

BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

14 DECEMBER 2017

Present: Councillors C Atkins (Chair), F Chapman, J Chatterley, P Downing (Vice-Chair), P Duckett, D Franks, M Headley, T Khan, D McVicar, J Mingay, R Saleem and Y Waheed

Mr G Chambers, AC D Cook, ACO Z Evans, CFO P Fuller and DCFO G Ranger

17-18/FRA/41 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, Kathryn Holloway.

17-18/FRA/42 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

17-18/FRA/43 Communications

A list of the communications was tabled for information and included the following:

Civic Events

The Chair and the Chief Fire Officer had attended the Business Awards in Bedford as the Service had presented an award for Lifetime Achievement.

The Chief Fire Officer and Councillor Waheed had attended the Love Luton Awards as the Service had presented an award for Safer Communities.

The young woman who was the recipient of the Child Courage Award was also one of the Service's Fire Cadets.

Representatives of the Authority and the Service had attended Remembrance Sunday events throughout the County.

Police and Crime Commissioner

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire had recently given evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee requesting additional funding for the Force.

Dunstable Community Fire Station

Dunstable Community Fire Station were about to participate in a trial to act as a blood donation centre. It was recognised that the Blood and Transfusion Service was always seeking

additional venues and this was a good example of partnership working and providing additional services to the community.

Employment Appeal Tribunal

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that the firefighters' case against the transitional arrangements relating to the new pensions scheme had been referred to the Employment Appeal Tribunal and that the Tribunal had sat the previous week. The judgement was expected in mid-January 2018 and would be reported to Members at that time.

Mouth Cancer Screening

The Assistant Chief Officer reported on the visit of a mobile mouth cancer screening unit to Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters. Take-up of the screening was extremely high.

One Public Estate

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that an interest free loan of £230,000 had been awarded from One Public Estate to fund a feasibility study for a joint Police and Fire Headquarters. Details about the use and the repayment of the loan had not yet been received.

Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the funeral of the Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson, the serving Chief of Avon Fire and Rescue Service, was being held that day.

17-18/FRA/44 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17-18/FRA/45 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).

17-18/FRA/46 Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group 29 November 2017

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 29 November 2017.

The Group had made two recommendations, one in relation to the addition of an aerial drone to the Capital Programme and the other recommending a five-year extension of the current ICT Shared Service with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Councillor Headley advised that the option for either Service to end the contract before the expiry of the five-year period remained.

RESOLVED:

1. That the addition of an aerial drone to the capital programme, to be purchased in conjunction with Bedfordshire Police, be approved.
2. That the Shared Services agreement between Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority for a further period of five years with the same terms as the existing agreement be agreed, acknowledging that the agreement would have to be amended to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.
3. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2017 be received.

17-18/FRA/47 Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group 30 November 2017

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 30 November 2017.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that a letter was currently being drafted for the Chair to sign requesting the Chief Executives of the three unitary authorities to formally agree to a “developer pays” scheme in relation to the provision of fire hydrants in new developments.

At present an informal arrangement was in place and this had been working well, with no challenge from the developers. It was recognised that fire hydrants were easier and cheaper to fit at the construction stage rather than retrospectively.

Councillor Mingay highlighted the other following matters:

- The tender process for an aerial drone had commenced and should conclude in February 2018.
- The Service had responded to over 500 incidents as part of the effecting entry agreement.
- 15 new on call recruits had recently attended a Retained Foundation Training Course and 10 had attended Breathing Apparatus training.
- The performance indicator measuring the number of primary fires had missed its target by 16%. This was an improvement from the previous quarter but remained a concern.
- The Arson State of the Nation Report for 2017 had recently been published. 47% of fires attended by Fire and Rescue Services nationally were deliberate. There had been a 44% increase in deliberate road vehicle fires and an 11% overall increase in deliberate fires nationally.
- There were also a number of areas of high performance, including a significant reduction in mobilisations to automatic fire detector false alarms following the introduction of a new mobilisation policy. The number of mobilisations to these calls had reduced by 44% from the previous year.
- Customer satisfaction rates with the Service were currently 100%.
- During its consideration of the Review of Effectiveness, Members of the Group had agreed that the Group was well supported by Officers.

Members commented on the low rate of prosecutions for arson and suggested that pressure should be placed on the Police to reassess the Force Strategy so that arson was a higher priority, recognising that it was a blight on local communities.

