

**MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON 14 MARCH 2023**

Present: Councillors P Duckett (Chair), J Chatterley, K Choudhry, M Headley and Y Waheed
CFO A Hopkinson, DCFO C Bigland, ACFO A Kibblewhite, ACO G Chambers, Mr G Britten (MO), Ms L Fair, Ms T Draper and Mrs N Upton

22-23/EC/44 Apologies

An apology for lateness had been received from Councillor Choudhury.

Both Councillor Waheed and Mr G Britten, the Authority's Monitoring Officer, were unwell so were unable to attend the meeting in person and joined remotely via Teams.

22-23/EC/45 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

22-23/EC/46 Communications

The Chair reported on the Fire Conference that he had attended the previous week. This had been a very informative event and during the conference the Fire Minister had agreed to visit Bedfordshire to discuss the co-responding activity undertaken in support of the Ambulance Service.

A meeting had recently been held with two of the local MPs representing constituencies in Bedfordshire, Richard Fuller and Andrew Selous.

The Chair advised that the Fire Brigades Union membership had voted to accept the most recent Grey Book pay offer by the national employers of 7% and 5% and that Officers were working through the budgetary implications of this agreement.

The Chair stated that he had attended the strategic briefing presented to the HMICFRS Inspection Team by the Principal Officers the previous day and this had been a positive meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Fire Minister would be visiting, but the date had had to be postponed due to Parliamentary business. The Director of Fire & Resilience at the Home Office had also indicated a desire to visit; however, it was not yet known if these visits would take place together or separately.

22-23/EC/47 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2023 be confirmed as a true record.

22-23/EC/48 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/EC/49 Governance Review: Constitutional Updates

Members received proposed revisions to certain constitutional documents of the Authority that were intended to reflect the Local Government Association's independent review of governance, subsequent discussions with Members and the recommendations arising from the desktop document review of governance documents conducted by Shahin Ismail, Monitoring Officer at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority.

The Monitoring Officer explained how the changes related to the actions that had been agreed at the meeting of the Executive held on 31 October 2022. He also suggested that it may be appropriate for a Code of Conduct to be considered by the Audit and Standards Committee in the next municipal year.

The report set out revised Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for the Authority and its two Committees to clarify the roles of each body. The Monitoring Officer highlighted that the Audit and Standards Committee had been given responsibility for monitoring the operation of the policies relating to grievances, bullying and harassment and the disciplinary procedure. Responsibility for the determination of Stage 2 appeals under the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) had been removed from the Executive. As the revised Scheme of Delegation placed the approval and adoption of such IDRPs under the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, it was proposed that the Audit and Standards Committee was given responsibility for monitoring the operation of this procedure.

The Monitoring Officer was also proposing amendments to the Authority's Standing Orders, which had not been reviewed since 2017. Changes were being proposed in relation to voting in accordance with current legislative requirements and other changes had been proposed to ensure consistency of language. It was important that these were in accordance with the Combined Scheme under which the Authority was constituted. Standing Orders 1 and 2 had been amended to request that the constituent authorities appointed to the Authority

for the four year period and that the Authority acknowledges that it was optimum for the Chair be appointed and then re-appointed for this term to ensure continuity of leadership.

In relation to political proportionality, the Monitoring Officer commented that he needed to correct the narrative to the changes as set out in paragraph 2.9 of his cover report. No such proportionality requirement has been included in Standing Order 25 as to date no political groups have existed on the Authority, the effect being that the proportionality rules (under sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989) have never yet applied to the committees; therefore he had not added a proportionality rule to the Standing Orders. Changes were also being proposed to the Standing Orders relating to public participation and a new Standing Order had been produced detailing the call-in procedure.

