 2023/24 be approved.

### 22-23/FRA/74 Members' Allowances Scheme

Members received the proposed Members' Allowances Scheme for 2023/24, to take effect from 1 June 2023.

In presenting the report, the Monitoring Officer, Mr G Britten, referred to the recommendations made by Independent Remuneration Panels to the three constituent authorities. These had been appended to the report for reference.

In accordance with previous practice, the allowances had been adjusted in line with the Local Government Pay Settlement (for 'Green Book' staff). However for 22/23 this had been based on a lump sum payment rather than a percentage uplift, it was therefore proposed that the Scheme of Allowances for 23/24 be increased in line with the percentage uplift awarded to Green Book staff for allowances – 4.04%.

#### RESOLVED:

That the Members' Allowances Scheme be updated from 1 June 2023 in accordance with the proposals set out in the report and that the Scheme be adopted for the financial year 2023/24.

### 22-23/FRA/75 Briefing on the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented a report briefing Members on the findings from London Fire Brigade Cultural Review.

The Service had been undertaking a gap analysis against all recommendations contained within the report, although it was noted that some of the recommendations were specific to the London Fire Brigade. A number of actions had been identified, including the introduction of an anonymous reporting tool and a helpline to report allegations/concerns. The Service was also exploring with potential suppliers, a third party reporting mechanism.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the National Fire Chiefs Council had prepared some Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) maturity tools. The Service was exploring with Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Services the potential for establishing an independent professional standards unit.

#### RESOLVED:

That the contents of the briefing be acknowledged.

22-23/FRA/76 Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24

Members received the Calendar of Meetings for 2023/24.

**RESOLVED:**

That the submitted provisional calendar of dates for meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its associated Committees for the forthcoming year be approved.

22-23/FRA/77 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme for 2022-23 be received and the 'cyclical' Agenda Items for each meeting in 2022-23 be noted.

22-23/FRA/78 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SCHEDULE 12A, PARAGRAPH 3 OF PART 1: EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

**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

78. Industrial Action Update

The meeting ended at 1.33 pm