

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2018

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

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

18-19/FRA/43 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Chatterley, P Duckett and Kathryn Holloway, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire.

18-19/FRA/44 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

18-19/FRA/45 Communications

Changes to Combination Order statutory instruments

The Chief Fire Officer reported on a letter that had been received from the Home Office relating to progress in relation to the change of statutory instruments for Combined Fire Authorities to allow the local Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to become a voting Member of the Authority. The enabling legislation was expected to come before Parliament in the spring.

HMP Prison

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, following concerns raised by Members at the last Authority meeting, he had written to the Chief Inspector of the Crown Premises Fire Inspection Group about the fire safety arrangements at HMP Bedford. A response to the letter had been received.

It was noted that HMP Bedford would be the subject of a two-day inspection programme in the early part of 2019.

A full report on the Service's concerns with HMP Bedford was appended to the Service Delivery PCG Minutes which would be discussed later in the meeting.

Letter of Thanks from Sue Ryder

The Chief Fire Officer referred to a letter from Sue Ryder acknowledging the fundraising efforts of the team at Biggleswade Fire Station. One of the events had raised approximately £630 and over £1000 had been raised for the charity to date.

This was in addition to the significant fundraising efforts of the Service on behalf of the Firefighter's Charity.

Presentation from Fire Brigades Union

The Chair advised that he, the Vice-Chair and Councillor Waheed had attended a Fire Brigades Union presentation held at the Luton Theatre.

Councillor Waheed expressed the view that the presentation had been very informative and had been well-received.

18-19/FRA/46 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2018 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/FRA/47 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. Two members of the Fire Brigades Union were present as observers.

18-19/FRA/48 Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group 27 November 2018

Councillor Chapman introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 27 November 2018.

Mr Paul Hughes, the Service's newly appointed Head of ICT and Improvement, had been introduced to Members at the meeting. It was noted that he had extensive experience in both the private and charity sector.

A slight underspend was being forecast for the year as a result of the 2% pay award that had been agreed for firefighters.

Councillor Chapman highlighted that £350,000 of savings had been identified through the zero-based budgeting exercise that had been undertaken.

Members had requested Officers to contact the Authority's treasury management advisors regarding any advice they had to offer relating to the risks posed by Brexit.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service was seeking to identify and treat the risks across the Service relating to Brexit, particularly in the event of no deal being reached. There did not appear to be a great risk in terms of the Authority's investments as they were not dependent on the UK's relationship with Europe.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 27 November 2018 be received.

18-19/FRA/49 Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group 29 November 2018

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group that was held on 29 November 2018.

Councillor Mingay reported on performance against a number of indicators that were subject to seasonal variation, such as PI01 (primary fires) and PI04 (deliberate fires).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, as part of the target-setting process for 2019/20, consideration would be given to profiling monthly and quarterly targets to account for seasonal variation.

Councillor Mingay also referred to the continual increase in the number of Road Traffic Collisions attended by the Service.

Councillor Mingay tabled the report he had presented at Bedford Borough Council's Full Council meeting the previous week on HMP Bedford. The Service had responded to 74 incidents at the Prison since 2013/14; 56 of these were fires.

The Policy and Challenge Group had received a report on these incidents and the response from the Service. An 'urgent notification' process was triggered in September 2018 following a week-long inspection of the Prison and it was noted that another inspection would take place in early 2019.

Councillor Mingay expressed particular concern about the Memorandum of Understanding with the Prison, which, despite being submitted for signature in March 2018, remained unsigned.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 29 November 2018 be received.
2. That the report considered by the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group be received and an update on arrangements at the Prison be submitted to a future meeting of the Authority.

18-19/FRA/50 Draft 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Programme

The Head of Finance and Treasurer introduced his report on the proposed revenue budget and capital programme seeking Members' approval to consulting on a draft Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2019/20.

He reported that he had received notification from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that an error in the calculations of Revenue Support Grant had been identified, and that as a result, the Authority would receive £190,000 less in 2019/20. The Ministry had confirmed that it would not seek to recover the approximate £595,500 that had been overpaid to the Authority in the period 2016/17-2018/19.

In response to a question, the Head of Finance and Treasurer confirmed that he had spoken to the Deputy Director of Local Government Finance at the Ministry suggesting that the four-year settlement agreement should be honoured. However, he had been advised that the Ministry had a duty to rectify errors in calculation when these had been identified.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer reported that he would revisit the calculations that had been provided for previous years to identify the error.

The resultant impact of this on the budget was that the Revenue Support Contributions (line 51) had been reduced and the budget requirement to be consulted on was now £29.672 million, with a proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99% and a Capital Programme of £1.736 million.

A Council Tax increase of 2.99% was equivalent to a £2.86 annual increase or 5 pence per week increase for a Band D property.

Members were advised that the tables reflecting the level of business rate income and the Council taxbase had been updated.

A revised Medium Term Revenue Plan was tabled and the Head of Finance and Treasurer highlighted the decrease in line 51 and the increase to the Collection Fund surpluses (line 56) that had been made, based on previous years.

