

## MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14 MARCH 2024

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

### 23-24/EC/43 Apologies

There were apologies from Cllr S Hussain who joined the meeting remotely.

### 23-24/EC/44 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

### 23-24/EC/45 Communications

#### **Local Government Association Fire Conference**

The Chair reported on the Local Government Association Fire Conference that she had attended earlier that week with the Vice-Chair and Chief Fire Officer. She commented particularly on the value of networking with other Fire and Rescue Authority Chairs and Chief Fire Officers and of the increasing number of female Chief Fire Officers in the sector, including two at neighbouring fire and rescue services.

Cllr S Hussain joined the meeting virtually at 10.02 am.

The conference sessions had covered a wide range of topics including finance, climate change, culture, risk management planning and the Government's response to the White Paper on Fire Service Reform. All PowerPoint presentations given at the conference would be available on the Local Government Association's website. The Chair requested that these be circulated to all Members of the Authority when available.

The Chief Fire Officer had raised concerns with the Home Office representative regarding the lack of both capital grant and transformation/innovation funding available to fire and rescue services and suggested that either a fund be introduced for the sector and individual fire and rescue services to apply for funding or that the Police Innovation fund be expanded to include the fire and rescue sector.

It was noted that the Shadow Ministers for Fire were also present at the conference.

### **Correspondence from Fire Brigades Union**

The Chief Fire Officer reported on a letter sent from the Fire Brigades Union to the Chair regarding minimum service levels (MSLs). Similar letters had been sent to Chairs across the country and the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Monitoring Officer would be available to assist in drafting a response.

The Chair advised that she and the Vice-Chair would be meeting with FBU representatives later in the month.

### **LGA Fire Leaderships Essentials Course**

Councillor Goodchild reported on his attendance at the Fire Leaderships Essentials Course. This had covered a wide range of topics, and he recommended it to all Members who had not previously attended. He believed that the next course would be held in November 2024.

The Chair suggested that this be raised at the next meeting of the Authority. She would be recommending that weekend courses be provided to enable more Members, including those in full-time employment, to take part.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that they could suggest items to be included in the Member Development Programme and that this topic would be discussed at a future meeting of the Authority. He noted that a progress update against the action plan arising from the Local Government Association's independent review of the Authority's governance will also be prepared for Members at a future meeting so they had oversight of progress being made.

### **NJC Review**

The Chief Fire Officer referred to meetings with Chairs and Chief Fire Officers and the NJC taking place imminently in relation to the Grey Book pay negotiations.

### **Launch of Virtual Reality (Road Safety) Van**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer invited Members to the launch of the virtual reality road safety vehicle. This was a joint initiative with the Police and Crime Commissioner aimed at young drivers. All details had been emailed to Members.

Councillor Goodchild requested that if his attendance was required at a meeting, especially at short notice, that he be contacted by telephone in addition to email.

### 23-24/EC/46 Minutes

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee held on 22 January 2024 be confirmed as a true record, subject to the date in the sixth paragraph of the confidential minute relating to the date of the next inspection being amended to read early 2025 rather than 2024.

### 23-24/EC/47 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).

### 23-24/EC/48 HMICFRS Action Plan Update

The Chief Fire Officer presented Members with an update on the progress made against the Service's HMICFRS Action Plan that addressed the areas for improvement identified by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in their 2023 service inspection report. Changes to the format of the action plan had been made following feedback received from Members. The new format was appreciated by Members, although the Chair suggested that some text be included to confirm which pillar of inspection the action related to. This would provide greater clarity for both Members and the HMICFRS.

Members received an updated pie chart which displayed how many actions were currently not on target (31%), on target for completion (52%) and completed (17%), as the figures had been transposed on the chart provided in the original report.

Members then received an update on the areas identified as not on target (either amber or red). The Chief Fire Officer explained that the whole area for improvement would be RAG rated amber or red if even one of the deliverables was not RAG rated green and that new deliverables may be added if additional areas of work were identified. This work was overseen by Thomas Warner as Service Liaison Lead.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported on the areas for improvement assigned to him as follows:

#### Area 4(a): Fire Risk Data Warehouse

Due to resourcing issues, the completion date for this action had been delayed to 30 June 2024. There had been issues with a software update whereby it had been overwriting data during testing. After further work, this issue had now been resolved and work was progressing.

### Area 6(a) and Area 7(b): Revised Protection Process for Unwanted Fire Signals and Produce a Business Engagement Plan

These areas for improvement were interrelated. Due to slippage in the programme, additional resource had been allocated to this area of work and it was hoped that this would now be completed by the end of May 2024.

It was noted that in many cases, this was an education issue and that businesses would have to be aware of any consequences for repeated unwanted fire signals. Any reduction in attendance to unwanted fire signals could be identified as an efficiency as fire fighters would then be available for other areas of work. This should be acknowledged in the Service's productivity and efficiency plan.

