

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 19 JULY 2023**

Present: Councillors J Burnett, G Coombes, R Goodchild, M Headley, M Hussain, S Owen, A Sultan and R Wenham
CFO A Hopkinson, DCFO C Bigland, ACFO A Kibblewhite, ACO G Chambers, Mr G Britten (MO), Mrs K Heard, Ms L Fair and Mrs N Upton

23-24/FRA/12 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ali, S Hussain and Versallion.

23-24/FRA/13 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

23-24/FRA/14 Communications

Service Awards and Values Evening

The Chair reported on the Service Awards and Values evening which was held the previous week at Cranfield University. She commented that it was pleasing to see staff being recognised for their good work.

There had also been a Cadets Awards Evening on 15 July 2023. One of the cadets had been awarded a scholarship and this had been acknowledged at the event.

Protection Uplift Grant

The Chair advised that the Service had been awarded an extra protection uplift grant of approximately £153,000.

The Chief Fire Officer added that this would enable the Protection Team to continue to undertake additional building responsibilities that arose following the Grenfell Towers tragedy.

In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the grant funding would be allocated towards qualifications for staff to achieve the appropriate standard to carry out their additional responsibilities, as well as the recruitment of additional staff to assist with the increased workload. The increase in demand, which included work relating to Homes in Multiple Occupation, had been reported to Members recently during a presentation on protection and enforcement.

Risk of the Service being unable to provide an operational response

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update following the discussion of the lowering of this risk at the Audit and Standards Committee on 6 July 2023 following the agreement around the fire fighters pay award and the subsequent reduced threat of imminent industrial action. However, further industrial action could not be ruled out should the Government's response to the consultation on the White Paper "Reforming our Fire Service", which was expected before the summer recess and had now been delayed, contained contentious issues. Members were provided with assurance that the Service kept its contingency plans under constant review and that the risk would be re-evaluated subject to any proposals arising from the White Paper response.

Fire Incident in Luton

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the fire incident that took place on 18 July 2023 in Skyline Place, a high-rise building in Luton. The Service had coordinated a five pump response, with additional specialist equipment also being dispatched to the scene, including the aerial platform. The first two appliances arrived at the incident within 5 minutes, and the fire, although very aggressive, had been contained to the flat of origin, with no fire spread. No members of the public were injured, although a fire fighter had been treated for minor burns.

The Police and Ambulance Service had also been in attendance and a major incident had been declared, although this was later de-escalated.

In response to a question, Members were advised that all major incidents were reviewed by the Organisational Assurance Working Group to identify any learning points. This was an internal process; however, Members would receive information at some events through communications at meetings and also through the Bulletin and performance monitoring reports presented to the Authority.

Members recognised the timely response to the incident and the success in containing the fire to the flat of origin.

Water-related Incident in Bedford

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that a canoeist on the Great Ouse had reported a woman lying face down in the water along The Embankment in Bedford on 16 July 2023. Service personnel had attended the scene, retrieved the woman from the river and performed CPR and first aid on the individual, who had subsequently been transferred to hospital and remained in hospital. It was not yet known if the woman intended to enter the water or not.

It was noted that there had been two recent drowning incidents in the river and that the Service was holding a water safety awareness event on 25 July 2023, as water related incidents were on an upwards trajectory as a result of the hot and wet weather.

The Chief Fire Officer reported on additional water safety measures that had been implemented, such as the provision of reach poles on The Embankment and at Harrold Odell Country Park. All staff were trained in water rescue and the Service was improving both its preventative work and facilities for response in this area.

23-24/FRA/15 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority held on 20 June 2023 be confirmed as a true record.

23-24/FRA/16 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).

23-24/FRA/17 Audit & Standards Committee meeting 6 July 2023

The Chair presented the Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee meeting held on 6 July 2023 in the absence of Councillor Ali.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 6 July 2023 be noted.

23-24/FRA/18 Executive Committee meeting 11 July 2023

The Chair introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 11 July 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 6 July 2023 be noted.

23-24/FRA/19 Terms of Reference of Fire Authority

The Monitoring Officer introduced his report on proposed changes to the Terms of Reference of the Fire and Rescue Authority which arose from discussions around Lead Member areas at the meeting of the Executive on 11 July 2023. These related exclusively to updating the Lead Member roles, which were specifically set out in the Terms of Reference that had been approved by the Fire and Rescue Authority at the conclusion of the governance review in March 2023.

