



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY HELD AT MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL CHAMBER ON WEDNESDAY 16 JUNE 2021 AT 11 AM.

Present: Councillors Bagge, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Christensen, Clarke OBE, Darlington, Exon, Hall, Hopkins, Hussain, Lambert, Marland, McLean, Rankine, Stuchbury, Waite and Walsh

Officers: G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) F Pearson (Communications Manager)
Remotely: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), S Wells (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), S Tuffley (Head of Covid 19 Preparedness and Response), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), P Mould (Group Commander Protection), K Mercer (Station Commander Aylesbury Fire Station & USAR)

Apologies: None

Live Webcast Broadcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

Councillor Hopkins opened the meeting by thanking the Leader and officers of Milton Keynes Council for the use of the Council Chamber and the technicians supporting the meeting.

Councillor Hopkins also welcomed to the Chamber the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, Mr George Anson and congratulated him on his appointment in March 2021.

Councillor Hopkins wished to acknowledge Mr David Tooley, Democratic Reporter, as he understood this would be his last meeting; and to endorse the Chairman's announcement regarding Fraser Pearson.

To comply with social distancing guidelines, senior officers including Chief Fire Officer Jason Thelwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mick Osborne and Chief Finance Officer Mark Hemming were joining the meeting remotely via Microsoft Teams.

FA01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Councillor Hopkins in the Chair)

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Clarke OBE be elected Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Clarke OBE be elected Chairman of the Authority for 2021/22.

(Councillor Clarke OBE in the Chair)

Councillor Clarke OBE thanked Members for re-electing her.

FA02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Authority for 2021/22.

FA03 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 17 February 2021, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA04 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Chapple declared he was in receipt of a firefighter's pension.

FA05 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that:

She wished to thank former Members Andrew Cole, Wendy Mallen, Douglas McCall, Tim Mills, Hannah Minns and Liz Walsh for their service on the Authority; and to welcome the four new Members from Buckinghamshire Council, Ralph Bagge, Bill Chapple OBE, Ashley Waite, and Matthew Walsh; and two new Members from Milton Keynes Council, Emily Darlington and Allan Rankine.

The Service was currently undergoing its third inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The current inspection started on 24 May 2021 and is being undertaken virtually, (due to Covid-19 restrictions) over several weeks, concluding in early July. I look forward to receiving our inspection report, which will be published in the Autumn.

After over 25 years in the public sector, Fraser Pearson, Communications Manager is retiring from Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. Fraser joined from Buckinghamshire County Council, in 2005, when the majority of news was found in print and Facebook had just launched. During his time he has led on getting our safety messages out to the community and promoting the work of the service, from news articles to Twitter posts, with national media often picking up our messages. Fraser's social media posts regularly reach over 20,000 people across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and beyond. On behalf of the Authority, I would like to thank Fraser for his dedicated service to Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service.

The past couple of weeks have seen the Service attend a number of challenging incidents that despite the repeated endeavours of our operational crews, sadly resulted in the tragic deaths of two young males. During the recent Bank Holiday Monday, operational crews were mobilised in the afternoon, to separate water related incidents the first being at Abbotsbrook, Bourne End and the second in Olney. Both incidents involved young males entering the water, which on each occasion attracted a multi-agency response and the deployment of our specialist water rescue teams from Beaconsfield and Newport Pagnell respectively.

The Service works tirelessly to reduce the number of these incidents, through simple safety messaging and supporting the national water safety campaigns, such as the recent National Fire Chiefs Council 'Be Water Aware' campaign, that took place between the 26 April – 2 May 2021. Following these dreadful incidents, water safety messages were again reiterated through our various media platforms, receiving 25,000 views and being shared on 250 occasions.

A further notable incident occurred at the Cressex Business Park, High Wycombe, which involved an industrial property fire. The incident required an operational response from all three fire and rescue services within the Thames Valley, with ten pumps and two aerial appliances required to bring about its safe and controlled resolution. The fire developed extremely quickly, which meant the chances of saving the effected industrial units were unlikely. Therefore, firefighting operations concentrated on mitigating the spread of fire to adjacent premises. Perhaps unsurprisingly this incident generated significant interest with more than 4,000 visits to the page about the incident on the BFRS website and 17,000 website visits overall (more than seven times our daily average).

