

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
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**REPORT AUTHOR: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND SECRETARY/MONITORING OFFICER**

**SUBJECT: GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

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For further information on this report contact: Chief Fire Officer  
Tel No: 01234 845017

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Background Papers:

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Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New		

*Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.*

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## **PURPOSE:**

To make decisions on the future governance arrangements of the FRA.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Members consider the options identified in this report together and determine the way forward.

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### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Police and Crime Act 2017 made provision for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC's) to take over the governance of Fire and Rescue Services, subject to the acceptance of a business case. Where the PCC had no wish to take over the governance of the FRA, the Act included arrangements for the PCC to become a voting member of the FRA. This element required secondary legislation to vary the combination orders under which FRAs are constituted and this legislation has yet to be enacted. In the meantime, Bedfordshire FRA has chosen to invite the Police and Crime Commissioner to participate in Authority meetings but without a vote.
- 1.2 Each year the FRA carries out an internal review of its effectiveness and both external audit and internal audit have given confirmation of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements that are in place.
- 1.3 In 2018 the FRA commissioned RSM, its internal auditors' to carry out a review of the governance arrangements for the authority. RSM submitted their report in October 2018.
- 1.4 The Review suggests a number of areas which, if implemented, may improve the efficiency of the Authority and reduce the bureaucratic burden on the Fire and Rescue Service in supporting it at a time when resources are increasingly under pressure. The review also included some benchmarking information.
- 1.5 In summary the report deals with the following areas:
  - Number and functionality of FRA meetings
  - Location of meetings
  - Staffs requirement of Members

- Structure of Policy and Challenge Groups
- Member of Allowances

1.6 These matters were discussed informally by FRA members at a workshop held on 17 January. The purpose of this report is to allow the FRA to decide whether it wishes to make any adjustments to the structure of the FRA or the manner in which it conducts its business.

## 2. The Composition of the FRA

- 2.1 The constitution of the FRA is governed by the Bedfordshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1996 as subsequently varied and amended. The Scheme allows for the FRA to comprise no more than 25 members appointed by the constituent authorities. The appointments made by each of the constituent authorities must be proportionate to the number local government electors in its area.
- 2.2 Since it was first established in 1997 the FRA has been made up of 12 members, initially shared between Bedfordshire County Council (8) and Luton Borough Council (4) and since 2009 shared between Bedford Borough Council (3), Central Bedfordshire Council (5) and Luton Borough Council (4).
- 2.3 One Combined FRA (Hampshire) has recently reduced its membership to 10. However, generally Bedfordshire does not stand out as having a higher number of members than other FRAs.
- 2.4 If the FRA wishes to consider reducing the size of its membership, it could be reduced to 9 or 6 with the representation from the constituent authorities being adjusted accordingly. In theory the membership could also be increased, though this is unlikely to be seen as contributing to the overall efficiency of the FRA.
- 2.5 An additional factor to be considered is the likelihood that the PCC will become a full voting member of the FRA in the foreseeable future, subject to the enactment of secondary legislation to vary the Combination Scheme.

## 3. Committees and Policy and Challenge Groups

- 3.1 Currently, the Authority has 2 committees, the Executive and the Audit and Standards Committee, together with 3 Policy and Challenge Groups: Service Delivery, Human Resources and Corporate Services. There is also a Corporate Equality Group. created as a committee and comprises the Chair, Vice Chair and Chairs of each of the 3 Policy and Challenge groups.