In response to a question on the Strategic Road Safety Partnership, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that this group was a rebranding of the former Casualty Reduction Partnership and would consist of the same key stakeholders as that Partnership. It was hoped that this would lead to a more consistent approach regarding road safety issues across the County.

RESOLVED:

1. That a letter be drafted for the Chair of the Authority to sign requesting the commitment of the Chief Executives of the three unitary authorities in Bedfordshire to formally agree a “developer pays” scheme in relation to the provision of fire hydrants.
2. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 30 November 2017 be received.

17-18/FRA/48 Mobilising System Options Appraisal

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer introduced his report which set out the contractual situation in relation to the current emergency call handling and mobilisation system and recommended an approach to identify the most appropriate arrangements for the future provision of emergency call handling and mobilisation.

The current system had been procured jointly with Essex Fire and Rescue Service in 2012 following the demise of the Government’s regional control project. The current contract expired in 2019 and Essex Fire and Rescue Service had indicated that it would be running a procurement exercise for a new mobilising system, in part due to the cost of upgrading the current system to ensure compliance with the Emergency Services Network that would replace Airwave.

It was recognised that the Service did not have the expertise internally to assess all the available options and the Authority was recommended to approve the engagement of specialist consultants to produce an options appraisal for consideration by Members.

This provided the Service with opportunities to consider collaborating with other emergency services.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that discussions had been held with the current provider regarding an extension of the contract in the interim period.

It was noted that the current provider could tender for the new contract.

RESOLVED:

That the options appraisal approach for the future provision of emergency call handling and mobilisation set out in the report be endorsed.

17-18/FRA/49 Draft 2018/19 Revenue and Capital Programme

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, submitted his report on the draft Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2018/19. This information had previously been presented at the first Members’ Budget Workshop in November.

The Authority was being asked to approve a draft revenue budget requirement of £29.15 million with a Council Tax increase of 1.99% and a draft Capital Programme of £1.219 million for public consultation.

A Council Tax increase of 1.99% equated to an annual £1.85 increase per Band D equivalent property, or just over 3.5 pence per week. It was anticipated that a cap of 2% would remain, although confirmation from the Department for Communities and Local Government had not yet been received. If the cap was removed, Members may be asked to consider options to increase Council Tax above 2%.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer reported that there had been an increase of 1,328 in Band D equivalent properties from the constituent Councils' original estimates for 2018/19. This equated to approximately £126,000 of additional Council Tax income. The variance in the business rates income from the original forecasts was negligible.

There was currently a collection fund surplus of £348,000 forecast for 2017/18, with £339,000 of this generated from Council Tax.

Members were referred to the Medium Term Revenue Plan that was attached as an appendix to the report. Additional costs had been forecast in relation to the firefighters' pension scheme. £750,000 had also been added in 2019/20 in relation to the new mobilising system. Other amendments included the addition of the Collection Fund surplus and an updated utilisation of the transformational earmarked reserves up to 2021/22.

It was noted that the business rate income may need to be updated and that the new budget bids would be discussed in greater detail at the Authority's next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That subject to review and consideration of these papers, the following be approved for public consultation:

1. A draft revenue budget requirement of £29.195 million, as per Appendix 1, with a council tax increase of 1.99%; and
2. A draft Capital Programme of £1.219 million as per Appendix 3.

17-18/FRA/50 Members' Allowances Scheme 2018/19

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer submitted the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2018/19. An increase in accordance with the local government pay award was proposed.

RESOLVED:

That the Members' Allowances Scheme be updated from 1 April 2018 in accordance with the proposals set out in the report and included as part of consideration of the Budget for 2018/19.

17-18/FRA/51 Collaboration Working Group

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented an update on the collaboration with the Police and Ambulance Service. In presenting the report, he highlighted the following:

- The Collaboration Working Group was now meeting at two-monthly intervals. A joint Fire and Police management team meeting was being held later in the week to consider progress to date and to discuss plans for the future.
- An internal audit of collaboration had recently been completed by RSM. A number of recommendations had been identified in the audit report and the Service was in the process of implementing these.
- As discussed earlier in the meeting, the bid for One Public Estate funding for a feasibility study for a joint Police and Fire Headquarters had been successful. This would be the largest collaboration project to date.
- Co-location of the Police at a number of the Community Fire Stations continued to be very successful.
- The effecting entry pilot had proved to be effective. The evaluation was currently in process but it was anticipated that this workstream would continue as part of normal response arrangements.

- The drone which would be purchased in conjunction with Bedfordshire Police would comply with recently released national specifications and may be listed on the national assets register.
- Control staff had recently been granted access to the Police incident monitoring system.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that a representative of East of England Ambulance Trust had attended a recent meeting of the Collaboration Working Group.