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 2021/22:

Buckinghamshire Council (11)

Councillors Bagge, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Christensen, Clarke OBE, Hall, Hussain, Lambert, Stuchbury, Waite and Walsh

Milton Keynes Council (6)

Councillors Darlington, Exon, Hopkins, Marland, McLean and Rankine

FA07

COMMITTEE MATTERS

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

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

(i) Conservative Group:	11 seats	(64.70%)
(ii) Liberal Democrat Group:	3 seats	(17.65%)
(iii) Labour Group:	3 seats	(17.65%)

- (b) Committee Matters – Committee Appointments

RESOLVED –

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

- (a) Executive Committee (8 Members):

- (i) Conservative – 5 seats
- (ii) Liberal Democrats – 2 seats
- (iii) Labour – 1 seat

- (b) Overview and Audit Committee (9 Members):

- (i) Conservative – 6 seats
- (ii) Liberal Democrats – 1 seat
- (iii) Labour – 2 seats

RESOLVED –

1. That the following Members be appointed to the Executive Committee:

Councillors Christensen, Clarke OBE, Hall, Hopkins, Lambert, Marland, McLean and Walsh in accordance with the Group Leaders wishes.

2. That the following Members be appointed to the Overview and Audit Committee:

Councillors Bagge, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Darlington, Exon, Hussain, Rankine, Stuchbury and Waite in accordance with the Group Leaders wishes.

(c) **Standing Orders for the Authority and its Committees**

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that at a meeting of the Executive Committee in March 2021, the Chairman agreed to an amendment of the procedural standing orders. The proposed amendment introduced an opportunity for the Chairman to invite officers to provide updates on actions committed from proceeding meetings. Also, the opportunity had been taken to delete from the agenda order receiving the minutes of the standing committees.

RESOLVED –

That the amendments to the Standing Orders for the Authority and its Committees be approved.

FA08 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Authority considered proposed dates for its meetings and meetings of its committees during 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

1. That meetings of the Authority be held on Wednesday 13 October 2021, Wednesday 8 December 2021, Wednesday 16 February 2022 and Wednesday 15 June 2022, all at 11 am.
2. That meetings of the Executive Committee be held on Wednesday 14 July 2021, Wednesday 15 September 2021, Wednesday 17 November 2021, Wednesday 9 February 2022 and Wednesday 23 March 2022, all at 10 am.
3. That meetings of the Overview and Audit Committee be held on Wednesday 21 July 2021, Wednesday 10 November 2021 and Wednesday 16 March 2022, all at 10am.

FA09 APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Authority considered the appointment of representatives to outside bodies having received nominations which were seconded:

RESOLVED –

1. That Councillors Clarke OBE and Hopkins 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 Councillors Clarke OBE and Hopkins be appointed as the Authority's representatives to the Local Government Association Annual Fire Conference.
4. That Councillors Clarke OBE and Hopkins be appointed as the Authority's representatives 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 Carroll and Hopkins be nominated as substitute members of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee.

FA10 LEAD MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

That Members be appointed as Lead Members for 2021/22 as follows having received nominations which were seconded:

RESOLVED –

Responsibility	Lead Member
Service Delivery, Protection and Collaboration	Councillor Clarke OBE
People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance	Councillor Lambert
Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT	Councillor Hopkins
Health and Safety and Corporate Risk	Councillor McLean

FA11 2020-2025 CORPORATE PLAN: YEAR 1 PROGRESS REVIEW AND UPDATE

The Chairman advised Members that this was a review of progress made over the first year of the five-year Corporate Plan that was approved at the Annual Meeting in June last year. In light of the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, officers had also taken the opportunity to refresh and streamline the programme of activities that would be undertaken over the remaining four years of the plan in pursuit of the Strategic Objectives.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that for each item of the original plan approved last year, the report showed what had been completed during the first year of the plan and also provided a status report for the remaining items using the RAG system. Of the 47 projects and workstreams set out in the plan, 12 had been completed or were now embedded as 'business as usual', 11 were amber, which meant they were slightly behind but recoverable and in some instances this was due to the impact of Covid-19. 20 were green and 4 were without a RAG status marked N/A as they were not due to commence during the first year of the plan. There was an error at item SE2.1, it was marked green but colour coded amber.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised that the last part of appendix 2 reported on the outcome of the streamlining exercise carried out by the Senior Management Team, consolidating items that were thematically similar and/or had strong interdependencies. The biggest change related to ongoing work on the evaluation of risk in the community, operational resourcing, the people related themes and property had been consolidated into a single item. The

document had also been updated to reflect the latest financial projections that were reported to the Authority in February 2021.

In addition, as Members were aware, the Service was currently under inspection by HMICFRS. This was the second full inspection of the Service, the first having been carried out in 2019 and Members would have seen that the Corporate Plan included 'areas for improvement' identified by the Inspectorate in their report on their findings. The findings of the current inspection should be available towards the end of the year, and these would be reviewed, and the plan potentially update again.