Following the decision of the Fire and Rescue Authority to delegate the appointment to Lead Member Roles at the Annual General Meeting on 20 June 2023 to the Executive Committee, that Committee, at its meeting on 11 July 2023, was presented with, and agreed in principle, re-designated Lead Member roles that would be more compatible with the strategic aims of the Authority following the adoption of a new Community Risk Management Plan.

The changes were set out in full in Appendix 2 to the report. Three of the roles were substantially, if not completely, the same and so had been appointed to at the meeting.

Two new roles had been proposed: Physical and Digital Assets and Finance, Productivity and Efficiency. The Members nominated for these were the Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, and the Authority was being asked to agree the changes to the Terms of Reference and ratify the appointments made by the Executive Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, once the appointments to Lead Member roles were agreed, Principal Officers would make arrangements to meet with and brief Executive Members on their areas of responsibility before the next meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Amendments to the Authority's Terms of Reference as shown in Appendix 2 of the report be approved.
2. That the appointment of the following members of the Executive Committee into the following Lead Member roles be noted:
 - a. 'Prevention and Protection': Councillor Sultan
 - b. 'Emergency Response and Resilience' (redesignated as 'Emergency Response'): Councillor Goodchild
 - c. 'Workforce and Organisational Development' (redesignated as 'People & Culture'): Councillor Hussain
3. That the appointment of the following members of the Executive Committee into the following Lead Member roles be ratified:
 - a. 'Physical and Digital Assets': Councillor Burnett

b. 'Finance, Productivity and Efficiency': Councillor Headley

23-24/FRA/20 2022/23 Q4 Year End Performance Report

The Fire and Rescue Authority received a summary of organisational performance at the end of the fourth quarter of the 2022-23 financial year.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, in addition to the year to date performance information, data was also provided in comparison to the previous year's performance, as well as the five year average.

In response to questions from Members, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that:

- Primary fires were classed as fires affecting people or property and secondary fires were generally smaller outdoor fires that did not involve people or property. Deliberate fires could be primary or secondary fires.
- Call handling performance was measured both in terms of time of alert to time of response and time of call to time of response. The decision had been made to provide both sets of data to improve transparency. The general increase in incidents would impact on attendance standards and times. The data indicated that the response was 6 seconds over the target time of 10 minutes but under the target time in relation to other incidents. It was also worth noting that increased call challenge could not be undertaken effectively in a very short period of time and asking Control Staff to challenge calls would increase response times. A review would be carried out this year, at the previous request of Members, on attendance standards so that the performance data reported was more meaningful.
- False alarms caused by fire alarm testing should not be responded to, but this was dependent on the level of call challenge.
- Performance data was presented to Members on a quarterly basis.
- Some of the data relating to call handling was not available as the Service had changed mobilising systems during the year.
- The incident relating to the three injuries affecting performance against the indicator measuring days lost due to serious accidents involved a member of the public colliding with a fire appliance. This had been investigated and reviewed by the Organisational Assurance Working Group but was not the fault of the Service.
- Fitness tests were now being undertaken every day and was expected that performance against this measure would improve in the current reporting year.

Ric Brackenbury, Business Application Manager, advised that the new mobilising system was able to extract data from January 2023 so this data could be reported to Members at future meetings.

Stuart Auger, Head of Response, explained that major incidents generated multiple calls and that this could delay response as there were only three operator positions in Fire Control. For example, a vehicle fire on the M1 could generate 50-100 calls.

RESOLVED:

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

23-24/FRA/21 2023/24 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer presented his report on the forecast year-end (31 March 2024) budget monitoring position as at 31 May 2023.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer reported that the Authority would receive an additional £460,000 above the budgeted amount in relation to Business Rates Section 31/Tariff top-up Payments, and an increase of £9,000 in Services Grant following the Government's final confirmation for 2023/24 after the budget setting process had been concluded. The Service had also been awarded a Protection grant of £153,000 which was discussed earlier in the meeting.

The income from investments was £180,000 more than forecast as at the end of May and there was a forecast underspend in non-operational staffing as the result of vacancies. The current forecast underspend was approximately £700,000 and Members were being asked to agree an equal apportionment of the forecast underspend/final underspend between the Transformational Reserve and the Pay/Pensions reserve, noting that it was anticipated that pay increases above the levels currently budgeted for would be agreed for future years.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the year to date staffing figures were on track. These had not been reported on this occasion due to the time lag between the reporting period and the meeting date the report was being submitted for.

