

**MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
HELD ON 18 MARCH 2022 AT 10AM**

Present: Councillors J Chatterley (Chair), M Headley, and D McVicar
CFO A Hopkinson, ACFO A Kibblewhite and Mr J Atkinson
Councillors Y Waheed and C Atkins were present via MS Teams

21-22/EC/42 Apologies

42.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Choudhury, DCFO C Bigland and ACO G Chambers.

21-22/EC/43 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

43.1 There were no declarations of interests.

21-22/EC/44 Communications

- 44.1 The Chair reported that he had received a letter from Andrew Selous MP following his request regarding the White Paper which was due to be published imminently.
- 44.2 The Chair provided an update regarding the LGA Fire Conference that he and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) attended on the 15/16 March which included an address by the Fire Minister, Lord Greenhalgh, along with a number of other speakers and also included workshops on a range of topics.
- 44.3 A Member referred to the long service and good conduct awards which were given to those members of staff in recognition of their continued long service with 30-40 years of service as from 11 March 2022. The CFO advised that the Annual Service Awards had provisionally been scheduled to take place on 9 June 2022, and that correspondence to 'save the date' were to be issued shortly. As with last year, it is intended to host the Long Service Awards as a separate event later in the year.

21-22/EC/45 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the informal meeting held on 20 January 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

21-22/EC/46 Public Participation

46.1 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).

21-22/EC/47 Outcome of the Monitoring Officer's review of the Scheme of Delegation

47.1 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer introduced his report on the review of the Scheme of Delegation that he had undertaken following the request of the Committee at its meeting on 7 October 2021. A briefing had been held on 10 February 2022 whereby the process and changes had been considered and reflected in the draft Scheme of Delegation as presented.

47.2 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer specifically referred to paragraph 1.4 of the draft Scheme of Delegation which showed a substantive list of decisions regarding corporate policies which were reserved to the Authority.

47.3 The Executive considered the draft Scheme of Delegation and requested that the following items also be included in paragraph 1.4:

- > Budget/Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- > Treasury Management;
- > Asset Strategy/Plans; and
- > Decision on changes to the location of fire stations.

47.4 The CFO reassured Members that any proposals involving changes to the Authority's Estate assets including the closure, relocation or creation of new fire stations would be presented to the Authority in the first instance, followed by a public consultation.

47.5 In response to a comment seeking reassurance that other matters such as amending the location and number of fire appliances would also be included in the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the Secretary and Monitoring Officer referred to paragraph 1.5 of the draft scheme which encouraged the CFO to consult the Authority on controversial or sensitive matters.

47.6 In relation to the appointment of Senior Officers, the Secretary and Monitoring Officer referred to paragraph 2.21 of the Scheme of Delegation which stated that the CFO had delegated authority to determine the management structure of the service below the level of Principal Officer. Any appointments required at a higher level had been delegated to the Authority's Executive Committee.

- 47.7 The CFO commented that under the guidance of the Chairman, he had liaised with the LGA in terms of what they could offer in terms of a wider, independent review of the Authority's governance arrangements, which would be conducted through the lens of the forthcoming White Paper on reforming the fire service and would involve Member Peers from a comparable Authority.
- 47.8 The Executive was requested to consider whether it wanted to adopt the draft Scheme of Delegation as amended in the interim and continue to engage with the LGA regarding a wider review, or whether Members had some alternative ideas that they may wish to explore.
- 47.9 The Chair advised that at the recent LGA Conference, governance had been a significant topic of discussion, whereby a number of authorities were looking to review their governance processes. The Scheme of Delegation would need to be reviewed again after the White Paper had been published, especially as the current document had been in place for ten years.
- 47.10 The Chair suggested that a question and answer session could be held in order to determine whether the governance structure currently in place was sufficient moving forward. The CFO concurred and suggested that the matter could be considered at the next meeting of the Executive FRA.
- 47.11 The Chair advised that he would liaise with the Authority's statutory officers (CFO, Secretary and Monitoring Officer and s151 Officer) to scope out the options discussion with the Executive regarding a potential peer review of the Authority's governance arrangements.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to adopt the revised scheme of delegation included as the Appendix to the report, subject to the following items being included at Paragraph 1.4:
 - Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - Treasury Management Strategy;
 - Asset Management Strategy/Plans; and
 - Decision on the closure and/or relocation of fire stations.
2. That Members receive a briefing when the White Paper is published.
3. That the Chair liaises with the Authority's statutory officers (CFO, Secretary and Monitoring Officer and s151 Officer) to scope out the discussion with the Executive regarding options for a potential peer review of the Authority's governance arrangements.

21-22/EC/48 Review of Member attendance at FRA meetings

- 48.1 The Chair welcomed Councillor Atkins as she had been invited to attend this meeting as Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee.

