

Minutes of the meeting of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2016 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillors Brunning, Busby (Chairman), Carroll, Exon, Glover, Gomm, Huxley, Lambert (part), Mallen, Marland (part), Reed, Schofield, Teesdale and Watson

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), N Boustred (Head of Service Delivery), P Holland (Head of Service Transformation), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer), G Wylie (Property Manager), F Pearson (Communication and Consultation Manager), A McCallum (Executive Assistant to Chief Fire Officer), D Beesley (Administrative Support Manager), J Wolfenden (Firefighter), C Westover (Firefighter), Mark Abinger (Managing Director - Hub Professional Services), J Castle (Principle Architect - Hub Professional Services), R Hicks (Technical Technician - Hub Professional Services) and M Goodwin (Mechanical & Electrical Services - Dunwoody LLP)

Apologies: Councillors Clarke OBE and Wilson

FA17 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 8 June 2016, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman's Announcements had been circulated in advance.

FA19 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

Overview and Audit Committee – 14 September 2016

The Authority considered the recommendations of the Overview and Audit Committee held on 14 September 2016 relating to:

(a) Appointment of External Auditors

The Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee advised Members that this report had been reviewed by the Overview and Audit Committee on 14 September and the recommendation agreed was that the Authority be recommended to appoint an auditor using a sector led body arrangement. It was felt that the Authority would get a better value audit at a lower price from this arrangement.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority join a 'sector led body' arrangement".

(b) Independent Persons

The Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee advised Members that the five individuals named in the recommendations should be appointed as Independent Persons. The five individuals had varied levels of experience

and may be called upon in the coming months or years. There would be a small financial implication as set out in the report received by the Overview and Audit Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. John Jones, Vasco Fernandes, Chris Ensor and Maureen Briggs as Independent Persons be appointed for a period commencing on 19 October 2016 and terminating at Midnight on 31 October 2020; and
2. Chris Fogden be appointed as an Independent Person for a period commencing on 1 July 2017 and terminating at midnight on 31 October 2020.

FA20

2017-18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT: TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

The Chairman advised Members that this response was very detailed and was seeking clarity on fire and rescue authorities in the lower quartile being allowed to raise council tax by less than 2% or up to and including £5, whichever is the higher.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that although there were a lot of questions in the consultation, the Authority was only responding to two. Most of the questions were very technical and referred to business rates arrangements and retention. There were two key questions for the Authority, the first one was around guaranteed funding.

Members would be aware that they approved the Efficiency Plan which guarantees the Authority's Revenue Support Grant for the next four years. One of the Authority's responses was that the Authority urges the Government to consider guaranteeing the Fire Revenue Grant for four years rather than year by year which it does at present.

The main question was question three regarding the council tax referendum. Historically the Authority had been capped at 1.99%. The consultation was slightly ambiguous as there was no specific mention of fire and rescue authorities, but there was a freedom for lower quartile police and crime commissioners to raise council tax by up to £5, and also for district councils and flexibilities for county council's adult social care to increase council tax by an extra 1.99%. The Authority was potentially asking the Government for the freedom to increase up to £5 as a lower quartile fire and rescue authority. This did not necessarily mean the Authority would take the increase, but to ask the Government to consider the option which would give the Authority more flexibility when it came to setting the budget in February 2017.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that if the £5 increase were an option, it would not be put in reserves, but would be put into plans on how the Authority could improve its service to the community.

Councillor Watson asked if other fire and rescue authorities would be asking the same and was advised that the understanding was that they would.

RESOLVED –

That the proposed response to the consultation be approved.

The Chairman advised Members that before the public and press were excluded a presentation would be given on the proposed Blue Light Hub.

Councillor Marland declared an interest as a Director of the Milton Keynes

Development Partnership Board which owns the land.

The Property Manager introduced the team from the Hub Professional Services, who showed Members a presentation of the design, specification, procurement and operations of the building and how the property team would be able to manage the building after completion.

