

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 7 OCTOBER 2019

Present: Councillors C Atkins, J Chatterley (Chairman), J Gambold, M Headley, D McVicar, K Malik, I Shingler and Y Waheed

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

Mr S Ashby, a representative of the Home Office, was also present

19-20/FRA/39 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Berry, Choudhury and Franks. Councillor Atkins apologised as she had to leave the meeting at 10.30am.

19-20/FRA/40 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

19-20/FRA/41 Communications

LGA Fire Commission

The Chair reported on the LGA Fire Commission meeting that he had attended with the Chief Fire Officer. The new independent Chair of the Fire Standards Board, Ms Suzanne McCarthy, had given a presentation and had informed the Commission of the Board's intention to produce more national standards that would then be implemented and monitored by individual Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities.

HMICFRS update

A meeting with the Inspectorate had been attended by the Chair and Deputy Chief Fire Officer. The Inspectorate was currently designing "Phase 2" of the inspection regime and was seeking the views of Fire and Rescue Services on the first phase of inspections in order to develop future inspections in a more collaborative way.

Awards Evening

The Service Awards Evening had been held on 26 September 2019. The Chair commented on the number of inspirational stories and celebrated the achievements of the Service's firefighters and support staff.

The Chair suggested that the Authority may wish to invite members of staff to its meetings to speak about their achievements.

Members Development Day, 29 October 2019

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that a draft agenda for the Members Development Day to be held on 29 October 2019 would be circulated to Members by the end of the week and requested that Members notify him of any additional items that they wished to include on the agenda.

CFA Conference, 10 October 2019

The Chair advised that Councillors Berry, Duckett, Headley and McVicar were attending the Conference as day delegates, with Councillor Waheed attending the pre-conference dinner the night before and staying over for the Conference.

Recruitment Vehicle

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that there was an opportunity to view the new recruitment vehicle following the meeting.

Home Office Liaison

The Chief Fire Officer introduced Mr Sam Ashby of the Home Office's Fire and Policing Directorate. The Home Office was seeking to liaise more closely with Fire and Rescue Services outside of major metropolitan areas. Mr Ashby would be performing this role in Bedfordshire and would act as a single point of contact for the Service/Authority with the Home Office.

Mr Ashby advised that he would also be performing this role with Bedfordshire Police.

A discussion around the "stay put" policy and the Grenfell Inquiry ensued. Mr Ashby advised that the results of the report would be released at the end of the month. It was unlikely that the Home Office would express a view on an operational matter.

The Chief Fire Officer reiterated that the "stay put" policy worked well in Bedfordshire as the Service had extensive knowledge of all the high rise buildings in the County and undertook regular training in those environments to ensure incident commanders are able to quickly identify

when a building is not behaving as intended and adapt their firefighting tactics accordingly including switching from “stay put” to part or full evacuation.

What3Words

The Chair circulated leaflets explaining how to use the What3Words app that Fire Control are now using to assist in locating emergency callers.

LGA Fire Leadership Essentials Programme

Councillor Malik reported on the LGA Fire Leadership Essentials Programme that she had attended with Councillor Berry. She had found this very informative, particularly in learning how other Authorities utilised different ways of working. There had also been an inspirational address from Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, the Chief Fire Officer of West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

19-20/FRA/42 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2019 be confirmed as a true record, subject to the inclusion of J Atkinson as one of those present.

19-20/FRA/43 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).

19-20/FRA/44 2019/20 Budget Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer introduced his report which provided the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 31 August 2019.

In relation to the non-salary budgets, three overspends were forecast in the areas overseen by Head of Response (£15,000), Head of Governance and Asset Management (£35,000) and Head of Information Communications Technology (£45,000), with an underspend in the Assistant Chief Officer’s area of £34,000. A salary year-end underspend of £460,000 was forecast in relation to whole-time firefighters. The underspend was largely the result of a pension grant of £1.7 million being awarded to the Service and a larger pay award being budgeted for.

The discrepancy between the budget requirement set by Members and the figures detailed in the report was due to budget manager earmarked reserves that had been carried forward from the previous year.

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that, subject to the approval of Members, a number of projects in the Capital Programme were due to be slipped into 2020/21 within the technical and fleet management area. The total amount of these schemes was £1.143 million.

Members were advised that there had been a saving of £54,000 in relation to the server hardware renewal following the completion of the project.

The following medium term savings and efficiencies were RAG rated as amber or red: saving following procurement of new firefighter PPE contract, savings from Blue Light Installations, procurement, Management Information System (MIS) and control income generation.