The view was expressed that the collaboration programme should include projects that could provide measurable improvements to service.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be acknowledged and that the progress that has been made to date be welcomed.

17-18/FRA/52 DCFO Appointment Process

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Executive had recently decided to proceed with a national advertisement for an operationally competent Deputy Chief Fire Officer in January 2018 following consideration of a range of options.

The Executive had delegated the detailed arrangements and content of the advertisement and selection process arrangements to the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

In response to a question, the Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the Executive Members would be involved in every stage of the recruitment process.

RESOLVED:

That the decision of the Authority's Executive to proceed with a national advertisement for the post of Deputy Chief Fire Officer in January 2018 be endorsed.

17-18/FRA/53 Calendar of Meetings 2018/19

Members received the draft calendar of meetings for 2018/19. School holidays and meetings of the constituent authorities had been avoided wherever possible.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the visit to the Fire Service College proposed for 20 June 2018 and encouraged all Members to attend. It was hoped that the Service's new recruits would be training there at the time.

RESOLVED:

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

17-18/FRA/54 Paperless Meetings Trial

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted a report on the possible introduction of paperless meetings across all Fire and Rescue Authority, Audit and Standards and Policy and Challenge Group meetings.

The Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group had been trialling paperless meetings successfully for over two years. With the introduction of modern.gov, it would be easier for Members to access all agendas electronically. A move towards paperless meetings could save the Authority in the region of £3230 in printing costs and postage per annum.

Members of the Authority would be supported to become paperless and could contact Area Commander Cook directly if they had any issues. It was noted that Members of the Luton Borough Council had been issued with tablets from the Council and that they were not allowed to download any applications directly onto this. This would require liaison between Officers from the Authority and Luton Borough Council to allow Luton Borough Council Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority access to the modern.gov application.

In relation to the recommendations set out in the report, it was acknowledged that the first two were advisory.

Many Members expressed the view that they did not want to use separate bedshire.com email addresses as they already had a number of different email accounts and would prefer to use their personal email addresses to access modern.gov.

In response to comments, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that paper copies of the agenda could still be provided to Members chairing meetings and that restricted reports could be sent out to Members in hard copy if they were not able to access these through the firewall if they chose to use their own personal email addresses.

It was also noted that anyone unable to access agendas and minutes electronically due to disability would be issued with hard copies.

RESOLVED:

That the approach set out below for the trial of paperless working be endorsed:

1. That Members respond to the email from Service Assurance Manager to confirm what type of device and operating systems (Apple iOS, windows or android) are loaded on to their device.
2. That Members download Modern.gov application from iTunes or google play to their tablet device and register within 48 hours of the email notification.
3. That the Modern.gov trial at Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group meetings, with the meeting packs in landscape view, continue.
4. That the implementation of paperless meetings take place from a set date in 2018 for all meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority, Audit and Standards Committee and the Policy and Challenge Groups.
5. That the trial of paperless meetings be reviewed at the Authority's Annual Meeting in 2019.

(Please note: Councillors T Khan and Y Waheed left the meeting during the consideration of this item as a result of other commitments.)

17-18/FRA/55 Information Bulletin

Members received the information bulletin for the period 1 July – 30 September 2017.

The Chair invited Members to the Christingle Service on 21 December 2017 at St Mary's Church in Woburn and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. She asked that her thanks to those firefighters and other Fire and Rescue staff who were working over the holiday period be recorded.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

17-18/FRA/56 Supplementary Item: Enabling Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to sit and vote on Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) - Government Consultation

The Chair advised that this item had been included on the agenda as a late item of urgent business as the deadline for responses to the consultation was 15 January 2018, which was before the next scheduled meeting of the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the proposed changes to FRA Combination Scheme Orders were to allow Fire and Rescue Authorities to appoint the relevant Police and Crime Commissioner to the Authority with voting rights and to enable the Police and Crime Commissioner to appoint a substitute to attend meetings on his/her behalf. The substitute could speak at meetings but would not be granted voting rights.

Whilst supporting the proposals in principal, Members expressed concern about the possible impact that an additional member would have on the political balance of the Authority and agreed that Government should be recommended to consider this as part of the consultation feedback.

RESOLVED:

That the following response to the consultation be submitted on behalf of the Authority: That the proposals as set out in the consultation document be supported, and that the Home Office be recommended to give consideration to the change it might make to the political balance of Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm