

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2018

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

Ms Justine Currell, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner,
CFO P Fuller, ACO Z Evans, SOC A Peckham, AC D Cook, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers

17-18/FRA/57 Apologies

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

17-18/FRA/58 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

Councillor Chapman disclosed a local interest in the Statement of Assurance (Minute 17-18/fa/061 Audit and Standards Committee 6 December 2017 refers) as a trustee of Hazard Alley, a safety centre located in Milton Keynes.

17-18/FRA/59 Communications

The Chair informed the FRA that she had agreed to add a late urgent item to the agenda. The item concerned options for the future provision of an emergency call handling and mobilisation system. It was important for a decision to be taken on a short-list at this meeting so that a detailed appraisal of the options could be completed in time for a preferred option with supporting business case to be recommended to the FRA by the end of March 2018.

17-18/FRA/60 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17-18/FRA/61 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/62 Audit and Standards Committee 6 December 2017

Councillor Chapman submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 6 December 2017, along with the Authority's Statement of Assurance.

Area Commander D Cook highlighted the updates to the Statement of Assurance and reminded Members of the requirement for English fire and rescue authorities to produce and publish an annual Statement of Assurance.

The Statement sets out the Authority's financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements as well as providing an overview of the services provided throughout the year. The number of incidents attended by the Service had increased during the year as a result of the extension of collaborative working with other blue light services. The benefit of protection and prevention work was demonstrated by the reduction in injuries arising from accidental dwelling fires.

In relation to the firefighters' pension changes dispute, Assistant Chief Officer Evans advised that this was ongoing and that consideration of the question of whether disproportionate impact was related to age had been referred back to the Employment Tribunal. More information would be provided to Members on the progress of this issue as and when it was available.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Statement of Assurance 2016/17 be approved.
2. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2017 be received.

17-18/FRA/63 Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group 11 January 2018

Councillor Waheed submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 11 January 2018 and highlighted the following:

- The Service had demonstrated strong performance against indicator EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women), with more female recruits attending a training course in Quarter 3.
- All the health and safety indicators had met or exceeded target levels.
- The Public Sector Equality Duty Report had been approved. This document set out information on the local population, the Service's practices, workforce and the equality objectives for 2016 to 2020.
- A questionnaire capturing equality data had been developed for distribution at Open Days. This had been trialled at 6 stations in 2017 and was being rolled out across all stations during 2018.
- The Positive Action Report consisted of 15 actions and set out the expected outcomes, Management Lead and timescale for completion.
- The Service had recently recruited an individual with Police experience to its HR team and was working with Bedfordshire Police on its recruitment campaign as it sought to recruit more candidates from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to become more representative of the communities that it served.
- The Service had conducted an employee opinion survey. 62.8% of employees had completed the survey and a number of positives, as well as areas for development, had been identified. An action plan had been created to address the areas of development.
- Following a request from Members at the previous meeting, a report on the Service's appraisal process, including redacted samples of appraisal documents, was submitted to the Policy and Challenge Group.
- Members were also advised of amendments to firefighter pension legislation.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 11 January 2018 be received.

17-18/FRA/64 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, presented his report on the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 31 December 2017.

He reported that the forecast non-salary underspend was £206,500 and the forecast salary underspend was £265,000, resulting in a total forecast underspend of £471,500.

In response to questions on the revenue budget forecast outturn, the Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that he would provide additional information to Members about the variances not included in the report and detailing the proposed spend for Quarter 4 in the strategic management budget via email.

Members were asked to approve an addition to the Capital Programme of £75,000 to extend car parking at Fire and Rescue Headquarters on Southfields Road. Approximately 35 on-street car parking spaces for Service employees would be lost when double yellow lines were installed along the length of the road opposite headquarters. The proposals related to works to the existing main car park to create 21 additional spaces and the installation of a grass grid base near the Training Centre car park to create 12 car parking spaces.

Members considered this addition in the context of the possible development of a joint Police and Fire Headquarters. It was recognised that there was a need to alleviate the current parking issues that would result from the planned works to Southfields Road, whilst taking into consideration the uncertainty of the future of the current Headquarters site.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that the tender had been constructed so that the two parts of the project could be progressed individually, with no added cost to the Service.

