

BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

held on 7 June 2022 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Burnett, J Chatterley, K Choudhury, P Duckett, J Gambold, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

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

Ms E McGuinness of the Local Government Association observed the meeting remotely via Teams

22-23/FRA/1 Membership

The Monitoring Officer reported that there had been no changes to the membership of the Authority from the previous year.

22-23/FRA/2 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Franks.

22-23/FRA/3 Election of Chair 2022/23

In accordance with the Authority's Standing Orders, the Monitoring Officer presided over the election of Chair.

Councillor P Duckett was nominated by Councillor R Berry and seconded by Councillor J Gambold. Councillor Y Waheed was nominated by Councillor J Burnett and seconded by K Choudhury.

Both Councillor Y Waheed and Councillor P Duckett gave statements in support of their nominations for the role of Chair of the Authority.

Following a secret ballot, Councillor P Duckett was nominated Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor P Duckett be elected Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2022/23.

22-23/FRA/4 Election of Vice Chair 2022/23

Councillor Y Waheed was nominated by Councillor P Duckett and seconded by Councillor J Gambold. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Y Waheed be elected Vice-Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2022/23.

(Note: following this item, a minute's silence was held in remembrance of former Chief Fire Officer Paul Fuller, who had passed away on this day in 2021. The Chief Fire Officer advised that a garden of memorial and wellbeing was being developed in the inner quadrant at Fire and Rescue Headquarters and that it would be officially opened by the Lord Lieutenant on 8 July 2022. All Authority Members would be invited to this event, with further details to follow.)

22-23/FRA/5 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

22-23/FRA/6 Communications

The Chair thanked Members for supporting his nomination for the role.

Councillor Y Waheed proposed a vote of thanks to the outgoing Chair of the Authority, Councillor J Chatterley, who had chaired the Authority during the pandemic and had provided support and guidance to other Members and to the Chief Fire Officer during his first year in post.

Councillor Chatterley's honourable service to the Authority during his time as Chair was recognised.

22-23/FRA/7 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

22-23/FRA/8 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).

It was noted that Craig Carter, a firefighter from Luton and a Fire Brigades Union official, was observing the meeting remotely.

22-23/FRA/9 Executive Committee meeting 26 May 2022

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 May 2022 for information. These had been circulated following the publication of the agenda and did not form part of the published agenda pack.

Councillor Chatterley, who had chaired the meeting, reported on the items that had been discussed at the meeting. These had included the White Paper on Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service and the recruitment process for a new Monitoring Officer.

The Executive had agreed that an independent review of governance should be undertaken and, as recommended in the report, an independent peer review would be led by the Local Government Association.

Emily McGuinness, a Peer Challenge Manager at the Local Government Association (LGA), explained the LGA's role in facilitating the peer review process. This would involve experts from other Services and Fire and Rescue Authority Members, as well as the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, who would visit the Service over two days, after which a presentation would be given and report prepared for Members on the findings of the review.

Councillor M Headley stated that he had declared an interest at the Executive Committee meeting as he acted as a peer reviewer for the LGA and the Executive was being asked to appoint that organisation to oversee this work. His understanding was that, now that the LGA had been appointed, he no longer had an interest to declare and this was confirmed by the Monitoring Officer.

The Executive had also received an update on the latest guidance and position on implementing the firefighters Pension Scheme 'Remedy' and had, separately, agreed to a review of the abatement and re-engagement policy in light of the continuing recruitment and retention difficulties being experienced by the Service.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 May 2022 be received.

22-23/FRA/10 Authorisation of Members to Report to the Constituent Councils on Meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report requesting the Authority to make arrangements for reporting to the Constituent Councils.

RESOLVED:

That Councillors P Duckett, J Gambold and Y Waheed be authorised to report to their respective Constituent Councils on the meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2022/23.

22-23/FRA/11 Representation on Local Government Association (LGA) Matters

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report on the appointment of representatives to serve on Local Government Association (LGA) groups.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Chair, Vice Chair and Councillor Chatterley be appointed to serve on the LGA General Assembly, noting that Councillor Atkins already sat on the Fire Services Commission as a balancing Member.
2. That the Chair be appointed as the Fire and Rescue Authority's representative on the LGA Fire Services Commission.

