

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2021 AT 10.30AM**

(Please note, the start of this meeting was delayed by 30 minutes to enable the meeting to be quorate)

Present: Councillors J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, M Headley and D McVicar

CFO A Hopkinson, ACO G Chambers and Mr J Atkinson were also present

Councillors C Atkins, J Burnett, P Duckett, D Franks, J Gambold, I Shingler, DCFO C Bigland, ACFO A Kibblewhite, SOC I Evans, AC J Tai, AC S Auger, Mr S Frank and Ms S Zavery were present via Teams

21-22/FRA/61 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Berry and Y Waheed.

21-22/FRA/62 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

21-22/FRA/63 Communications

Fire and Rescue Service support for the COVID vaccination programme

The Chair advised that he had received a letter from the Minister earlier in the morning requesting all fire and rescue services to support the COVID vaccination programme and that funding would be provided for any costs incurred in doing so. It was noted that this Service was already actively supporting the local vaccination programme.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided further detail on the Service's significant involvement in the local vaccination programme and response to the Omicron variant in Bedfordshire, including the management and staffing of mass vaccination centres and ongoing support of the Local Resilience Forum Secretariat.

HMICFRS Inspection Report

The Chief Fire Officer reported that an embargoed version of the Inspection Report had now been received and that it would be circulated to Members for information as soon as possible. The report was due to be published at midnight and the State of Fire Report laid before Parliament at 2pm on 15 December 2021.

21-22/FRA/64 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2021 be confirmed as a true record.

21-22/FRA/65 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).

21-22/FRA/66 Executive Committee Minutes from 30 November 2021

The Chair introduced the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 30 November 2021 and advised that these would be deferred to the end of the meeting so that they could discuss the confidential matters considered at the meeting.

21-22/FRA/67 Portfolio Lead Updates: Assets and Collaboration

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the update to be received at this meeting related to Assets and Collaboration. Following a discussion at the previous Executive Committee meeting, all Portfolio Lead Updates would be accompanied by a written report on the agenda and Members' attention was drawn to the two slides published as part of the agenda. More detailed written reports would accompany future updates, which would be provided to the Authority as part of a rolling programme.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the update by expanding on the Service's involvement in the vaccination programme and the significant amount of support provided by the Service to the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided further detail on asset management. As part of this, she highlighted the following:

- There was currently a tender process in progress for the procurement of new fire ground radios, which would assist the Service in achieving some of the targets set out in the Grenfell Tower Action Plan, and for new battery operated cutting equipment used at Road Traffic Collisions.

- A Memorandum of Understanding with EEAST had been signed for the servicing of vehicles and consideration was being given as to whether the Service could provide out of hours servicing for EEAST vehicles.
- Greater focus had been placed on the disposal of assets, to achieve more income for the Service as well as to consider more sustainable forms of disposal.
- An electronic asset and fleet tracking system was being rolled out across the Service.
- New gas detectors had been fitted to all appliances as an additional measure to improve the safety of fire fighters and the general public.
- Discussions were ongoing with London Luton Airport regarding servicing of vehicles operating on that site; this was recognised as an additional income generation opportunity.
- Service technicians were being trained to fit and service Airwave radios, blue lights and sirens, which would reduce expenditure on external repair.

Councillor McVicar commented that he was unable to access his notes as his device could not access the Wi-Fi in the Lecture Theatre. He expressed disappointment that the in-person attendance at the meeting was so low and that the Police appeared to be losing focus on collaboration at the strategic level as they continued to cancel meetings of the Collaboration Board, of which he was a Member. As the Police had not yet signed up to the Estates Strategy, this was of grave concern.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received.

21-22/FRA/68 2021/22 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer presented his report informing the Authority of the forecast year-end budget monitoring position as at 31 October 2021. The three year Comprehensive Spending Review settlement announcement was anticipated on 16 December 2021.

