

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 31 OCTOBER 2022 AT 10.00 AM**

Present: Councillors P Duckett (Chair) (part), R Berry, J Chatterley, K Choudhury, M Headley, D McVicar (part) and Y Waheed

Chief Fire Officer A Hopkinson, Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Kibblewhite, Mr G Britten and Ms L Fair were also present

Councillors C Atkins and I Shingler and Deputy Chief Fire Officer C Bigland logged in remotely to the meeting via Teams

(Councillor Waheed in the chair)

22-23/FRA/47 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Burnett, D Franks and J Gambold.

An apology for lateness was received from the Chair and the Vice-Chair, Councillor Y Waheed, chaired the meeting until his arrival (at the end of the discussion of Minute 22-23/fa/052: Executive Committee Minutes).

Assistant Chief Officer G Chambers sent his apologies as on leave.

22-23/FRA/48 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

22-23/FRA/49 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 8 September 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

22-23/FRA/50 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).

22-23/FRA/51 Audit and Standards Committee 29 September 2022

Members received the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 29 September 2022 for information. As the Committee continued to meet remotely, the Authority was required to ratify all decisions made by the Committee as set out in the Minutes.

Councillor Atkins introduced the Minutes, and in doing so, highlighted the following:

- The external audit of the Statement of Accounts had been further delayed due to EY's ongoing resourcing issues. It was now anticipated that the audit would be undertaken in March 2023, and Members of the Committee had expressed concern about the impact this may have on the Service.
- Additional information about outstanding actions arising from internal audits had been requested for the next Committee meeting.
- Two extension requests had been received; however, during the course of discussions it transpired that one of the actions had already been completed. The Committee agreed to the extension request relating to the Human Resources - Grey Book recruitment action to update the On-Call Recruitment Policy to December 2022 and this would have to be ratified by the full Authority.
- The Committee had approved the updated Abatement and Re-engagement Policy, subject to the inclusion of a paragraph from the Local Government Association guidance that clarified which pay figure should be used in the calculations.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 29 September 2022 be received, subject to the inclusion of Councillor R Berry's apology for absence.
2. That the decisions made by the Committee to approve the extension request for the internal audit action to update the On-Call Recruitment Policy and the updated Abatement and Re-engagement Policy, be ratified by the Fire Authority.

22-23/FRA/52 Executive Committee Minutes 11 October 2022

The Authority received the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 11 October 2022.

In the absence of the Chair, the Chief Fire Officer reported on the following:

- He and the Chair had met with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire and the Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner regarding the use of Toddington Community Fire Station and the Police's involvement in the Blue Light Estates Strategy.
- The issue of a wider estates strategy across the public sector estate had been supported by the Chief Executives Forum and a collaboration working group was being constituted.
- The Service had come in seventh out of twenty-three Fire and Rescue Services at the recent Breathing Apparatus awards; this was a significant achievement for the team involved.
- A number of Open Days had been held since the Executive meeting and these had been well supported by the local community.
- The Executive Committee had received updates on the independent governance review, progress on the development of the new Community Risk Management Plan, the new approach being taken in relation to the setting of the 2023-2024 budget and immediate detriment.
- Options for progressing the performance call-in of the response targets had been considered and it was being proposed that a Task and Finish Group be constituted of non-Executive Members to undertake a deep-dive of performance in this area.
- The targeted use of abatement and re-engagement had been agreed for particular posts in recognition of the continued recruitment and retention challenges.
- An update on the legal challenge submitted by the Fire Brigades Union, and the Service's response, had been provided. It was noted that no further correspondence had been received.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2022 be received.