The view was expressed that in addition to being efficient, it was also important to be effective.

The Chair requested that the Business Engagement Plan be shared with all Members of the Authority before the next Authority meeting.

### Area 9: Fire Control Arrangements

Staff levels in Fire Control were now over establishment with three trainees due to start imminently and one transferee joining from another fire and rescue service. The Service now held a waiting list for future vacancies in the control team. Fallback arrangements with other services, including Essex, were being explored and a Control Enhancement Team was being developed to provide further resilience. As this had not yet been completed, the action had been rated as amber.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided updates on areas for improvement assigned to him as follows:

### Area 11: Alignment with National Operational Guidance (NOG)

The adoption of National Operational Guidance (NOG), to ensure a consistency of approach across all fire and rescue services, was an involved process including detailed gap analysis, action planning, introduction of any new or amended training requirements and changes to policies and procedures, if necessary, prior to implementation.

The Service had previously signed off four packs of NOG. However, upon review by the new project lead, additional work was being undertaken in relation to these so that the Service could evidence full compliance and implementation.

The Chief Fire Officer had determined this area to be subject to a 'call-in' review, as progress had been slower than anticipated, and the results of this review would be reported to Members. The approach previously taken had been to incorporate the easier "low hanging fruit". The introduction of NOG was now progressing on a risk assessed basis. The four that had been largely completed were incident command, operations, Breathing Apparatus and water rescue. The next four NOG packs to be implemented were control, major incidents, fires and firefighting and fires in tall buildings. Work on the NOG pack on control was due to commence in June 2024.

The Chair and other Members of the Executive expressed concerns about the proposed timescale, as the completion date of April 2025 was after the next possible HMICFRS inspection.

The Chief Fire Officer reassured Members that he shared Members' concerns and this had contributed to his decision to 'call-in' the project. Consideration of allocating additional resources to accelerate delivery would be part of the review by the Principal Officer team.

An additional complexity was the concurrent publication of a suite of new Fire Standards. This was placing a significant workload on the team led by Peter Knight, who was now leading this work on behalf of the Service following staffing changes. Having previously worked in this area in Hampshire, he was well placed to drive forward progress on this project.

In response to a question on how HMICFRS would view a clear demonstration of progress, the Chief Fire Officer reported that, in his opinion, the inspectors would likely only take a view on what had already been achieved, as was demonstrated by the identification of the cause for concern, even though a clear roadmap to address this had been shared.

In response to a comment on preparedness for the next inspection and the development of an action plan to address any areas for improvements that may be identified at that time, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that Thomas Warner was responsible for completing the self-assessment and that he also reviewed all inspection reports released to identify emerging themes.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that it was likely that the preparation work for the next inspection would commence following the State of Fire and Rescue Report and the strategic assessment.

The Chair suggested that a Member Development Day be held in autumn to engage all Members of the Authority in this process.

#### Area 12(a): Implementation of new Operational Assurance software

The Service was working with PDRPro on bespoke software to address the NOG requirements on station audits, debriefs and active monitoring. The Service would become a PDRPro Centre of Excellence and the implementation of this software would allow the Service to replace three systems, some of which were still paper-based, and facilitate the identification of trends and patterns. The first phase of the project had gone live and it was expected that the final phase would be completed by the end of July 2024. Parts (b) and (c) of the action had already been completed.

#### Area 20(b): National Operational Guidance alignment of operational development programmes

This was linked to AFI 11 which had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Members' attention was drawn to the areas that were progressing as expected and/or had already been completed. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reported on the increased availability of on-call firefighters as a result of additional training sessions that were being provided.

In response to a comment regarding the number of actions which were due for completion by 31 March 2024, the Chief Fire Officer expressed confidence that these were all in progress and, to his knowledge, would be completed by the end of the month.

Following a discussion about the importance of driving forward transformational work and progress against the action plans, and action being taken internally, including moving the Portfolio and Programme Board meetings to a more frequent bi-monthly rhythm, it was agreed to seek to arrange an additional meeting of the Executive in April 2024 and that proposals for Member engagement in this process be reported to the full Authority by way of additional text in the report on the productivity and efficiency plan being submitted to the next meeting of the Authority on 28 March 2024.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that an additional deliverable had been introduced to implement functional area succession planning. This action had a completion date of 31 March 2025 as it involved meeting with all function Heads to identify critical roles and development pathways for those roles, starting with the HR function. It was anticipated that each area would take 4-6 weeks to complete.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress made to date against the action plan be acknowledged.

23-24/EC/49 Work Programme

Members received an updated work programme for information, noting that it had been agreed that an additional meeting be arranged in April 2024.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the work programme for 2024/25 would be populated with items following the Authority's Annual General Meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme for 2024-25 and the 'cyclical' agenda items for each meeting in 2024-25 be noted.

The meeting ended at 11:35am