

BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

held on 10 February 2022 at 10.00am

PRESENT

Councillors J Chatterley (Chair), R Berry, J Burnett, M Headley and D McVicar

Deputy Chief Fire Officer C Bigland, Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Kibblewhite, Assistant Chief Officer Chambers, Mr J Atkinson and Mr S Frank were also present

Chief Fire Officer A Hopkinson, Councillors C Atkins, P Duckett, D Franks, J Gambold, I Shingler and Y Waheed observed the meeting via Teams

21-22/fa/086 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor K Choudhury. Councillor Y Waheed submitted apologies for lateness.

21-22/fa/087 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY AND OTHER INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

21-22/fa/088 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair advised that, as was his usual practice, he had circulated all items of communication to Members of the Authority for information. He highlighted the most recent items of communications as follows:

Internal Communications

Members had received the monthly update from the Communications Team for January 2022, information on the prevention work impacting numbers and the Red Bulletin. These provided Members with a greater insight of the inner workings of the Service.

'Responding to New Risks' Section 31 Grant Determination for FY 2021/22

A communication from the Home Office had been received confirming the award of £54,654 to support the national Specialist Marauding Terrorist Attack (MTA) capability. The grant amount was similar to that awarded the previous year.

White Paper on Fire Service Reform

The National Fire Chiefs Council had circulated a letter regarding the White Paper on Fire Services Reform that was due imminently.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the White Paper was expected to be published shortly and had been referred to in the recent Levelling Up White Paper. Upon its publication, a report would be prepared for submission to the Authority. It was anticipated that the White Paper would be subject to a 10 week consultation and it was important that a considered response be prepared on behalf of the Authority and the Service.

21-22/fa/089 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

21-22/fa/090 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/fa/091 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING 20 JANUARY 2022

The Chair submitted the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Executive held on 20 January 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Executive held on 20 January 2022 be accepted.

21-22/fa/092 COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2022-2023 ACTION PLAN AND BUDGET CONSULTATION UPDATE

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, Mr S Frank, introduced his report providing an update on the results of the consultation on the 2022-23 Budget and the 2022/23 Annual Action Plan of the current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). 746 surveys had been completed as part of the consultation, with 22 personal interviews being undertaken with organisations that had not been systematically engaged with previously including representatives of gypsies and travellers, faith groups, parish and town councils, and young people. The consultation included a survey sent to over 15,000 individuals registered on the BedsFireAlert Community messaging system, via the Authority's website and publicised through the local press and several social media campaigns on the Service's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter channels. Letters were sent to a number of key partners and local organisations and community groups who were asked to promote the consultation.

86% of respondents had supported the proposed 1.99% Council Tax increase, with 78% in support of a larger £5 increase. Suggestions for savings, efficiencies and collaborative opportunities had been submitted and these were being analysed. 92% of respondents supported fleet innovation and testing different ideas.

71% of respondents had completed the equality and diversity section and this illustrated that the consultation had reached a broad range of groups across the County. Compared to the previous year's consultation, there had been proportionately more responses from younger people, people with disabilities, people from diverse backgrounds and women.

A further report would be presented to the next meeting of the Authority. As a result of the responses received, there would be a greater focus on community engagement, environmental management and demonstrating ethical governance credentials. These would also shape the next CRMP. The results of the consultation, and changes implemented as a result, would be published on the Service website.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged.

21-22/fa/093 2022/23 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer presented his report on the proposed Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for 2022/23.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer highlighted the following:

- Due to changes in the locally collected business rates and Section 31 grant, there was an update to the budget from that set out in the original report. The updated figures had been circulated to Members via email the previous day. The updated revenue budget requirement was £33.393 million. There was no change to the proposed Council Tax increase, which was being set at 1.99% or £23.401 million, equating to a charge of £104.45 per Band D property.
- Members were being asked to approve a Medium Term Revenue Plan based on either a 3% (Appendix 1) or 4% (Appendix 1a) pay increase. This was in the context of rising inflation which was expected to peak in April at 7.25%.
- There had been no changes to the other appendices as set out in the report and previously discussed at Member Budget Workshops and the meeting of the Authority held on 11 January 2022, although it was noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy set out at Appendix 5 would need to be updated in accordance with the changes reported.

