

Minutes of the meeting of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2017 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillors Brunning, Busby (Chairman), Carroll, Clarke OBE, Exon, Glover, Gomm, Huxley, Lambert, Mallen (part), McDonald, Reed, Schofield (part), Watson and Wilson

Officers: M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), L Swift (Director of People and Organisational Development) M Hemming (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), F Mansfield (HR Services and Development Manager), N Boustred (Head of Service Delivery), P Holland (Head of Service Transformation), J Parsons (Head of Service Development), M Stevens (Principal Accountant), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), F Pearson (Communications and Consultation Manager), R Priest (Group Commander, Community and Business Safety), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Marland and Teesdale

FA35 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 14 December 2016, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA36 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman's Announcements had been circulated in advance, but the Chairman wanted to bring to Members attention the news that the Chief Fire Officer had been awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal in the New Year's Honours List, and was sure that Members joined him in agreeing it was a tremendous achievement.

One other event the Chairman wanted to elaborate on was the Reform Event which was the opportunity for the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service to outline how he saw the future of the fire and rescue service. In the speech it was reiterated that there would be a dedicated inspection regime for fire and rescue services but there was still no clear decision as to how it would be implemented. Also mentioned in the speech was the duty to cooperate from the Police and Crime Bill, and also the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) being able to produce a business case to take on responsibility for fire and rescue services and for fire and rescue services to cooperate and provide information, if the PCC asked for it. This Authority had a very good relationship with Thames Valley Police, however, if a business case came forward and there was not a consensus, there would be an evaluation panel who would decide if the PCC would take over or not and a recommendation would be made to the Minister.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



The Democratic Services Officer would provide a link to the speech if requested.

The Chairman asked the Head of Service Delivery to give Members a brief update on an incident (explosion and fire in a block of flats) that the Urban Search and Rescue Team had been assisting with in Oxfordshire.

FA37

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES:

Executive Committee – 8 February 2017

The Authority considered the recommendations of the Executive Committee held on 8 February 2017 relating to:

- Size of the Authority and its Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure
- The Prudential Code, Prudential Indicators and the Minimum Revenue Provision
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2017/18 to 2019/20

(a) Size of the Authority and its Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that there had been a very good debate on this at the Executive Committee meeting. To ensure there was no inaccuracy with the data, he felt it was prudent to bring to Members' attention the updated indicative figures of the electorates across the constituent authorities.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Authority remains a size of 17 Members;
2. that the Procedure for the handling of allegations under the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members (Annex C) be adopted;
3. that 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 and Crime Commissioner were to become a Member of the Authority.

(b) The Prudential Code, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision

The Deputy Director of Finance advised Members that the Prudential Code was established to ensure that capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Authority had no plans for further borrowing and was in a slightly over-borrowed position at present. Due to prohibitive penalties the early repayment of borrowing was not an option at this time, but this would be kept under review.

RESOLVED –

That the Prudential Indicators and the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement be approved.

(c) Medium Term Financial Plan 2017/18 to 2019/20

The Lead Member for Finance, IT, Procurement and Control introduced the report and advised Members there were three aspects to this report. The first was to note and have due regard to the report and statement of the Chief Finance Officer, the second was to approve a 1.98% increase in the Council Tax Precept and the third was to approve the capital programme. The Principal Accountant advised Members that the Government was continuing its change in policy. There was no more council tax freeze grant; there was a continuing fall in the revenue support grant and there was an expectation for council tax to increase. This assumption was built into the Authority's four year settlement plan which was approved last October 2016.

The revised Appendix 1 had been updated following confirmation from the billing authorities of the amounts receivable from council tax and business rates. The substantive changes of note were business rates income for 2017/18 had been revised upwards from £4.949m to £5.123m (an increase of £174k). Future years' figures had also been revised upwards in line with this increase. The pay adjustment figure had been increased by £13k, following receipt of the local government pension scheme valuation report, to allow for the slightly higher than expected increase in employer contributions. Also, the use of reserves figure had been reduced by £100k as a lower amount was now required to balance the budget.

The Principal Accountant also advised Members that if the Authority continued with a 1.98% increase in Council Tax Precept in future years, there would be a minor £19k deficit in 18/19 and an accumulated £253k deficit in 19/20. These were deficits that could be addressed through the savings process that was part of the MTFP. Also, even with the 1.98% increase, there were still risks, the main one being the questions over continuation of the Authority's USAR funding.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority:

1. note and have due regard to the report and Statement of the Chief Finance Officer (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.

