

Minutes of the meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillors Busby (Chairman), Carroll, Gomm, Marland, McDonald, Reed and Schofield

Officers: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), L Swift (Director of People and Organisational Development), D Sutherland (Director of Finance and Assets), M Hemming (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), K McCafferty (Head of Human Resources), P Holland (Head of Service Transformation), M Stevens (Principal Accountant), J Parsons (Head of Service Development), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) F Pearson (Communication and Consultation Manager) and J McNeill (South East Employers)

Apologies: Councillor Lambert

EX28 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 23 November 2016, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX29 BUDGET MONITORING PERFORMANCE AND DEBT MANAGEMENT APRIL-NOVEMBER 2016

The Lead Member for Finance, IT, Procurement and Control introduced the report and advised Members that there were three aspects to it. The first was regarding the £510k underspend against a revenue budget of £28.3m, the second was the capital update showing the projected spend and the carry forward items and the third was debt monitoring.

The Deputy Director of Finance advised Members that local press had picked up on this and the previous budget monitoring report. The Bucks Herald had presented a good news story regarding the Authority investing £500k in apprenticeships and Mix 96 had run a story on the Authority putting aside funds for a 'sprinkler initiative' for future years.

The Principal Accountant advised Members that the Authority had been proactive in developing resilient resourcing models in order to meet known risk and demand levels of the service, while maintaining response standards. Examples of this approach included operating with a smaller regular establishment, which was reinforced by on-call and whole-time firefighters working 'Bank' shifts. With a smaller regular establishment being achieved via falling staff numbers from 2013/14, due to retirements and leavers, the 'Bank System' offered the Service a flexible resource, designed to maintain appliance availability in the event of crewing shortfalls. This also showed that service levels were being maintained and costs were reducing.

RESOLVED –

1. That the latest projected outturn forecast for the Authority as at 30 November 2016 be noted.
2. That £200k of the projected underspend for 2016/17 be transferred to the Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay (RCCO) reserve in order to add resilience to this area in future years.

EX30

THE PRUDENTIAL CODE, PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION

The Director of Finance and Assets advised the Committee that this report was presented as the Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision policy statement were required to be approved by the Fire Authority and to support the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Prudential Code was established to ensure that capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. The indicators presented here demonstrated that the current plans for capital investment meet this criteria and present an acceptable level of risk to the Authority. The minimum revenue provision was a statutory charge to the General Fund, which ensured that the Authority had sufficient cash balances to repay borrowing upon maturity, reducing the refinancing risk.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority be recommended to approve:

1. the Prudential Indicators; and
2. the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement

EX31

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) 2017/18 TO 2019/20

The Lead Member for Finance, IT, Procurement and Control introduced the report and advised Members that this was an important report in terms of setting the budget for next year.

The Deputy Director of Finance advised Members that the reason for the revised Appendix 1 was that the Authority does not receive the final figures from the billing authorities until the statutory deadline of 31 January 2017. Following this there were some slight changes to the estimates given prior to the final figures being released.

The Principal Accountant advised that looking at the Local Government Finance settlement for 2017/2018 and the MTFP summary which was revised on Appendix 1, Members could see that the Government was continuing with its change in policy in this area. There was no Council Tax Freeze Grant and there was a continuing fall in the Revenue Support Grant/Central Government funding. There was also an expectation that Council Tax would be increased every year under the current spending

review period. The four year funding settlement that was put forward and agreed by the Authority in October 2016, assumed a 1.99% increase in Council Tax precept year on year.

The Principal Accountant advised Members that if the Authority did not increase the Council Tax precept in 2017/2018, it would be looking at a £349k deficit. If precept levels remained unchanged in 2018/2019, there would be an accumulated deficit of £1.09m and again in 2019/2020 there would be an accumulated deficit of £2.4m.

The Principal Accountant advised that in line with the plans for the four year settlement, assuming 1.99% increases in Council Tax precept year on year, there would be a minor £19k deficit in 2018/2019 and £253k accumulated deficit by 2019/2020. These deficits would be addressed by savings bids through the MTFP process over these years. There were still risks relating to the figures in the revised model with the main one being questions over the continuation of the USAR grant.

RESOLVED –

It is recommended that the Authority be recommended to:

1. Note and have due regard to the report and Statement of the Chief Finance Officer (see section 8 of Annex A).
2. Approve a Council Tax precept of £60.88 for a band D equivalent property (a 1.98% increase from 2016/17 – equal to 2.3p per week and the revenue budget as set out in Appendix 1.
3. Approve the capital programme as set out in Appendix 2.

EX32

SIZE OF THE AUTHORITY AND ITS CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that at the Authority's AGM on 8 June 2016, it was requested that a review of the number of Members on the Fire Authority be reported. Members would note from the report that this request was prescient of one of the key findings of the Adrian Thomas Review which was that authorities should review the size of their membership. This decision was pre-eminently a decision for Members to make and for that reason the report does not advocate a position, rather its focus was to present facts and context.

The Director of Legal and Governance also advised Members that as well as the request to look at the size of the Authority, there was also a request to look at the implications of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) involvement and this was touched on quite lightly in terms of the recommendations of the report, purely to note, what may or may not happen when the relevant parts of the Police and Crime Act come into force. Once the relevant

provisions come into force, the PCC can request a seat as a full voting member on the Authority and in receipt of that request, the Authority was obliged to consider it and either accept the request or give reasons to decline it.