- 48.2 The Committee received a report requesting that it consider whether some of its meetings should continue to be held virtually or on a hybrid basis now that all COVID-19 restrictions had been removed.
- 48.3 The Chair reported that there had been no movement from Government regarding any legislative changes as to whether meetings should be held in public or with dual functions.
- 48.4 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer quoted the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government as being broadly supportive of hybrid meetings, whilst recognising that some decision-making meetings required to be held in public and in person. He also referred to quorums being a matter of concern for meetings of the Executive should Members wish to continue using a hybrid option.
- 48.5 The Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee advised that the Audit and Standards Committee had met virtually for the last year and that this arrangement had been particularly successful in allowing everyone to attend. Key personnel who contributed to meetings had been able to attend meetings even if they had had other pressing issues to attend to (i.e. a funeral or carer roles). Having in-person meetings would have meant that these personnel and their valuable contributions would have been missing. Any decisions required to be taken by the Committee had been submitted to the FRA for ratification which had also worked well.
- 48.6 The Chair expressed concerns that the relevant legislation currently stated that Members can only vote during a meeting if they were present in person, which could possibly affect the outcome of a decision. Should a meeting have full membership and be required to be held in person, the outcome may well be different to a meeting held virtually whereby only the Members who were present in person, not in attendance virtually, would be able to vote.
- 48.7 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer commented that virtual meetings had worked well in the last year, however there had been some issues regarding the quorum. The Audit and Standards Committee continued to meet informally and virtually with any decisions being forwarded to the next meeting of the FRA for ratification. Virtual meetings had, and continued to work well for the Audit and Standards Committee particularly as there was no need for them to meet in person to carry out their roles.
- 48.8 The Scheme of Members' Allowances was based on attendances made each year, therefore there may be a need to review allowances to ensure that the Scheme also reflected virtual attendances at meetings. The Secretary and Monitoring Officer advised that he would consider this matter further and report back to the Committee.
- 48.9 The Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee also referred to the example of bad weather or Members being required to travel long distances to attend meetings, whereby the facility of a hybrid meeting should be in place in order to enable Members and Officers to attend virtually if required.

48.10 The Chair proposed the following recommendation:

<u>Committee</u>	<u>Meeting Arrangements</u>
Audit and Standards	To continue as hybrid meetings, and to be kept under review.
Executive and FRA	Members are requested to attend in person whenever possible. Should Members be unable to attend a meeting in person, for a valid reason, a hybrid option would be made available. However, this would be on the understanding that Members attending the meeting virtually would be unable to vote. All Members should be encouraged to attend meetings in person in terms of allowances.

48.11 The Secretary and Monitoring Officer emphasised that all meetings must observe provisions of the Local Government 1972. Subject to that, the Executive was sympathetic to Members attending meetings remotely, whilst recognising that they would not be able to vote.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Secretary and Monitoring Officer considers whether the Scheme of Members' Allowances needs to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects virtual attendances at meetings, and report back to the Committee.
2. That the following arrangements for meetings of the FRA be approved:
- 3.

<u>Committee</u>	<u>Meeting Arrangements</u>
Audit and Standards	To continue as hybrid meetings, and to be kept under review.
Executive and FRA	Members are requested to attend in person whenever possible. Should Members be unable to attend a meeting in person, for a valid reason, a hybrid option would be made available. However, this would be on the understanding that Members attending the meeting virtually will not be able to vote. All Members should be encouraged to attend meetings in person in terms of allowances.

21-22/EC/49 Work Programme

49.1 The Executive received its updated work programme.

49.2 The following items were to be added to the Committee's Work Programme for 2022/2023:

- > Scoping of an independent review of governance;
- > White Paper update;

- > Immediate Detriment Framework update;
- > CFO Objective Setting – review;
- > 2023/2027 Strategic Planning and Timeline;
- > Review of Portfolio Holder leads; and
- > Member Development Programme.

49.3 The Committee also requested an update regarding the material effects within the budget and impacts on services, including vehicle and fleet implications.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Work Programme be received and the cyclical agenda items be noted.
2. That the Work Programme be updated to include the suggested items listed above.

21-22/EC/50 Retirement of Monitoring Officer

- 50.1 The Chair reported that the Secretary and Monitoring Officer had tendered his resignation and would be leaving his position at the end of June 2022.
- 50.2 The Chair also advised that in terms of expenditure, a significant amount of funds had been spent on legal fees, therefore a review of the Secretary and Monitoring Officer role and their level of expertise could be undertaken.
- 50.3 The CFO wished to record his thanks to the Secretary and Monitoring Officer for all of his support to him personally and to the Authority. He also advised that he would submit an options appraisal report for the Executive to consider at their next meeting.
- 50.4 The Chair also wished to record his thanks to the Secretary and Monitoring Officer who had been a significant help to him over the last couple of years which had been greatly appreciated.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update be received.
2. That the CFO submits an options appraisal report to the next meeting of the Executive regarding a review of the Secretary and Monitoring Officer's role moving forward.

Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Paragraphs 1, 4 and 5 of Part 1: Exclusion of the Public

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 items on the grounds that the matters to be discussed involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 4 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended):

Item

51. Abatement Issue
52. Succession Planning (Operational Staff)

The meeting ended at 12.02 pm