

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 13 JULY 2022 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Christensen, Hall, Hopkins, Marland, McLean, Rouse 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 Carter (Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO), M Crothers (Programme Manager) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Remotely: S Tuffley (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets) and A Stunell (Head of Human Resources)

Apologies: Councillor Lambert

The Vice 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>

EX01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Vice Chairman in the Chair)

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Rouse be elected Chairman of the Committee for 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Rouse be elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2022/23.

(Councillor Rouse in the Chair)

The Chairman was delighted to advise Members that the Authority had been awarded the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award, and the certificate would be presented in October.

EX02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Hopkins be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hopkins be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2022/23.

EX03

MINUTES

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 23 March 2022, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX04

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Chairman asked the Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience to give an update on EX44 On-Call Firefighter Update.

The Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience advised Members that five new recruits were starting on the 31 August at Chesham, West Ashland and Olney fire stations. The Service had launched the first of four Awareness Evenings with the first one attracting over 35 people, with 32 of them requesting application forms. The other Awareness Evenings were scheduled over July, August, and September, with inductions planned for February 2023. Four 'Have a Go' evenings were taking place across the county. The first one held at Princes Risborough Fire Station was a great success. Eight people attended, which resulted in either progression to application, or a Personal Development Plan to assist with training. Four recruitment days were planned over the next four months at Princes Risborough, Aylesbury, Buckingham and Olney fire stations, with the events been promoted through social media. Marketing and Communications continued to work on developing different personas to target the cover needed to focus on. The Service now had four Recruitment Champions across stations to help assist and promote the recruitment.

At the request of a Member the Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience agreed to liaise with him regarding the use of a local magazine to support the promotion of opportunities at Olney fire station.

The Chairman reminded Members to follow the social media pages to help promote the good work being done on these recruitment campaigns.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that at the end of this item the idea of a Firefighter Covenant, similar to the Armed Forces Covenant was mentioned. He reported there was a new National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) strategic group being set up for on call recruitment

and he had been nominated to sit on the group and would raise this at the first meeting.

EX05 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None.

**EX06 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2021 – MARCH 2022
(PROVISIONAL OUTTURN)**

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report at Appendix A set out the Authority's revenue and capital spending position as at 31 March 2022, together with the projected outturn position for the financial year. The provisional outturn figure for the year was a net underspend of £0.225m. It was recommended that this figure 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 there were some significant variances he would like to bring to their attention which had contributed to the overall underspend.

In 2021/22, there was a business rates review carried out on all the Authority's estates by an external company to confirm if the rates being paid were correct. Following completion of the review, a rates rebate was confirmed in the region of £300k which had been backdated to 2017. This was a one-off saving.

The Service had seen significant underspend (£440k) in employee costs predominantly in relation to Support staff. This was due to a delay in recruitment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and general difficulties in recruiting staff to specialist roles in the current environment, which had resulted in several posts not being filled.

The Authority had received additional in year funding in the region of £350k in relation to Protection, Covid and local taxation income grants which were only confirmed in year. These significant variances had all contributed towards the underspend and had resulted in the Service not having to use reserves.

Table 3 provided a breakdown of Covid-19 spend since March 2020. In total the Service had spent £969k of which £850k had been funded by government.

Table 5 showed the key capital projects and to note was the USAR rig built at Aylesbury Fire Station and now complete. A slippage of £1.5m had been requested which predominantly related to a delay in the delivery of red fleet appliances and the completion of the WAN/LAN project.

The Chairman asked for an update on the West Ashland issue.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that the Authority was going through the legal process and explained the progress to date, whereupon the Lead Member for Finance & Assets, Information Security, and IT confirmed that he had received a thorough briefing on the position.

RESOLVED –

1. That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as at 31 March 2022 be noted.
2. That the slippage of £1.514m on the capital programme is approved to be carried forward into 2022/23.
3. That the underspend of £0.225m 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.

