

**MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
MEETING HELD ON 16 JULY 2020**

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

CFO P Fuller, ACO G Chambers and SOC A Peckham

20-21/FRA/1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Duckett. The Secretary and Monitoring Officer, Mr J Atkinson and Deputy Chief Fire Officer A Hopkinson were also unable to attend the meeting.

20-21/FRA/2 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

20-21/FRA/3 Communications

The Chair advised that he circulated regular communications to Members of the Authority for information. He requested that the thanks of Members of the Authority to the employees of the Service for the work undertaken during the pandemic be recorded.

Letter from Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Home Office

The Chief Fire Officer reported on a letter that had been received from Lord Greenhalgh, the current Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Minister of State for the Home Office which had requested the Service's views on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) State of Fire Report. A three page response, covering such issues as fire service reform, pay and conditions and the culture within Fire and Rescue Services, had been produced.

HMICFRS Inspection Timetable

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service would be subject to a virtual thematic inspection of the Service's response to the COVID19 pandemic. The normal inspection timetable, which had been delayed as a result of the pandemic, was expected to resume from the spring/summer of 2021.

Recovery

The Chief Fire Officer reported that, in addition to an internal COVID19 response group that had met regularly throughout the pandemic, meetings of the recovery cell were now becoming more frequent to address issues arising from the relaxation of lockdown. The recovery cell, which included all members of the Corporate Management Team as well as a number of other Officers within the Service, would be considering the opportunities to change the way that the Service operates now that it had experience of working in a virtual way. In this respect, a facilitated session had been arranged on 21 July 2020, where these opportunities would be explored through challenging the current ways of working and assessing whether a new model would be more efficient and effective.

External challenge was being sought and the Chief Fire Officer had invited the HMICFRS to take part in this process.

20-21/FRA/4 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 be confirmed as a true record.

20-21/FRA/5 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).

20-21/FRA/6 Executive Committee 24 April 2020

The Chair submitted the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 24 April 2020. The main item of business was how to conduct Authority meetings during the lockdown period. The Annual General Meeting had been postponed from 2 June to 3 September 2020 and this meeting and the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee on 2 July 2020 had been held as remote meetings via Zoom.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 24 April 2020 be received.

20-21/FRA/7 Executive Committee 8 July 2020

The Chair introduced the draft Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 8 July 2020. The Executive was proposing that each member of the Executive be allocated a portfolio area of responsibility on which they would report regularly to the full Authority. This would require a change in the terms of reference of the Committee and the updated terms of reference were submitted for approval.

In response to a question on where responsibility for the day-to-day monitoring of revenue and capital would sit, the Authority was advised that the scrutiny role of the Audit and Standards Committee had been strengthened and that the Authority itself was provided with all the finance reports for approval. Whilst it had been discussed that monitoring of the Authority's finances should form part of the Corporate Services portfolio, this had not yet been agreed.

Members noted the Minute on the confidential item that had been considered at the meeting. As there was nothing to report at this time, that particular Minute was not discussed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 8 July 2020 be received.
2. That each member of the Executive be allocated a special area of responsibility as shown in Appendix A of the report.
3. That the terms of reference of the Executive Committee be revised and adopted as shown in Appendix B of the report.
4. That no changes be made to the Scheme of Member Allowances at this time but that this be reviewed in December 2020.
5. That the Executive give further consideration to where the day-to-day monitoring of revenue and capital should sit in the special areas of responsibility to be allocated to individual members of the Executive.

20-21/FRA/8 Audit and Standards Committee 02 July 2020

Councillor Headley introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 2 July 2020. At the meeting, the Committee had been advised of the proposed increase in the annual audit fee from £23,000 to £50,000. The Committee had not accepted this increase. The Committee had also received the Service's updated Corporate Risk Register and significant improvements had been made to the document.

In response to questions, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer, Mr G Chambers, advised that EY would be advising Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) that the fee increase had not been accepted, at which point PSAA would contact the Service to discuss this. He reported that other FRAs had also been subject to similar increases from EY.

PSAA had engaged with a number of the larger audit firms during the tendering process and there may be other options for the Authority to pursue.

Members would be provided with an update of the discussions with the PSAA once these had taken place.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 2 July 2020 be received.