The Assistant Chief Officer explained how the Pay and Pensions Reserve had been used to fund the fire fighters pay award for the current financial year. As at 31 March 2023, this reserve stood at £1.126 million. £1 million had been used in the budget-setting process for 2023/24 so the balance was currently £126,000. The transformational earmarked reserve was also used to help in budget-setting over the medium term to prevent the need for rash savings and efficiencies.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the constant financial challenges facing the public sector, including the unfunded pay awards, had been a factor in introducing a Lead Member role for Finance, Productivity and Efficiency.

In response to a question about the use of the Pay and Pensions reserve, the Assistant Chief Officer explained that the Service personnel were involved in two pension schemes: the fire fighters pension schemes for operational staff and the Local Government Pension Scheme for non-operational staff. The Local Government Pension Scheme was a funded scheme through which assets were invested. The fire fighters pensions schemes were unfunded schemes supported through the Home Office. It was a Member decision to move funds in and out of the Pay and Pensions reserve so these were not ring-fenced.

In response to a further question, the Assistant Chief Officer expressed the view that there were no capital or revenue schemes not already included in the funded Capital Programme which it would be more beneficial to the Service to fund at the expense of allocating the underspend to reserves to assist in future budget-setting.

It was proposed that items 1-5 be taken en bloc with item 6 being considered separately.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updates provided within this report be noted.
2. That the receipt of Business Rates income from central government in excess of budget be noted.
3. That the receipt of Services Grant from central government above the budget be noted.
4. That the unbudgeted Protection uplift Grant for 2023/24 be noted.
5. That the forecast increase in Investment income be noted.
6. That it be agreed to apportion equally the forecast underspend to the Transformation Reserve and Pay/Pensions Reserve.

23-24/FRA/22 2023-2027 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) - Briefing for new Members

The Chief Fire Officer briefed Members of the new Fire and Rescue Authority on the 2023-27 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which was approved at the Fire and Rescue Authority's meeting on the 30 March 2023 and subsequently published on the Service website.

In response to a question, Members were advised of the extensive consultation process that had been conducted in relation to the CRMP that had resulted in the highest number of responses received to date for a CRMP consultation. This was undertaken using a number of different methods, including attendance at events, one to one interviews, an online survey and direct consultation with stakeholders, partners, and specific groups, such as young people.

It was confirmed that Town and Parish Councils had been consulted as part of this process.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service has also set up a Community Panel, which first met in May. This would be a valuable asset in terms of community consultation.

In response to a question about how often the CRMP was reviewed, the Chief Fire Officer replied that progress against the CRMP was reported to the Fire and Rescue Authority on at least a 6 monthly basis. An action plan was prepared for each year, with the main body of the CRMP updated every four years.

A review of the Service estate would be undertaken, given the age and condition of some of the stations. Dunstable was the most modern station, built in 2009, followed by Woburn in 1997. The majority of stations dated from the 1970s, and the stations were not necessarily located in the areas that would help to improve response times to incidents as the population of Bedfordshire continued to increase. This was a major piece of work in which Members would be fully engaged, and the initial discussions would be held on the Member Development Day on 5 October 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan covering the period 2023-27 be noted.

23-24/FRA/23 Work Programme

Members received the proposed work programme for 2023/24 and were asked if there were any items they would like to be included.

It was noted that, due to diary conflicts, the next meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority would be held on 3 October 2023. A meeting of the Executive Committee would now be held on the original meeting date of 21 September 2023.

The Chair emphasised the importance of Members attending Member Development Days and Budget Workshops. These were being held on the following dates:

5 October 2023 – Member Development Day at Luton Community Fire Station

30 November 2023 – Member Development Day and Budget Workshop

25 January 2024 – Budget Workshop

29 February 2024 – Member Development Day

The Chief Fire Officer advised that it was his intention to hold these events in different locations so Members could develop a greater understanding of the Service's estate.

RESOLVED:

1. That the work programme for 2023/24 be received and the 'cyclical' agenda items for each meeting in 2023/24 be noted.

2. That it be agreed that the next meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority be held on 3 October 2023, and the next meeting of the Executive Committee be held on 21 September 2023.

The meeting ended at 11.23 am