

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2019 AT 11.00 AM

Present: Councillors Christensen (part), Clare, Clarke OBE, Cranmer, Exon, Glover, Hopkins, Lambert, Marland, McLean, Minns, Roberts (part), 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), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), J Parsons (Head of Service Development), D Norris (Head of Service Delivery), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), A Chart (Health and Safety Manager), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Carroll, Irwin and McCall

6 members of the public.

Councillors Hopkins, Watson and Marland provided tributes following the recent passing of Councillor Kevin Wilson.

A minute's silence was held as a mark of respect for the recent passing of Councillor Kevin Wilson.

FA01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Director of Legal and Governance presiding)

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Clarke OBE be elected Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2019/20.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Clarke OBE be elected Chairman of the Authority for 2019/20.

(Councillor Clarke OBE in the Chair)

FA02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2019/20.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Authority for 2019/20.

FA03 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 13 February 2019, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA04 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 13 February 2019, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA05 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed returning Members, Councillors Douglas McCall and Keith McLean and new Member, Councillor Hannah Minns from Milton Keynes Council to the Authority.

The Chairman thanked the previous Chairman and Vice-Chairman and also the Director of People and Organisational Development and the Head of Service Development, who were both retiring as this would be their last Fire Authority meeting, on behalf of the Fire Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer praised both the Director of People and Organisational Development and the Head of Service Development and wished them both well in their retirements.

Chairman’s Announcements had been circulated in advance.

FA06 MEMBERSHIP OF THE AUTHORITY

The Authority noted that the following Members had been appointed by the Constituent Authorities to serve on the Fire Authority for 2019/20:

Buckinghamshire County Council (11)

Councillors Carroll, Christensen, Clare, Clarke OBE, Cranmer, Glover, Irwin, Lambert, Roberts, Teesdale and Watson

Milton Keynes Council (6)

Councillors Exon, Hopkins, Marland, McCall, McLean and Minns

FA07 COMMITTEE MATTERS

- (a) Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990

The Authority noted that the allocation of seats on the Authority was:

- (i) Conservative Group: 11 seats (64.71%)
- (ii) Liberal Democrat Group: 4 seats (23.53%)
- (iii) Labour Group: 2 seats (11.76%)

- (b) Committee Matters – Committee Appointments

RESOLVED-

That the following Committees be appointed and seats be allocated, as follows:

- (a) Executive Committee (8 members):
 - (i) Conservatives – 5 seats
 - (ii) Liberal Democrats – 2 seats
 - (iii) Labour – 1 seat
- (b) Overview and Audit Committee (9 members):
 - (i) Conservatives – 6 seats
 - (ii) Liberal Democrats – 2 seat
 - (iii) Labour – 1 seat

RESOLVED

1. That the following Members be appointed to the Executive Committee:
Councillors Clarke OBE, Hopkins, Lambert, McCall, McLean, Marland, Roberts and Teesdale in accordance with the Group Leader's wishes.
2. That the following Members be appointed to the Overview and Audit Committee:
Councillors Carroll, Christensen, Clare, Cranmer, Exon, Glover, Irwin, Minns and Watson in accordance with the Group Leader's wishes.

FA08

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Authority considered proposed dates for its meetings and meetings of its committees during 2019/20.

RESOLVED –

1. That meetings of the Authority be held on Wednesday 18 September 2019, 11 December 2019, Wednesday 12 February 2020 and Wednesday 10 June 2020, all at 11 a.m.
2. That meetings of the Executive Committee be held on Wednesday 10 July 2019, Wednesday 16 October 2019, Wednesday 13 November 2019, Wednesday 5 February 2020 and Wednesday 25 March 2020, all at 10 a.m.
3. That meetings of the Overview and Audit Committee be held on Wednesday 17 July 2019, Wednesday 20 November 2019, and Wednesday 11 March 2020, all at 10 a.m.

