

Minutes of the meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 12 JULY 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillors Carroll, Lambert, McCall, McDonald, Reed, Sullivan and Walters MBE (part)

Officers: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Chief Operating Officer), L Swift (Director of People and Organisational Development), D Sutherland (Director of Finance and Assets), M Stevens (Principal Accountant), K McCafferty (Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development), J Parsons (Head of Service Development), S Wells (Head of Operational Training and Assurance), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), G Barry (Information Governance and Compliance Manager), M Ridder (Employee Relations and Engagement Manager), F Pearson (Communication and Consultation Manger), A Bamford (Health and Safety Technician), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillor Marland

EX01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Democratic Services Officer presiding)

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Reed be elected Chairman of the Committee for 2017/18.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Reed be elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2017/18

EX02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was moved and seconded that Councillor McDonald be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2017/18

RESOLVED -

That Councillor McDonald be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for 2017/18

EX03 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 15 March 2017, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX04 PAY CLAIM 2017 – NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL (NJC) OFFER TO FIREFIGHTERS

The Chairman advised Members that the reason for this late urgent item was that on 1 July 2017 the Employers' side of the National Joint Council (NJC) sent an offer letter to the General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The offer was in two stages, the first stage being to immediately apply a 2% increase on basic pay across the board on the basis this would allow time

to reach a permanent agreement that can meet both parties' aspirations. The second stage of the offer was a further 3% with effect from 1 April 2018 as part of the 2017 settlement. The critical element of the second stage offer was that it was wholly reliant on governments across the UK providing the funding. The stage 1 offer, however, could have significant ramifications upon the Authority's current medium term financial plan.

The Chairman also advised the Committee that he had written to all the Members of Parliament for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes to ask for their support and to ask them to lobby Government on the Authority's behalf. To date the Authority had received two responses which were both very supportive. The purpose of this report was to get Members' views on how they would wish to take this matter forward.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Authority was part of the National Joint Council (NJC) and part of this was where the Employers (a group of cross party Councillors) meet with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to agree pay deals. The issue longer term was the pay volatility now being put into the Authority's planning process.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that in the 2015 Budget, the Government identified that public sector pay should be capped at 1% through to 2020. The Authority had an efficiency plan based on the fact that it would raise council tax 1.99% and that the public sector pay within this organisation would rise by a maximum of 1% all the way through to 2020. The issues that this pay offer raises were more wide ranging than just the 1% pay rise. The only way the Authority can offset this was by having an increased grant from Government or by raising council tax above the 2% limit. For the Authority to raised council tax above the 2% limit there would need to be a relaxation of the referendum limit.

The Chief Fire Officer was of the opinion that the best way the Authority could control its funding was through local taxation. 70% of the Authority's funding was through council tax and he felt that would be the best way to secure the long term financial future. The only other option in terms of pay increases was to look at the service provision within the Authority's area. Most Authorities in reaction to austerity had closed fire stations and removed fire engines. This service had planned well over the last seven years and had made extensive changes to how it operated. This had resulted in the service maintaining the number of fire stations and number of fire engines available to respond in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, but there was a limit as to how much further the organisation could be stretched, and without an increase in funding, either through Government or council tax, Members would have to look at some form of reallocation of resources in terms of fire stations and fire engines. This Authority would have absorbed a reduction in Government grant from 2013–2020 of £4.5 million (66%) and had reduced its headcount of frontline firefighters from 555 to

368. It was down to the goodwill of staff that it had managed to do this without closing a fire station, removing fire engines or making any firefighter compulsory redundant.

A Member asked that a third option be considered which was to have a referendum to ask the public if they supported an increase in firefighters pay.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this was another option. Members would need to agree there should be a lobby to Government to MP's to look to remove the referendum limit in the first instance and if that was a no, then Members could opt for a referendum.

Members were in agreement that the local MP's should be contacted and asked to support the removal of the current referendum limit or increasing the level to enable this Authority to plan more effectively and to ensure it can continue to provide the best possible service to its community.

A Member asked a question regarding the projection of council tax over the coming years and was advised that the additional savings required from the Authority would be in the order of £1.2m. The 1% council tax rise raised about £180k.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the FBU was recommending to its Members that they reject the offer. The FBU would be giving a response to the NJC on the 24 July 2017.

The Chairman moved the following recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Carroll:

'That that the report be noted and supported and that the seven Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Members of Parliament be written to, supporting a pay increase in excess of 1% and to remove or raise the referendum limit for Fire Authorities only'

On being put to a vote it was:

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted and supported and that the seven Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Members of Parliament be written to, supporting a pay increase in excess of 1% and to remove or raise the referendum limit for Fire Authorities only.

EX05

BUDGET MONITORING PERFORMANCE AND DEBT MANAGEMENT APRIL 2016 – MARCH 2017 (PROVISIONAL OUTTURN)

The Lead Member for Finance, IT and Procurement advised Members that this report presented the provisional revenue and capital outturn position and debt management performance to 31 March 2017. The provisional outturn figure for the year was an underspend of £871k.