Members commented on lines that reflected revenue contributions to capital, which illustrated one-off funding of capital projects such as the mobilisation system.

In relation to Appendix 2, which set out the assumptions and uncertainties underpinning the budget setting process, Members' attention was drawn to an estimated liability of £1.2 million for employer contributions to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. There had been additional funding awarded from Government for both Police and Fire and Rescue Services to help with these costs, however, it was likely that this was for one year only and would form part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Members were referred to a note on the budget consultation which was due to go out with the proposals and were asked to provide feedback to the Head of Finance and Treasurer.

An analysis of the consultation responses received would be submitted to the next meeting of the Authority.

RESOLVED:

That the following be approved for public consultation:

1. A draft revenue budget requirement of £29.672 million, as per Appendix 1 of the report, with a council tax increase of 2.99%; and
2. A draft Capital Programme of £1.736 million as per Appendix 3 of the report.

18-19/FRA/51 Fire Authority Report - Options Paper

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer submitted his report which advised Members of the completion of the Governance report and sought to identify a way forward in considering its outcomes. It was proposed that the Chief Fire Officer and the Secretary and Monitoring Officer produce an options paper for discussion by Members at an informal workshop.

A number of concerns were raised with the recommendations set out in the audit report and on the report generally, particularly in relation to the appointment of Members to groups based on skill sets. It was noted that these would be addressed formally pending the outcome of the discussions on future governance options.

The view was expressed that the opportunity to review the Special Responsibility Allowances should also be undertaken, including consideration of whether an Allowance should be payable to the Member representative on the Collaboration Working Group.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that he would discuss the Authority's dissatisfaction with the content of the governance audit report at the next contract management meeting with the internal auditors.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Chief Fire Officer and the Secretary/Monitoring Officer be instructed to jointly produce a discussion paper for Members to consider informally.
2. That those Officers arrange an opportunity for discussion amongst Authority Members before any proposals, if appropriate, are made to the Full Authority at its meeting in February 2019. **[Subsequently arranged in the Budget Workshop and agreed for the paper to be received at the March meeting.]**

18-19/FRA/52 Members' Allowances Scheme 2019/20

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2019/20.

It was noted that the outcome of the governance review may have an impact on the Members' Allowance Scheme and that this item should be deferred accordingly.

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the Members' Allowances Scheme be deferred pending the outcome of the Governance review.

18-19/FRA/53 Collaboration Working Group

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided an update on the current status of 'Blue Light' collaboration workstreams.

The first meeting of the Delivery Group, chaired by a Service Group Commander, had taken place on 9 November 2018 and had been well received. This Group would be responsible for operational delivery and project management, leaving the Programme Board to have a strategic overview.

A meeting had been held with the Deputy Chief Constable and the Assistant Chief Officer during which both Services had reaffirmed their commitment to the consideration of a Joint Headquarters. This had been confirmed in an email. The provision of a new Custody Suite at Police Headquarters had been postponed pending the outcome of these discussions. The operational requirements and output specifications would be revisited and agreement in principle had been made to the appointment of an independent project manager for a six-month fixed term period.

In response to a question, the Head of Finance and Treasurer reported that the Carbon Trust assessment of Fire and Rescue Headquarters would be completed by January 2019.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the drone that had recently been produced had been affected by a technical issue with the battery that would be resolved by the supplier.

The view was expressed that co-location was very different from having a joint Headquarters and that care must be taken in the language that was used. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Services would seek to integrate functions when there was a strong business case to do so.

Members also commented that it was important for this Service to act as an equal partner in collaboration arrangements with the Police.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be acknowledged.

18-19/FRA/54 HMICFRS Update

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the publication of the inspection report had been delayed to 20 December 2018 and, as such, he was not able to present the findings at this meeting as the report was currently under embargo.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that Members would be provided with the final inspection report as soon as it was available.

RESOLVED:

That the update be received.

18-19/FRA/55 Community Risk Management Plan 2019-2023

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced his report which provided an update on progress in developing the next Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) covering the four year period 2019-2023 and sought Members' views on proposals to revise the existing vision, objectives and priorities to improve alignment with the new fire inspection framework.

A comprehensive review of local risks had been undertaken and the Service was awaiting the final results of the HMICFRS inspection to inform further work on the draft CRMP. Members' approval was being sought to progress the CRMP to a stage where a draft could be produced for public consultation.

Members were referred to the proposed timetable which set out that the draft CRMP would come before the Authority for approval for public consultation on 17 January 2019. There would then be an eight-week consultation period on the CRMP, following which the final draft would be submitted to the Authority meeting on 28 March 2019.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that detail of the collaboration projects would be contained within the document in the information supporting the priority areas.

Concern was expressed about the change in purpose to becoming “an outstanding service”. It may be more appropriate to seek to “provide outstanding services” as this was more outward looking.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report and approach to developing the Community Risk Management Plan be acknowledged.
2. That the approach to consultation and associated timetable be agreed to enable final approval of the Community Risk Management Plan at the full Authority meeting on 28 March 2019.

18-19/FRA/56 Fire Fatality Presentation

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

Item

Fire Fatality

The meeting ended at 11.50 am