FA09

APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Authority considered the appointment of representatives to outside bodies:

RESOLVED –

1. That no Member be appointed to attend the Local Government Association Annual Conference.

2. That Councillor Clarke OBE be appointed as the Authority's representative (and Councillor Hopkins as the Standing Deputy) to the Local Government Association Fire Commission.
3. That Councillor Clarke OBE be appointed as the Authority's representative (and Councillor Hopkins as the Standing Deputy) to the Local Government Association Annual Fire Conference.
4. That Councillor Clarke OBE be appointed as the Authority's representative (and Councillor Hopkins as the Standing Deputy) to the Combined Fire Authorities Conference.
5. That Councillors Clarke OBE and Lambert be appointed as the Authority's representatives on the Thames Valley Fire Control Service – Joint Committee.
6. That Councillors Hopkins and Watson be nominated as substitute members on the Thames Valley Fire Control Service – Joint Committee.

FA010

LEAD MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that as they would note on a later agenda item, in February 2019 the Executive Committee directed that a review of the Senior Management Team be undertaken. This review would necessitate a review of reporting lines and responsibilities. The Chairman had agreed with the Democratic Services Officer that her report be withdrawn and that the matter be deferred. The Chairman proposed that the Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer report back to the Authority, at a future meeting, for it to consider options for Lead Member roles and responsibilities.

RESOLVED –

That the appointment of Lead Members roles and responsibilities be deferred to a future meeting.

FA11

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES:

Overview and Audit Committee – 13 March 2019

CIPFA BENCHMARKING REPORT

The Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee introduced the report and advised Members that this report had been brought to the 13 March 2019 Overview and Audit Committee meeting and highlighted the performance of the Service relative to other fire services.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that as part of the budget setting, officer and Member panels were held. One of the challenges put forward was how the Authority knew if it was performing well against other Fire Authorities. In the past the Service had looked at the CIPFA Benchmarking reports internally, but it was agreed they would be presented to the Overview and Audit Committee, who then felt it would be appropriate to share with all Members of the Authority and all staff. It was shared to all staff by way of a Strategic Management Board (SMB) Blog so that staff were aware of how the Authority was performing.

A Member asked why some stations were taken off the run in order to plug gaps in other areas and was that a good use of resources and was advised that the Service operated a flexible resourcing model which was fit

for purpose across the county and was not focussed on specific areas. A range of crewing models were used to support it. The Service used on call firefighters, flexi firefighters who work different duty systems, a bank system and standing resource of whole time firefighters. This was constantly monitored and when necessary, resources were balanced across the county to ensure the appropriate resource was available. This was kept under regular review.

A Member asked if a record was kept of the amount of staff on duty and was advised that yes it was reported twice a day, but outside of the formal reporting it was kept under constant review during the 24 hour cycle.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Authority's resourcing model was unique, but had come about because of the financial position. The Authority had tried to remove the limit on precept last year, and were continuing to lobby government to change the level. The Service was stretched and any assistance that Members could give, in helping remove the precept level, would be of benefit to the Service moving forward.

A Member asked if the Authority should be looking at the issue of attracting more on call firefighters and was advised that this was a national issue of firstly attracting and then retaining on call firefighters, but the service was looking at ways to overcome this.

A Member identified some inconsistencies in the CIPFA report in respect of the way it expressed numbers of incidents in real terms and in percentage terms and as was advised by the Director of Finance and Assets that he would write to Members to clarify the position.

A Member asked if the Authority could charge for some of its services and was advised that it was very limited under the Fire and Rescue Services Act as to what it could charge for. The Authority did have a charging policy for a limited number of services.

A Member asked if the Authority charged for the second time it attended a false automatic fire alarm (AFA) and was advised that although the Localism Act 2011 had introduced a power for the Authority to consult on, and adopt, a policy to introduce charges for persistent false AFAs from non-domestic premises, the Service attended all AFAs but did not charge for them; and that officers would not recommend adopting a charging policy as such false AFA often emanate from public sector premises.

