

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2017**

Present: Councillors C Atkins (Chair), F Chapman, P Downing (Vice-Chair), P Duckett, D Franks, M Headley, T Khan, D McVicar, J Mingay, R Saleem and Y Waheed

CFO P Fuller, ACFO I Evans, ACO Z Evans, Mr G Chambers, Mr J Atkinson

Also Present: Police and Crime Commissioner Holloway

The Vice-Chair of the Bedfordshire and Fire Rescue Authority, Councillor Downing, opened the meeting and immediately adjourned the start to 10.15 as a number of Members were not yet present as a result of exceptional traffic delays.

17-18/FRA/28 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Chatterley. Councillors Chapman and Khan also apologised for their late arrival. DCFO Ranger had also sent his apologies for the meeting.

17-18/FRA/29 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

17-18/FRA/30 Communications

1. Bedfordshire Blue Light Collaboration Project Terms of Reference

The Chief Fire Officer, in response to a question, advised that Councillor Downing was the FRA's representative on the Project Management Board. The Board was jointly chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. The Chief Fire Officer also confirmed that there was a standing invitation to the Ambulance Service to be represented on the Board.

RESOLVED:

That the Terms of Reference for the Bedfordshire Blue Light Collaboration Project, be acknowledged.

2. 25 July 2017: Police and Crime Panel visit to Community Fire Stations

It was reported that the Police and Crime Panel had visited a number of Community Fire Stations on 25 July 2017.

3. 6 September 2017: Fire Service Awards

The Chair advised that she had attended the recent Fire Service Awards.

4. 10 September 2017: CFO and Councillor Waheed attendance at Memorial Service near to St Paul's Cathedral

The Chair advised that the Chief Fire Officer and Councillor Waheed had attended the Memorial Service on 10 September 2017.

5. Week commencing 9 October 2017: Engagement Day for CFOs and Chairs of Fire Authorities

The Chair advised that the Conference had learnt of the new inspection regime and were provided with details as to how this would be rolled out.

6. 11 & 12 October 2017: CFA Conference

The Chair mentioned the CFA Conference which had taken place at Wyboston. The Chief Fire Officer added that the Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service had given a presentation on Insurance Mutual and Members had presented on Blue Light Collaboration work.

7. 13 October 2017: Fire Commission Conference

The Chair reported on the above Conference which was for the Chairs of Fire Authorities throughout the country to meet. This was organised by the Local Government Association and the subject matter on this occasion had been: the new inspection process; pay; pensions and issues arising from the Grenfell Tower disaster.

8. Actions of the Crew from Shefford Fire Station

The Chief Fire Officer reported that a Shefford Crew had stopped to help a Police Officer who was in difficulty in trying to apprehend a suspect. He added that he was particularly pleased to hear of their assistance as this demonstrated the further benefits of working together. The Deputy Chief Constable had written to the Crew to thank them for their efforts. Police and Crime Commissioner Holloway added that she had passed on her congratulations at the time and that she would also be writing to the Shefford Crew. In response to a question, the Chief Fire Officer advised that it had not been necessary during this incident, however, it was possible that citizens could make a common law arrest if this was appropriate.

9. Letter of thanks from a Kenyan Chief Fire Officer

The Chair reported the receipt of a letter of thanks from a Kenyan Chief Fire Officer following his visit to the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service which was to gain experience and to enhance his understanding of the work of the Service. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service had been supporting Kenya on an ongoing basis with equipment which was no longer required, however, was still in working condition. The Chair added that the letter of thanks had been directed in particular to the Chief Fire Officer, the Leadership Team, Crew Commanders and specific Watches. The Chief Fire Officer mentioned that there was also an outstanding invitation from the Kenyan Fire Service for the Chief and the Chair to visit them, however, this would necessitate attempts being made to fund the trip from outside Fire Service resources.

10. Current position concerning NJC “Grey Book” Pay Award discussions

The Chair confirmed that the FRA would be considering this matter at a later item on the Agenda.

11. Passing Out Parade for new Recruits

The Chair reported on the recent Passing Out Parade at which Certificates had also been presented to Fire Service Cadets.

12. DCFO Ranger

The Chair advised that had DCFO Ranger been able to attend this meeting, it would have been his final FRA meeting before his retirement. The Chair wished to place on record, and this was supported by the FRA, his considerable contribution to the Authority and for his work with the Fire Service. The Chair advised that she would send a note to DCFO Ranger to formally give thanks on behalf of the FRA and she would give her thanks in person at an appropriate opportunity.

