

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2020

Present: Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, D Franks, J Gambold, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler and Y Waheed

CFO P Fuller, ACO G Chambers, ACFO A Peckham and Mr J Atkinson

19-20/FRA/69 Apologies

There were no apologies.

19-20/FRA/70 To consider the implications of Cllr Malik's Resignation

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer submitted his report on the implications of Councillor Malik's resignation from the Authority following her appointment to Luton Borough Council's Executive. Her resignation created a vacancy on the Authority's Executive Committee and the Luton Local Strategic Partnership for the remainder of the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

A nomination to fill the vacancy had been put forward by the Labour Group on Luton Borough Council but this had not yet been formally confirmed at its Full Council meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That Councillor Franks be appointed to the Executive Committee for the remainder of 2019/20 Municipal Year.
2. That Councillor Franks be appointed as the Luton Member of the Local Strategic Partnerships for the remainder of the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

19-20/FRA/71 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019

The State of Fire and Rescue Report had been published following the conclusion of the final tranche of inspections. This was the Secretary of State's assessment of the sector in England, based on the inspections carried out between June 2018 and August 2019. Human Resources had generally been identified as an area of improvement across the sector. There had also been recommendations around the need for more operational independence.

HMICFRS Inspection

Notification had recently been received that the Service would be subject to inspection in the summer, with fieldwork commencing in July 2020. A Service Liaison Lead had been appointed and it was hoped that this individual would remain in post throughout the process.

Fire Commission Meeting

The Chair reported on the meeting of the Fire Commission he had attended on 24 January 2020. The meeting had focused on the Mayor of London's report on the implementation of the Phase 1 recommendations arising from the Grenfell inquiry.

LGA Champion's Network

The Chair reported on the network meeting attended by himself and the Vice-Chair on 22 January 2020. Barriers to greater equality and representation had been discussed and the meeting had provided positive networking opportunities as well as opportunities to explore best practice.

Celebration of 75 years of Vauxhall

Councillor Waheed reported on the celebration event on 30 January 2020 that she had attended with the Chief Fire Officer. The impact of Vauxhall on Luton, as a large employer, was recognised, as was the contribution to the event of students from Denbigh High School.

Ministerial Letter

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, following the publication of the State of Fire and Rescue Report, a letter had been sent to all Chairs and Chief Fire Officers of Fire and Rescue Authorities from the Home Office, responding to the report and highlighting key areas of improvement.

National LGA Fire Conference

The Chair advised that he and the Vice-Chair would be representing the Authority at the National LGA Fire Conference which would take place from 9-11 March 2020.

Passing Out Parade for On-call Fire Fighters

The Chair reported on the recent passing out parade for the 10 new recruits to the Retained Service. The Chief Fire Officer added that this was the first such parade for on-call fire fighters and that in future, employers of those individuals would be invited to attend.

Denise Clarke

The Authority was advised that Ms Denise Clarke, Head of Human Resources, would be retiring from the Service at the end of April 2020.

19-20/FRA/73 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2019 be confirmed as a true record.

19-20/FRA/74 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).

19-20/FRA/75 Audit and Standards Committee 5 December 2019

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 5 December 2019 and reported on the ongoing review of the Service's Corporate Risk Register. The Register had been in need of updating and the progress made to date had been reported to the Committee, with a further report to be submitted at the Committee's next meeting.

Councillor Headley submitted the Statement of Assurance to the Authority for its approval. The Committee had made a number of minor alterations to the document, all of which had been incorporated.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee 2019 held on 5 December be received.
2. That the Statement of Assurance be approved for signature by the Chair of the Committee.

19-20/FRA/76 2020/21 Community Risk Management Plan

The Authority received a report on the outcomes of the consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2019-2023.

The Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the consultation on the CRMP had been run jointly with the budget consultation. Just fewer than 15,000 emails had been sent to Alert subscribers and the consultation was also promoted on the Service website and through its social media channels. Face to face engagement had also been undertaken. 395 responses had been received to the consultation, the overwhelming majority of which were in favour of the actions included in the action plan.

RESOLVED:

1. That the findings of the Community Risk Management Plan consultation be acknowledged.
2. That the final draft Community Risk Management Plan 2019-2023 and the 2020/21 annual action plan be approved, as suitable opportunity has been given for local communities and staff members to comment.

