

MINUTES OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2019

Present: Councillors C Atkins, R Berry, J Chatterley (Chairman), K Choudhry, P Duckett, J Gambold, M Headley, K Malik, I Shingler and Y Waheed

Police and Crime Commissioner K Holloway

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

19-20/FRA/60 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Franks and McVicar. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Atkins and Waheed.

19-20/FRA/61 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests.

19-20/FRA/62 Communications

Asian Fire Service Association Conference

The Chair, Vice Chair and Councillor Malik had attended the Asian Fire Service Association Conference in Sheffield on 28 and 29 November 2019. The Service had been shortlisted for a positive action award in relation to its recruitment vehicle.

Members who had attended the Conference commented on the number of examples of good practice in relation to equality and diversity that had been discussed.

Diversity Champions Network

The Chair reported that he would be attending the meeting of the Diversity Champions Network in London on 22 January 2020 on behalf of the Service.

HMICFRS

The inspection reports from Tranche 3 had been released and the Chief Fire Officer advised of the individual results on the three inspection strands: effectiveness, efficiency and people. It was noted that the Service had done well in comparison to a number of other Services that had been inspected in the last tranche.

A piece of work was being undertaken to identify all areas for improvement and of concern across the country arising from the inspection reports, as well as areas of best practice, to inform the Service's improvement journey. The Service also sought a peer review by the Local Government Association.

Data Collection from the Standards Board

Information was being collected in an emergency response during fire standards.

LGA Meetings and Training for Members

The Chair reported that Members had been circulated information and training opportunities. Members should advise if they were interested in attending any of the training available.

Whole Time Recruits Pass Out Parade

A Pass Out Parade had been held on 4 December 2019 for the 16 new whole time recruits. This had been attended by three Members of the Authority.

The Authority was advised that a Pass Out Parade was being held for the on-call recruits in February 2020.

Mark Hustwitt

Mark Hustwitt's funeral had recently been held and had been well attended by Service staff. His widow had been supported by the Service since Mr Hustwitt's death. Mr Hustwitt had died in service and had served as the Communications and Engagement Manager.

Grenfell- Actions arising from the Inquiry

Councillor Franks had brought an article in The Guardian newspaper to the attention of the Service. His primary concern had been that the recommendations arising from the Inquiry relating to the improvement of the built environment may not be implemented by parties outside of the Fire and Rescue Services.

The Chief Fire Officer reassured Members that the Service was very proactive in ensuring that it had accurate knowledge of the built environment in Bedfordshire. In this respect, a building in Luton had recently been identified that was less than 18 metres high (so not qualifying as a high rise) that had combustible cladding and this was being dealt with. The Service worked with its social housing partners to prosecute rogue landlords using housing legislation.

The Authority had a brief discussion on HMOs and unauthorised accommodation and the fire dangers arising from these. The Officer appointed to identify rogue landlords would be invited to the next meeting of the Authority to give a presentation to Members.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported that, at a national level, the implementation of the recommendations for the Fire Sector as a whole were being monitored by a sub-group of the National Fire Chief's Council.

An action plan had been developed and would be presented to Members at an appropriate time.

Toddington Fire Station

An event to celebrate the creation of a shared emergency service facility at Toddington as part of the collaboration between the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police Service was being held on 10 January 2020. All Members were invited to attend.

Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards

The Service had been shortlisted in two categories: resilience and learning from major incidents and most influential LGBT+ individual in Fire.

Firefighter Pat Carberry had won the award for most influential LGBT+ individual in Fire.

Luton Best Awards

Representatives of the Service had attended the Luton Best Awards. The Service had sponsored the "Making Luton Safer" award.

Carol Service

Members were invited to the Carol Service to be held at 7.30pm on 18 December 2019 at St Mary's Church, Woburn.

19-20/FRA/63 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2019 be confirmed as a true record.