A Member asked that because of the current financial situation, if it was the plan to bring forward holding a referendum or would the Authority be looking at other means of raising finances. He was advised by the Director of Finance and Assets that although it was a challenging financial outlook since the budget was set in February 2021, the Authority had received some positive financial news around business rates projections. The plan was to bring an update to Members on the annual financial strategy over the coming months to look at potential options for savings, whether the Authority chooses to borrow and other options available. As advised by the Chairman, the Authority continued to lobby Government to increase the referendum limit, but as Members would recall, a referendum reserve was agreed, so there was money set aside if it was needed.

A Member asked if the environmental and global impact could be added to the Corporate Plan and was advised that this area was in the Public Safety Plan and addresses issues around climate under civil contingencies. Although flooding wasn't specifically referenced in the Corporate Plan, there were regular reviews of the Authority's capabilities in light of the risks that were faced.

A Member was pleased to see under 'SE3.1 Civil emergencies' a mention of electric vehicles and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that infrastructure for electric vehicle charging was already in place at the Blue Light hub and the service was also looking at other sites. The technology was not there yet for fire appliances, but the Authority was certainly looking at the rest of the fleet.

RESOLVED –

That the 2020-2025 Corporate Plan Progress Review and Update be approved.

FA12

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OBJECTIVES 2020-2025 YEAR ONE UPDATE

The Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance introduced the report and advised Members that the service took its responsibility for people, equality and diversity and assurance very seriously; and this work had been undertaken over a number of years both internally and collaboratively with other local fire and rescue services and nationally with other fire related

organisations. The strategic enablers within the Corporate Plan, show some of the projects and their rag status.

As previously mentioned, the last HMICFRS inspection rating for People was good. The Lead Member thanked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for his strategic guidance, the Head of Human Resources and the members of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group. All members of the EDI group were volunteers from the organisation, who had put thought into how the Service could reflect the needs and wants not only of its own staff, but also that of the communities it served.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that in June 2020 the Authority approved the overarching EDI Objectives 2020 to 2025 and the refreshed six, twelve and eighteen-month tangible objectives which were set out against elements of the Authority's core values, diversity, service to the community, improvement and people.

Appendix 1 provided an introduction to the statutory duties outlined by the prevailing legislation, the overarching objectives and a summary of EDI headlines. The EDI group were engaged and had taken ownership of actions to ensure that EDI was embedded into the service. In the 2019 HMICFRS report, EDI was assessed under the 'People' pillar, and was deemed 'Good.' The January 2021 HMICFRS Pandemic report stated, 'staff wellbeing was a clear priority.' The People Strategy approved at the October 2020 Authority meeting was refreshed to ensure it was fully reflective of the 2020–2025 Corporate Plan. The strategy detailed the Service's vision, values, aim and key areas.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that community engagement was progressing through new ways of working including the following - virtual presentations to community groups; a series of talks simultaneously translated into Urdu; engagement through the new Community Boards across Buckinghamshire; delivery of food parcels to families identified by Social Care Welfare visits; virtual school and uniformed group visits; fire and wellness visits to high-risk occupants; virtual on-call awareness evenings and interviews, which moved to socially distanced, covid secure interviews when restrictions allowed; participation in virtual LGBTQ+ Pride webinars on hate crime; trans awareness to trans acceptance and positive action.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that Appendix 2 showed the six, twelve and eighteen-to-twenty-four month objectives, where progress had been made, what has been completed and where objective timescales had been reviewed. The EDI group continued to make strong progress against these objectives. The objectives had been extended to twenty-four months to ensure they reflected the refreshed Corporate Plan and HMICFRS priorities where EDI was a key area.

A Member asked about the disability internship and if it would be funded and was advised that the service was only at the first stage of the process, further information on costs and whether there was any funding available needed to be discussed and a report would come back to the Authority in due course.

A Member asked what it meant by 'investigate the need for a driving licence' in Appendix 2 and was advised that this was something discussed by the EDI Group, currently it was a requirement for operational staff to have a driving licence. Looking at the barriers, potentially financially, for people being recruited who could not necessarily afford driving lessons.

A Member asked in Appendix 3 if the numbers could be added, not just percentages, and was advised that they would be added.

RESOLVED –

1. that the contents of the report, EDI objectives for 2020-2025 in Appendix 1 and EDI workforce data in Appendix 3 be noted;
2. the revised six, twelve and eighteen to twenty-four month objectives in Appendix 2 be approved.