- The final figures for business rate collection had been received. Both Luton Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council had collected less than forecast, and as such, the total had reduced from £2.5 million as set out in the report to approximately £2.3 million.

Members commented on the likely impact of the Fair Funding Review and the Levelling Up the UK White Paper, which could result in less Government funding being allocated to the constituent authorities and the knock-on effect of a reduction in business rate income to those authorities and to the Authority itself.

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that he would soon be attending a meeting with other Authority Treasurers where he would raise this issue, as some Authorities may have more of an indication of the direction the Government may take.

In response to questions, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that:

- The saving resulting from a change to the Corporate Management Team was the result of a Green Book post replacing an operational post.
- The minimum revenue provision did not include any additional borrowing requirements. If additional borrowing was to be considered, it should be done so sooner rather than later, before the interest rates and Bank of England base rates increased. As the Authority was unable to borrow in advance of need, it may be more prudent to fund any additional requirements from reserves, such as the £2 million collaboration reserve.

In discussing the two proposals for the budgeting for the pay increase and noting the current and forecasted rates of inflation, Members supported budgeting for the larger increase of 4% as set out in Appendix 1a.

The recommendations relating to the revenue budget requirement of £33.393 million, with a corresponding precept of £23.401 million and a 1.99% Council Tax increase were put to the meeting and the votes recorded thereon were as follows:

For the Recommendations (5) Councillors R Berry, J Burnett, J Chatterley, M Headley and D McVicar

Therefore, these recommendations were carried unanimously.

The remaining recommendations were also put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED:

1. That it be determined for 2022/23 that:
 - a. A Revenue Budget requirement is set at £33.393m, met as indicated in paragraph 3.8 of the report.
 - b. In meeting this budget requirement, the Authority's Precept be set at £23.401m and that consequently, a council tax increase of 1.99% up to £104.45 per Band D equivalent property, calculated as shown in Paragraph 3.8 of the report.
 - c. In order to meet the Precept requirement, the 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 the report.
2. That the updated Medium-Term Revenue Plan recirculated as Appendix 1a to this report be approved, and the 2022/23 savings and efficiencies detailed at Appendix 2 also be approved.
3. That the 2021/22 year-end underspend is allocated to the Pay/Pensions Reserve.
4. That the Medium-Term Capital Programme attached at Appendix 3 to this report be approved.
5. That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy attached at Appendix 4 to this report and the Reserves Strategy at Appendix 5 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 the reserves for which the budget provides, attached at Appendix 6 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.

21-22/fa/094 HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance presented his report which provided an update and comparative analysis of the Service's 2020-21 inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue (HMICFRS) and the next stages of improvement planning.

The Service had ranked fourth out of the thirteen Fire and Rescue Services inspected in the first tranche. Across these thirteen Services, nine noteworthy practices had been identified, all of which the Service was either in the process of implementing or considering. The main difference between Merseyside, which had been awarded an 'Outstanding' rating, and the rest of the Fire and Rescue Services, was its robust evaluation. The station planning process, ensuring that the golden thread from the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) ran through all activities at station level.

The progress of the areas for improvement had been integrated into the 2022-23 Community Risk Management Plan Action Plan within the new Business Management Information System. A gap analysis had been undertaken and would be presented to Members at a future meeting of the Authority.

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance added that there were further improvements needed if the Service was to improve upon its previous judgement of 'Good'. The next inspection was expected at the beginning of 2023.

In relation to partnership working, as demonstrated by Merseyside through its work with Liverpool John Moores University, Members were reminded that this Service worked in partnership with Nottingham Trent University to evaluate the effectiveness and added value of its collaborative working with the East of England Ambulance Trust.

The Chief Fire Officer added that, as part of his role as Member of Steering Group of the National Fire Chiefs Council, he was actively supporting efforts to establish a national Academic Coordination, Evaluation and Research Committee to co-ordinate and share relevant research and improve organisational learning.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the challenge to improve performance would be impacted by the Service's ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. Many fire & rescue services were forecasting a higher than expected level of attrition of operational staff at all levels in the coming months at a time when the UK labour market is facing considerable challenges. Private sector employers were also able to offer more lucrative pay packages and pension and pay changes were resulting in staff leaving the Service earlier than expected. It was as important as ever for the Service to market itself as an employer of choice if we are to attract the best talent.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged.

