

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2018

Present: Councillors C Atkins, F Chapman, J Chatterley, P Downing (Chair), P Duckett, D Franks, M Headley, D McVicar, J Mingay and Y Waheed

CFO P Fuller, DCFO A Hopkinson, ACO Z Evans, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers

K Holloway, the Police and Crime Commissioner

18-19/FRA/27 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T Khan.

[Councillor Saleem sent apologies but these were not received until after the meeting]

18-19/FRA/28 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

18-19/FRA/29 Communications

High Sheriff Visit

The Chair reported that the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, his wife and two of his children had visited Fire and Rescue Headquarters the previous day and, in addition to being shown a number of facilities such as the Training Centre and Control Room, the High Sheriff had expressed a real interest in the Service and had asked pertinent questions about funding and other issues.

It was recognised that, as well as entertaining visiting judges, the High Sheriff also undertook an advocacy role. During his year in post, the High Sheriff would visit thousands of local organisations and seek to facilitate relationships between those organisations when appropriate.

Meeting with Chair of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The Chair advised that he had recently met with Councillor Kevin Reynolds, the present Chair of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority. During their meeting, the Chairs had discussed the ICT Shared Service, sharing of Principal Officers, the HMICFRS Inspection process, the current situation in Cambridgeshire in relation to the Police and Crime Commissioner and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service's development of a training centre off the A1 near Huntingdon.

Like Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority was currently undergoing a governance review, and Councillor Reynolds had volunteered to share the results of this with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority.

Fire Commission

The Chair and Chief Fire Officer had attended the meeting of the Fire Commission. It was noted that the Policing and Fire Minister was not present.

It was understood that in addition to the Government's preoccupation with Brexit, the Minister's absolute priority was to seek to tackle the increase in serious violence caused by knife, gang and drug crime.

In this respect, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire advised that the Minister would be visiting Bedfordshire on 25 October 2018 and that she would request that representatives of the Fire and Rescue Service were invited to participate in those discussions.

Combined Fire Authority Meeting

The Chair and a number of Members had attended the meeting of the Combined Fire Authorities that had been hosted at Milton Keynes Dons Football Stadium.

The Chair highlighted two issues that had been identified at the meeting: the need for a crisis response plan and the use of digital strategies.

Ongoing concerns about funding for combined fire authorities had been raised and the Chair had volunteered to head up a working group that would consider how a meaningful business case could be prepared for submission to the Minister, who had not responded to previous letters that had been sent on the subject. He stated that there would be an opportunity for other Members to be involved in this work if they so wished.

Station Visits

The Chair reported that there had been two Station Visits during the summer period.

Fire Cadets

The Chief Fire Officer reported Fire and Rescue Service Cadet had recently been installed as one of the Lord Lieutenant's seven cadets. The Chief Fire Officer would circulate the citation that had been read out at the ceremony to Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority for their information.

Governance Report

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the final version of the internal audit report had recently been received and would be submitted through the normal reporting processes. This should provide a platform for Officers to produce an options paper for Members to consider in due course.

Service Awards Evening

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Awards Evening that had been held at the Auction House in Luton the previous month had been well supported by Members.

National Firefighters Memorial Service

The Chair and Chief Fire Officer had attended the national memorial service held in London.

Members' Development Day

The Chair advised that the presenter from the CIPFA Conference on commercial contracts had been invited to attend. It was noted that the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer were not available on the day as a result of conflicting commitments but it was agreed that it should proceed as planned.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire emphasised the importance of including penalty clauses in contracts and enforcing these when required.

18-19/FRA/30 Minutes

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Officer that had been injured at the Fire Service College had now returned to service on modified duties.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2018 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/FRA/31 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).

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

18-19/FRA/32 Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group of 13 September 2018

Councillor Chapman introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 13 September 2018. She reported that recommendations had been made relating to the revenue budget and capital programme.

Councillor Chapman also referred to the pay award for firefighters and the zero-based budgeting exercise that would be undertaken in relation to the larger budget areas.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire reported that Bedfordshire Police would be undertaking a priority based budgeting exercise and that this information could be shared with the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that priority based budgeting was another exercise that could be undertaken in the future.

Policy and Challenge Group had also recommended the approval of the Asset Management Plan for land and buildings.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 13 September 2018 be received.
2. That the £90,000 underspend already identified be moved to the Transformation Reserve.
3. That the Asset Management/Fleet System be added to the 2018/19 Revenue Budget.
4. That Sharepoint and Xen Desktop be transferred from capital schemes to revenue projects.
5. That the updated Asset Management Plan for Land and Buildings be approved.