FA21

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED -

By virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as the annex to the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of the Authority; and on these grounds it is considered the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Communication and Consultation Manager, Executive Assistant to Chief Fire Officer, Administration Support Manager and the two Firefighters left the meeting.

(Councillor Marland left the meeting)

(Councillor Lambert joined the meeting).

FA22

BLUE LIGHT HUB FOR MILTON KEYNES

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report was about the Blue Light Hub. There were a couple of key pieces of information that he wanted to advise Members. Firstly regarding South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS). The Director of Finance and Assets had been in constant touch with his opposite number and the latest position was that the SCAS Trust Board met last month and discussed the proposal and at its next meeting on 30 November a decision would be made.

The Director of Finance and Assets also advised Members that there were no changes to the cost options set out in Annex 2. The Option 1 costs remained the same and showed how the project would be funded. The report should reassure Members of the affordability of the project. All the options were affordable but the dilemma today was whether SCAS would be joining the project or not. The decision was whether to go with Option 1, but if SCAS decided not to be included does the Authority go with Option 2 or 3. If SCAS didn't come on board and the Authority choose Option 2 there would be an increased funding requirement, but this option should still remained affordable.

Members also needed to decide whether the Authority should go ahead and build the second floor. In the report it gave the benefits of building the second floor not just for the Authority as an organisation, but for Milton Keynes as a whole. The second floor could be used for a number of requirements including community use, commercial use, other public sector services, a 'growth' space for any of the blue light hub services, or a mixture of any of the above. The return on investment would be worth the marginal cost of the build.

In light of his concerns about the timing of the earliest ratification by the SCAS Board of SCAS's intentions, the Director of Finance and Assets revised his recommendation. On consideration of the revised recommendation it was:

RESOLVED -

That the construction of a complex comprising Ground, 1st and 2nd Floor at the West Ashland site, housing all 3 blue light services in line with the estimated costs and funding set out in Annex 2 (exempt from publication) be approved on the proviso of an irrevocable commitment from SCAS to its capital contribution prior to 2 December 2016.

The Communication and Consultation Manager, Executive Assistant to Chief Fire Officer, Administration Support Manager and two Firefighters re-joined the meeting.

FA22

A UNITARY COUNCIL FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AUTHORITY

The Chairman advised Members that on the 22 September 2016 Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) approved a draft business case for the establishment of a single unitary council for Buckinghamshire to replace the existing two tier county and district structure and this report details the pros and cons of the proposal for the Authority.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this report came about after a general monitoring of the wider world of local Government both locally and nationally. There was also mention in the report of the parallel study by the four Buckinghamshire districts that was published last week. The general feeling was that the risks and issues that are likely to arise would be similar in nature but different in magnitude. It was very much a preliminary assessment. The report only considered the risks on behalf of the Authority.

In terms of the current risks that arose, most of those would occur during the transition period and whether it followed the blueprint that had been set out. If it was to go ahead, the Authority would appoint a lead officer to the transition programme, to represent the Authority's interest.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised that in terms of the benefits, these would accrue when it had achieved a new future state. If it was to go for a single unitary model, there would only be one authority rather than the present configuration of five. In terms of the Authority's own view, yes there were risks for the transition period, but they were manageable and could be mitigated by good engagement with the transition programme and there could potentially be long term benefits that could be advantageous.

RESOLVED –

1. that the officers' initial assessment of the potential opportunities and risk arising from BCC's proposal (Appendix 1) be noted;
2. that Members acknowledge and recognise the benefits of the proposal.

It was agreed that the Chairman should write to the Secretary of State to convey to him, on behalf of the Authority, the Authority's support for Buckinghamshire County Council's proposals as set out in its business case.

FA23

Date of Next Meeting

The Authority noted that the next meeting of the Fire Authority was to be held on Wednesday 14 December 2016 at 11.00am

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.25PM