FA13

PROTECTION UPDATE AND POLICY STATEMENT

The Group Commander Protection advised Members that the report was split into two areas. One was the quarterly update on the Protection Team's progress against the Building Risk Review and Protection Uplift programmes, and the other was the revised Protection Policy Statement. Contained within Appendix A was the refreshed Protection Policy Statement, this was shortened and in line with the Regulators Code. It set out the Authority's commitment to support Responsible Persons where appropriate and take the proportionate level of enforcement action where required.

The Group Commander Protection advised Members that following approval, the aim was to publish the Protection Policy Statement on the external website. Appendix B related to the Building Risk Review progress, based on activity submitted through the National Fire Chiefs Councils Tymly portal. Officers had reported back on 50 premises and were on target to complete this work by mid-July 2021. The other appendices gave information on current activities being undertaken. Also, a question was raised at the last Authority meeting regarding premises figures provided by the Home Office, compared to those held by the Service. A comparison could be seen at Appendix E. Additional grant funding had now been allocated to UK fire and rescue services for 2021/ 22. This Service had been allocated £195,925.69, fifty per cent of which had already been received, with the subsequent fifty per cent to be received in March 2022, subject to a number of criteria being met.

The Chairman asked Councillor Marland in his capacity as Leader of Milton Keynes Council to explain to Members what was being done in Milton Keynes. Councillor Marland advised that Milton Keynes Council had undertaken an Article 4 Direction in central Milton Keynes to remove permitted development rights for office conversions from business and commercial premises into residential; concerns included fire safety as when work was undertaken to change the internal modelling of a building, it may compromise the original fire safety and protection within the building.

RESOLVED –

That the Building Risk Review (BRR) update be noted, and the draft Protection Policy statement be approved.

FA14 USAR TRAINING FACILITY AT AYLESBURY

The Station Commander Aylesbury and USAR advised Members that the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) programme was established following the 9/11 attack on New York in 2001. USAR formed part of the Government's New Dimension programme, which sought to enhance the capability to allow certain fire and rescue services to respond to a range of major emergencies. These could include acts of terrorism, natural disasters, incidents involving large scale transport collisions or attacks on national infrastructure. Aylesbury Fire Station was proud to be part of the national network of 20 bases for the people, vehicles and equipment needed to provide this National Resilience capability. To ensure staff were well equipped and trained to provide this enhanced technical rescue capability, crews were expected to engage in a wide range of additional training that was above and beyond that of the standard frontline firefighter.

The Station Commander Aylesbury and USAR advised Members that the Service needed to be able to demonstrate best value to the communities and to the Home Office who provide additional funding on an annual basis for delivering this capability. The inclusion of a USAR training facility at Aylesbury would not only assist in demonstrating best value but would also ensure the USAR crews were trained and prepared to the same level of other USAR crews nationally. The benefits to be had from the inclusion of the training facility were separated into three main areas:

Invest to Save - the financial cost to the Authority for providing the USAR capability could be significantly reduced if training could be undertaken in house and on site. This would result in £10,800 savings in relation to current annual training costs. In addition to this, it would reduce overtime and bank cover costs;

Invest to Protect – having a dedicated training facility at the same location as the USAR crews would allow for a much higher frequency of training, ensure staff were safer whilst demonstrating the Authority's commitment to the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees;

Invest to Secure – A USAR specific training facility at Aylesbury would help demonstrate the Authority's commitment to the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) for providing the capability. The provision of a rig at Aylesbury would also provide an opportunity for the Authority to demonstrate to NRAT that funding provided to support and purchase USAR specific training facilities had been effectively utilised.

A Member asked what were the expected lifespan of the USAR training rig and the ongoing maintenance and inspection costs and was advised that the maintenance costs would be 1 to 2 percent of the budget (£2k-£3k) and the equipment had a lifespan of twenty five years.

A Members asked whether the government had a plan to streamline USAR and would it affect this Authority, the Chairman advised that the investment in equipment showed government that the Authority wanted to keep USAR.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the 'New Dimensions' review was currently underway, the government was currently replacing the DIM (detection investigating and monitoring) vehicles for hazardous materials and other areas around high-volume pumping. USAR would be looked at in 2024. The current view was that the asset refresh would take place and this training rig would put us in a stronger position and enhance our position nationally.

The Chairman advised Members that when Covid-19 restrictions allowed, there would be a Members visit to USAR which she hoped they would all attend.

RESOLVED –

That the business case be approved.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman again thanked Milton Keynes Council for the use of their Council Chamber for this meeting.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 12.16 PM