18-19/FRA/33 Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group of 19 September 2018

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group that was held on 19 September 2018 and reported on the large piece of work that was currently underway in relation to the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the CRMP would be presented to Members at a future meeting.

Councillor Mingay highlighted performance against PI11 (average call-handling time to mobilise to primary fires), which had missed its target by 40%. The performance had been impacted by nine calls ranging in time from 61 seconds to 440 seconds. The 440 second call was from a caller on the motorway who was not able to identify the location of the fire.

Another issue of concern was the number of fires that had taken place in HMP Bedford. It was noted that, as the Prison was a Crown Property, it was not inspected by the Service, although the Service did undertake operational familiarisation visits. Following the concerns raised, the Service would write again to the Crown Premises Fire Inspection Group and request its view on whether the Group was satisfied with the fire safety arrangements at the Prison.

The view was expressed that many of the issues at the Prison were the result of overcrowding.

The Police and Crime Commissioner reported that, in relation to reoffending, she was setting up an online directory of services for offenders. This information would be translated into all the main community languages used in Bedfordshire and the content was being prepared with the assistance of former offenders. The Commissioner was also working with You Turn Futures and JobCentre Plus to improve services for ex-offenders.

Councillor Atkins welcomed this project, as one of the Ward Councillors for the area. She had received a number of complaints about the behaviour of prisoners from residents of the area around the Prison.

Councillor Mingay reported that, whilst there were no fire fatalities during the reporting period, there had been four water deaths.

In response to a reference to the decreasing rate of return to the customer satisfaction surveys, Strategic Operational Commander Peckham advised that the methods used to distribute and collect the surveys was being reviewed in an attempt to increase the rate of return to the levels achieved previously.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 19 September 2018 be received.
2. That ways to improve feedback of its meetings to constituent authorities be considered, such as a video presentation provided by the Chief Fire Officer outlining the extensive activities undertaken by the Service that Members of constituent councils may not be aware of.

18-19/FRA/34 Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group of 20 September 2018

Councillor Waheed introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 20 September 2018.

Councillor Waheed reported on the progress made against the HR Payroll Project and the positive performance against the majority of indicators, with the exception of EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation) and some of the training indicators that had missed their targets by 1-2%.

Councillor Waheed advised that the Group had received the Health and Safety Annual Report. The number of accidents had decreased significantly from 388 in 2016/17 to 104 in 2017/18. 54 of these days related to the same incident.

The People Strategy 2018-22 had also been received. The Strategy had been subject to internal and external consultation and 92% of respondents had responded positively to all areas. Following the approval of the Strategy, it would be loaded onto the Service website.

The view expressed at the meeting about a “canteen culture” was a general comment that there may be a perception amongst certain communities and Members were assured that there were no specific concerns about this culture in the Service at the present time.

The Chair highlighted concerns that had been raised during recent Station Visits around the e-learning package and leave arrangements for on call firefighters and advised that Officers had been asked to progress these.

Firefighters at Toddington Fire Station had also queried whether a Cadets Scheme could be introduced at the Station.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 20 September 2018 be received.
2. That the roll-out of unconscious bias training to Members of the Authority be supported.

18-19/FRA/35 Audit and Standards Committee of 25 September 2018

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 25 September 2018.

He advised that the Committee had agreed that the Review of Effectiveness not be undertaken this year as a governance review of the Authority was currently in progress.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 25 September 2018 be received.

18-19/FRA/36 NJC Pay Awards

The Assistant Chief Officer introduced her report on the NJC pay awards and offers for Green Book and Grey Book staff, as well as seeking authority to implement the pay award for Brigade Managers.

The Service was involved in national pay bargaining arrangements and therefore the agreements reached in relation to Green Book and Grey Book staff were for acknowledgment only.

For Green Book staff, a pay increase of between 4.3% and 15% for those on spinal column points 2-28 had been agreed, with a 4.04% increase over two years for those above spinal column point 29. A new pay spine was being introduced from 2019 from 1-43 with even 2% pay gaps between spinal column points 6-28.

In relation to Principal Officers, the pay agreement was not automatically implemented. A two stage-approach had been agreed providing a 1% increase on 2017 basic salary levels with effect from January 2018, rising to a 2% increase on 2017 basic salary levels with effect from 1 July 2018. There had been no local review conducted since 2015 so Members were being asked to consider the application of the national agreement.