19-20/FRA/64 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/65 2019/20 Revenue Budget and Capital Monitoring Programme

The Assistant Chief Officer introduced his report setting out the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 31 October 2019.

The current forecast underspend was £303,000, although the Assistant Chief Officer reported that there may be an additional cost of approximately £100,000 relating to the Service's use of the ICT Shared Service.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the Assistant Chief Officer reported that there were a number of items of slippage, in part relating to the suppliers seeking to hold back equipment in preparation for the International Exhibition for Rescue, Fire Prevention, Disaster Relief, Safety and Security to be held in Hanover in June 2020. Members of the Service Technical Team would attend the exhibition.

Appendix 1 of the report highlighted the savings and efficiencies, some of which had not been achievable in the current financial year.

In response to a comment, the Assistant Chief Officer confirmed that the employer contributions for each of the firefighter pension schemes would be met by Government grant in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Further information on the forecast overspend relating to the ICT Shared Services was requested.

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised forecast outturns for revenue and capital be noted.
2. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.7 of the report regarding the reconciliation work being undertaken regarding the firefighter pension schemes be noted.
3. That the comments in paragraph 2.3.8 of the report regarding the potential cost of recruits in year be noted.

19-20/FRA/66 Draft 2020/21 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax

The Assistant Chief Officer submitted his report which presented information to allow Members to approve further consultation on a draft Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2020/21. The information had been presented to Members at the Members Budget Workshop held on 27 November 2019. A draft revenue budget requirement of £31.051 million, with a council tax increase of 1.99% and a draft Capital Programme of £1.568 million were being proposed.

It was noted that a 1.99% increase in Council Tax would add £1.96 per Band D property per annum.

The initial outcome of the consultation would be presented to Members at the second Members Budget Workshop on 16 January 2020. As requested at the first budget workshop, the Head of ICT and Infrastructure would be providing more information on the proposed ICT and software capital schemes.

The uncertainty in the medium term was recognised, as was the need to build capacity when there was an opportunity to do so.

The proposed budget consultation questions included a whether there would be support for an increase over 1.99%, in the event that the cap was removed. It was the intention of the Service to run the budget consultation process in parallel with the consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

RESOLVED:

That the following be approved for consultation:

- a. A draft revenue budget requirement of £31.051 million, with a council tax increase of 1.99%;
- b. A draft Capital Programme of £1.568 million; and
- c. The draft budget consultation approach and questions as set out in paragraph 8 of the report.

19-20/FRA/67 Draft 2020/21 Community Risk Management Plan

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer submitted an update on the progress made towards the 2020 refresh of the 2019-2023 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and the associated consultation.

The key changes were to the Service Values and Behaviours Framework. These had been revised following consultation with Service staff. It also included a new forward by the Chief Fire Officer and the Chair of the Authority.

As part of the consultation, there would be three headline questions, with a free text box being provided for additional comments.

Concern was expressed that the commitment to investment in ICT that had not yet been agreed by Members as part of the budget process, although it was recognised that the need to invest and improve in this area had been highlighted during the Service's HIMCFRS inspection.

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised Service Values be supported.
2. That the initial draft of the refreshed 2019-2023 Community Risk Management Plan be approved.
3. That the consultation arrangements and questions be agreed.

19-20/FRA/68 Information Bulletin (July - September)

Members received the Service information bulletin for the period July to September 2019.

In recognising the number of new starters to the whole time and on-call establishment, the Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service had introduced a new fast-track process for on-call fire fighters to progress to whole-time positions, subject to them meeting the entry requirements.

Members noted the number of false alarms that the Service was mobilised to. This had reduced significantly following a change in policy that was introduced a few years ago. Further work was being undertaken to reduce this still further.

In relation to the incident at Sunderland Hill, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that when there was more than one incident at the same location, an after fire inspection was conducted to decrease the risk of future incidents occurring.

RESOLVED:

That the information bulletin be received.

The meeting ended at 2.15 pm