RESOLVED:

1. That the forecast outturn for revenue and capital be acknowledged.
2. That the addition of a capital project to expand car parking at Fire and Rescue Headquarters to the value of £75,000 be approved, subject to the works to the main car park being undertaken first, with a review of the car parking situation being undertaken before the work on the additional grass grid spaces at the Training Centre car park is progressed.

17-18/FRA/65 The 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, submitted his report on the Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2018/19. The Authority was being asked to approve a draft revenue budget requirement of £29.437 million with a Council Tax increase of 2.99%.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer reported that there had been a slight variation to the figures previously discussed at the Members' Budget Workshop of £21,000 per annum. There had also been an increase to Line 54 of the Medium Term Revenue Plan to £195,000. With these changes, the forecast net balance of the Transformational Earmarked Reserve in 2021/22 had increased from £1.019 million to approximately £1.5 million which could result in the reserve being used to balance the budget in 2022/23, subject to the outcome of national pay bargaining negotiations.

In relation to the assumptions underpinning the development of the budget, it was noted that the firefighter pay award could be a significant budget pressure. A 4% provision had been

made for the firefighters pay award; however, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services had recently been awarded a 20% increase over a four year period. This was subject to Scottish firefighters accepting the broadening of the traditional role of a firefighter. Pay negotiations in England remained ongoing and could present a much larger cost than that currently forecast.

The Service currently held £2.6 million in general reserves, approximately 9% of its budget, which was the average for Combined Fire Authorities.

The original budget proposals, prior to the change in the Council Tax Referendum cap, had been subject to public consultation, with 78% of respondents supporting a Council Tax increase of between £2.50- £5 per Band D property. The current proposals resulted in a £2.78 increase per annum per Band D property.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the proactive use of the transformational earmarked reserve to provide an enhanced service to the public in the context of sustained funding reductions, as illustrated in a graph detailing the Revenue Support Grant reductions set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Officers deliberately generated an underspend to ensure that funds were rolled forwards to support the budget setting process in future years. It was important that this information was captured and shared with others.

The recommendations relating to the revenue budget requirement of £29.437 million, with a corresponding precept of £19.972 million and a 2.99% Council Tax increase were put to the meeting and the votes recorded thereon were as follows:

For the Councillors Atkins, Chapman, Chatterley, Duckett, Franks, Headley,
Recommendations Khan, McVicar, Mingay, Saleem and Waheed
(11)

RESOLVED:

1. That it be determined for 2018/19 that:
 - (a) A Revenue Budget requirement is set at £29.437m, met as indicated in paragraph 3.8 of the report.
 - (b) In meeting this budget requirement, the Authority's Precept be set at £19.972m and that as a consequences, a Council Tax increase of 2.99% up to £95.59 per Band D equivalent property, calculated as shown in Paragraph 3.8 of this report.
 - (c) In order to meet the Precept requirement, the Head of Finance/Treasurer be authorised to issue Precepts in the necessary form to each of the Unitary Councils and for the amounts indicated in Paragraph 3.11 of this report.
2. That the Medium Term Revenue Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report and the 2018/19 savings and efficiencies detailed at Appendix 2 to the report be approved.
3. That the 2017/18 in-year underspend is allocated to the Transformation Reserve.
4. That the Medium Term Capital Programme attached at Appendix 3 to the report be approved.
5. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy attached at Appendix 4 to the report, which also contains the reserves strategy, be approved.
6. That in considering the above recommendations, the Treasurer's statement on the robustness of estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of reserves for which the budget provides, attached at Appendix 5 to this report, be noted.
7. That any budget amendments, following receipt of the final settlement figures, be delegated to the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer.

17-18/FRA/66 Localism Act 2011 - Pay Policy Statement 2018

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted the annual pay policy statement and its constituent parts for the financial year 2018/19. She referred Members to the changes from the previous annual pay statement including information on nationally negotiated pay increases for Green, Grey and Gold Book staff and updates to the responsibility and scale of the Service and the pay multiples.

In response to questions, the Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the Service was subject to national pay bargaining agreements and could not negotiate at a local level and that the pay multiple was based on the unabated salary of the Chief Fire Officer.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed pay policy statement for 2018/19 be approved.

17-18/FRA/67 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Consultation

Strategic Operational Commander Peckham presented his report on the public consultation for the Fire and Rescue inspection programme and framework presented by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The consultation period ran from 19 December 2017-19 February 2018.