At 31 October 2021, there was a forecast non-salary underspend of £218,000, largely as the result of business rate refunds. There was also a forecast underspend in relation to audit fees, as there was a saving of £20,000 following the referral of a proposed increase of £33,000 from Ernst & Young to the Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSSA) which PSAA had agreed only £13,000 and the receipt of Government grant of £12,000 in response to the expected rise in audit fees that had been awarded to all qualifying public sector bodies in 2021/22. There was a variance in the forecast salary budget due to unbudgeted pay awards to be funded by an earmarked reserve. Therefore, the total forecast variance at year-end was expected to be £170,800.

The Assistant Chief Officer provided an update on the Capital Programme. As previously agreed, the BA Set, Cylinders and Ancillaries replacement had been slipped into 2022/23. The cost of this project may exceed the budgeted amount of £450,000 and, if this was the case, this would be reported to the Authority in due course.

In response to questions and comments, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that the Service received additional funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Government under the area of Prevention and Protection in relation to its dementia support and other health related work. The Government funding was subject to returns to the Home Office being approved and the most recent return submitted had been accepted. The Service was also in regular discussion with the Clinical Commissioning Group regarding funding requirements.

Increases in the taxbase arising from new homes being built would be reflected in the budget that would be presented to the Member Budget Workshop and then to the Authority meeting. There had been an increase in Band D equivalent properties from approximately 217,000 to 224,000.

In response to a question about the level of income generated through vehicle servicing for EEAST, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that this was in the region of £65,000 annually and that additional income may arise from the servicing of Bedfordshire Police and London Luton Airport vehicles.

RESOLVED:

That the updates provided within the report be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/69 Q2 2021/22 Performance Report

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the summary of performance at the end of Quarter 2 of 2021/22. In introducing the report, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer commented that the performance base was higher than for the previous year and highlighted the following:

Prevention

Performance against the secondary fires target had dipped; this was most likely the result of seasonal variation, as most fires of this type occurred during the summer months.

Protection

The percentage of building regulations consultations completed on time had not achieved its target as there were currently vacancies in the Service as well as a national shortage of Fire Safety Inspectors. Of the 230 building regulations consultations 58 were not responded to within the 15-day period providing a compliance level of 75%.

The number of automatic fire detector false alarms in non-domestic properties had missed its target by 29.82%. The Service aimed to reduce attendance to this type of false alarm through call handling.

Response

RDS availability of first pump had missed its target by 35.2%. Recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters continued to be a challenge and a new project would commence this year to develop new and innovative ways of managing the on-call workforce.

There were also challenges relating to the percentage of time whole-time global crewing availability enabling nine riders on two pump responses (one with five crew and the other with four) as whole-time global crewing had been affected this quarter by several factors including extra annual leave to be taken after a carry-over of annual leave and people shielding or isolating. The Chief Fire Officer reassured members that the minimum crewing level of BFRS fire appliances is four firefighters, with five being the optimum number. Although the performance of this indicator was below target, and of obvious concern to officers and members, he was unaware of any occasion where a wholetime crewed fire appliance became unavailable due to crewing levels. The indicator reflected an increase in the number of occasions when wholetime fire appliances were operating at the minimum crewing level of four firefighters so the numbers of firefighters attending two-pump incidents had reduced by one firefighter (from nine to eight).

It was noted that the Service's performance against the Authority's emergency response standards were not included in the data suite presented in this report. A revised set of performance indicators was being prepared for the next reporting year. These would include the response standards and other measures that would facilitate comparison of the Service's performance against other fire and rescue services.

Empowering

All of the Human Resources indicators were meeting or exceeding their targets.

A significant amount of work had been undertaken to improve performance against the Organisational Development indicators, with additional courses and spaces being provided to address the gaps in training that had arisen during the pandemic when courses could not be provided at full capacity. This had allowed the Service to meet the majority of its targets around compliance with competency requirements.

The health and safety indicators had been impacted by a small number of incidents and consideration was being given as to how this could be reported to give a more accurate assessment of the situation.

Fleet

All measures were on target for the reporting period.

Finance

The Assistant Chief Officer had provided an update on Finance under the previous agenda item.