(Councillor Duckett joined the meeting)

(Councillor Duckett in the chair)

22-23/FRA/53 Programme Board Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented an update on the Service Corporate Programme, including the progress against and current status of all major projects as at the end of Quarter 2 (30 September 2022). The Appendix, which had not been included with the published report, would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

85% of projects were RAG rated as Green, with only 4% currently identified as Red, or outside of agreed targets. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted areas of Amber or Red performance as follows:

- Safe and Well – the project had been delayed due to a reduction in Officer time being available to progress the digitisation of the process. The development of an application to enable fully mobile form implementation was progressing so that Safe and Well visits could be recorded remotely and there would be no need for firefighters to complete hard copies of the forms that would then require inputting into the system.
- Data Warehousing – this project had also been impacted by Officer resourcing.
- Replacement Mobilising System – some residual items had not yet been completed.
- National Operational Guidance – the implementation of this had been delayed as resources had to be re-directed elsewhere for operational purposes.
- Projects RAG rated as Amber and Red were called in to Corporate Management Team to review performance.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer also reported on the following areas of high performance and new projects:

- PDRPro- a successful upgrade of the training platform for Grey Book staff from Version 3 to Version 5 had improved the effectiveness of the delivery of competency training throughout the organisation.
- Stations Productivity Assessment – in line with the Community Risk Management Plan, a study of productivity and utilisation of assets and resources had been completed.
- Luton Pump Relocation Project – the trial had formally commenced on 3 October 2022.
- Prevention Road Safety Vehicle Virtual Reality – the procurement of a vehicle had been faced with challenges arising from the cost and the Service was working with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to increase funding contributions. The costs associated with the project were split equally between the Service and the OPCC, with the funding from the Service being met within existing budgets.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Programme Office was led by a small team comprising a Programme Manager and three Programme Officers and a Digital Transformation Officer, with much of the work to drive forward progress being undertaken by existing staff in addition to their other duties.

The Chair, acknowledging that much of the project management work was being undertaken by operational staff, asked that the thanks of Members for the high level of performance be passed on to all those involved.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made against the Corporate Programme be noted.

22-23/FRA/54 Collaboration Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided a verbal update on the Service's collaboration projects. As Members were aware, the Service was in the process of developing a "Haynes Manual", or best practice toolkits, for areas of collaboration with the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST), in areas such as falls prevention and bariatric rescue. Discussions continued to encourage EEAST to increase the funding provided to collaboration activity led by the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported on increased interest in the collaboration activity with EEAST. In his role as Chair of the regional Fire and Ambulance Collaboration Board, he had been approached by both the London Fire Brigade and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service requesting involvement.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that the falls team continued to work with and support the most complex patients/vulnerable cases and the bariatric rescue team based at Dunstable Community Fire Station was the UK lead in this area.

It was noted that, as well as improving outcomes, this diversification of activity provided an additional income stream.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that he was one of three individuals working within the Fire and Rescue sector who had been asked to give evidence about blue light collaboration to the House of Lords' Public Services Committee. This would be an ideal opportunity to raise awareness of the work being undertaken in Bedfordshire.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received.

22-23/FRA/55 Fire and Rescue Authority's Action Plan following LGA Governance Review

The Chief Fire Officer introduced an action plan to update the Members' Handbook following the review of governance undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA). The objectives of the review had been: to future proof governance arrangements; reform the governance arrangements to support a long-term professional partnership between Officers and Members; to make the Authority more accountable to the public; and to raise the visibility of the Authority and inform the public about what it does and why.

Areas for improvement as well as areas of good practice had been identified during the review. In this respect, Mr S Frank, the Service's Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, was attending an HMICFRS Chief and Chairs event to speak about this Service's engagement with the local community.

A draft action plan had been developed following the conclusion of the review, including actions such as the provision of a new Member Development Programme and updating the constitutional aspects of the Members' Handbook. Members would be kept apprised of any progress.

The Chair commented that some of the actions identified called for high levels of Member engagement and involvement, and suggested that a Task and Finish Group be constituted to undertake some of this work.

In relation to the recommendation to consider extending the tenure of the Chair, Councillor Headley commented that this may require a change to the Combination Scheme.

Mr G Britten, the Monitoring Officer, confirmed that this was the case, as the election of a Chair on an annual basis was set out in the Scheme. He added that, although it was unlikely that the Scheme would be amended by Government, Members could consider coming to an arrangement whereby the Chair could stand down and then be re-elected without opposition.

The recommendation that the Authority consider extending the tenure of the Chair had originally been mooted by the LGA (but not included in the action plan) as the White Paper had expressed a preference for a single point of contact.