The inspection would assess the operational service, efficiency of the service and organisational effectiveness of the service. Following the piloting of the inspection process in Staffordshire, West Yorkshire and Suffolk Fire and Rescue Services, the inspection process would be undertaken in three tranches during an 18 month period in 2018/19, with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in the first tranche. Judgements would range from outstanding to inadequate. A good judgement would be awarded based on policy, practice or performance that met relevant national operational guidance or standards.

The Authority was advised that Service Officers were working closely with HMICFRS and that HMICFRS was engaging with the sector. Examples of this were that 50 members of the sector had been seconded to support the process and the sector was represented on the Technical Advisory Group which was working on data collection.

Members were referred to the inspection methodology which set out 11 diagnostics relating to the three inspection areas and discussed the proposed Service considerations to the Government consultation set out in Appendix B.

Concern was expressed about the level of resource that would be required to support the inspection, as it was noted that the process would take a number of weeks, noting that Senior Officer support for the process had already been allocated.

It was noted that the inspection process coincided with the introduction of the revised National Framework and that there may be a shift towards national standards as a result of the introduction of the inspection regime.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Service considerations for a response to the public consultation be received.
2. That a joint response to the consultation document, as set out as in Appendix B to the report, be submitted from both the Service and the Authority.

17-18/FRA/68 Home Office Fire & Rescue National Framework for England Government Consultation

Area Commander Cook introduced a report which informed the Fire and Rescue Authority of the Government's consultation on the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. Changes from the 2012 Framework and the 2014 addendum were detailed in the report. The consultation on the Framework ended on 14 February 2018.

Key differences included the identification of new priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities, references to the new inspection regime and to the publication of a Medium Term Financial Strategy, changes resulting from the Police and Crime Act 2017 and the statutory duty of Fire and Rescue Authorities, Police and Ambulance Services to collaborate for efficiencies and effectiveness and responsibility for maintaining the national resilience capability.

The new Framework would come into effect from 1 April 2018.

In response to questions, Area Commander Cook confirmed that the Service had no specific comments it wished to raise through the consultation process, but that it would be producing a response to the consultation.

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft National Framework document and the changes from the 2012 version and the 2014 addendum be acknowledged.
2. That a response to the Government consultation of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England document, if deemed necessary, be delegated to the Chair of the Authority to meet the required timescales.

17-18/FRA/69 Collaboration Working Group

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Evans provided an update on the collaborative work being undertaken by the Service.

He made the following comments:

- A feasibility study relating to the development of a joint Police and Fire Headquarters was being progressed and was being funded through a loan from One Public Estate. Governance arrangements for the project were currently being developed, and the Service's Head of Finance had been appointed as the lead for the project.
- Co-location had been successful. There had been some issues around the facilities requirements at Leighton Buzzard and these were being addressed.
- Members were invited to two launch events relating to Leighton Buzzard and the hub in Luton.
- The pilots of missing vulnerable persons' searches and effecting entry were being evaluated and would be discussed at the next Project Board. It was anticipated that approval to include these duties as business as usual would be requested.
- The purchase of a drone had been delayed as the costs had been higher than that specified in the tender. Further collaboration on drone provision across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire was being explored.
- Control staff had been granted access to the Police STORM Incident reporting system.

Members recognised the significant amount of collaborative work being undertaken.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged.

17-18/FRA/70 Information Bulletin

Members received the information bulletin for the period 1 October – 31 December 2017.

In response to a question, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Evans reported that one fatality during the period had been referred to the coroner and may be attributed to a fire at the property.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service supported vulnerable elderly people through the provision of Safe and Well visits. Assisted living facilities were not generally deemed to be high-risk unless a structural issue had been identified.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that the Service analysed historical and demographic data, including the Exeter data set, to identify individuals at risk. This included the over 65s. That data was used to inform the programme of Safe and Well visits. A number of referrals were also received from Age Concern. Those most at risk generally did not reside in supported living communities, but in private homes where smoke alarms had not been fitted.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

17-18/FRA/71 Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1:
Exclusion of the Public (Mobilising System Options Short List)

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 Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Mobilising System Options Short List (paragraph 3)

17-18/FRA/72 Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, paragraphs 3 and 4 of part 1:
Exclusion of the Public (Change in Benefit in Kind Calculation on Emergency Vehicles)

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 Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Change in Benefit in Kind Calculation on Emergency Vehicles (paragraphs 3 and 4)

The meeting ended at 1.07 pm