

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
HELD AT FIRE AND RESCUE HEADQUARTERS ON 10 JANUARY 2023 AT 10.00 AM**

Present: Councillors P Duckett (Chair), J Chatterley, K Choudhury and M Headley
CFO A Hopkinson, DCFO C Bigland, ACFO A Kibblewhite, Mr G Britten and Ms L Fair
Councillors C Atkins and Y Waheed observed the meeting via Teams

22-23/EC/33 Apologies

- 33.1 Councillor Y Waheed was unable to attend the meeting in person and joined remotely via Teams.
- 33.2 The Assistant Chief Officer and Treasurer was unable to attend the meeting due to work commitments.

22-23/EC/34 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

- 34.1 There were no declarations of interests.

22-23/EC/35 Communications

- 35.1 The Chair reported that a series of meetings with local MPs had been arranged to demonstrate and explain the depth and breadth of services provided by the Fire and Rescue Service in order to deepen their understanding of the operation of a modern fire service.
- 35.2 The Chair congratulated those involved in the Christingle Service that he and other Members attended before Christmas.
- 35.3 Following lobbying by Fire and Rescue Services, the Government had agreed that precepts could be increased by up to £5. This would be discussed further at the Member Budget Workshop to be held on 13 January 2023.
- 35.4 The provisional Local Government Settlement had now been announced and the impact of this on the budget setting process would also be discussed at the Member Budget Workshop.

22-23/EC/36 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2022 be confirmed as a true record.

22-23/EC/37 Public Participation

37.1 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).

22-23/EC/38 CRMP Update

- 38.1 Ms L Fair, the Business Support Manager, provided an update on the Community Risk Management Plan. The survey had been launched and 159 responses had been received to date, with two weeks of the consultation period remaining. Whilst there were fewer responses received than in previous years, the average completion time of 19 minutes indicated that greater consideration was being given to those who had submitted responses.
- 38.2 There were high levels of support for the Service's new mission statement and for the provision of new workshops, with less support for trials and testing.
- 38.3 A number of suggestions for efficiencies and savings had been submitted and these would be included in the report to be presented at the next full Authority meeting on 2 February 2023, as would a Year 1 Action Plan.
- 38.4 The Chief Fire Officer advised that the final CRMP report for publication was scheduled to be considered by the Authority at its meeting in March 2023. He emphasised that consultation on aspects of the CRMP had been ongoing throughout the year, including at major local events such as Bedford's River Festival, bringing the total level of responses received up to 800 to 900.
- 38.5 In response to a question about how the CRMP survey was being promoted, the Business Support Manager confirmed that, in addition to being available on the Service's website, it had also been promoted through social media channels. The Chief Fire Officer

added that many group circulation lists, such as the Beds Fire Alert, that had over 1,000 members, had also been advised that the survey was live.

38.6 Members were asked to promote the survey and to encourage local residents to complete this before the survey period concluded.

22-23/EC/39 Governance Update & New Member Development Programme

39.1 The Business Support Manager reported on the work that had been undertaken following the Local Government Association's review of the Authority's governance arrangements. A clear call-in procedure, and the ability to appoint Task and Finish Groups to undertake specific areas of scrutiny work, was being added to the terms of reference of the Audit and Standards Committee. The proposed arrangements were being discussed further by the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee at a meeting on 30 January 2023, with the intention to prepare a report for consideration at the next Authority meeting.

39.2 Work was also progressing on the development of a public engagement strategy to increase the profile of the Service in the local area and to improve understanding of the breadth of activities in which the Service was engaged in.

39.3 In response to a comment about the previously stated intention that the Audit and Standards Committee itself would not undertake the scrutiny function, as it had its own responsibilities, and that a scrutiny body would need to be a separate Committee, although the membership of the two may be similar or identical, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this would be the case and that there would be a clear separation of the two.

39.4 Whilst Members supported the intention to webcast the Authority's public meetings, concern was expressed that this could be very expensive and that cost-effective options should be explored, recognising that much of the equipment required had already been purchased to allow for Members and Officer to access meetings remotely.

39.5 The intention to submit a number of constitutional updates had been listed in the report and concern was also expressed that Members would need to be consulted on any changes proposed and fully engaged in the review process.

39.6 The Chief Fire Officer referred to the report, where it was clarified that these would be presented to the Authority for discussion.

39.7 Mr G Britten, the Monitoring Officer, advised that any proposed changes to the Code of Conduct should also be subject to public consultation as recommended by the Committee for Standards in Public Life.

39.8 The Business Support Manager outlined the costs associated with implementing a webcasting solution through Public-I, the company that supported many of the constituent authorities in this respect. It was noted that the cost was not proportionate to the

requirements of the Authority, as it had far fewer meetings that needed to be webcast. A solution via Teams was being explored, and Civica, the company that provided Modern.gov, had also indicated its intention to develop a webcasting option and that it would keep the Service informed of these service developments.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress made in delivering the outcomes from the Governance Review be noted.
2. That the new Member Development Programme, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

22-23/EC/40 Response to implications of the London Fire Brigade Culture Review

- 40.1 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented her report on the outcome of the London Fire Brigade Culture Review. This had been carried out by Nazir Afzal OBE and a team of six following the sad death of a fire fighter who had been allegedly the victim of bullying and a culture audit undertaken in 2020 which identified patterns of controlling behaviour in the London Fire Brigade.
- 40.2 Following the publication of the report at the end of November 2022, the Service had responded by undertaking a gap analysis against the 23 recommendations set out in the report. These would be RAG rated and the results reported to Members, with an action plan developed to address any issues arising. The Service was also planning to introduce cultural awareness training, in addition to the equality and diversity modules that were already available to Service staff.
- 40.3 The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that, although significant progress had been made in the “People” area from the first HMICFRS inspection 2018, when some areas had been graded as ‘requires improvement’ to the last inspection in 2021, in which the Service was graded as ‘good’ across the “People” area, as the employer of over 600 staff, it was important that the Service was not complacent and would use the report to help drive future improvements.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be acknowledged.

22-23/EC/41 HMICFRS inspection

- 41.1 Members noted that the inspection had been brought forward, despite the Service having made representations that the new timescales were not practical as it meant that the inspection and the work required in preparation for it could fall within periods of industrial action.

- 41.2 The Business Support Manager advised that the document request had been received and was currently being responded to. 53 documents and a self-assessment of 1,500 words were due by 5 February 2023. An inspector would be visiting the Service on 27 January 2023 in advance of the full inspection commencing on 27 February 2023.
- 41.3 It was acknowledged that a staff survey undertaken at this point in time, with national industrial action being proposed, would not be reflective of the local relationship between staff and the Service and it was hoped that the inspectorate would take this into account.
- 41.4 It was anticipated that, in light of the Culture Review discussed under the previous agenda item, there would be a greater focus, if not a thematic review, on corporate culture.

22-23/EC/42 Work Programme

- 42.1 Members received the updated work programme and noted the cyclical items.
- 42.2 The Chief Fire Officer reported that other items may be added to the agenda if there were any developments, such as in relation to immediate detriment or the new website.

22-23/EC/43 Industrial Action Update

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

Item

43. Industrial Action Update

The meeting ended at 10:58am

