

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 14 JULY 2021 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Christensen, Clarke OBE, Hopkins, Lambert, McLean and Walsh

Officers: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Remotely: M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets) A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets) G Porter (Communication Officer) S Wells (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience) S Tuffley (Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response)

Apologies: Councillors Hall and Marland

Live webcast broadcast:

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

The Director of Legal and Governance confirmed the webcast was live.

Councillor David Hopkins welcomed Members to the July Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority and confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed on the Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service YouTube channel. Following the meeting, a recording would continue to be available on this channel and it was also being recorded, should there be any technical difficulties.

EX01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Director of Legal and Governance in the Chair)

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

RESOLVED –

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

(Councillor Clarke OBE in the Chair)

EX02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Hopkins be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hopkins be elected as Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

EX03

MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 24 March 2021, be approved (subject to two typographical corrections), and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX04

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman asked for updates on the previous minutes, and was advised:

Minute EX46 - Gender Pay Gap Report 2020, it was confirmed that the Gender Pay Gap Report 2020 had been submitted to the Government's website.

Minute EX47 – Firefighters' Pension Scheme, the Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the Authority made the decision that it would start paying immediate detriment, so arrangements were put in place but there had not yet been a case to process due to timing, but there would be one due in September. In terms of advice, the Authority was limited in the advice it could give but would always advise pension members to take their own professional advice, but they would be helped as and when necessary, in terms of process and making sure they do seek the correct advice and the Authority works closely with its pension administrator to do so.

EX05

**BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021
(PROVISIONAL OUTTURN)**

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report in Appendix A set out the Authority's revenue and capital spend position as at 31 March 2021, together with the projected outturn position for the financial year. The report at Appendix A was a provisional position pending final audit recommendations and confirmation of any accounting adjustments to go through before the final position was reached. The audit was due to take place in September and hopefully it would be completed before the November Overview and Audit Committee meeting where the Statement of Accounts would be presented.

The provisional outturn figure for the year was a net underspend of £966k, which represented a 3.08% variance against the budget. It was recommended that the £966k be transferred to the revenue contribution to capital reserve in line with the approved medium term financial plan.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that Table 1 showed the budget and provisional outturn for each Directorate as at 31 March 2021. The budget of £31.339m compared to the provisional outturn of £31.202m gave a year end underspend of £138k. Furthermore, the level of funding was showing a favourable variance of £829k which had resulted in an overall net underspend of £966k. Table 3 showed the spend analysis of all the Authority's Covid-19 related costs since the start of the pandemic. In terms of Covid funding, over the three tranches, the Authority had received in the region of £800k, of which it had only spent £665k as at 31 March 2021. The residual balance of £145k had been carried over into the 2021/22 financial year and would be utilized in this financial year.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that Table 6 showed the reserves position. This figure included £586k which was held by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and represented the Authority's share of the Thames Valley joint control room renewals fund in order to fund the refresh of ICT hardware equipment for the control room as and when necessary. The Authority needs to report its share of the contributions, but these funds were specifically assigned for the capital refresh of the control room.

A Member asked as a result of new recruits joining the organisation and joining the 2015 pension scheme and not the 1992 pension scheme, what savings was the Authority able to realise for the next two financial years before any potential increases of revised employer contribution rates were implemented from 1 April 2024. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that the Authority was currently building the budget for next year based on moving everyone into the 2015 pension scheme and having no one on the 1992 pension scheme. From April 2022 the Authority was looking at savings of £150K. If the employer contributions increased in 2024, it would be a short-term saving.

A Member asked at the end of March 2021 the spend on Covid-19 related activity was £665k, what was the latest spend position. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that there was still a requirement for the Authority to submit monthly returns on Covid activity, at the end of June it was around £55k for the quarter, which

took the total spend to circa £715k leaving a residual balance of around £90k. In terms of potential risk, this was staff members having to self-isolate and having to cover them with bank staff which would increase costs.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that he attended meetings at Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Councils and every week they looked at the strategy around the future vaccination programme. Members would be aware that the Service had helped run a number of vaccination centres across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Discussions had been taking place about future fire service involvement, firstly, to ensure the Service finished off the first vaccination programme and everyone was vaccinated and secondly the involvement in any booster programmes. The Service had also offered its facilities (fire stations) for the booster programme.

Area Commander Simon Tuffley provided Members with a presentation detailing the Covid-19 pandemic and the support that Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service had provided to the communities it served.

The Chairman thanked the Area Commander for his presentation and stated she didn't think members of the public knew what the fire service had been doing throughout the pandemic, a lot more than just putting out fires.

The Chairman wanted to put on record her thanks and that of all the Members to everyone at Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service for the work they had done during the Covid-19 pandemic, and every day. The Vice Chairman endorsed the Chairman's thanks.

A Member asked if there had been a reduction in 'business as normal' for the Service during the pandemic as there had been fewer people out on the roads and people had worked from home; and if there had been fewer call outs which had allowed the Service to undertake this extra work and also what lessons had been learned from this.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that in terms of the Service's response, it had changed its response e.g., getting involved in the vaccination programme. Traditionally the Service would have been going out to the communities, identifying the most at risk in the communities and giving them fire and safety advice. As the Service was involved in the vaccination programme from the start, what had happened was the most at risk in the communities had come to the vaccination centres, which enabled the Service to access them in a different way. The Service gave fire safety advice, community safety advice, smoke detector advice, so not only did the Service help in running the

vaccination centres, but it was able to engage with those most at risk in the community.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Service continued to work alongside its partners, and one of the biggest lessons learnt was how local authorities and health authorities can work together during a pandemic. The pandemic brought everyone together in a way it had not done before. This weekend members of staff would be working alongside Milton Keynes Council in the centre of Milton Keynes to encourage younger people to get their vaccinations, which would also enable the promotion of fire safety messages and the service as a career choice.

A Member praised the work undertaken at Stoke Mandeville Hub, not only did he get his second vaccination there, but as Mayor of Aylesbury he went to thank all the volunteers and, despite being a Member of this Authority, had not appreciated how crucial the work of the Service and the skill set of its officers were in making that hub work; it was very much appreciated.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked the Members on behalf of the officers involved.

RESOLVED –

1. That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as at 31 March 2021 be noted.
2. That the slippage of £472k on the capital programme is approved to be carried forward into 2021/22.
3. That the underspend of £966k is transferred into Revenue Contribution to Capital Reserve (RCCO).
4. That delegated authority be given to the Chief Finance Officer 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, then the Chief Finance Officer will report these to Members at the next available meeting.

EX06

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED –

It was moved and resolved that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 as the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person (including the Authority);

and on these grounds it is considered, at this moment in time, that the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

EX07 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 24 March 2021, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 15 September 2021 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.15 AM.