Details of the recorded vote were set out below:

| | For | Against | Abstained |
|----------|-----|---------|-----------|
| Brunning | ✓ | | |
| Busby | ✓ | | |

| | | | |
|------------|---|--|--|
| Carroll | ✓ | | |
| Clarke OBE | ✓ | | |
| Exon | ✓ | | |
| Glover | ✓ | | |
| Gomm | ✓ | | |
| Huxley | ✓ | | |
| Lambert | ✓ | | |
| Mallen | ✓ | | |
| McDonald | ✓ | | |
| Reed | ✓ | | |
| Schofield | ✓ | | |
| Watson | ✓ | | |
| Wilson | ✓ | | |

FA38

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2017/18

The Lead Member for Finance, IT, Procurement and Control introduced the report and the Deputy Director of Finance advised Members that this was the same strategy as last year, which had performed very effectively. Since the Authority brought Treasury Management in house four years ago it had raised £560k which was approximately £140k per year. Following the Brexit vote the Authority had seen interest rates fall fairly significantly, so there was a bit of a downside risk to the forecast.

At the next Overview and Audit Committee meeting, the Authority's treasury management advisors, Capita, would give a presentation and look at different investment options with Members. Once this debate had taken place, a mid-year review of the strategy would take place if necessary.

A Member asked if it would be possible for the Authority to consider investing with the Churches, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) and was advised that the Authority did hold a money market fund account with them.

RESOLVED –

That the Treasury Management Policy Statement, Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2017/18 be approved.

FA39

PAY POLICY PRINCIPLES AND STATEMENT 2017/18

The Lead Member for Human Resources and Equality and Diversity introduced the report and advised Members that the pay policy was required to be updated each financial year and was therefore being presented today as the 2017/18 Pay Policy for the Authority.

The Director of People and Organisational Development advised Members that the emphasis of the 2017/18 Pay Policy had not changed. The focus was on could the Authority be even more transparent. The policy was also looked at to ensure statements were clear and easy for staff to understand.

The Director of People and Organisational Development advised Members that this year as part of the Authority's duty to collaborate and also as part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed between the three Thames Valley fire and rescue back in June 2015, the Authority had actively looked to collaborate on some of its pay policy options. This would continue going forward, if it was in the interest of the Authority to do so.

The HR Services and Development Manager advised Members that this pay policy was based on the current 2016/17 pay policy and had been updated and minor amendments made where appropriate. The emphasis of the document had not changed. The pay multiples had gone up very slightly due to the pay increases that took place for both Gold and Grey book staff and the highest salary having the larger increase causing the ratio to increase slightly. Also highlighted in the report was the opportunity the Authority had taken over the past year with staff voluntarily adopting terms and conditions outside the grey book, further increasing the Authority's resilience and enhanced and flexible workforce.

The HR Services and Development Manager asked Members to note the introduction of the public sector exit cap of £95,000 that would apply to the Authority later in the year. Also, the introduction of 'claw back' termination payments for departing employees earning £80,000 or more who return to any public sector body within twelve months of receipt of an exit payment. It should also be noted at the Executive Committee meeting last week, it was agreed to remove the Private Medical Insurance scheme within the Authority. The contract would not be renewed in April 2017.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Pay Policy Principles and Statement at Appendix 1 be approved as the Statutory Pay Policy Statement for 2017/18;
2. that the requirement for an in-year review of the Pay Policy Principles and Statement with the introduction of the cap on public sector exit payments be noted.

FA40

DISTRICT COUNCILS' COMBINED ALTERNATIVE SUBMISSION OF A 2 UNITARY MODEL

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this report was a follow up to the one that was presented to the Authority in October 2016, which outlined the potential implications for the Authority arising from the adoption of a single unitary council model for the areas currently administered by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) and the four District Councils, as proposed in the case prepared by BCC and submitted to the Secretary of State in September 2016 for his consideration.

At that time the Authority was aware that the District Councils had commissioned Deloitte to help them prepare an alternative case, full details of which were published on 10 January 2017 and approved for submission to the Secretary of State at special meetings held in parallel by all four District Councils on 16 January 2017. The District Council's case proposed the adoption of a two unitary model informed by the economic geography of the county as an alternative to the single unitary model proposed by BCC.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that the Authority had therefore carried out a preliminary assessment of the potential implications if a two unitary model was adopted, using the same approach agreed for the BCC proposal. The new evaluation was shown at Appendix 1 and also included for reference purposes, at Appendix 2, was the evaluation of the BCC proposal that was presented to the Authority in October 2016.