The Chief Fire Officer had liaised with Executive Members concerning the replacement of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and they had agreed that the Assistant Chief Fire Officer Evans should assume the responsibilities as Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer until a permanent replacement could be found. It had been decided that it would be more appropriate to advertise the post in January 2018.

17-18/FRA/31 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17-18/FRA/32 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).

17-18/FRA/33 Review of Standing Orders

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer reminded Members of the proposed change in the FRA Standing Orders, which needed to be agreed at this meeting following the initial approval of which had stood referred from the previous meeting.

Police and Crime Commissioner Holloway confirmed that she was not seeking to take over responsibility for the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, not least because the Fire Authority were supportive of collaboration and because it was incumbent on her as a priority to secure the future of Bedfordshire Police as a standalone Force. In addition she had been welcomed by the Fire Authority and was happy to attend meetings and looked forward to when she might also be entitled to a voting right.

RESOLVED:

That the Authority’s Standing Orders be amended by adding the paragraphs shown in italics in the Appendix to the report.

17-18/FRA/34 Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group 13 September 2017

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group held on 13 September 2017.

In introducing the report and Minutes, Councillor Headley highlighted the following issues:

- The current planning arrangements for the 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme.
- The arrangements for the Budget Workshops for Members, the first of which was scheduled for 21 November 2017.
- The Committee had requested further information, and had consequently received, a presentation on mobile data terminals.

In response to a question from a Member concerning the difficulty for the Fire Service to access high rise buildings without knowing the relevant access code, and whether the Police could share this information, the Police and Crime Commissioner advised that she would bring the matter up at her next Governance Board meeting. Councillor Franks commented that Luton Borough Council owned high rise blocks, and changed the access code on a regular basis, as the codes were often shared inappropriately.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 be received.

17-18/FRA/35 Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group 14 September 2017

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group held on 14 September 2017.

Councillor Mingay highlighted the following matters in particular:

- In terms of the Co-Responding Project, the Service had attended 66 of the 91 calls which had been received to date.
- The improvements to the Retained Duty System Recruitment Process could result in up to 20 new recruits who would attend the next course in Autumn, which was double the number which had previously been achieved.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of primary fires, with the target having been missed by 31% for the reporting period, however, this was not seen as an issue which required further attention at the current time.
- There had been an increase in accidental dwelling fires and the target had been missed by 6%.
- The new mobilising system enabled traffic conditions and roadworks to be taken into account when planning the route to an incident.
- The Fire Service had mobilised to 261 non domestic Automatic Fire Detector incidents during the first quarter of 2016/17 and this had decreased to 144 incidents for the same period in the current year. This was as a direct result of the work of the Fire Service and the education of residents.
- With regard to the 425 customer satisfaction surveys which had been conducted, there had been 229 responses returned which had demonstrated a 99% satisfaction rate.
- The Service continued to work with partners across a wide range of activities to reduce incidents of arson and deliberate fire.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that following recent arrangements being put in place, the Community Hubs were now up to full strength with the South and Central Section being covered by Chief Inspector Hob Hoque and the North and Central Section by Chief Inspector Bernie White. She added that part of their duties included meeting with Councillors with an aim of building up community intelligence. In response to a question, the Commissioner confirmed that each Hub had one main priority across three Local Authority Wards, however, the Chief Inspectors worked with Councillors to determine the priority, whilst also being able to respond to other areas of work.

In response to a question from a Member concerning the recruitment of Retained Duty System applicants who would be able to respond to an RDS station within six minutes rather than the current five minutes, ACO Evans responded that there was a balance to be achieved in fire appliance availability, however, this matter would be monitored to ensure that service delivery was not unduly affected.

Councillor Mingay took the opportunity to express his thanks to DCFO Ranger for his help and assistance over the last few years and wished him well for the future.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 14 September 2017 be received subject to noting that Councillor Franks had been in attendance.

17-18/FRA/36 Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group 20 September 2017

Councillor Waheed introduced the report of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 20 September 2017.

In introducing the report and Minutes, Councillor Waheed highlighted the following matters:

- The HR and Payroll project had been RAG rated as “amber” as a result of cost overruns and compatibility issues. The project was now expected to be signed off at the next Board meeting.
- An e-voucher system had now been rolled out for those employees who were not eligible for a free flu vaccination. It was also noted that this system avoided the need to provide a suitable facility and a Nurse to administer the vaccination, which was a cost saving for the Service.
- Targeted positive action events had been held to encourage applications for whole-time recruitment from under-represented groups of the community.
- Two of the recent whole-time recruits had been former Fire Service Cadets.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 be received.