It was agreed at the Chairman's suggestion that the Authority wrote to the Fire Minister, Nick Hurd MP in the name of the three Group Leaders about the funding concerns and stretched capacity faced by the Authority as it was adjacent to London and was expecting significant growth across the Oxford-MK-Cambridge Arc.

(Councillor Roberts left the meeting)

Minute 035 (unapproved) of the Overview and Audit Committee – 13 March 2019

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

FA12

REVISION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS

The Director of Legal and Governance introduced the report and informed Members some of the higher level policies and procedures come to the Authority or its Committees for approval. Some of the responsibilities in the documents were assigned to the Director of People and Organisational

Development and Members would have heard earlier in the meeting some of the structure redesign that was currently being undertaken.

Recommendations one and two were to put in stop gap measures whilst the post of Director of People and Organisational Development was kept vacant by ensuring that the responsibilities were either transferred to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, or to the Head of Human Resources. Recommendation three was intended to create clarity of roles and responsibilities which would address a key finding from the pensions investigation report.

RESOLVED –

1. That the following documents be amended so that references to the Director of People and Organisational Development be deleted and replaced by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer:
 - Equality and Diversity Inclusion Policy
2. That the following documents be amended so that references to the Director of People and Organisational Development be deleted and replaced by the Head of Human Resources:
 - Whistleblowing Procedure
 - Financial Regulations
 - Managing Business Change
3. That the following documents be amended so that references to the Director of People and Organisational Development be deleted:
 - Scheme Manager’s Pension Discretions (Firefighters Pension Scheme 2015)
 - Amendments to the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme 1992 and the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme 2006 (effective 1 July 2013) Discretions
 - Pay Policy Principles and Statement
 - Relocation Assistance Scheme

It being moved and seconded it was RESOLVED:

The Director of Legal and Governance be delegated authority to make any technical changes necessitated by personnel changes, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, to any policies or procedures that ordinarily require the approval of amendments by the Authority or one of its committees.

FA13

2015-20 CORPORATE PLAN: FINAL YEAR REVIEW AND REFRESH

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this was an information item that provided an update on where the Authority was with the delivery of the current five year Corporate Plan which was now well into its final year. The original, and indeed ongoing purpose of the Corporate Plan, was to specify and programme the work needed to reshape the Service as envisaged by the 2015-20 Public Safety Plan.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that an overview of progress made over the first four years of the Corporate Plan was set out at Section 2 of Appendix 1. It focused on what’s been achieved in relation to implementing the larger, more complex and, in some cases, more capital intensive elements of the Plan.

In particular, the Milton Keynes reconfiguration including the new Blue Light Hub at West Ashland, Workforce Reform, Business and Systems Integration programme and other technological advances. Changes to the Authority's operating context, particularly the financial, government policy and legislative contexts were set out in Section 3. As Members would have noted, the financial forecast took the Authority out beyond the lifetime of the current plan and forms part of the context for the next Public Safety and Corporate Plans which would cover the period 2020-25. In particular, Members would see that, based on the current MTFP forecast, the Authority still had significant financial challenges, not least because the current mitigation was effectively based on drawing down reserves.

Section 4 provided an overview of the main updates to the Plan and areas of focus for the final year notably in relation to:

- Collaboration, particularly with the other Thames Valley fire and other blue light services; and,
- the further development operational resourcing via the Development of Operational Resourcing (DoOR) Programme.

Members would also see more detailed updates to individual projects and tasks at Section 7 highlighted in yellow. The following points show how different elements of the plan integrate and align to achieve greater effect. For example:

- the additional resourcing for the Authority's Protection function which leverages its apprenticeship programme in pursuit of Strategic Objective 2; and,
- The Authority's continued commitment to independent assurance of its operational functions and processes alongside its ongoing engagement with the HMICFRS in pursuit of SO4 which would both inform future planning out beyond the lifetime of this current plan.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that regarding future plans, the Authority would be bringing the draft 2020-25 Public Safety Plan to the next Authority meeting on 18 September 2019 where it would be seeking approval to put it out for formal public consultation.