20-21/FRA/9 Annual Overarching Performance Report Year End 2019/20

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the overarching performance report for year end 2019/20 that was aligned to the Service's strategic objectives. In general, the Service had performed well, with only a few areas of concern.

Assistant Chief Officer Peckham drew Members' attention to the following:

- The number of primary fire injuries (PI14), where the individuals concerned required hospital treatment, had been higher than the five year average but lower than the number reported in 2018/19. Of the 30 injuries reported, 9 were identified as serious.
- The number of safe and well visits delivered (PI15) had been higher than the previous year but had not reached the stretch target set, possibly as a result of the Service being unable to undertake these visits at the end of the reporting period due to COVID19. The inability of the Service to deliver these visits would continue into the current reporting year.
- The number of Primary Fires in Non-Domestic Buildings (PI18) was higher than the previous year, with a number of incidents relating to particular individuals detained at HMP Bedford. These individuals were no longer at the Prison.
- The average response time to primary fires (PI30) was slower than both the previous year and the five year average and the Corporate Management Team had agreed that further research be undertaken to determine the reasons for this. There had previously been issues with the response time of the first appliance negated by the arrival of further vehicles, however, this had now been resolved as there had been manual data interrogation which led to a confidence level of 90-95%. The performance for Quarter 4 was better than target levels.
- The continued high levels of performance during the final quarter of the year for corporate services was acknowledged.
- The equality and diversity indicators remained challenging. 18% of on-call appointments had been made to female firefighters and the Service continued to work hard to represent the diverse community that it served.
- The sickness indicators (H1-H3) had been negatively impacted by three long-term injuries sustained to staff during training exercises. Following any incident leading to any injury, a thorough accident investigation process was followed to identify any learning points. There had been no negligence on behalf of the Service.
- The training indicators had been impacted by COVID19 and the Service's reduced ability to safely deliver centralised training. The impact of this would continue into the current performance year.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Service's performance against the delivery of the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) at the end of quarter Four 2019/20 be acknowledged.
2. That the Overarching Performance Report be published on the Service website.

20-21/FRA/10 Proposed Indicators and Targets 2020/21

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the proposed suite of performance indicators and associated targets for 2020/21 and sought the Authority's endorsement to incorporate these into the Service's performance management framework, recognising that the indicators were currently being used to measure performance as the first meeting of the Authority had been delayed due to COVID19 and the difficulty of setting targets in the present circumstances.

Assistant Chief Officer Peckham requested that the indicator measuring the number of primary fire injuries where the victim went to hospital be amended from fewer than 23 to fewer than 27, as the five year average was 26.4, rather than the 21.8 indicated in the report. He also asked that the indicator measuring the number of safe and well visits be revised, as the Service was currently unable to deliver these visits.

In response to questions regarding the reduction in the target for recruiting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff across the organisation, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that the target was still challenging and that the performance of the Service in this area was above the national average. This comparative data was available in the performance report that had been considered under the previous agenda item.

It was recognised that the Service performance should be higher than the national average as Bedfordshire had a higher than average proportion of residents from BAME groups.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed suite of performance indicators and targets for 2020/21 be endorsed, with the amendment requested to the indicator measuring the number of (primary) fire injuries where victim went to hospital and the revision of the target measuring the delivery of safe and well visits.
2. That the report be approved for publication on the Service's website.

20-21/FRA/11 Revenue Budget and Capital Monitoring Programme

The Assistant Chief Officer – Finance and Corporate Services introduced his report on the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 30 June 2020.

The report had been reformatted to provide an executive summary that included the following information:

- A Green Book pay award of 2.75% had been agreed, resulting in a £42,000 budgetary pressure on the staffing budgets.
- The Service had received a COVID19 grant from the Government of £607,000 and £161,000 in relation to the Fire Protection Board and Protection Funding.
- The audit fee from EY had increased from £23,000 to £50,000 as discussed earlier in the meeting.

- There had been significant capital slippage from 2018/19.
- The Fire Fighter Employer Pensions Grant would continue for a second year.
- Negotiations on the fire fighter pay award and broadening of the role were ongoing.
- It was likely that there would be a deficit on the Collection Fund as a result of COVID19. Authorities would be granted a three year period to pay this back.
- The ongoing annual recharge between Cambridgeshire FRS and the Service for the ICT Shared Service would need to be reviewed.

