

# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022 at 11.00 AM.

**Present:** Councillors Clarke OBE, Hopkins, Marland and Walsh

**Officers:** J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), F Mansfield (HR and Advisory Manager), A Collett (Organisational Development Manager) J Humphrey (Station Commander On Call North and South), G Darvell (On Call Support Manager North) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

**Remotely:** S Tuffley (Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response) and S Wells (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience)

**Apologies:** Councillor Christensen, Hall, Lambert and McLean

The Chairman advised the Committee that the meeting was being recorded and would be uploaded on to the Authority's YouTube channel after the meeting.

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

## **EX39 MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes and the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 9 February 2022, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## **EX40 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES**

In respect of Minute EX29 Great Holm Update, the Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that at the last meeting, he was asked what provision would be made for electric vehicle charging points on site. He had emailed the Executive Committee Members initially saying there would be at least one charging point, but having now seen the planning application, there would be three charging points on site.

The Director of Finance and Assets also advised that at the last meeting, he advised Members that he was due to meet a Milton Keynes Councillor and her colleague regarding the issue of graffiti on site. The meeting had now taken place, and one of the suggestions was to get large pictures to go on the worst affected areas of boarding. The Milton Keynes Councillor had provided contact details of a company in Milton Keynes that had done this for other buildings, so contact would be made with the company to see what the cost would be.

The Director of Finance and Assets also advised that he had now seen the near final version of the planning documents. He was content with them, and subject to cosmetic changes being made, they would be submitted to Milton Keynes Council next week.

The Chairman asked if the entry points had been discussed, and the Director of Finance and Assets confirmed they had. The new owners cannot use the old emergency access and egress roads for domestic vehicles going in and out of the site, because of the speed of exit and entry from the highway. There would be some discussions about whether they could be used by some emergency services coming onto the site, but it would not be part of the planning application.

**EX41                    DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

None.

**EX42                    GENDER PAY GAP 2021**

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that as an organisation, the Authority had a duty to carry out gender pay gap reporting, and to publish six pieces of prescribed data about the pay and bonuses of male and female employees on an annual basis by 30 March. The snapshot date for public sector employers was 31 March each year, and the data presented within the report, was based on data as at 31 March 2021.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that the gender pay gap showed the difference between the average earnings of males, compared to females, irrespective of role or seniority. It examined the difference in the average pay gap, expressed as a percentage of male earnings. It was important to note that a gender pay gap was not unlawful and the presence of a gender pay gap does not mean the Authority was discriminating against groups of individuals. A gender pay gap was a reflection of a workforce profile at a specific time, i.e. the snapshot date. In comparison, equal pay was a

legal obligation and about unequal rewards for male and females carrying out the same job, similar job or work of equal value, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Organisations can have a gender pay gap without breaching equal pay provisions, and the Authority's gender pay gap was not as a result of any equal pay issues

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that this was the fifth year of undertaking gender pay gap reporting. And for 2021 both the mean (average) and median (mid-point) gender pay gaps had decreased, which was positive, and took the Authority's gender pay gap 1.6 percentage points below the UK national average for 2021, which was 15.4 per cent. Both the mean and median gender pay gaps for 2021 were the lowest since first reporting in 2017.

For 2021, the mean gender pay gap had decreased by 5 percentage points from 2020, to 13.8 per cent (from 18.8 per cent) and the median gender pay gap had decreased by 6.3 percentage points from 2020, to 9.0 per cent (from 15.3).

The gender pay gap report had highlighted that the Authority continued to have a gender pay gap. However, figures were not expected to reduce significantly within the short to medium term, as the issues driving gender pay gaps required a longer-term commitment.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that the gender pay gap was generally caused by underrepresentation of female employees in higher paid or senior roles. In order to lower the gap, attention must be paid to the recruitment, retention and development of females into those areas, and a range of strategies adopted to support this. It was positive to note, that 2021 had seen an increased representation of females in senior roles, with this year seeing the highest representation since first reporting in 2017. A number of key areas of activity to lower the gender pay gap had been identified, as detailed in the action plan within the report. Whilst the foundations for improvement had been laid through these initiatives, and progress was being made, it would be several years before there was a significant impact on gender parity within pay. The Authority would continue to strive to increase gender diversity in all areas of the organisation and lowering the gender pay gap.