In response to a number of questions asked, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that he would include a greater level of detail about the areas forecasting an overspend or underspend in the next budget monitoring report.

A specific request was made for details on the salary budget for wholetime firefighters to be circulated to Members following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the forecast outturns for revenue and capital be acknowledged.
2. That the capital slippage requests into 2020/21 be agreed as identified in Table 3 of the report.
3. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.7 of the report regarding the reconciliation work being undertaken regarding the firefighter pension schemes be noted.
4. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.8 of the report regarding the potential cost of recruits in year be noted.
5. That the saving in paragraph 3.3.2 regarding the Server hardware renewal capital project which slipped into 2019/20 but has now completed be noted.

19-20/FRA/45 Mid-Year Treasury Update

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted the mid-year treasury update as at 30 September 2019.

There was low spending on capital expenditure at this point in the year. The Authority currently held £9.987 million of debt, all of which were long term loans. The current level of investment was approximately £12 million.

The Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the capital expenditure set out in the report did not include the slippage agreed under the previous agenda item and an additional amount of £75,000 for the Wi Fi refresh.

In response to the presentation of the level of external debt, the Assistant Chief Officer advised that he would liaise with Link Asset Services, the Authority's treasury management advisors, to ensure that this was presented in a more meaningful way in the future.

In relation to risks around Brexit, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that he had met with Link Asset Services the previous week and had been assured that the Authority held a diverse portfolio. The Authority held a wide range of investments in the UK, Europe and around the world with a variety of investment periods. He advised that he would circulate a list of the Authority's investments to all Members following the meeting for information.

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that he would be investigating ethical investments in the near future. As a general rule, these did not provide as great a return or provide the same level of security as traditional investments.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

19-20/FRA/46 Collaboration Working Group

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented an update on progress with key collaboration initiatives between the Service, Bedfordshire Police and East of England Ambulance Service as managed through the Blue Light Collaboration Strategic Board.

Following the change in the senior leadership team at Bedfordshire Police, the DCFO and ACO had held a positive meeting with the new Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) and ACO from Beds Police and there is a renewed energy to drive collaboration projects forward. The intention was to fund a strategic post to drive some of the projects forward and identify new opportunities for collaboration and efficiency savings. This would be part funded by the Service and would provide a great development opportunity for managers. This would replace the post previously proposed to support the Joint Headquarters project.

The development of a joint Headquarters was making progress.

Work to enable the Police to move into Toddington Community Fire Station and the Ambulance Service to move into Dunstable Community Fire Station was also progressing. This would bring the total number of fire stations jointly used with the Police to 6 and those jointly used with the ambulance service to 5. The Service's partners would be paying for the refurbishment costs and the Service would also receive rental income.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer was meeting with the East of England Ambulance Service to discuss how this Service could support them to improve their performance.

He reported on plans with Bedfordshire Police to provide video live streaming from the incident ground. This would enable Control Rooms to establish a link with callers by sending a text message and would also allow Officers to live stream from their phones via an app.

The Service continued to work with the Police so that the Service could provide response driver training for Police Officers. It was noted that there was high demand for this service.

An individual had been seconded, for a 6 month period, from Bedfordshire Police as the Interim Communications and Engagement Manager. Other opportunities continued to be explored with the police in this area, such as improving the resilience of out of hours on-call arrangements.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been successful in his application to undertake the most senior leadership development programme in policing in the United Kingdom; the Strategic Command Course (SCC) in early 2020. He is the first DCFO to secure a place on the course and the second fire officer to secure a place on the course, the other being a serving Chief Fire Officer. The course presents a unique opportunity to engage in a demanding and stretching lateral development programme providing significant benefits for the Service and the DCFO.

Members expressed some concern around how the DCFO's absence may impact the Service but the CFO gave assurances that appropriate backfill arrangements are being developed as part of wider succession planning and development considerations. It was suggested these could be discussed further at the forthcoming Member Development Day.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report and the continued efforts to pursue collaboration with the Service's blue light partners be acknowledged.

19-20/FRA/47 Work Programme

Members received an updated work programme for 2019/20.

The Assistant Chief Officer advised that Members would receive a list of reports that would have been submitted to meetings of the Policy and Challenge Groups at the Member Development Day for potential inclusion on the work programme.

In response to a comment about a planning application considered by Central Bedfordshire Council, the Chief Fire Officer advised that he would speak to Councillor Shingler about this outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2019/20 be received and the 'cyclical' Agenda Items for each meeting in 2019/20 be noted.

19-20/FRA/48 Business Continuity

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 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Item: Business Continuity

The meeting ended at 11.42 am