

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2019

Present: Councillors C Atkins, F Chapman, J Chatterley (Vice-Chair in the Chair), D Franks, M Headley, T Khan, D McVicar, J Mingay and Y Waheed

CFO P Fuller, DCFO A Hopkinson, T/ACO G Chambers, Mr J Atkinson and SOC A Peckham

18-19/FRA/75 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Downing, P Duckett and R Saleem.

18-19/FRA/76 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

18-19/FRA/77 Communications

Local Government Association Conference and Combined Fire Authority (CFA) Meeting

It was noted that one of the key areas of discussion at the CFA meeting was that many CFAs had reduced the number of Authority Members. This would be discussed further under the review of governance.

Zoe Billingham, HMI, had also spoken about the introduction of an inspection of Fire and Rescue Authority governance.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the Chair of the Authority was also the serving Chair of the LGA CFA Group. As he was not standing for re-election, he was resigning from this position. A replacement had not yet been appointed.

Fire Safety Conference

The Service had hosted a Fire Safety Conference on 26 March 2019 at Kings House, Ampthill Road. There had been a number of presentations, including on the safety of the built environment and Luton's Rogue Landlord Scheme. The Rogue Landlord Scheme was a

targeted and effective partnership that led to the prosecution of rogue landlords. It also highlighted the work being undertaken by the Service to ensure the safety of the built environment post-Grenfell.

Procurement of Replacement Mobilising System

The Chief Fire Officer reported that he had received notification from Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service that it wished to withdraw from the joint procurement of a replacement mobilising system.

Members were assured that this would not affect the intention of the Services to provide back-up arrangements for each other; however, it was acknowledged that this was dependent on the compatibility of the systems chosen by each Service. As the product specification had been developed jointly with Cambridgeshire, it was unlikely that this would be an issue.

The view was expressed that this was a risk and that Members should be kept informed of progress on the procurement process, particularly in relation to the compatibility of the systems chosen.

Request from Home Office

The Service had received a request from the Home Office to host a visit from the newly appointed Deputy Director of Fire and Resilience. A date and programme for the visit would be arranged and Members would be advised of the details in due course.

Firefighter Pay and Conditions

In relation to the ongoing pay dispute, the Chief Fire Officer reported that the National Employers had issued a letter which set out a wide range of proposals on the expanded role of the firefighter and associated increases in remuneration. It was noted that additional Government funding would be required to fund the proposed pay increase.

The Fire Brigades Union would be balloting its Members on the proposals.

Councillor Atkins requested that Members of the Authority be given advance notice of communication items.

18-19/FRA/78 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2019 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

18-19/FRA/79 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) and that there were no members of the public present at the meeting.

18-19/FRA/80 Executive Committee 4 February 2019

The Vice Chair introduced the report on the Executive Committee meeting held on 4 February 2019.

Councillor Headley expressed concern that the Minutes of the meeting had not been submitted. It was noted that Minutes of Committee and Policy and Challenge Group meetings were submitted to the Authority for information as a matter of course. He also expressed concern that a report had not been circulated for Executive Members to consider in advance of the Executive Committee meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that a business case was tabled at the meeting and that the matters discussed were under his delegated authority, and had been discussed with Members at the Budget Workshop.

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer acknowledged that the governance process around this decision could have been improved and that lessons should be learnt from the experience to increase still further the openness and transparency of decision making.

Councillor Atkins also expressed concern and requested that the papers submitted to the meeting and the Minutes of the meeting be circulated to all Members for information.

Councillors Atkins and Headley requested that their votes against acknowledging the report be recorded.

It was noted that the decision of the Executive would stand as the Authority was not being requested to approve or agree the decision taken, merely to acknowledge it.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report not be acknowledged due to concerns over the governance arrangements.

18-19/FRA/81 Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group 27 February 2019

Councillor Chapman introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 27 February 2019.

The Authority was being asked to adopt the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Annual Investment Strategy and the Treasury Management Practices.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 27 February 2019 be received.
2. That the following updated documents be adopted:
 - i. Treasury Management Strategy Statement
 - ii. Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Annual Investment Strategy
 - iii. Treasury Management Practices

18-19/FRA/82 Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group 7 March 2019

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group that was held on 7 March 2019.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that some of the performance indicators relating to response times had been affected by “ghosting” whereby the arrival time of the first appliance was overwritten by the system when subsequent appliances arrived at the incident. The supplier of the mobilising system had recently issued a “fix” and this was currently being tested by Essex Fire and Rescue Service. It was hoped that this would be resolved by June 2019. He advised that historical response data going back to 2016 would need to be cleansed.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the data relating to the number of individuals killed or seriously injured in Road Traffic Collisions was provided by another organisation and the time lag on the data was close to one year.

Councillor Mingay reported on the four water related deaths that had been recorded during the third quarter and continuing concerns about the management of HMP Bedford.

Members were advised that the joint headquarters project was progressing. Consideration was now being given to separating the project into 4 functions: core headquarter functions, response, training and workshops, as this would be more manageable and would also enable other partners, such as the Ambulance Service, to enter into the collaborative arrangements. A Project Manager was being appointed to drive the project forward.

Councillor Mingay referred to one of the fire fatalities that had occurred during the third quarter and expressed concern that the Ambulance Service had taken 35 minutes to arrive at the scene following the emergency call being received.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 7 March 2019 be received.

18-19/FRA/83 Audit and Standards Committee 14 March 2019

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee that was held on 14 March 2019. The Committee had received updates on the internal and external audit plans.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 14 March 2019 be received.

18-19/FRA/84 Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group 18 March 2019

Councillor Waheed introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 18 March 2019.

