

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2024

Present: Councillors J Burnett (Chair), R Goodchild, M Headley (Vice-Chair), S Hussain and A Sultan
CFO A Hopkinson, DCFO C Bigland, T/ACFO J Tai, ACO G Chambers, Mr G Britten and Mrs N Upton

23-24/EC/35 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

23-24/EC/36 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

23-24/EC/37 Communications

HMICFRS Cause of Concern: progress update

The Chief Fire Officer reported that correspondence had been received from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to confirm that the Cause of Concern in relation to Fire Fitness Testing had been discharged. This information was embargoed until 19th January 2024 when it was published on the HMICFRS website. That confirmation was testament to the hard work and focus of all staff.

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire (PCC)

The Chair confirmed that both herself and the Chief Fire Officer would be attending the PCC Annual Business Conference on 13 February 2024.

23-24/EC/38 Minutes

MATTERS ARISING ON MINUTES 23 NOVEMBER 2023:

The Chair noted page 6 that the HMICFRS had provided an update on how the current tranche of inspections was progressing and on the thematic review of handling of misconduct cases. Ten fire and rescue services had been selected to take part in this review.

The Chair noted page 8 and the report on culture for submission to the full Authority and that an update be provided when that was ready for submission.

The Chief Fire Officer responded that there would be a People and Culture Member Development event on 29 February along with a Budget Workshop on 25 January 2024 and an additional Member Development event on 8 March 2024 covering Emergency Cover Review and Estates Programme.

The workshop on 29 February would include an update on progress with the Culture Improvement Action Plan at which time there would be agreement on what would go to a public meeting as an outcome of the Workshops.

The Chair noted page 9 that the 360-degree feedback sessions had taken place with staff from Group Manager and above, with additional sessions to be held for staff below this level at future dates.

Officers confirmed that sessions had taken place for middle and senior managers and no specific patterns were presently apparent although there was to date a fairly small pool of participants. The Chair proposed this be further considered at a future Member Development event.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 23 November 2023 be confirmed as a true record.
2. That the Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 5 January 2024 be confirmed as a true record.

23-24/EC/39 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).

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that following the publication on 19th January 2024 of the letter from HMICFRS discharging their Cause of Concern in relation to firefighter fitness testing, that Item 7 - HMICFRS Action Plan Update would take part in the public part of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Item 7 to be considered by the Committee in the public part of the meeting.

23-24/EC/40 Work Programme

Members considered the updated Work Programme, noting the cyclical items.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that following the Government's response to the White Paper consultation further items of work would be programmed over the next 2 to 3 months.

The Chair added that there may be additional Items following the Workshops.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme for 2023-24 and the 'cyclical' agenda items for each meeting in 2023-24 be noted.

23-24/EC/41 HMICFRS Action Plan Update

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the report to provide an update on the progress made against the Service HMICFRS Action Plan that addressed the Areas for Improvement identified in the 2023 inspection report. Following the introduction, he proposed to ask Officers to assist with responses to questions relevant to their specific areas.

The key sections of the report with the relevant page numbers were set out for the Committee to refer to.

A Cause of Concern had been issued under "Promoting the right values and culture" and a recommendation had been given that within 28 days the service should provide an action plan that detailed how it intended to make sure all staff met the minimum fitness requirements.

The Service had a fitness policy which required all firefighters to pass a fitness test on appointment and annually thereafter or after an absence from work of 28 days or more. There was a backlog of fitness tests caused by the intentional suspension of annual fitness testing during the COVID pandemic. Since then, the Service had utilised an external provider to address the backlog of fitness tests. An action plan had already been in place to address the backlog before the anticipated publication of the report. At no time was a firefighter allowed to ride a fire appliance without first having undertaken a fitness test. It was simply that some staff had not undertaken one within the previous 12 months and the Service had not fully caught up with the backlog.

In a meeting between the Chief Fire Officer and HMICFRS on 2 January 2024 it had been confirmed that the Cause of Concern would be discharged, and a draft letter was being issued at the time of publication of this report. That letter confirming the discharge was published by HMICFRS on 19th January 2024.

In response to a question from the Committee it was confirmed by Officers that a numbering system would be added to reports to assist in referencing sections when asking questions.

Concern was expressed in a comment from a Member of the Committee that working timelines had been delayed or deferred (in one case by a whole year) and it was asked whether the now revised dates were secure or whether there was doubt as to whether they would be met.

A discussion took place on the dates set out within the report before the Committee. The Chief Fire Officer explained that these extensions to the target completion dates had not been brought to his attention to approve prior to the meeting but he took full responsibility for the content of the report.

Given that the dates in the report would therefore generally need to be reviewed and updated, the Chair proposed that review should take place before the Committee substantively consider the report and that it therefore be deferred to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Item 7 be deferred for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

23-24/EC/42 Item 4 Confidential Minutes 23 November 2023 and 5 January 2024

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

Item

Item 4 Confidential Minutes 23 November 2023 and 5 January 2024

The meeting ended at 11:02am