In response to questions and comments, Members were advised that:

- Over half of all dwelling fires were cooking related. Although cooking fires affected all age groups, the elderly were the most vulnerable to harm and preventative advice was provided through social media and other activity, particularly around the use of deep fat fryers and the importance of not leaving cooking appliances unattended.
- Individuals with dementia may require specialist interventions to prevent cooking fires from occurring.
- All building regulations consultations were responded to, although the Service was not able to respond to them all within the 15 day period due to the staff shortages in the Fire Safety Team. The four vacancies (two operational and two support) were being recruited to, but there was a national shortage of qualified Fire Safety Inspectors. In addition to the recruitment process, the Service was also supporting staff internally to achieve the relevant qualifications.
- The Service was undertaking further analysis to identify the reasons for the increase in attendances to automatic fire detector false alarms. There were over 20,000 non-domestic premises in the County and the majority of these premises had some sort of alarm system installed. Over 60% of the total calls responded to during the reporting period were from one building. There was also a high percentage of these alarms from hospitals and care homes. The Service had adopted a risk based approach so that a response would be provided for buildings with a sleeping risk, such as hotels and care homes. For lower risk premises, a reduced attendance would be sent out of hours to investigate.
- The turnaround time for fleet repairs appeared to be longer when compared to the previous year. This was due mainly to the availability of parts and spares as many of these came from Europe. The increase in servicing work was being accommodated through the employment of an additional service technician.

RESOLVED:

That the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan at the end of Quarter 2 be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/70 Public Sector Equality Duty Report

Ms S Zavery, the Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, submitted the Service's Public Sector Equality Duty Report for 2020/21. The specific duties under Public Sector Equality Duty required public authorities to share information relating to people with protected characteristics with due regard to: eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimization, and any other conduct that was prohibited under the Act; advancing equality of opportunity between persons who shared a relevant protected characteristic and persons who did not share it; and fostering good relations between persons who shared a relevant protected characteristic and persons who did not share it.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager drew Members' attention to the following:

- There had been an increase of 10.2% of ethnic minority staff starting in employment in the Service.
- There has been a decrease in the percentage of people leaving from LGBTQ+ backgrounds from 5.9% to 1.9%, but an increase in the percentage of people leaving between the ages of 17 – 24.
- 41% of staff leavers had been employed by the Service for 5 years or less.
- There had been a 3.2% increase in people aged 46-55 applying for support posts and a 3.6% decrease in those applying between the ages of 17-24. There had also been a 6.2% decrease in the number of female applicants.
- There had been a 6.7% increase in minority ethnic applicants applying for uniform positions.
- During the year, 13 complaints and 98 compliments had been received. The Service did not capture any equality information about people making complaints or compliments.

The Service would continue to seek to improve its representation from ethnic minority communities, women and people in the younger age groups, to become more reflective of the community that it served. Work was also ongoing to review policies and procedures to make them more inclusive and to improve equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the Service.

In response to questions asked by Councillor Burnett, which she would capture and email in for a fuller written response, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager advised that:

- The Service wanted to improve the rate of disclosure of sexuality and other protected characteristics.
- It may be possible to provide information on the representation of individual minority ethnic groups but it was important to ensure that the data allowed the Service to compare itself against other fire and rescue services.
- Engagement with minority ethnic groups in the County had been hampered by the pandemic.
- The Service would consider how it could participate in Race Equality Week.

In relation to unconscious bias training, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that all senior managers had received the training and that she would liaise with colleagues in recruitment to ensure that all individuals involved in recruitment and selection processes had received this training before participating in these processes.

The high percentage of leavers within 0-5 years of employment with the Service was primarily the result of individuals leaving after 2-3 years of working as on-call fire fighters.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted report be approved for publication.

21-22/FRA/71 Pilots and Trials to Improve Response

Following discussion held at the Budget Workshop, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer submitted a report which sought the support of Members to develop proposals designed to improve emergency response times over a time-limited period and to collect data to underpin the modelling analysis undertaken as part of the ongoing Emergency Cover Review elements of the Authority's strategic Community Risk Management Plan. These included the provision of an additional primary appliance in the Shefford/A1 corridor area and the relocation of one of the appliances based in Luton to an alternative temporary location in the northern part of Luton. It was hoped that these trials would help improve response times, especially to Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs).