The Principal Accountant advised the Committee that the £871k year-end underspend boosts the Authority's general fund to £3.035m, which was above the risk assessed level of £2m. This

would contribute to the possibility of transferring £900k to the Revenue Contributions to Capital Outlay (RCCO) Reserve. This would provide future investment for property, vehicles and equipment. In addition to this, the Authority could create a new training reserve of £85k, which would facilitate the upskilling of all current and future on-call firefighters. The sprinkler reserve would also be topped up with £50k, this would transfer the remaining unspent budget from 2016/17 so that it was available to use in future years.

RESOLVED –

1. That the provisional outturn forecast for the Fire Authority as at 31 March 2017 be noted.
2. That the recommended transfers to reserves set-out in the Executive Summary be approved.
3. That the slippage of £13,541k on the capital programme be approved to be carried forward into 2017/18.
4. That delegated authority be given to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance to authorise any late changes to the movements in reserves and capital slippage amounts resulting from accounting adjustments needing to be made during the year-end closedown process.
5. That should any changes to the amounts referred to above be required, the Chief Finance Officer be requested to report these to Members at the next available meeting.

EX06

2015-20 CORPORATE PLAN: MID-TERM REVIEW & REFRESH

The Head of Service Development advised Members that this plan was first agreed in 2015 and was designed to deliver the Public Safety Plan (PSP) 2015-2020. The purpose of this approach was to ensure that a focused delivery of the PSP was achieved through having clear strategic objectives. These were underpinned by three strategic enablers which were designed to also assist managers and staff in identifying tasks that could be linked through department plans and personnel objectives and appraisals.

The Head of Service Development advised Members that the Authority was now halfway through delivering this plan and had undertaken a detailed review of progress. This report showed tasks that had been completed, rescheduled or removed from the plan. The amendments to the plan reflect changes to the operating context such as the introduction of the duty to collaborate. The four strategic objectives and three strategic enablers had been kept as they were. The most significant change from the original plan had been the approach to operational resourcing.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that the plan was approved by the Fire Authority back in June 2015. The

purpose of the report was to update Members on progress with the delivery of the plan and proposed updates and revisions to the current plan both to reflect progress made to date and changes to the Authority's operating context that have occurred since the plan was originally formulated and approved. Alongside the Public Safety Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan, the Corporate Plan sets out how the strategic risks facing the Authority over the three year period to March 2020 would be managed.

A Member asked why the 'no strike' clause was included in the new employment proposition and was advised that everybody had a right to strike, however a no strike agreement was linked to a non-pensionable discretionary annual payment for providing business continuity.

A Member asked why the Blue Light Hub tender process was being re-run and was advised that there were no compliant bids within the first tender exercise.

A Member asked how often the plan comes to the Executive Committee for review and was advised that it came at conception, midterm and when completed. The balanced scorecard was reported regularly to the Overview and Audit Committee and then reported to the Fire Authority.

Members discussed whether they wanted to receive a review yearly, but as most of the activity was regularly reported to the Executive Committee, it was decided to leave it as it was.

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress achieved with the delivery of the 2015-20 Corporate Plan during the first two years to March 2017 be noted.
2. That the updated 2015-20 Corporate Plan be recommended to the Authority for approval.

EX07

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH COLLABORATIVE TENDER

The Lead Member for People and Equality and Diversity introduced the report and advised the Committee that this was a good news story and was consistent with the Authority's duty to collaborate.

The Director of People and Organisation Development advised Members that this also goes beyond Thames Valley collaboration and includes Northamptonshire. Occupational Health was seen as part of the normal human resources service, but the Authority saw it as part of the strategic aim regarding optimising the contribution and wellbeing of its people. It was part of the employment proposition offered to staff when they join the Authority.

The Employee Relations and Engagement Manager advised Members that the Occupational Health (OH) Contract for OH Services and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was part of a sub contract arrangement with Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) and in place since 2013. With the contractual arrangement coming to an end in September 2016, this created an opportunity to consider new suppliers and to improve the OH service through new collaborative arrangements.

The Employee Relations and Engagement Manager advised Members that the creation of the tender and subsequent contract were collaborative arrangements between Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS), Northampton Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS). Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) were initially involved in the collaborative tender process, however in June 2016, decided to withdraw.

The Employee Relations and Engagement Manager advised Members that the contract contains the addition of preventative health and well-being initiatives. This was not part of the previous provision under the old contract. With the growth in mental health issues and associated absence nationally, the programme would commence with mental health initiatives. In addition, the Authority's existing employee demographics were likely to be further impacted by recent pension changes creating an ageing workforce risk, therefore, the programme would contain initiatives to mitigate the risk of claims through ill health and were intended to optimise employee contribution by keeping happy and healthy in work.