Members would have seen from the evaluations that the Authority had not sought to express a view as to which of the proposals was likely to be most beneficial in terms of overall outcomes for the public, council tax payers etc., though obviously the Authority had an interest in this alongside other public service stakeholders. The Authority had confined the scope of the evaluation to identifying potential areas of opportunity and risk for the Authority relative to the existing two tier structure albeit that some comparisons were drawn to illustrate the comparative effect on the Authority's operations to the extent that they can be determined from the materials presented.

As with the BCC proposal, the evaluation of the risks and benefits were somewhat speculative and the extent to which they may manifest themselves would depend on the detail and manner in which any changes were implemented.

It was also noted that the proposed re-organisation of itself would not be sufficient either to meet the strategic challenges identified or to put local government finances in Buckinghamshire as a whole onto a sustainable basis for the future and achieving this would also depend on the success of other measures to transform service delivery and stimulate the local economy.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that as with the BCC proposal the Authority's view was that the greatest risks to the Service operationally arises during the transition from the current state to the new two unitary structure, and on balance, a move to a two unitary council structure was likely to be a more complex and therefore risky enterprise from the point of view of maintaining service continuity, than would be the case with a move to a single unitary arrangement, based on the existing BCC organisation and infrastructure.

A Member asked if both reports could be sent to the leaders of all the councils involved (Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, South Bucks District Council, Wycombe District Council and Chiltern District Council) and this was agreed.

RESOLVED –

1. that the officers' initial assessment of the potential opportunities and risk to the Authority arising from the District Councils' proposal (appendix 1) be noted;
2. that the potential benefits of the proposal compared with the current two-tier structure of County and District councils be acknowledged and recognised.

FA41

BLUE LIGHT HUB UPDATE

The Lead Member for Property and Resource Management introduced the report and advised Members that the Hub was a great asset for Milton Keynes.

The Head of Service Transformation advised Members that as they would see at Annex A, the Chief Fire Officer had made a submission to the Milton Keynes Council (MKC) Development Control Committee requesting that it reconsider the section 106 commitment and the letter sets out the reasons why the Authority would like them to do so. The Authority's officers were endeavouring to reduce the commitment to the section 106 as much as it possibly could. The commitment was around £160k for the public art and carbon neutrality contribution.

The planning permission was subject to the section 106 agreement being in place before the permission would be granted, the greatest risk for the Authority was that no decision notice would be issued and the development could not take place.

Members all agreed that the Chief Fire Officer be requested, in consultation with the Chairman, to try and secure the removal or reduction of the planning obligation contributions.

RESOLVED –

1. that the transfer of a sum of up to a maximum of £170,000 from the 16/17 revenue contingency budget to Capital in support of the Blue Light Hub project be approved.
2. that authority be delegated to the Director of Legal and Governance to enter any necessary deeds of agreement to enable the Blue Light Hub development to proceed.

Having been moved by Councillor Reed; and seconded by Councillor Clarke OBE, it was resolved that:

3. the Chief Fire Officer be requested to use his best endeavours in consultation with the Chairman to secure the removal or reduction of the planning obligation contributions.

Councillor Mallen left the meeting.

FA42

UPDATE ON SPRINKLERS

The Head of Service Delivery reminded Members that at the recent workshop held on 16 November 2016 entitled 'Prevention, Protection and the Evolving Role of the Firefighter' there was a discussion around how the Service supports sprinkler installations and how the different types of suppression systems operate. It was agreed to capture this in a report and

also to show some of the footage from a live demonstration that was carried out in 2014 at Chalfont St Peter.

Group Commander Richard Priest showed Members footage of the live demonstration that took place in four bungalows in Chalfont St Peter that were due for demolition. Different suppression systems were utilised to show how they performed against the same scenarios. These were a sprinkler system, a portable mist system, a fixed mist system and one with no suppression system.

Members had agreed in October 2015 that up to £250,000 could be used from Authority reserves to support and promote the installation of sprinklers into the most at risk premises in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. To date, the money had not yet been spent, but there were three potential cases, one was a premises where they had some very vulnerable people in Milton Keynes, another was a care home within Aylesbury for a retrospective fit and the third was a brand new sheltered housing development in the south of Buckinghamshire.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the report be noted.

Councillor Schofield left the meeting.

FA43

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Authority noted that the next meeting of the Fire Authority was to be held on Wednesday 7 June 2017 at 11.00am.

Before closing the meeting the Chairman advised Members that it was his and Councillor Schofield's last Fire Authority meeting as neither were standing in the May elections, although there were an Executive Committee on 10 May 2017. The Chairman thanked everyone for their support over the eight years he had been a Member of the Fire Authority. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.32PM