

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

HELD ON 24 APRIL 2020 AT 11.30AM

Present: Councillors J Chatterley (Chair), C Atkins, D Franks, and Y Waheed
CFO P Fuller, DCFO A Hopkinson, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers
Councillors M Headley and S Khurshid were also present

12. Apologies

12.1 Due to technical issues, apologies were received from Cllr McVicar.

13. Membership

13.1 The Chair welcomed Councillor S Khurshid to the Authority and introduced all those present.

14. Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

14.1 There were no declarations of interests.

15. Minutes

15.1 Concern was expressed that the Chair was the only Member present who had attended the meeting on 4 February 2019, as Councillor Waheed had not yet been able to join the virtual meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2019 be received and that the Chair and Vice-Chair be delegated authority to confirm the accuracy of the Minutes so that they can be signed as a true record.

16. Communications

- 16.1 The Chair reported that he had been sending Members of the Authority regular updates via email. These included updates following his regular discussions with the Chief Fire Officer.
- 16.2 The Chief Fire Officer referred to a letter that had recently been received from James Brokenshire, the Minister of State for Security. He advised that this letter would be circulated to all Members for information.
- 16.3 Within the letter, the Minister referred to the change in legislation which removed the requirement to hold Annual General Meetings for Fire and Rescue Authorities, with other meetings being held remotely as required, as Fire and Rescue Services should be focused on service delivery. There had been no removal of the requirement to adhere to the national framework.
- 16.4 The Service had not had any difficulty procuring the required PPE. Fire fighters and their families were now eligible for testing if they were displaying symptoms. Twelve Service personnel had been tested to date and there had been no positive cases of COVID-19.
- 16.5 The letter also touched on issues such as protection for retained fire fighters so that they were not disadvantaged through COVID-19 loss of earnings scheme as a result of their employment by the Fire and Rescue Service, arrangements for bringing retired fire fighters back into employment and the extension of LGV licences.
- 16.6 It was noted that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had completed his strategic leadership course and had been awarded a distinction.

17. Update from the Chief Fire Officer

- 17.1 The Chief Fire Officer provided a detailed update on action taken by the Service to support the local community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff had responded brilliantly to the challenge, with many volunteering to go above and beyond in aid of the local communities of Bedfordshire. To date, this included over 24 separate areas of action that had been implemented both immediately prior to and during lockdown.
- 17.2 This included the ordering and delivery of “community welfare packs” to some of the County’s most vulnerable residents as identified through Exeter and MOSAIC data, of which almost 400 had been delivered, the secondment of staff to both the Ambulance Service and the Local Resilience Forum’s community support cell, transport of materials to enable the Friends of Bedford Hospital to produce approximately 350 sets of scrubs for use in theatre and the delivery of a YouTube fire station visit for Year 2 children.

- 17.3 The Service had also developed a mechanism for recording expenditure on COVID-19, an internal strategic planning group, safe working practices to ensure that social distancing was maintained, staff and public information videos which had been made available on YouTube, support for the creation of a temporary morgue in Essex, delivery of food to on-duty crews to ensure they were well fed and did not have to leave the station to purchase food, the continuation of critical training and maintenance and improved sanitation. The Service's driving instructors were working with the Ambulance Service to provide training to trainee paramedics.
- 17.4 In addition, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer was representing the Service on the National Fire Chiefs Council COVID-19 Foresight Group.
- 17.5 Two stations, Harrold and Leighton Buzzard, had proactively come forward to develop local agreements to enable co-responding with the Ambulance Service. This had recently been implemented in Harrold.
- 17.6 The Service continued to support its partner organisations and staff were participating in the weekly "Clap for the NHS". A visit had also been paid to Captain Tom Moore, who had raised over £25 million for the NHS and was a resident of Bedfordshire.
- 17.7 It was suggested that fire safety advice could be provided to those on the NHS list of "shielded" individuals, recognising that these were some of the County's most vulnerable residents.
- 17.8 Members recognised the efforts of Service staff in developing and supporting these new initiatives.
- 17.9 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided an update on the fire at the Signature Flatbreads factory at the Chiltern Park Industrial Estate in Dunstable. The first appliance had arrived at the incident within three minutes of the call being received. The incident was attended by three pumps, an aerial platform and a water carrier. The fire did not spread and the company was able to resume production on all but one of the production lines.
- 17.10 Thanks had been forwarded to those involved in the incident and the incident would be used as a case study for incident command training.
- 17.11 In response to a question about the funding of COVID-19 expenditure, the Assistant Chief Officer for Finance and Corporate Services and Treasurer reported that the Service had received £105,000 in the first tranche of local authority funding. The amount allocated in the second tranche had not yet been confirmed. The next return to the Home Office was due on 8 May 2020 and the Service was currently collecting costs for that return.

17.12 It was hoped that the expenditure would be covered in full from Government grant. The Service was also considering a recharge to partners for work undertaken by the Service, although this was not the preferred option.

18. Public Participation

18.1 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. Arrangements for FRA Meetings during the Coronavirus Emergency

19.1 The Executive Committee received the report of the Secretary and Monitoring Officer on how to manage meetings during the coronavirus emergency.

19.2 The relevant legislation had been amended to allow for greater flexibility in the arrangement of local authority meetings, including the ability to hold meetings with remote attendance and to cancel or postpone Annual General Meetings.

19.3 Following consultation with the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer, it was being proposed that the Annual General Meeting be postponed and that the meetings arranged for 30 April and 16 July be cancelled.

19.4 In relation to the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee due to be held on 2 July 2020, the Assistant Chief Officer for Finance and Corporate Services and Treasurer reported that the Finance Team were still working to progress the Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement and that he would be in a position in a few weeks' time to confirm whether the timescales allowing these items to be considered by the Committee at its meeting on 2 July 2020 could be adhered to.

19.5 Members discussed the various options available, recognising the impact of holding meetings on the Service's resources, but also the value of engaging with Members of the Authority.

19.6 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer referred to the potential difficulties of conducting a secret ballot at a virtual meeting, as would be required at the Annual General Meeting. The most practical way of conducting a vote during a remote meeting was by roll call, where Members could be easily identified.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Annual Meeting of the FRA be postponed until 3 September 2020 and that the FRA meeting due to be held on 30 April 2020 be cancelled.
 2. That the FRA meeting due to be held on 16 July 2020 be conducted as a remote meeting.
 3. That the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee be authorised to determine whether the Committee's meeting due to be held on 2 July 2020 should proceed remotely or be cancelled following consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and the Treasurer.
20. Governance Review
- 20.1 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer suggested that, given the current pandemic, the governance review should be revisited at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Governance Review be considered at a future meeting of the Authority.

The meeting closed at 12.47pm.