21-22/fa/095 LOCALISM ACT 2011 – PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer submitted a report on the proposed Pay Policy Statement for 2022. The Fire Authority was reminded of the requirement to agree and publish an annual pay policy statement and its constituent parts for the financial year 2022/23. The Pay Policy Statement was based on data from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

As previously requested by Members, the Service had sought to obtain comparative pay multiple information from across the region and the three constituent authorities. This has been collated using information published for 2020/21 on each authority's website but had required additional research as not all authorities presented their pay data in the same way. The Service's pay multiple was slightly above the average of the region's Fire and Rescue Authorities but was lower than the public sector averages of its constituent authorities.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted proposed pay policy statement for 2022/23 be approved.

21-22/fa/096 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME

The Monitoring Officer, Mr J Atkinson, introduced the proposals for the Members Allowances Scheme for 2022/23. No changes were being proposed to the basic allowance or the Special Responsibility Allowances. The current daily rate of £171.92 was based upon the Local Government Pay Award for 2020/21 and would be updated as soon as the pay award for 2022 was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the Members' Allowances Scheme be updated from 1 June 2022 in accordance with the proposals set out in this report and that the Scheme be adopted for the financial year 2022/23.

21-22/fa/097 GRENFELL TOWER ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented an update on the Service's progress against the Grenfell recommendations action plan and the subsequent next stages for moving forward to assist with completion.

All 46 recommendations from the Phase 1 report had been incorporated into an Action Plan, including the fourteen that were directed solely towards the London Fire Brigade to ensure that there were no potential gaps. The action plan had been fully audited, RAG rated and the progress of each area identified with a timeline of progress and completion had been recorded. The action plan was managed internally by the Head of Training and Asset Management. Progress against the plan was monitored via the Operational Assurance Team, the Assurance Working Group and the Service Delivery Leadership Team.

18 actions had been completed with an additional one requiring no further action, leaving a total of 23 actions in progress and 3 actions that were on track to be completed within the set time frame.

The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (formerly MHCLG) had provided each Fire and Rescue Service with a list of premises in their areas that were thought to be over 18 metres in height or consisting of 7 or more floors. This list identified 72 potential premises within Bedfordshire that required an inspection. Further premises in addition to those on the list were identified by the Protection Team as requiring a review during the inspection process. All inspections had been completed in June 2021 in advance of the deadline of December 2021. This list had now been reduced to 65 premises following clarification as some were multiple buildings with common staircases on the same site.

In response to Members queries about the actions relating to protection and whether the completion of all of these was reliant on legislation being passed, and what the definition of multiple buildings with common staircases on the same site was, it was suggested that a more detailed report on the inspection of high rise premises and the ongoing actions in progress be prepared for consideration at the next meeting of the Authority.

The Chair commented that it would be useful if Members could be made aware of any local authority owned high rise premises within their areas.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report and update be acknowledged.
2. That a further report on high-rise premises be submitted to the next meeting of the Authority.

21-22/fa/098 INFORMATION BULLETIN

Members received the information bulletin for Quarter 3 (October to December 2021), with the Chief Fire Officer commenting on the new format of the document. This was still a work in progress and it was hoped that, when provided to the constituent authorities with the narrative reports of the Authority meetings, it would provide Members who did not serve on the Authority with a better understanding of the Service.

In response to a comment by the Chair, the Chief Fire Officer agreed that, due to the timing of meetings, it was not always possible to provide the information in a timely manner.

Councillor Headley commented that some of the content could lead to the identification of specific individual and/or properties and therefore should not be published in the public domain.

Councillor Burnett expressed the view that the information bulletin was not reflective of the diversity within the Service and throughout the County it served and suggested that improvements should be made in this respect.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked Members for their comments on the reformatted information bulletin.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

21-22/fa/099 WORK PROGRAMME

Members received the updated Work Programme, noting the additions of reports on the anticipated White Paper on Fire Service Reform and high rise buildings that had been made earlier in the meeting. The Chief Fire Officer asked Members to advise of any additional items or topic areas they wished to be presented to future meetings.

It was agreed that an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy be presented to the next meeting of the Authority.

RESOLVED:

1. That the work programme be received.
2. That the following items be added to the work programme: White Paper on Fire Service Reform, Grenfell Tower Action Plan – detail on high-rise buildings in Bedfordshire, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The meeting closed at 11.33 am.