

## MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY ON 10 DECEMBER 2020

Present: Councillors C Atkins, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, P Duckett, D Franks, J Gambold, M Headley, S Khurshid, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

CFO P Fuller, DCFO A Hopkinson, ACO G Chambers, ACFO A Peckham, SOC G Jeffery and Mr J Atkinson

### 20-21/FRA/49 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R Berry.

### 20-21/FRA/50 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

### 20-21/FRA/51 Communications

#### Correspondence

The Chair reported that he had circulated the three items of correspondence he had received. The first was a fire and rescue service inspection update that had been received from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the second was from the Home Office in relation to the fire and rescue sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the third was also from HMICFRS providing a report on inspection activity in 2020/21.

#### Fire Incident

The Chief Fire Officer reported on an incident in St Neots to which Bedfordshire crews had responded to support Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. There had been two fire fatalities and appropriate support arrangements were being put in place for the responding crews.

#### Grant Funding Bid

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service had received notification from the Minister that it had been unsuccessful in its bid for a second wave of COVID funding. It was not known if any of the five fire and rescue services who had applied had been granted funding. As

the pressures detailed in the bid related primarily to the winter period, the Service had been encouraged to resubmit a bid for retrospective funding in the New Year.

#### Request from East of England Ambulance Service Trust

The Chief Fire Officer reported that a formal request from East of England Ambulance Service Trust had been received to continue providing support to the Trust until the end of March 2021. Discussions were ongoing regarding the impact to the Service and how any additional costs arising would be reimbursed.

#### Request from the Clinical Commissioning Group

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service had also received a formal request from the CCG to support the mass vaccination programme. Volunteers were required to provide marshalling and administrative support in four hour blocks at locations around Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.

The Service did not feel that it was able to facilitate this as a result of the impact on operational resilience but would circulate the request via the Blue Bulletin and encourage members of staff to volunteer in their own time if they so wished.

#### Draft COVID-19 Inspection Letter

The Chief Fire Officer reported that he had received the draft letter detailing the outcome of the recent HMICFRS COVID-19 inspection as part of the pre-publication fact-checking stage. The Service had been requested to populate a template on activities undertaken as a result of the national tri-partite agreement. As the Service had taken part in local agreements, the activity undertaken by the Service was not reflected in this part of the document and the Chief Fire Officer advised that he would be seeking reassurances that this would be referred to if the table was published as part of the annual State of Fire Report.

#### NJC Circular

A joint circular from the secretaries of the national employers and the Fire Brigades Union had been received regarding the incorporation of the tri-partite agreement into the employee/employer relationship at national level.

#### 20-21/FRA/52 Minutes

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2020 be confirmed as a true record.

### 20-21/FRA/53 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).

### 20-21/FRA/54 HMICFRS Update Report

Service Operational Commander Jeffery provided an update on the COVID-19 inspection undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in October 2020. The inspection included evidence gathering, a staff survey and a series of interviews covering areas such as business continuity management, operational response and fire control, human resources, health and safety, prevention, protection, finance and the Service response to COVID-19.

As reported earlier in the meeting, the draft letter detailing the outcome of the inspection that took place from 12-23 October 2020 had now been received and feedback had been overwhelmingly positive, in particular the recognition of the significant support that the Service has provided to the Ambulance Service over the pandemic period and the ability of the Service to maintain its core business. The two learning points related to the delay in the reintroduction of on-call training and the resumption of the fire safety audit inspection programme.

The Service would respond to the draft letter and it was anticipated that the final letter would be published by the end of the year.

In response to a question, the Service Operational Commander confirmed that the Service continued to prepare for the full inspection, which had been postponed from April 2020 and was anticipated to take place early in 2021. This included regular contact with the Service Liaison Lead at HMICFRS.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that this was the last meeting of the Authority that Service Operational Commander Jeffery would be attending before he retired at the end of the year.

The Chair and other Members of the Authority thanked Service Operational Commander Jeffery for his commitment and years of service and wished him all the best in his retirement.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the update be received.