RESOLVED –

That the content of the Gender Pay Gap Report 2021 be noted and approved for submission to the Governments website (gov.uk) as per reporting requirements.

**EX43**

**FUNDING PHASE 2 LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Organisational Development Manager advised that this paper was asking Members to note the positive evaluation of Phase 1 of the Leadership & Management Development Programme and to approve the transfer of a £51k underspend from the 2021/22 Training Needs Analysis budget, into a future funding reserve, to be used in 2022/23 to procure Phase 2 of the programme and fund a delegate onto the Executive Leadership Programme. Members approved a partial growth bid of £50k for investment into the Leadership & Management Development Programme in 2021/22, with an invitation to present a further bid, for the remaining funds needed to fully roll out the programme. Since then, it had become apparent through reviewing the budget for the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) 2021/22 vs what had been procured, that there may no longer be a need for a growth bid, and that a forecasted underspend could be used to fund Phase 2 instead.

Phase 2 involved rolling the programme out to the remaining established managers, this included support staff, watch commanders and crew commander if timings, crewing and funding allowed. The underspend would also be used to fund one Executive Leadership Programme place in 2023, which the Authority had two senior managers being successful in their application for.

The Organisational Development Manager advised that this proposal had been produced in consultation with finance, the training strategy group and procurement, to ensure it met all of their requirements. To ensure the leadership programme content was fit for purpose and that both facilitators and delegates were engaged and finding value in attending, initial feedback, in the form of a survey, was sought from the attendees of cohorts 1 and 2. A summary of the feedback was contained within Appendix 2 and would be used to develop the content for the remaining cohorts of Phase 1, Phase 2 and adapt the facilitators approach where necessary. A more in-depth evaluation would be undertaken as part of the project, which would include re-visiting the initial audit undertaken as part of this project, reviewing of appraisal performance ratings and the culture survey outcomes.

For Members information, once all existing managers had completed the programme, it would then become acquisition training for all new managers/leaders and development for any potential future managers/leaders. This would be delivered internally via the Learning and Development team, therefore no longer requiring additional funding to procure delivery by the external provider.

The Chairman asked about the initial evaluation, under the heading 'Facilitator' how many people were the 13 per cent who were not engaged with the facilitator throughout.

The Organisational and Development Manager advised that this was two people. The programme served more as a refresher for the two people rather than new learning.

A Member asked for clarification regarding train the trainer, that the Service would not now need to use an external trainer and was advised that was correct.

RESOLVED -

1. That the positive evaluation of Phase 1 of the Leadership & Management Development Programme be noted.
2. That the transfer of the £51k underspend from the 2021/22 Training Needs Analysis budget, into a future funding reserve, to be used in 2022/23 to procure phase 2 of the Leadership & Management Development Programme and fund a delegate onto the Executive Leadership Programme be approved.

#### **EX44 ON-CALL FIREFIGHTER UPDATE**

The Station Commander On Call North and South and the On Call Support Manager North, gave Members a presentation on the On-Call Firefighter Update.

The presentation is available to view [here](#).

A Member asked about the website recruitment, it mentioned the pay that could be expected for the new contract and being out two or three times a week for a few hours at a time. When factoring in someone getting to a competent stage, the numbers look substantially better than what the website stated. Perhaps it might be better to look at the average time out, the average pay etc.

The Station Commander On Call North and South, advised Members that he would share a dashboard with them, which was being utilised in social media and was having a good impact. This was from another fire and rescue service but was something that he wanted to adopt and integrate into the Service's social media posts. The dashboard gave an overview of the On Call station, the number of incidents, and the time the person would be out at an incident. It would be useful information to show their employer. It could also highlight the average earnings for that station.