- 3.2 The Governance review suggests a redefinition of the purpose of the groups and this could be created to mirror the 3 pillars of Fire and Rescue Service Inspection so that scrutiny is focussed in those specific areas. As such, Service Delivery would become Effectiveness, Corporate Services – Efficiency and Human Resources – People. The Corporate Equality Group could be absorbed into the “People” Policy and Challenge Group. There would still remain a need for a Member Diversity Champion. At the recent workshop members seemed supportive of this initiative and indicated support for a reduction to just 2 policy and challenge groups, one covering Effectiveness and the other Efficiency and People.
- 3.3 Assuming that the overall membership of the FRA does not change and with 6 places on each Committee/PCG, there would be 12 members to fill 22 places. (There would be 4 members on the Executive Committee.)
- 3.4 The terms of reference of the two new PCGs can be based on those for the current PCGs. No change is necessary for the Audit and Standards Committee. It is suggested that the terms of reference for the Executive Committee should include specific responsibility for the management of the employment relationship between the FRA and the Chief Fire Officer. At present, responsibility for this relationship rests solely with the full FRA.
4. Numbers of meetings
  - 4.1 The Governance Review found that the number of meetings held each year by the FRA was in line with FRAs; these include Briefings, Authority meetings, Policy and Challenge Groups, Policy and Challenge Group briefings, Audit and Standards Committee, Ad hoc Executive Committee meetings, Member development days, budget workshops, workplace visits and other engagement meetings.
  - 4.2 Almost all of these meetings require provision of management time for preparation and a large number demand the production of detailed papers and reports as well as minutes and recorded decisions.
  - 4.3 The workload could be substantially reduced by removing the need for extensive background papers in favour of a record of the key points of the discussion and or the decisions made. Full papers where still required could be reserved for the full Authority meetings only. It is perhaps the case that a freer and less formal discussion with fewer members could lead to a more granular understanding of the issues facing the Authority and the strategy to address them given the role of the Authority is Governance rather than managerial decision making.

4.4 Members are also asked to consider the nature of Chairs briefings. At the Members Workshop there seemed to be support for Policy and Challenge Group Chairs to be briefed informally on a 1:1 basis with an appropriate Officer. This is already the case in some groups. If the purpose of the Policy and Challenge Group is to gain more granular understanding of issues it may not be necessary to have a pre-meeting briefing at all. These are not decision-making bodies but examine the issues and then make recommendations to the Full Authority.

## 5. Knowledge and skills requirements

5.1 The Governance Review suggested that there should be an alignment between the membership of Policy and Challenge Groups and the skills and expertise of the members appointed to serve on those Groups. The suggestion appears to misunderstand the nature of the FRA. The Authority is representative of our Unitary Authorities to which Members are elected based on personal characteristics and/or political allegiance. It would appear difficult to maintain any realistic form of either political or geographic representation if Members were selected for Policy and Challenge Group related to specific skills and interests. It is often the case that Members who have particular knowledge and experience try to use that most effectively. It is also the case some originality of thought from those without particular training or skills in an area can generate very effective challenge.

## 6. Members Allowances

6.1 The Governance Review includes benchmarking information about Members' allowances. This shows that basic allowance is in line with other FRAs and that the special responsibility allowances paid to Committee and PCG Chairs are below the average. However, the allowances paid to the Chair and Vice-Chair are both higher than the average paid by other FRAs. In addition to their SRA, the Chair and Vice Chair receive a basic allowance. Thus the combined allowances received by the Chair and Vice Chair assume that they spend 120 and 70 days respectively on FRA business. One option would be to deduct 20 days each from the number of days that are assumed for the purpose of their SRAs.

## 7. Attendance

7.1 Attendance remains mixed with some Members attendance being very high and some less so, often for very valid reasons of itself, attendance is a cumbersome measure and it might be agreed that some Members who are less able to attend still make a very valid and worthwhile contribution. It may, again, be useful to consider whether fewer members who are individually more engaged is a more effective way forward.

8. Meeting venues

- 8.1 Fire Authority meetings should be held at a venue where there is sufficient space to accommodate members of the public if they wish to attend. The Policy and Challenge groups are not public meetings and can be held anywhere.
- 8.2 It has been proposed meetings are moved around different venues within the Service to facilitate more effective staff engagement and public visibility.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The FRA is asked to determine what changes, if any, it considers should be made to the constitution of the Authority having regard to the outcome of the Governance Review and the discussion that took place at the Members' Workshop. In particular, it is suggested that the FRA may wish to consider the following elements of its governance arrangements:
- The composition of the Authority;
  - The size, structure and terms of reference of committees and groups;
  - Arrangements for meetings including briefings;
  - Members allowances

**PAUL FULLER**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER CBE QFSM MStJ DL**

**JOHN ATKINSON**  
**SECRETARY/MONITORING OFFICER**