## 20-21/FRA/55 Q2 Performance Report

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented a summary of organisational performance at the end of Quarter 2 2020/21. In introducing the report, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that 80% of the performance indicators were meeting target or within 10% variance and 86% had improved from the previous year.

The Members of the Executive Committee confirmed that they had met with the relevant Service Leads to discuss their relevant performance areas.

In discussing the performance, it was noted that the number of primary fire fatalities was 1 for the year, and that the percentage shown was not the actual against the five year average but the percentage reduction between the two, which was 25% as reported.

It was also noted that 44% of the total number of Automatic Fire Alarms attended in Non-Domestic Properties were to premises in Bedford Borough. Additional information on the location of the premises would be provided to Councillor Atkins as the relevant Executive Member.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted areas of good performance during the reporting period, including a 20% reduction in primary fires and an increase in Safe and Well Visits delivered during September and October 2020. In terms of response, the availability of on-call fire fighters had improved during the period.

The increase in secondary fires was thought to be caused by the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres and the consequent increase in rubbish fires.

In relation to the prevention indicators, efforts were being made to complete the fire safety audit by year-end, noting that this activity had ceased during the first lockdown period as the Service had prioritised other areas of work.

There had been a decrease in performance against the training indicators due to COVID as the Service had not been able to deliver as many courses. Work was now being undertaken to make the Training Centre more COVID secure and alternative methods of providing training were also being considered.

The health and safety indicators had been impacted by a very small number of accidents resulting in long periods of time off from work, particularly in the case of an on-call fire fighter who had sustained a burn injury during training.

In response to a question about the availability of the first on-call appliance, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that performance against this indicator was not impacted by the secondment of staff to the Ambulance Service. The Chief Fire Officer referred to other factors which

impacted performance against this indicator, including the location of the nearest available resource and traffic conditions, and reassured Members that resourcing was kept under constant review.

The secondment of staff to the Ambulance Service was funded primarily through Government grant. The on-call staff were also available to the Service and many had taken a sabbatical from their primary employment to support the Ambulance Service. There was a 60/40 split between whole time and on call fire fighters who had been seconded.

In response to a question about the recording of fire fatalities, Members were advised that it was for the Coroner to decide if a death was to be recorded as a fire death. This would not be the case if it was an unavoidable death.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) at the end of Quarter Two be acknowledged.
2. That the report be approved for publication on the Service's website.

20-21/FRA/56 2021/22 Budget Update and Consultation

The Assistant Chief Officer – Finance and Corporate Services introduced his report which provided an update on the 2021/22 Budget process and presented the draft Council Tax consultation questions. The questions remained largely unchanged from the previous year and the consultation would be run in parallel with the consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan.

Unlike in previous years, the Authority would be considering its draft budget in January. This was as a result of the delay in the announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review, as the detail of the provisional financial settlement would not be released until around 17 December 2020.

As part of the announcement, the Council Tax referendum limit had been set at 2% and the Government had guaranteed to cover 75% of Collection Fund losses due to COVID-19.

Therefore, it was being proposed to consult on support for a 1.99% Council Tax increase. This would be an increase of £2 per annum for a Band D property. As in previous years, support for a larger increase would be gauged. Consultees would also be asked for any suggestions for savings or efficiencies which could be considered by the Service.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the proposed public Council Tax consultation questions at Appendix 1 of the report be approved.
2. That the budget process updates be noted.

## 20-21/FRA/57 Public Sector Equality Duty Report

The Chief Fire Officer submitted the Service's Public Sector Equality Duty Report (2019/20) to the Authority for consideration. The report provided information on the support provided for members of staff with protected characteristics, identified the percentage of underrepresented groups in the Service's employment and highlighted other equality issues such as the gender pay gap.

Members were referred to the Executive Summary of the report which set out the position as at 31 March 2020 and demonstrated the evolution of the Service to become more representative of the communities it served over time.

Members commented favourably on how informative and well laid out the report was and the amount of work undertaken in this area throughout the Service.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the report be approved.