She reported on performance. EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women) and EQ1b (percentage of new entrants to the whole time operational duty system to be women) had missed their targets, although the appointment of female recruits remained a priority for the Service. H1 (number of serious accidents (over 28 days) per 1000 employees) and H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees) had also missed target due to two injuries resulting in the loss of 120 days. T7 (percentage of flexible duty officers that have attended an Incident Command Assessment within the required frequency for their role) had also missed its target; however, the one Officer this related to had now been nominated to attend another course.

As the meeting was inquorate, the proposed human resources and organisational development indicators and targets for 2019/20 and the 2019/20 corporate health and safety objectives were submitted to the full Authority for approval.

A number of the targets had been stretched. The training targets remained unchanged.

RESOLVED:

1. That the submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 18 March 2019 be received.
2. That the proposed Human Resources performance indicators and targets for 2019/20 be endorsed.
3. That the progress made in relation to the 2018/19 Health and Safety objectives be acknowledged and the proposed 2019/20 Corporate Health and Safety Objectives be endorsed.

18-19/FRA/85 Firefighter Pension Schemes Local Pension Board Report 2018/19

The Temporary Assistant Chief Officer submitted the first Annual Report of the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority Local Pension Board covering the period from 1 April 2018 until 31 March 2019.

The Board had been in operation for three years and its purpose was to secure compliance with the Firefighter Pension Schemes regulations, any other legislation relating to governance and administration of the schemes and with requirements imposed in relation to the schemes by the Pensions Regulator. There were two employer and two employee representatives on the Board and it was chaired by the Temporary Assistant Chief Officer. The Human Resources Manager and a pension adviser from LPP also attended the meetings.

The report set out the training received by Pension Board Members as well as issues discussed at Board meetings during the year.

The Authority was reminded that the internal auditors had awarded the Pension Board arrangements an opinion of substantial assurance.

The Chair of the Local Government Association's Pension Board Effectiveness Committee had attended a meeting of the Local Pension Board and had made very positive comments about the operation of the Board.

The Temporary Assistant Chief Officer stated that all Members of the Authority were welcome to attend Board meetings as observers.

In response to a comment, the Temporary Assistant Chief Officer advised that he would check whether Members of the Authority were able to sit as Members of the Local Pension Board.

RESOLVED:

That the report and the progress made by the Local Pension Board be acknowledged.

18-19/FRA/86 Disposal of Assets under the Scheme of Delegated Authority

The Chief Fire Officer provided the annual report on the disposal of obsolete vehicles and equipment assets. Any disposals over the value of £10,000 required the authorisation of the Authority.

In response to a question, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Land Rovers would be retained until the residual value decreased to the point where the cost of maintenance was no longer economically viable. As it was likely that this point may be reached during the year, their disposal had been submitted to Members for authorisation.

RESOLVED:

1. That the content of the report be acknowledged.
2. That the disposal of the 7 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.

18-19/FRA/87 Governance Review

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer presented a report setting out options for the future governance arrangements of the Authority following a review into the Authority's governance arrangements by the internal auditors, RSM, and discussions with Members at the Member Budget Workshop. No formal recommendations had been presented as it was for Members to formulate their own proposals.

In this respect the Chair of the Authority had submitted a number of proposals which had been circulated to Members in his absence. These included suggestions to reduce the number of Members on the Authority, introduce tenure arrangements and reduce the allowance of the Chair and Vice Chair.

Concerns were expressed about these proposals, as it was thought that reducing the number of Members would negatively impact the governance of the Authority and that any decisions about tenure arrangements would be for the constituent authorities to make.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to comments made by Zoe Billingham about the possible introduction of inspection of Authority governance arrangements and highlighted the importance of Members undertaking this review to move the Authority forward.

After a lengthy discussion, Members agreed that the proposals to reduce the size of the Authority and to introduce tenure arrangements not be pursued, but that the other proposals, including changes to the Committee structure, be discussed at the Member Development Day.

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer proposed that, as the calendar of meetings had already been agreed with new Policy and Challenge Groups based on the HMICFRS inspection strands, and as Members wished to discuss the Committee structure further, appointments to the Committees should not be made at the Annual General Meeting and should take place at the following meeting to await the discussions of the Member Development Day.

It was noted that if this was agreed, any urgent decisions required between the Annual General Meeting and the appointment of Chairs comprising the Executive Committee would be made by the CFO following consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposals put forward by the Chair regarding tenure and the size of the Authority not be pursued.
2. That the remainder of the proposals be discussed by Members at the next Member Development Day.

3. That appointments to Committees and Policy and Challenge Groups be deferred from the Annual General Meeting to the following Authority meeting to enable a report to be produced summarising the discussions held at the Member Development Day.

18-19/FRA/88 Final Draft CRMP

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced his report which set out the outcomes of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2019-2023 consultation process.

Conservative estimates suggested that the consultation document had reached 65,000, or 10% of Bedfordshire's population. However, only 125 survey responses had been received, far less than the response to the recent budget consultation. From the responses received, 99% supported the new mission "to provide outstanding fire and rescue services", 91% supported the approach and content and 82% supported an in depth analysis of emergency cover arrangements.

The final version of the CRMP would be published on the Service website and would be sent to Members of the Authority for information. It would also be made available to all key partners and stakeholders.

As it was the last meeting of the Municipal Year, the Vice Chair thanked all the Authority Members for their hard work.

Councillor Atkins also expressed her thanks for the support provided by Officers.

RESOLVED:

1. That the findings of the CRMP consultation survey be acknowledged.
2. That the final draft CRMP and the 2019/20 annual action plan be adopted, recognising that suitable opportunity has been given for local communities and staff members to comment.

The meeting ended at 12.25 pm