In response to a comment about previous discussions around extending the membership of Authority Members in the event that they had not been re-elected to the constituent authorities, the Monitoring Officer advised that this was not possible as Members, if not re-elected, ceased to be Members of the principal authorities four days after the election, after which point they were unable to represent the respective council on any body, including the Fire and Rescue Authority. In the event that an urgent decision had to be taken between the election and the Annual Meeting, this would be taken by the Chief Fire Officer. The legislation that provided for Chairs of principal councils to keep their role until the council's Annual Meeting even if no longer an elected councillor, did not apply to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

In response to additional comments and questions received from Members, the Monitoring Officer made the following comments:

- The Authority could not be bound to re-appoint the Chair for the four year-period, but an expression of intent could be stated.
- Any Member could act as a substitute on any Committee, as there was such a small pool of Members from which to appoint. Some of detail from the previous Standing Orders had been removed and this would be reintroduced to provide additional clarity.
- Prior notification of questions from members of the public allowed for an appropriate response to be provided at a meeting. It was noted that the Chair had discretion, and reference to allow for late questions to be put would be added in the revised Standing Orders.
- Members requested a decrease in the number of Members required for a call-in, from five members to two members.
- Members requested that Task and Finish groups constituted to hear Member call-ins would be held as public meetings. Internal call-ins, or deep dives, could take part in private sessions if required.

In discussing what strategic documents should be reserved for the full Authority, with specific mention being made of Asset Strategies and whether decisions to close or relocate a fire station should be set out under the Executive or Authority terms of reference, it was noted that Members would need to determine which strategic documents they would wish to consider at full Authority meetings. In relation to the closure or relocation of fire stations, whilst it was recognised that a decision of this magnitude would be taken through the Community Risk Management Plan process, and the Plan itself, and the associated annual action plan arising from the Plan, were submitted to the Authority

for approval, it was agreed that additional clarity could be provided through the amendment of Section 5.5 and in 3.3 of the Executive functions as it related to “future priority programmes”.

RESOLVED:

That the following documents be recommended to the Authority for approval, taking into account the comments made at the meeting:

- i. draft Terms of Reference for the Authority and the Executive and Audit and Standards committees;
- ii. draft Procedural Rules for Task and Finish Groups (including Call In Task and Finish Groups)
- iii. draft Procedural Standing Orders for the Authority and its Committees
- iv. an additional Procedural Standing Order (6b for call-in), subject to the number of Members needed to call-in a decision being reduced from 5 to 2, and clarification that meetings discussing Member call-ins would be open to the public
- v. draft Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

22-23/EC/50 Options Appraisal for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Community Panel

Mr S Frank, Head of Strategic Support and Assurance, presented a report on the findings from recent meetings and research on developing a Community Panel. As part of the development of the new Community Risk Management Plan, a wide range of community engagement and consultation activities had been undertaken, and, as this had been identified as an area for improvement during the last inspection, it had been agreed to strengthen this area.

The report set out the following four options for consideration: collaborate with Bedfordshire Police Community Scrutiny Panel, integrate with Council Community Citizens’ Panels, develop a dedicated Fire and Rescue Service Community Panel and commission the Community Voluntary Service Bedfordshire or Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum to do this on behalf of the Authority. The risks, benefits and potential costs involved were also set out in the report.

It was suggested that Bedfordshire Police, Healthwatch and the constituent Councils be approached regarding the development of the Panel and requested to advise their own panel members of this so that any interested individuals could be included.

Members of the Executive supported the creation of a dedicated Fire and Rescue Service Community Panel and also the provision of a wide range of engagement activities to include both virtual and in person events, questionnaires and other forms of engagement.

The Head of Strategic Support and Assurance advised that a more detailed report, detailing proposals for the operation of a Fire and Rescue Service Community Panel, would be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged and that Option 3 be supported as the best way forward.

22-23/EC/51 Core Code of Ethics

Ms T Draper, the Service's Learning and Development Manager, gave a presentation on the Fire Standard on the Core Code of Ethics. The adoption of such a Code was the first of 14 fire standards currently published by the Fire Standards Board. The Service was required to adopt and embed the Core Code to demonstrate that the service was fully committed and compliant at both an individual and corporate level, ensure the attitudes, professional behaviours and conduct described within the Code were reflected in its decision-making, policies, procedures, processes, and associated guidance that govern how the Service manages, to provide training and support to all those who worked for, or on behalf of, a Service to achieve their understanding of the Code and an appreciation of their responsibilities in adhering to it and to not detract from the Code.

The five principles of the Code of Ethics had been developed in accordance with the Nolan Principles of Public Life and were as follows: put our communities first, integrity, dignity and respect, leadership and equality, diversity and inclusion.

The role of the Authority Members was to hold the Chief Fire Officer to account for the implementation of the Code at a local level, play a proactive role in challenging behaviour inconsistent with the Core Code and ensure strategies, policies and performance measures were in place to promote and embed a positive and inclusive culture.