It was noted that further clarification would be required in relation to the action on member appointments, as this could apply to the appointments of Members to the Authority or to the appointments made by Members for certain Principal Officer roles. Currently, the Members of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Council were appointed for four-year terms, with Luton re-appointing on an annual basis, leading to less continuity in the membership from that authority. The Leader of Luton Borough Council had been requested to make the appointments on the same basis as the other constituent authorities, but this had not yet been formally agreed in writing.

Councillor Headley also requested clarification in relation to the actions relating to the website and expressed the view that the date included in the report may need to be reviewed. Actions should also be worded in a way that reflected that Members were being asked to consider whether to approve or adopt any changes to the Members' Handbook rather than 'agree' as stated in the draft action plan.

Arising from discussions, it was acknowledged that the Chair of the Executive and the Chair of the full Authority did not necessarily need to be held by the same individual, although from conversations with LGA representatives and in light of the White Paper, it may be beneficial for this to be the case.

The Chair asked the Chief Fire Officer to identify actions which would benefit from Member involvement and then consideration could be given to delegating responsibility for this to a Task and Finish Group.

The Chief Fire Officer replied that he would prepare a report for submission to the Executive Committee.

The Chair requested that the LGA Equality and Diversity Charter and the Fire Standard Code of Ethics be circulated to all Members of the Authority for information.

RESOLVED:

That the action plan be approved subject to the requested amendments being made.

22-23/FRA/56 Mid- Year Treasury Management Report

In the absence of the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer, the Chief Fire Officer presented the mid-year Treasury Management report.

Treasury Management training could be provided if Members expressed the wish to receive it. The capital expenditure forecast for the year had reduced from £1.357 million to £876,000.

The report set out changes to the prudential indicators, the borrowing/investment strategy for 2022/23, including consideration of the use of money market funds for short-term investments, and the general economic conditions, such as the increase in the Base of England base rate and in inflation measures.

Due to the interest rate changes, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer had indicated that a review of the policy to not repay the loans taken out from the Public Works Loan Board would be undertaken. In the past, the substantial penalty changes had not made this option viable. Any future borrowing needs would need to form part of this consideration.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the budgeted investment return for 2022/23 had been set at £65,400. However, due to the unexpected increase in Bank of England base rate this had been revised to an expected return of approximately £250,000 by 31 March 2023.

The Chair requested that the Authority's policy of borrowing and lending, including how credit ratings were taken into consideration, be reviewed by the Executive Committee and recommendations in light of such a review be made to the full Authority

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

22-23/FRA/57 Portfolio Leads Update: Workforce & Organisational Development

Councillor Choudhry gave a presentation on his Portfolio area, workforce and organisational development.

As part of his presentation, he advised Members that:

- 30 wholetime plus 6 transferees, 2 Control and 22 on call firefighters had been recruited by the Service during the previous year, along with 25 Green Book staff, including some hard to fill roles such as the Occupational Health Manager and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager.
- Hybrid working arrangements had been implemented for appropriate roles.
- The Service had undertaken a benefit and recognition staff survey.
- The Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy had been revised, including Reasonable Adjustments Guidance and the launch of an individual “reasonable adjustment passport” for qualifying staff.
- A neurodiversity steering group and staff working group had been developed.
- An extensive health and wellbeing events and services programme had been developed for staff, including the launch of the cycle to work scheme.
- Significant pensions work had been undertaken during the year.
- A new People Strategy and new People priorities for the Community Risk Management Plan had been developed.
- Strategic and operational plans to deliver statutory services during potential industrial action had been drafted.
- A review of Occupational Health had been undertaken, including contract re-procurement and addressing the COVID backlog of health surveillance and medicals.
- A whole-time recruitment plan for 2023/24 had been developed as part of the Service’s succession planning procedures.
- Management training in core people management practices had been developed with Learning and Development Officers.
- The Service had taken part in a range of engagement activities with underrepresented groups, such as “Have a Go” days, schools and college events, Eid in Luton, Bedford River Festival, social media and mailshots to community centres and local businesses.
- There was strengthened partnership working, particularly with Bedfordshire Police, on recruitment and community events
- A “Women in the Fire Service” group had been constituted and was particularly active, with a local employee group and representatives in every Service in the Eastern region. A menopause awareness day had been held on 18 October 2022.
- The new EDI Manager would start in post in January 2023. This post would be responsible for a number of actions including supporting the Service in engaging with underrepresented community groups, working with regional colleagues to share knowledge and resources, establishing a Bedfordshire EDI forum with partners and developing relevant training and reviewing and refreshing EDI policies.
- The Service had led on a Black History Month national conference, with the assistance of the Asian Fire Service(?) Association. This was recognised as a very successful event and Members in attendance commented favourably on their experiences taking part.