A Member asked if the Service was recruiting On Call firefighters in Milton Keynes to cover absentees within wholetime firefighters in Milton Keynes.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that there were On Call firefighters in Milton Keynes, Olney for example, was a standalone On Call fire station. There were also two on call pumps at West Ashland and one at Broughton. If the Milton Keynes area does get busy, those

On Call firefighters provide resilience, they do not cover absentees within wholetime firefighters.

The Chairman asked if some potential On Call staff were not at the appropriate level, for example in maths, were they helped to get up to the correct level.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised Members that, in conjunction with Human Resources, they were now offering a support mechanism for each area of the process. Also, for those candidates that come very close to the pass mark, they were offered the chance to try again.

The Chairman also asked why there was a 12-18 month timeframe to put the strategy in place.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that it was to allow the Service time to work on improving the recruitment strategy and that was also the time frame before results would be seen. The new recruitment campaign would see recruits coming in August 2022 and the next new intake would have been January 2023, but it had been delayed by a couple of months to March 2023 to allow for work on the strategy.

The Chairman asked whether there were any issues with the new contracts, did they take away any benefits from the firefighters.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that they had run a number of engagement sessions, and consulted with the rep bodies, to advise that it would not impact the On Call firefighters financially. The new contract really provided an improved response. On call firefighters could provide 90 hours, split between 60 hours of immediate response and 30 hours of tiered response. Less immediate response hours than currently, which would give them a better work life balance. It was also an increase financially of £300 per annum.

The Chairman asked how they would be 'defining the target audience'

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that along with the Communication, Marketing and Engagement Manager, they were building personas which would help drive the recruitment campaigns, targeting people who would be able to provide that crucial daytime availability. Gender neutral and looking at diverse sections of the community, building semi-fictional assignments, and creating a number of personas. Creating posts that could be pushed out on social media.

The Chairman also asked that once the On Call firefighter had done their modular training over 12 months, were many lost to other fire and rescue services because they were now trained.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that with regards to retention, at the awareness events, they gave as much information as they possibly could without holding back, and that was done to alleviate people losing interest because of the true expectations of being an on call firefighter. From when a potential recruit attends an awareness event, to being deemed a competent firefighter, can take up to 12 months. The Service was looking to streamline this process.

The Chairman asked how Members could assist with recruitment. Members visit different parts of the community, perhaps that was something that could be considered and asked whether something could be sent out to residents' associations, as there may be local people looking for employment.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that literature was being developed that would be available to send out to potential interested parties.

The Vice Chairman also suggested using parish magazines to put out information, at little or no cost. He felt that whilst social media was very popular, people trusted parish magazines.

The Vice Chairman asked how many On Call firefighters, joined as wholetime firefighters as a way into the service.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that it was sometimes a direct route. The Service took on call firefighters into the flexi firefighter roles. The NFCC were also working on a process where an on call firefighter could go directly into a wholetime firefighter role.

The Vice Chairman asked if the remuneration rates were set nationally and was advised that the actual retainer (base pay) was set nationally, but it actually depended on the number of call outs. There were other opportunities to earn, as on call firefighters get paid for their training hours. Once an On Call firefighter was competent and fully skilled, if its not a detriment to their 'home' appliance, they could undertake bank shifts as well.

The Vice Chairman asked if the intake months of January and August were set, or if they could be moved to March and October for example.

The Station Commander On Call North and South advised that the intake months were set by the Service as twice a year. This was to get ten new recruits in, as ten was the key number for training courses.

The Chairman felt it would be worth officers talking to the Local Enterprise Partnerships and Bucks Business First regarding recruitment for on call firefighters.

Members discussed the Armed Forces Covenant and whether there could be a Firefighters Covenant. The Chief Fire Officer would raise this with the National Fire Chiefs Council.

**EX45**

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 13 July 2022 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.15 AM.