It was noted that the Assistant Chief Fire Officer had been designated as the senior Officer responsible for promoting the Code throughout the Service.

A one page document entitled "Our Professional Behaviours and Values" had been produced and was widely displayed throughout Service buildings. The eight behaviours (I am trustworthy, I listen, I am inclusive, I am innovative, I am confident and resilient, I am a role model, I encourage continuous improvement, and I am a team player) had been developed in line with the NFCC Leadership Framework, the Code of Ethics and the Service values and, from the 1 April 2023, would be included in all staff performance appraisals, setting the standard for the behaviours expected of all staff throughout the Service and to demonstrate the Service's commitment to embedding these within the Service.

Members recognised the importance of promoting and displaying these values themselves, acknowledging that any cultural change must start at the top of an organisation.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of this covering paper and the presentation be acknowledged, and the adoption of the Core Code of Ethics be approved.

22-23/EC/52 2023/24 KPIs Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation to the Executive Committee on the work that was currently being undertaken on the development of 2023/24 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) following concerns on performance being raised at a previous Authority meeting, and how this information would be reported to Members in future.

A working group of Officers had been constituted to review the current challenges and to discuss how improvements in performance and reporting methodology could be progressed. It was intended for performance improvements to be developed at lower levels of management in the Service, with an escalation process to the Strategic Management Team and full Authority in due course if issues were not resolved.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that one of the challenges arose from the discrepancy between the descriptions of the performance indicators and the need to accommodate both local and national data requirements. In this respect, a gap analysis of various data sets was being undertaken so that the Service could ensure that it was reporting performance in accordance with the requirements of the Home Office and the Inspectorate, as well as being able to report transparently on local performance issues. There was a significant piece of work ongoing to describe KPIs in “Plain English”.

There was also an issue in relation to tolerance and variance; for example, a tolerance of 5% would be skewed by small numbers, and performance against an indicator could also be skewed by unusual patterns activity, such as the large number of outdoor fires resulting from the unusually hot and dry weather conditions the previous summer.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported on the benchmarking exercise that had been carried out on the call-handling indicators. This had identified that the Service’s performance targets in this area were not in line with the rest of the region or the country, with a significantly shorter time period in which to respond compared to other Service areas, with the majority being over 90/120 seconds in comparison to the 60 second target of the Service. As previously discussed, it was likely that this indicator would be separated into measuring incidents in addressable and non-addressable locations. It was noted that any degree of call challenge would extend the length of the call.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Inspectorate drew from a range of times for this indicator, and that the targets could be determined at a local level.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that the call handling indicators, as currently reported, did not take into account the type of fire, such as Category 1 risk of loss to life and property, which were the clear operational priority for response.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that consideration was also being given to how the data was being presented to Members, and he would be happy to receive feedback from any Member on this. It was intended to produce a report with an introductory executive summary, a KPI chart and then an analysis of performance against the expected standards.

It was recognised that it was also useful to receive and analyse benchmarking data. This had demonstrated that the Service's significant improvement in performance in the delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks had a directly positive impact on the reduction of dwelling fires. The Service had improved from the fifth worst performing Service to the thirteenth best in the space of a few years. This demonstrated the value of prevention activity.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service could report on local measures and that this would not influence the opinion of the HMI inspectors, as long as the data required by them was also presented. It was intended to submit a report on KPIs to the next full Authority meeting.

In response to a request from Councillor Waheed, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer agreed to circulate the slide pack to Executive Members for information.

In response to a question on timescales for implementation, Members were advised that it was intended to agree the updated KPIs before the end of the financial year, with the new KPIs being reported to the Authority in September, following the end of the first quarter of the 2023/24 performance year.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

22-23/EC/53 Work Programme

Members received the updated work programme for 2023/24 and noted the cyclical items.

It was noted that this would be populated in the coming months following the Authority's Annual Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme 2023/24 be received and the cyclical agenda items be noted.

22-23/EC/54 and 55 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SCHEDULE 12A, PARAGRAPH 3 OF PART 1: EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

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 Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Item:

22-23/EC/54 Industrial Relations/Actions Update

22-23/EC/55 Succession Planning

The meeting ended at 1.34 pm