A Member asked when would the current Airwave contract finish and was advised that at present the exact date was still unknown.

The Chairman stated that on reading the report the achievements needed to be recognised, as although there were financial constraints, what had been achieved should be acknowledged.

RESOLVED –

1. That the progress achieved with the delivery of the 2015-20 Corporate Plan during the first four years to March 2019 be noted.
2. That the revision in section 7 of the 2015-20 Corporate Plan be noted.

FA14

THE AUTHORITY'S PEOPLE STRATEGY 2016-2020 ANNUAL UPDATE

The Director of People and Organisational Development introduced the report and advised Members that putting it into context, the Authority invested over 70% of its revenue in its people. The Authority's current People Strategy supported the Public Safety Plan and the Corporate Plan. The aim was to optimise the contribution and the well-being of staff. Since Members approved the Strategy back in 2016, a significant amount of

progress had been made to ensure that the Authority had the right calibre, not just of people, but skills. One of the aims was for the Authority to be in the best possible position to attract and retain talented people against an extremely competitive external background.

The Head of Human Resources gave Members a brief online demonstration, highlighting key points within the People Strategy.

A Member asked how many apprentices the Authority currently had and was advised that there were 64 firefighter apprentices, 8 non-operational apprentices and 10 staff undertaking a Leadership and Management apprenticeship.

A Member asked if the Authority had attended the two job shows that took place in Milton Keynes to promote the Service and its apprenticeships and was advised that yes it had.

A Member asked why the Service was called Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and not Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Service and was advised that the Combination Scheme which established Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority on 1 April 1997, which coincided with the establishment of Milton Keynes Council created Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority, also gave a name to its operational service as Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, or such other name as the Authority may determine.

A Member asked regarding the decrease in average age from 41 to 39 and did the Authority have a long term average age that it was aiming for and was advised that no it didn't, but one of the reasons for highlighting the age reduction was the consequence of not recruiting for the previous 8 or 9 years, the operational workforce in particular was ageing. The decision was taken to recruit apprentices and an age limit was not specified.

(Councillor Christensen left the meeting)

RESOLVED –

That the content of the report be noted.

FA15

WELL-BEING STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of People and Organisational Development introduced the report and advised Members that it dove-tailed well with the People Strategy.

The Health and Safety Manager provided an updated on progress made, emphasising that the implementation of the Well-being Strategy would help to provide a holistic overview of the well-being needs of an employee throughout their career in the fire service.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that the Well-being Group was established in 2017. It was chaired by the Health and Safety Manager and had strong representation from across the Service including representative bodies, the Welfare Officer, Employee Relations Officer, Group Commander Service Delivery and the MIND Mental Health Blue Light Champions.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that the original focus on mental health, following self-assessment against the College of Policing Blue Light Wellbeing Framework, soon became clear that the remit needed

to be broadened to Well-being. The self-assessment led to an action plan to address the areas for improvement and the Well-being Strategy was created. The Well-being strategy was being embedded throughout the Service via well-being roadshows, health and safety updates and various other means of communication.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that a particular focus was mental health first aid. A programme of training for Mental Health First Aiders and Mental Health Champions had been delivered resulting in 19 qualified Mental Health First Aiders and 14 Mental Health Champions from across all sectors of the Service.

Following the work of the Well-being Group in terms of raising awareness of Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD), there had been an increase in the number of debriefs being carried out. Critical Incident Stress Debriefings was the support put in place for operational staff when they had been to traumatic incidents. The Service recognised that over a period of time, the more exposure they had, the more it could affect them psychologically.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that there were a number of initiatives across the service, and one of those being a charity, run by an ex police officer (Cameron Grant Memorial Trust) had produced a number of coasters and cards, free of charge, which had been personalised with the Service's own support information and had been placed in every meeting room and every station across the Service.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that a further funding request had been submitted to deliver Blue Light Trauma Awareness training to all operational staff and to refresh the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing training to current and new facilitators.

A Member asked if bereavement counselling could be included within the Well-being Strategy.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12:52 PM