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that, following protracted negotiations, a 2% increase had been agreed from July 2018 for Grey Book staff, although there was still no clarification about the broadening of the role.

In response to a question, the Head of Finance and Treasurer confirmed that there was provision in the budget for the proposed pay increases.

RESOLVED:

1. That the NJC Green Book Pay Award for 2018 and 2019 be noted.
2. That the application of the NJC Brigade Managers Pay Award for 2018 be confirmed.
3. That the ongoing NJC Grey Book pay negotiations for 2017/18 and the interim payment be acknowledged.

18-19/FRA/37 HMICFRS Inspection Update

Strategic Operational Commander Peckham introduced his report which provided an update on the recent activity involved in delivering Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection process in 2018. This had equated to 1,200 hours, or 150 days of support for the process to date.

It was noted that the Service Liaison Lead had changed partway through the process in June 2018 to Jerry Kirkby. This required the exploration stage to be revisited. The exploration stage included observing the exercise for "Storm Deborah" which was a multi-agency exercise, as well as giving the inspection team an opportunity to meet a number of staff.

HMICFRS had provided the Service with a Data Pack which included information collated from a number of sources. This had been reviewed by the Service to ensure that all the data contained within it was accurate. This then informed the fieldwork stage of the inspection.

HMICFRS had also provided a reporting line and staff survey access to enable staff members to report directly to HMICFRS and the feedback received would inform the final report which was expected in December 2018.

Strategic Commander Peckham then gave a presentation that had been prepared for management briefings to staff on the process. Staff had also been provided updates via the Blue Bulletin, with 11 updates provided to date.

The slides provided detail on a number of areas that had been highlighted as positive performance, as well as the areas that had been identified as needing improvement. Over 1800 individual data submissions had been completed. 126 staff had participated in the fieldwork stage of the inspection and the inspection team had visited 9 fire stations, Control and the Northern Area and Southern Area Offices.

Data returns would need to be submitted in October and again in January 2019.

The Chief Fire Officer suggested that the FRA briefing for the December meeting be brought forward and all Members be invited to attend as it was anticipated that the draft inspection report would be available at that time.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be acknowledged.
2. That the FRA briefing be brought forward to 3 December 2018 at 2pm and that all Members be invited to attend.

18-19/FRA/38 Collaboration Working Group

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided an update on collaboration initiatives between the Service, Bedfordshire Police and the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust which were managed through the Blue Light Collaboration Board.

The Police and Crime Commissioner advised that she would like to work with the Service around the communications in relation to the use of Harrold Fire Station by the Police and the red routes pilot. She highlighted the importance of police driver training and how useful it would be if the Service was able to provide this.

In response to a comment by the Chair on Fire and Rescue Services in other parts of the country assisting hospitals and the health and social care sector by completing home visits to check that properties were safe before individuals were released from hospital in order to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care, the Chief Fire Officer commented that the Service was willing to assist but that the local Hospitals and Ambulance Service had previously rejected these proposals.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be received.

18-19/FRA/39 Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Conference

The Chief Fire Officer presented his report which outlined the key issues arising from the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs' Conference 2018.

The key issue arising from the Chiefs' Conference was "presumptive firefighter cancer" as it was recognised that firefighters were more prone to certain types of cancer, such as prostate cancer. The Service had already put a number of measures in place to reduce contamination, such as the clean cab policy.

The Chief Fire Officer had given a presentation on firefighter mental health and awareness.

RESOLVED:

That the learning outcomes in the report be noted and future attendance at the Metropolitan Fire Chiefs' Conference be supported as appropriate.

18-19/FRA/40 Information Bulletin

Members received the information bulletin for the period 1 July 2018 to 30 September 2018.

In response to a question about the retention of on call firefighters, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that a number of on call firefighters left the Service after a short period of time as a result of work-life balance issues. The Service was currently considering changes to leave arrangements in order to make on call firefighting more flexible and to improve retention rates, as the Service recognised the scale of the commitment required. This improvement project was overseen by the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group.

The number of crop fires caused by the hot and dry weather was noted. The Service ran a large publicity campaign to raise awareness of the conditions and continued to work with farmers in order to prevent these types of fire from occurring.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that, on all but two occasions, the crops had already been cut when the fire had started.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

18-19/FRA/41 and 18-19/FRA/42 Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A (Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A)

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

Item

Joint Feasibility Study Update (Paragraph 3)
Pension Investigation (Paragraph 1)

The meeting ended at 1.24 pm