## 20-21/FRA/58 2019-23 Community Risk Management Plan - draft 2021/22 Annual Action Plan

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) annual action plan for 2021/22 and explained the associated public consultation process. The publication of the CRMP was a requirement under the current National Framework and must reflect up to date risk information and cover at least a 3 year period. The current CRMP covered a four-year period from 2019-2023 and had been approved by the Authority in 2019.

The CRMP had been updated to include a new foreword by the Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Fire Authority, along with more recent photographs and financial information.

In response to a question about the introduction of a volunteer scheme, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that it was envisaged that volunteers would work alongside the prevention teams and would provide a vital link to the communities in Bedfordshire, so that the Service could better understand its communities and how to improve the uptake of these services.

It was recognised that there were many active charity and voluntary organisations operating in Bedfordshire and that they had provided essential support to the communities of Bedfordshire during the pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service worked closely with the CCG to identify individuals in need of Safe and Well visits, as well as using Exeter data. The importance of partnership working to identify and support these individuals was acknowledged.

In reference to the emergency cover review, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that this would be presented to Members at a future Authority meeting and the Service had not committed to any changes at this stage. This would form part of the Service's Estates Strategy.

The Chief Fire Officer added that the review was currently in an initial data gathering and analysis stage.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the initial draft of Community Risk Management Plan Annual Action Plan for 2021/22 be approved.
2. That the consultation arrangements and questions be agreed.

20-21/FRA/59 Members' Allowances Scheme 2021/22

Mr J Atkinson, the Secretary and Monitoring Officer, presented his review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2021/22. It was being proposed that the Scheme be updated in accordance with the annual local government pay award, with no other changes being proposed at this stage.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Members' Allowances Scheme be updated from 1 June 2021 in accordance with the proposals set out in the report and that the Scheme be adopted for the financial year 2021/22.

20-21/FRA/60 Calendar of Meetings 2021/22

Members received the draft calendar of meetings for 2021/22, noting that the Chair had requested that regular meetings of the Executive Committee be included in the final version of the calendar. Members were advised that liaison had already taken place with the constituent authorities during the preparation of the draft calendar.

A request was made to postpone the meeting of the Authority scheduled for 2 September 2021 to the following week. An additional request was made for calendar invites to be sent for all meetings on the calendar, once it was approved.

**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, subject to the inclusion of Executive Committee dates and consideration being given to postponing the Authority meeting on 2 September 2021 to the following week.

20-21/FRA/61 Blue Light Collaboration Strategic Board

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update on the recent meeting of the Blue Light Collaboration Strategic Board.

The main focus of discussion had been the set of principles that would underpin the tri-service estates strategy. These had received broad support, with partners being asked to provide additional written feedback with a view to a final draft being submitted to a meeting in the New Year to be agreed by the Board.

Following the approval by the Board, the Service's own estates strategy would be reviewed and the outcome of this would be presented to a future meeting of the Authority.

The other item of discussion had been the joint Headquarters project. The Service's current Headquarters housed five key functions: response, control, training, general Headquarter offices and workshops and stores. Consideration was currently being given to the development of a joint workshop for the three services, following the successful trial of the servicing of ambulances by the Service.

The Board had requested a costed options appraisal to be presented to a future meeting.

Councillor McVicar, as the lead Member for Collaboration, commented on the support from the other services from the work being led by this Service, but advised caution as any financial impact of new Headquarter buildings would have to be carefully considered in light of the scarce resources available.

**RESOLVED:**

That the update be received.

20-21/FRA/62 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme, noting that the draft budget would be submitted to the next Authority meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that they were able to suggest items for inclusion in the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be received.



20-21/FRA/63 Information Bulletin

Members received the Quarter 2 Information Bulletin covering the period July to September 2020, noting the improved layout of the document.

**RESOLVED:**

That the information bulletin be received.

20-21/FRA/64 Executive Committee 9 December 2020

The Chair advised the Authority that there were no proposals arising from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 9 December 2020 to be reported.

The meeting ended at 11.42 am