17-18/FRA/37 Audit and Standards Committee 28 September 2017

Councillor Chapman introduced the report of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 28 September 2017.

In introducing the report and Minutes, Councillor Chapman highlighted the following matters:

- The Fire Service pay negotiations were ongoing.

- Ernst & Young had advised that the Audit Plan had largely been completed with outstanding work being required on the finalisation of work on employee costs.

Councillor Chapman commented that going forward, the number of Councillors' responses to the questionnaire from the Auditors concerning the Authority's effectiveness, needed to be improved. She added that the Auditors had been extremely complimentary of Fire Services finances and gave her thanks to the Head of Finance and Treasurer and his team.

The Police and Crime Commissioner referred to the Fire Service pay negotiations and commented that Police and Crime Commissioners had not been consulted by the Government before awarding the pay increase to the Police which would result in additional cost to the Bedfordshire Police of £650,000 and if a similar award was given to other Police staff, the total amount to be found would be £900,000. The increase had been put forward partly in the belief that Police Forces held significant reserves, however, the Commissioner reiterated that Bedfordshire Police reserves had been earmarked for capital projects or for future plans. She suggested that the Fire and Rescue Authority could write to the Police and Fire Minister to confirm that its reserves, on the whole, had already been allocated to specific projects.

In response to a question, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that there was no direct threat of industrial action by the Fire Brigade Union, however, the Union had indicated that whilst negotiations were ongoing their Members would not carry out any work outside of their usual responsibilities.

ACO Evans commented that there remained an ongoing National dispute concerning Fire Service pensions which was currently pending an appeal.

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer advised that the Audit and Standards Committee had referred a matter concerning the Code of Conduct to the Fire and Rescue Authority for consideration. Councillor Headley set out his concerns with regard to paragraphs 4.14 and 4.15 of the Code as these mainly arose following the guidance of the former Standards Board for England. He proposed and Councillor Duckett seconded, that those particular paragraphs should be removed from the Code of Conduct. It was also proposed that the Code of Conduct should be reviewed by the Audit and Standards Committee as part of their work programme.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2017 be received.
2. That paragraphs 4.14 and 4.15 of the Code of Conduct be removed and that the Audit and Standards Committee undertake a review of the Code of Conduct.

17-18/FRA/38 NJC Pay Awards

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report concerning the NJC Pay Awards.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that discussions were ongoing concerning the pay negotiations and neither side had agreed that there should be an interim award of 1%.

RESOLVED:

1. That the NJC Green Book Pay Award which has been agreed, and that it has currently not been applied, be noted.
2. That the application of the NJC Brigade Managers Pay Award for 2017 be confirmed.
3. That the ongoing NJC Grey Book pay negotiations for 2017 be noted.

17-18/FRA/39 Collaboration Working Group

ACFO Evans introduced the report of the Head of Operational Support and noted in particular that the arrangements for the Co-location of the Leighton Buzzard Station were now in place and was a great success with genuine engagement by Officers.

In response to a question from a Member concerning the Harrold Fire Station, the Chief Fire Officer said he was content for the Police to use the facilities as required. The Police and Crime Commissioner mentioned that as a result of the large scale housing developments being proposed in Riseley, that the Police would be reviewing the operation of the Riseley Police Station, rather than Officers moving to Harrold as had previously been proposed. She wished to place on record, her gratitude for the support given to Police Officers and to colleagues who had made them extremely welcome.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be acknowledged.

17-18/FRA/40 Information Bulletin

Members received the information bulletin for the period 1 April – 30 June 2017.

In response to a question, ACO Evans advised that turnover of fire fighters, other than by retirement, had reduced to less than 3%. She confirmed that the Service considered succession planning on an on-going basis and the position continued to be monitored.

In response to a further question, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Fire Service could also be called on to rescue animals as it was part of their responsibility. He further commented that if this service was not provided then it could be that members of the public might attempt to rescue animals and consequently might need to be rescued themselves.

The Chair took the opportunity to congratulate the Chief Fire Officer in being appointed the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire and was sure that he would carry out the duties with the full dignity that the position expected.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

The meeting ended at 12.04 pm