A Member asked if the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which was part of the sub contract with Buckinghamshire County Council had been transferred to the new arrangements and was advised that it had.

A Member asked what the name of the new Employee Assistance Programme was and was advised that it was Workplace Wellness.

RESOLVED –

That the positive outcomes of this initiative be noted.

EX08

STRATEGIC TRAINING AND DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP

The Lead Member for People and Equality and Diversity introduced the report and advised the Committee that this builds on the agreement the Authority had with the Fire Service College.

The Head of Operational Training and Assurance advised Members that this report was being presented in order to provide an overview of the notable benefits that have been realised through the continuation of the training and delivery partnership agreement between the Authority and the Fire Service College. There was a contractual agreement in place with the Fire Service College for an initial three year period which ensures our

operational staff continue to receive the best training possible, whilst at the same time providing value for money to local taxpayers. It enables the Authority's staff to undertake in a credible and realistic environment operational competencies and for those competencies to be subjected to independent scrutiny.

One key feature of the agreement with the Fire Service College which makes it cost effective to the tax payer, was that the Fire Service College would use the Authority's staff to deliver their own courses to national and international delegates and the Authority would receive training credits to offset the cost of its own training.

The independent scrutiny regarding the performance of both the Authority's Area Trainers and operation staff during the validation exercises, would also provide assurance that maintenance of skills training on stations remains effective and the associated occupational risks to our operational staff were being appropriately managed.

The Chairman advised that a visit to the Fire Service College for Members would be arranged and that Members would find the visit very beneficial.

A Member asked if there was a conflict of interest by the Authority providing trainers for the Fire Service College and was advised that the Authority's staff were overseen and validated by an external validator.

A Member asked if the 30 day termination clause in the contract, was two way and was advised that it was and this also protected the Authority.

RESOLVED –

1. That the enhanced benefits that have again been realised through the 2016/17 training and delivery partnership, principally those opportunities provided to our operational staff with regard to being able to train and exercise in realistic and challenging environments be acknowledged.
2. That the commencement of a new three year contract with the Fire Service College (Capita) that safeguards our ability to effectively deliver key elements of operational training be noted.

EX09

EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME (ESMCP)

The Head of Service Development, for the benefit of new Members who may be unfamiliar with this programme, provided some background information. The project was looking to replace the Airwave Communication System. This current system uses early generation mobile phone technology to provide radio communications between emergency services and their individual control rooms.

The Head of Service Development advised Members that in 2010 the ESMCP commenced to replace airwave with a cheaper system that would improve interoperability and the use of data technology through latest generation mobile phone technology. The programme had experienced a number of slippages. It has also recently been scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee which had resulted in the programme being reassessed and it was awaiting a new timeline to take it through to transition.

The Head of Service Development advised Members that the Authority was part of a collaborative approach based on the South Central Ambulance service area which incorporates Thames Valley Police and a number of fire and rescue services including Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

EX10

VERBAL UPDATE FOLLOWING THE GRENFELL TOWER INCIDENT

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that as they were aware this tragic incident was still dominating the news for many reasons. He wanted to give Members some assurance from a Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes perspective as to where the Authority was, and our response to the awful event that happened. Nationally as this began to unfold there was a lot of involvement from all Government departments, so nationally the National Fire Chiefs Council set up a central coordination group. Any information coming from Government went into the central coordination group and then was distributed out to all the individual fire and rescues services.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that locally a Thames Valley Group was established to coordinate activities across the Thames Valley, along with managing resources and requests for information from the centre. The Authority's operational crews and Inspecting Officers were visiting high-rise premises on a risk-assessed basis to offer assurance and to review statutory compliance whilst working with local Authorities and Housing Associations.

The Authority had been continuing to work with partners but had used the event to consider new ways of collaborating e.g. through the Bucks Safeguarding Adults Board, a task and finish fire group had been established to share communications, information, training and awareness sessions. Whilst this would benefit the current challenges, there were also opportunities to work closer and more effectively in the future. Safety and reassurance messages had been agreed across the local public sector and many agencies were using Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) information to inform the public. Posters

had been placed in all high-rise buildings telling residents to call BFRS should they be concerned about fire safety arrangements. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Authority had hosted a cross-sector national sprinkler conference to highlight the benefits of sprinklers in May 2017 and had also hosted a cross-sector national conference on passive fire safety to highlight the issues with maintaining compartmentation in buildings.

A Member asked how tall the highest high rise building in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes was and was advised that it was 14 floors high.

A Member asked a question regarding a recent story published in a Milton Keynes newspaper regarding a high rise building in Milton Keynes called Stephenson House and was advised that the improvement notice was in relation to the fire alarm system. Protection Officers who had visited the building were comfortable there was no risk to life, but an upgrade of the fire alarm system was required. It was not in relation to the cladding or any other specific passive fire protection measures within the building.

(Councillor Walters MBE left the meeting)

EX11

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 20 September 2017 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.05PM.