(Councillor McVicar left the meeting)

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on Organisational Development, training, learning and development and apprenticeships as follows:

- Over 900 training courses were delivered in 2021/22 to address the backlog created by COVID.
- A Tactical Firefighting course had been developed.
- A Marauding Terrorist Attack live play exercise had taken place at RAF Henlow, to which Members had been invited.
- Paramedics now took part in Road Traffic Collision refresher training.
- Three established Training Centre instructors would return to stations soon, with three new instructors recruited to replace them.
- Some safety critical training has been delayed as the Service planned for possible industrial action.
- The Service was working with Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services on the provision of a joint training facility as the training centre was running at full capacity and was limited by the size of the estate. This restricted the type of training that could be delivered.
- The Service had delivered two wholetime recruit cohorts in house, following one in partnership with Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Three on call recruit modular courses had been run, leading to the recruitment of 22 new on call firefighters.
- Industrial action may delay the latest recruits course from being completed.
- A Behaviours & Values poster had been designed which aligned to NFCC behaviours and the Core Code of Ethics.
- An incident command refresher course had been introduced to align command training to National Operational Guidance.
- Neurodiversity training was now included in gateways and the delivery of training.
- A large number of promotional gateways had been run, including at least one at every level.
- The application as a supportive provider for Hertfordshire had been successfully approved and Hertfordshire had been invoiced for £27,000 for the first cohort through training.
- The number of green book apprentices had increased, with apprentices in fleet, finance and administration.
- The Service was exploring how it could become an apprenticeship provider, as this was a recognised income generation opportunity.
- The Service had appointed a new Green Book Driver Training Manager and Driving Instructor. The London Fire Brigade had expressed an interest in the driver training course and this was recognised as another income generation activity.
- The Service was one of only two services that could provide an Emergency Response Driver Instructor Course.
- A new BMW training vehicle had been purchased.
- All Officers, even Green Book staff, had to complete driver training before they could use Service vehicles, even pool cars.

Members commented that driver training would be a good topic for a future Member Development Day.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

22-23/FRA/58 Work Programme

Members received the proposed work programme for 2022/23.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that he review the draft report on immediate detriment that was due to be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive Committee on 15 November 2022. If there was not sufficient additional information to pass on, the report may be deferred to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2022/23 be received and the 'cyclical' agenda Items for each meeting in 2022/23 be noted.

22-23/FRA/59 Communications

The Chair commented favourably on the multi-agency anti-terrorism exercise held on RAF Henlow that had been mentioned earlier in the meeting.

Pay Negotiations

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Fire Brigades Union was currently ballot of undertaking a consultative its Members on the improved pay offer of 5%. This was currently unfunded despite intensive lobbying of the Home Office. If the pay offer was rejected, it may lead to a further ballot on industrial action.

Hockwell Ring Community Engagement

This event would be taking place on Friday, 4 November 2022.

HMICFRS Chief and Chairs Event

Members would be provided with an update on the event which was taking place that day.

Participation in events with Partners

The Chief Fire Officer had been invited to take part in an All Party Parliamentary Committee on Carbon Monoxide as one of the Bedfordshire MPs, Andrew Selous is a member and would be part of the recruitment panel to replace the current Chief Constable, Garry Forsyth.

The Service would be working with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner on demand management around individuals requiring mental health services.

A one-day workshop would be taking place on how the public sector could better work with local volunteer networks.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer would be speaking at a National Fire Chiefs Council prevention conference on 10 November 2022. He was not aware if this meeting was open to Members of the Authority but would investigate.

The meeting ended at 12.11 pm.

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