19-20/FRA/77 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer introduced his report setting out the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 31 December 2019. An underspend of £116,000 was forecast.

In relation to the Capital Programme, it was noted that, as a result of the International Exhibition for Rescue, Fire Prevention, Disaster Relief, Safety and Security that was being held in Hanover in June 2020, a number of capital projects had been postponed to await the release of new technology.

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised forecast outturns for revenue and capital be noted.
2. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.7 of the report regarding the reconciliation work being undertaken regarding the firefighter pension schemes be noted.
3. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.8 of the report regarding the potential cost of recruits in year be noted.

19-20/FRA/78 The 2020/21 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax Setting

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted his report which presented information to allow the Authority to set a budget and precept level for 2020/21 in line with statutory requirements, approve a Medium-Term Revenue Plan for the period 2020/21 to 2023/24, approve a Medium-Term Capital Programme for the period 2020/21 to 2023/24 and approve a Medium-Term Financial Strategy which provided the strategic context for each of the documents, linking them to the Authority's corporate aims, objectives and strategic priorities.

350 responses had been received to the budget consultation, with 88% of respondents in support of the proposed 1.99% Council Tax increase. Just under 70% of respondents also supported an increase of £3-5 in the Council Tax, if this was allowed.

The Assistant Chief Officer drew Members' attention to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, in which a graph illustrating the reduction in Revenue Support Grant since 2014/15 was set out.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that the level of response to this year's budget consultation had been significantly reduced from previous years. This may be because it had been run jointly with the consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan. Whilst this indicated that the responses received would have been more informed, it also suggested that a standalone consultation may result in an increased level of response.

The uncertainty in medium term forecasting as the result of there being no Comprehensive Spending Review and no further information on the new funding formula was recognised.

The view was also expressed that the significant investment in ICT should be monitored to ensure that the benefits were being delivered.

The recommendations relating to the revenue budget requirement of £30.991 million, with a corresponding precept of £21.880 million and a 1.99% Council Tax increase were put to the meeting and the votes recorded thereon were as follows:

For the Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley, K Choudhry, D Franks, J Gambold, M Headley, D McVicar, I Shingler and
Recommendations Y Waheed
(10)

Therefore, these recommendations were carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

1. That for the financial 2020/21:
 - a. A Revenue Budget requirement be set at £30.991m to be met as indicated in paragraph 3.8 of the report.
 - b. In order to meet this budget requirement, the Authority's Precept be set at £21.880m resulting in a council tax increase of 1.99% up to £100.41 per Band D equivalent property, calculated as shown in paragraph 3.8 of the report, and that
 - c. The Treasurer be authorised to issue Precepts in the necessary form to each of the Unitary Councils for the amounts indicated in paragraph 3.11 of the report.
2. That the Medium-Term Revenue Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and the 2020/21 savings and efficiencies detailed at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved.
3. That the 2019/20 year-end underspend is allocated to a Pay Award Reserve.

4. That the Medium-Term Capital Programme attached at Appendix 3 to the report be approved.
5. That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy attached at Appendix 4 to the report and the Reserves Strategy attached at Appendix 5 to the report 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 the report, be noted.
7. That any budget amendments required following receipt of the final settlement figures be delegated to the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer.

19-20/FRA/79 Treasury Management Strategy and Practices

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted his report on the review of the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Treasury Management Policies. There were no material updates to report.

It was noted that Members last received treasury management training in July 2017.

The Authority currently had a total amount borrowed of £9.987 million, short-term investments of up to £10 million (up to £17 million if including short notice accounts) and budgeted interest of £115,000 from investments in 2020/21.

In relation to the operational boundaries for other long-term liabilities, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that if the limit had to be amended as the result of new liabilities being identified during budget monitoring, this could be reported to Members at the Mid-Year Review.

The term for the Public Work Loans Board borrowing was close to 40 years and the early repayment charges were significant.

RESOLVED:

That following consideration, the following updated policies be adopted:

- i. Treasury Management Strategy Statement
- ii. Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Annual Investment Strategy
- ii. Treasury Management Practices

19-20/FRA/80 Localism Act 2011 - Pay Policy Statement 2020

The Authority received the report of the Chief Fire Officer on the review of the annual pay policy statement and its constituent parts for the financial year 2020/21.