Subsequent to the report, the Chancellor had advised that a Comprehensive Spending Review would take place later in the year. The provisional settlement would not be known until the end of December and this would impact on the budget-setting process.

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer reported that the increased audit fee had been included in Table 1 of the report which set out the 2020/21 Revenue Budget Forecast Outturn. This could be amended if the fee level was reduced but was currently being reported as a variance.

The actuals to date had not been included in the report as the year-end accruals meant that they had little value at this time of year, but would be re-introduced in future reports.

The Capital Programme items were currently RAG rated as green. In relation to the savings and efficiencies, there were three that were RAG rated as amber. The first, relating to the management information system, was on target but would be forecast to be completed later in the year. This may result in only a percentage of the original savings being achieved. The collaboration savings were not being pursued at this point in time as a result of COVID19. An increase in interest received had also been RAG rated as amber as the interest rates had decreased.

In response to a question on the COVID19 grant, which was not ring-fenced, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer explained that it was being used for COVID related activities and the Service was required to send in monthly returns on how this was spent and some of this was for general support for other emergency services providers. There was an additional tranche of funding that the Service could bid for, with a submission being required by the end of September. Discussions were ongoing with the Ambulance Service in order to prepare a bid.

RESOLVED:

That the report, and the information contained therein, be received.

20-21/FRA/12 Treasury Management Annual Report

The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer introduced the Authority's Annual Report for Treasury Management for 2019/20.

As previously reported, there had been a significant amount of slippage in relation to the Capital Programme.

The Authority continued to have approximately £10million of long-term borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). There were substantial financial penalties to repaying this debt early. The Authority's debt and its maturity structure was set out in section 4 of the report, along with information on the Authority's investment portfolio. The investments totalled £15.7 million as at 31 March 2020, with £10.7 million held with UK financial institutions and £5 million in foreign banks.

The Authority had achieved a total investment income of £193,117, compared to a budget of £90,400. A target of £115,000 had been set for the year.

In response to a question, the Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer advised that he would speak to the Authority's treasury management advisors to confirm whether the advice on length of investment had changed in light of final Brexit preparations.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

20-21/FRA/13 Disposal of Assets under the Scheme of Delegated Authority

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update on the disposal of obsolete vehicles and equipment assets. The report currently included information on a number of assets of relatively low value and he advised that these would no longer be included in future reports.

Authorisation from the Authority was required if it was anticipated that the asset had a value of £10,000 or more and there were three such items requiring Member approval: two Land Rovers and a Scania Rescue Pump.

RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the report be acknowledged.
2. That the disposal of the three assets detailed in the report which individually have the potential to achieve income over the £10,000 threshold under the scheme of delegated authority be authorised.

20-21/FRA/14 Work Programme

Members received the updated Work Programme.

The Chair advised that any requests for additional items could be submitted to either himself or the Chief Fire Officer for inclusion on the Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be received.

20-21/FRA/15 Information Bulletin Q4 [Jan-Mar]

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the information bulletin for 1 January to 31 March 2020. This included a number of letters of appreciation. No complaints had been received during the reporting period.

Members' attention was drawn to the infographic on the final page of the Bulletin which summarised the work undertaken by the Service during the pandemic period. Since April, the Service had supported close to 2000 interactions with patients on behalf of the Ambulance Service.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service had attended a primary fire earlier in the morning in Brogborough, at a suspected cannabis factory located within a three-bed semi-detached property in the village. Though there had been extensive damage to that property, firefighters had been able to protect the adjoining property, which only suffered from 5% smoke damage. A photograph taken on site would be circulated to Members of the Authority for information.

It was hoped that, with technological advancements, Members of the Authority would be provided with more visual information on incidents attended by the Service.

The Chair reminded Members that the next meeting of the Authority would be the Annual General Meeting, and that the venue/platform would be confirmed closer to the time.

If held virtually, the Chief Fire Officer commented that any Members having technological difficulties accessing the remote platform could contact the Service and IT support would be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am