Councillor Headley expressed concern about the rationale behind the selection of these two particular pilots and expressed the view that he had not been provided with any information that suggested these were evidence based and forward-looking, taking into account the future growth planned in the County.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer replied that full modelling information and a business case, included financial and staffing implications, would be presented to a future meeting of the Authority before a decision was made to implement these pilots. The Authority was being asked to support the development of proposals only at this stage.

The Chief Fire Officer assured the Authority that investments would be made in all three constituent council areas and repeated his offer for a further members workshop to build upon the information already presented at the two previous workshops during this year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the intended approach to develop proposals to pilot/trial new ways of working be supported.
2. That the principles of this approach be incorporated into the public CRMP/Budget consultation for 2022/23.
3. That further briefings prior to implementation be received.

21-22/FRA/72 Developing Collaboration with East of England Ambulance Trust

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced a report providing options for future collaboration with the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST), building on lessons learnt from past and present collaboration projects including bariatric rescue, falls partnership and co-responding. Following the work that had been undertaken to demonstrate the social value of the current collaboration projects, it was important to develop a more sustainable funding model.

The Chief Fire Officer was currently leading discussions with all the fire and rescue services across the EEAST area to try and develop a consistent partnership approach across the whole area.

Members recognised the value of the collaboration work with EEAST and supported the ongoing work and the possible creation of a project team to lead this.

RESOLVED:

That the benefits, opportunities and risks of developing the Service's support to EEAST and acting in accordance with the service value: "Daring to be Different" be acknowledged.

21-22/FRA/73 Community Risk Management Plan Draft 2022-23 Annual Action Plan including CRMP and Budget Consultation

Mr S Frank, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, submitted a report on the development and application of Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) action planning, identify any gaps or duplication and approve a set of consultation questions to be launched as part of the budget consultation.

As part of the development of the Action Plan, Heads of Service had been asked to identify their top actions. These had been assessed, and with some actions rolled over from the previous Action Plan, 23 actions had been selected to form the basis of the annual Action Plan for 2022-2023. This was the last year of the current CRMP.

The CRMP and budget consultations would be combined as in previous years. Changes to the consultation process for 2022/23 included more open text questions about investment priorities and the long-term future of the Service, improved engagement with community groups and representatives of vulnerable communities and feedback on the Service website about what had changed as a result of consultation in the form of "You Said, We Did".

A small number of the actions had been identified as mission critical. These included actions to develop a more comprehensive profile of risk, to refine processes for effectively targeting protection activity towards higher risk premises in line with the latest national guidance, to improve on-call availability, to ensure safe systems of work and to empower staff, to ensure operational resilience and financial resilience and to integrate and fully utilise the Business Management Information System (BMIS) across the organisation and use it as a tool to

support transformational change.

In response to questions about the consultation process, the Head of Strategic Support and Assurance confirmed that all of the Service's key partners, including the three constituent local authorities, would be consulted.

The consultation would also be promoted via the Beds Fire and Alert system and internally within the Red Bulletin.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer referred Members to an email including a link to the draft consultation document.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress in developing the Authority's Corporate Action Plan forming year 4 of the 2019-23 Community Risk Management Plan be approved.
2. That the proposals for public consultation on the Authority's 2022-23 Budget and the Corporate Action Plan forming year 4 of the 2019-23 Community Risk Management Plan be approved.

21-22/FRA/74 Calendar of Meetings for 2022/23

Members received the proposed calendar of meetings for 2022/23, noting that clashes with meetings of the constituent authorities had been avoided wherever possible.

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.

21-22/FRA/75 Information Bulletin (Q2 July - Sept)

Members received the information for Quarter 2 (July to September) 2021.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the format of the information bulletin would be improved for the 2022/23 financial year. Suggestions were made as to how the data could be better displayed, such as the inclusion of the number of incidents in addition to percentages and displaying Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) as a separate column on the bar chart.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

21-22/FRA/76 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be received.

21-22/FRA/77 To receive the Executive Committee Confidential Minutes from 30 November 2021

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 1,2 3, 4 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Item

77. Executive Committee Confidential Minutes from 30 November 2021

The meeting ended at 12.39 pm