22-23/FRA/12 Appointment of Committees

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report which asked the Authority to make appointments to the Fire and Rescue Authority's Executive and Audit and Standards Committees for 2022/23.

Councillors C Atkins and J Burnett were nominated for the role of Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee for 2022/23. Following a secret ballot, Councillor C Atkins was appointed as Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee for 2022/23.

Members received the terms of reference of the Executive Committee for review and approval. It was agreed that these be approved at present, with any proposed amendments arising from the governance review to be referred to the Authority for consideration following the conclusion of that review.

RESOLVED:

1. That Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Burnett, D Franks, J Gambold, D McVicar and I Shingler be appointed to the Audit and Standards Committee for 2022/23.
2. That Councillors J Chatterley, K Choudhury, P Duckett, M Headley, and Y Waheed be appointed to the Executive Committee for 2022/23.
3. That Councillor C Atkins be appointed as Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee for 2022/23.
4. That the terms of reference of the Executive Committee be approved.

22-23/FRA/13 Members Briefing on the contents of the Home Office White Paper on Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report which provided Members with an overview of the key proposals made by the Home Office in its White Paper consultation 'Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service.' Members would be given a number of opportunities to discuss the White Paper and inform the Authority's response prior to the deadline of 26 July 2022, primarily at the Executive meeting on 22 June 2022, the Member Development Day on 7 July 2022 and the meeting of the Authority on 20 July 2022. Additional meetings could be arranged if required.

Given the proximity of the next Authority meeting to the deadline, the Chief Fire Officer recommended that he and the Chair be delegated authority to make any final amendments to the consultation responses following the meeting on 20 July 2022.

In response to a question, it was noted that two responses would be prepared to the consultation: one from the Authority and one from the Service.

The leaders of all three constituent authorities had been advised of the publication of the White Paper and encouraged to make representations. This was being progressed by Bedford Borough Council and Members of the other authorities agreed to chase progress at their Councils. The view was expressed that local MPs should also be contacted and invited to express their views.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the accompanying impact assessment and asked that this be sent to all Members of the Authority for information.

The Authority was advised that the Home Office was required to respond to the consultation responses within 12 weeks of the consultation closing. It was hoped therefore that this would be received in October 2022, when it would be discussed further by Members.

The Local Government Association and the National Fire Chiefs Council had refreshed the “Fit for the Future” Strategy and it was anticipated that this would be published as the earliest possible opportunity.

RESOLVED:

1. That the opportunities to discuss and inform the Authority’s formal response to the consultation in advance of the deadline of 26 July be noted.
2. That responsibility for signing off the final version of the Authority and Service responses to the consultation be delegated to the Chair and Chief Fire Officer respectively.
3. That the impact assessment be circulated to Members.

22-23/FRA/14 Member Development Programme

The Assistant Chief Officer presented the report on the arrangements for Member development, including the recommencement of station visits, in 2022/23.

Member Development Days were currently scheduled on 7 July 2022, 6 October 2022, 22 November 2022, 25 January 2023 and 23 February 2023. Treasury Management training and the discussion of the White Paper would take place on 7 July 2022. A number of topics had been suggested for discussion on the other dates, including building safety, the emergency cover review, Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and an update on the Fire Rescue Indemnity Company.

The Chief Fire Officer advised the development of the Service’s next 5 year strategic plan would be included.

The horizon scanning exercise previously undertaken was also referred to, and it was agreed that this should be repeated as it recognised as a valuable exercise.

RESOLVED:

1. That the arrangements for Member development in 2022/23 be confirmed.
2. That the topics included in the report and the additional items discussed at the meeting be programmed into the diarised Member development days.

22-23/FRA/15 Work Programme

Members received the proposed work programme for 2022/23. The work in revising the calendar, so that Corporate Management Team meetings, Authority meetings and Local Authority meetings were aligned as far as possible, was acknowledged.

It was noted that the work programmes would now be populated following approval of the revised calendar.

RESOLVED:

1. That the work programme for 2022/23 be received and the 'cyclical' Agenda Items for each meeting in 2022/23 be noted.
2. That the revised calendar be agreed.

The meeting ended at 3.06 pm