In answer to a Member's question it was confirmed that if a seat were offered to the PCC, this would not affect the number of, or proportionality of, councillor appointments made from across the two constituent councils.

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the proposed revised Code of Conduct Complaints procedure dispensed with the need to constitute and populate two subcommittees each of three Members as required under the current process in order to determine complaints and appeals. The proposed procedure was based on the procedure adopted by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority which had been in place since the Localism Act in 2011 permitted locally determined arrangements.

The Director of Legal and Governance also advised Members that if the PCC was to become a Member of the Authority, the Policing and Crime Bill amends the Localism Act 2011 so that the Authority must include in its Code of Conduct Procedure arrangements for allegations against the PCC to be referred to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel and for dealing with any resulting report made to the Authority by that Panel.

RESOLVED-

That the Authority be recommended to resolve that:

1. The Authority remains a size of 17 Members.
2. The Procedure for the handling of allegations under the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members (Annex C) be adopted.
3. It be noted that the Policing and Crime Bill will require the Authority at a future meeting:
 - a. If a request is received from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner to attend, speak and vote at Authority meetings as if a Member of the Authority, to:
 - i. consider the request, and
 - ii. give reasons for their decision to agree to or refuse the request.
 - b. to revise its Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure if the Thames Valley Police Crime Commissioner were to become a Member of the Authority.

EX33

EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME (ESMCP)

The Head of Service Development advised Members that this report was to provide a further update regarding the national

status of the programme and the impact on the regional and local transition. The Central Programme Board had recently announced a series of delays to the project, initially slipping by three months, now extended to six months. The resulting compression of the timeframe allowed for the testing and assurance process, was a concern, as they were still working to a deadline of 31 December 2019 for complete project completion.

The Head of Service Development advised Members that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had recently reviewed the Programme following the publication of the National Audit Office (NAO) report. The report was published on 25 January 2017 and the main findings were in line with the NAO report in that the risks of project overrun had not been fully assessed or budgeted for. The PAC had issued a recall inquiry for 1 February 2017 calling senior civil servants on the project to provide further evidence.

The Head of Service Development advised Members that since authoring the document the Central Programme Team had announced funding arrangements for much of the technical works such as control room upgrades and ICT security upgrades. It was also announced that funding for PSN compliance had been assured, but shortly after this announcement, the Authority received notification of the very welcome decision from Government Digital Services (GDS), that PSN wouldn't be required to access the ESN.

After completion of a tender process, Mott Macdonald had been appointed by the South Central Region to provide Programme Management for the five fire services involved.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report be noted.

EX34

APPRENTICESHIP PILOT

The Head of Human Resources updated Members on the current apprenticeship pilot. The twenty two firefighter apprentices had joined their stations in October (having been in training since August) and the feedback from station personnel was excellent. Twenty one had reached and maintained the required standard and had successfully completed their probation period. Equally, the four support staff apprentices were also doing well. The positivity surrounding the apprenticeship programme from all staff across the organisation was evident and the momentum continued with a plan to recruit at least two more support staff apprentices this financial year.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that on Friday 20 January 2017 the Government published its long awaited response to the consultation on public sector apprenticeship targets. The public sector target had been placed at 2.3% new starts each year based on the headcount of employees. For BMKFA for 2017/2018 this was estimated to be twelve new start apprenticeships, depending on headcount at the time.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that the Apprenticeship Levy would be introduced on 6 April 2017, all employers with a pay bill of £3m would be required to pay the levy. The levy would be charged at the rate of 0.5% of total pay bill. For the Authority this equated to a payment of £60k. Levy contributions were to be collated via PAYE and would be collected from April 2017.

The Head of Human Resources also advised Members that following the success of the familiarisation days held as part of the recruitment campaign for operational apprentices last year, the Authority was planning to hold more this year so that when there was an operational apprentice recruitment window (probably not before 2018) there was a pool of interested candidates who understand the role and physical requirements. This initiative also aimed to assist with improving diversity of the application pool. The scoping of an On-Call Firefighter Apprenticeship programme had been deferred to align better with the on-call proposition and estimated timings for this was summer 2017. This would allow resources to concentrate on the embedding and management of the support staff and whole-time firefighter apprenticeship programme.

J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), L Swift (Director of People and Organisational Development), D Sutherland (Director of Finance and Assets), M Hemming (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), P Holland (Head of Service Transformation), M Stevens (Principal Accountant), J Parsons (Head of Service Development) and F Pearson (Communication and Consultation Manager) left the meeting.

EX35

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT BOARD REMUNERATION AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2016 AND ANNUAL REPORT ON THE EMPLOYEE BONUS SCHEME

The Committee considered the report and appendices, details of which were noted in the confidential/exempt minutes.

RESOLVED:

It was recommended that:

1. a financial recognition of achievements to the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive through a bonus payment be approved.
2. the level of bonus payment to the Chief Fire Officer be agreed.
3. an amount of funds to be allocated to other members of the SMB by the Chief Fire Officer based on individual performance reviews be agreed.
4. The recommendation made in the independent review to cease Private Health cover for SMB Members be noted.

5. The summary of the awards made in 2015/16 under the Authority's Employee Bonus Scheme set out at Appendix 2 be noted.

EX36

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 15 March 2017 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.42AM.