It was noted that, whilst the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group was referred to in the Policy, it had no decision-making powers and reference to this Group, whilst it remained in the Authority's Committee structure until a formal decision was made, should be removed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted proposed pay policy statement for 2020/21 be approved, subject to the removal of the words “and Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group”, to be replaced with “who have delegated some powers to the Chief Fire Officer through a scheme of delegation” in paragraph 2.
2. That the version of the statement highlighting the changes from the previous year’s statement be circulated to Members for information.

19-20/FRA/81 Members' Allowances Scheme 2020/21

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report on the review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme for the 2020/21 Municipal Year. No significant changes were being proposed, although it was being suggested that the Scheme may require amendment following the consideration of the Governance Review at the next meeting of the Authority on 30 April 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the Members’ Allowances Scheme be updated from 1 June 2020 in accordance with the proposals set out in the report and that the Scheme be adopted for the financial year 2020/21 subject to any amendments that may be agreed following the Authority’s further consideration of the Governance Review at its meeting on 30 April 2020.

19-20/FRA/82 Calendar of Meetings 2020/21

The Authority received a proposed calendar of meetings for 2020/21.

RESOLVED:

That, the submitted provisional calendar of dates for meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its associated Committees for the forthcoming year be approved, subject to consideration of the Governance Review update to be received in April 2020.

19-20/FRA/83 Work Programme

The Authority received its work programme for 2019/20. Members acknowledged that items had been deferred from this meeting so that the budget reports could be properly considered.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2019/20 be received and the ‘cyclical’ Agenda Items for each meeting in 2019/20 be noted.

19-20/FRA/84 Information Bulletin (Q3 Oct-Dec)

Members received the Service information bulletin for the period October to December 2019.

It was noted that there were a number of incidents that had occurred outside of the reporting period that Members had been made aware of through email communication.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

19-20/FRA/85 Presentation by Daisy Byron on Rogue Landlords

The Authority received a presentation from Daisy Byron on Rogue Landlords. The presentation covered the following areas:

- The role of the HMO/Rogue Landlord Officer
- The organisations and teams that the Officer worked with
- The definition of a House in Multiple Occupation
- The goals that had been set
- Future plans

The HMO/Rogue Landlord Officer post had been appointed to for a fixed term basis from August 2019-February 2021. Upon taking up the post, the HMO/Rogue Landlord Officer had set up regular meetings with representatives of the three unitary authorities in Bedfordshire. This had proven to be a very useful networking opportunity. A large part of the role was to undertake and support joint inspections with teams from the local authorities, as well as responding to consultations on applications for HMOs. The Officer also provided training days and presentations. The last event, held on 15 January 2020 and attended by over 60 individuals representing fire and rescue, licensing, Environmental Health and private sector housing, was very successful and another event was planned for the summer. Risk based inspections were also undertaken.

An HMO was a property that housed three or more people from more than one household. The HMO Officer only had jurisdiction over properties with shared facilities; properties such as “beds in sheds” would be enforced by the housing authorities.

The HMO/Rogue Landlord Officer carried a warrant that allowed power of entry; local authorities and the immigration authorities had to apply for warrants.

Luton had been identified as the area of Bedfordshire which had the highest number of HMOs, both licensed and unlicensed. Selective licensing was being applied in five wards in Luton.

A proforma for a current investigation was tabled, as was a booklet providing examples of dangerous conditions and relevant facts and figures, for Members' information.

In response to questions, the Authority was advised that:

- Premises subject to notices were visited on a regular basis to ensure that landlords were taking the action required to make their properties safe for occupants.
- Training had led to an increase in concerns being raised about dangerous living conditions when crews undertook "Safe and Well" visits.
- There were a significant number of unlicensed HMOs in Central Bedfordshire and "road hits" were being undertaken to identify these properties.
- An Article 4 direction allowed specific permitted development rights for the areas covered by Article 4.
- The Service worked closely with local authorities to support prosecutions under private sector housing legislation.
- A successful prosecution could only be obtained if the risk of harm could be proven.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be received.

The meeting ended at 12.19 pm