EX07

PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that this report presented the updated Partnership Register, which was an action identified in the Annual Governance Statement. The report identifies new partnerships and those that had been removed from the register. There were two new partnerships, the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC), which was an insurance type arrangement, and a very successful collaboration project. The original membership has grown from nine members to 14 members. This arrangement had saved the Authority cost compared with traditional insurance arrangements. The second new partnership was around voice and data or WAN/LAN and was a recent joint venture with Buckinghamshire Council, NHS Trust and others to supply IT services across the Authority's sites.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that three partnerships had been removed from the register, which were cross-border arrangements, the Fire Service College and primary authority advice. The Fire Service College was badged as a partnership, but was a commercial arrangement, because of the way the Service provided Instructors at the college for recruit courses in exchange for Service credits. The cross border arrangements and primary authority scheme arrangements were both moved because they were statutory arrangements rather than partnerships. Cross Border is where the

Service provides mutual aid to other services and primary authority advice, was where a national business, rather than dealing with 44 different fire and rescue services, can elect to deal with just one fire service to provide safety advice for all their operations nationally. The register was updated by going through internal governance processes, and through relevant Boards and officers.

A Member asked if Milton Keynes Council was involved in the WAN/LAN arrangement and was advised that although this had been explored with Milton Keynes Council and its partners, they were in a separate arrangement for their network, but this did not preclude other joint arrangements.

RESOLVED –

That Members note the content of this report.

EX08

EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME

The Programme Manager advised Members that this report provided the latest update regarding the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), the last update was provided in November. Following the approval of the ESMCP Full Business Case in July last year, the Service had been expecting a briefing paper to be released by the Programme that could be used to inform stakeholders, this had now been released by the Programme and could be seen at Appendix A.

The Market Investigation Referral by the Competition and Markets Authority into the supply of land mobile network services for public safety in Great Britain and the involvement of Motorola in this continued, with the 'Provisional Decision' report due to be released this month. The National Programme was watching this carefully in order to assess its impact on the dates for delivery of the Emergency Services Network.

The Programme Manager advised that in her previous report, Members were informed of the high level review of the Local User Resource model that forms the basis of the funding support to transition fire services to the new Emergency Services Network (ESN). Each region was to receive a 'deep dive' visit to look at the way they had used their funding to date and the South Central Region visit took place in May. Assurances had been received that the Region had robust governance processes in place and 'has a clear grip on the finances and how claims can be evidenced'. Comments had also been made at the recent Fire Customer Group (FCG) meeting that this was a model to be replicated and the Region had been asked to present at a future FCG meeting on the approach it had taken.

The national review of the roles of the NFCC led Regional Co-ordination Managers and the Programme Managers who were employed by each Region and how they could work together to deliver national work, had now been completed and the Regional Programme Manager (RPM) roles were dispensed with at the end of May, with additional delivery manager roles being created within the NFCC Team. The South Central Region felt there was still a requirement for a regional resource to collate Programme work and take on additional workstreams and so submitted a business case to the 'deep dive' review, which was accepted. The previous RPM for the region had now taken on the role of Thames Valley Project Manager working closely with the Service Project Managers.

A Member asked for the best estimate of when this project might be delivered and did it put any additional risk on the Authority or residents of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

The Programme Manager advised that the Airwave contract had been extended to 2026. The ESN would give the Authority additional data capability, but some data was used through Airwave. Airwave was a robust network but was just not progressing.

RESOLVED –

That this update is noted.

EX09

HOME OFFICE WHITE PAPER CONSULTATION

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the purpose of this report was to obtain approval for the submission of the draft response. At the Annual Meeting on 15 June, the Authority resolved that a working group comprised of the Group Leaders, the Vice Chairman and Lead Members be established in order to formulate responses to be approved today. The Working Group met twice for discussions and have had further discussions outside of those meetings.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman thanked the Director of Legal and Governance and the Chief Fire Officer for navigating and pulling the draft responses together and crystallising the many thoughts from Members.

A Member had concerns he wished to place on record. One was around the ability and right for firefighters to strike and the minimum service provision. The Member felt that as there was not a lot of capacity in the Service's operational model, any minimum service provision was likely to be similar to what the Service was providing on a day-to-day basis. There was a danger that the Fire Brigades Union may see that particular issue as moving towards a police or medical model, even with an effective removal of the right to strike. If that was the government's direction, they need to state it, and the Authority should

be wary of getting into a back to forth with the representative bodies and confirm that the Authority's favoured position was not to remove people's right to take industrial action.

On the part of the additional duties and responsibilities, the Member raised concerns as to what were these duties, particularly if the Service was going to merge with the Police and Crime Commissioner any additional duties should be negotiated as a change of contract or change of terms and conditions and contractual obligations. Within that, making sure any changes were ring fenced as to who was responsible for the Service. Fire and Rescue Services do not have representation on Integrated Care Systems or Integrated Care Partnerships, but they may be able to provide different advice on health or council services. It could, therefore, become problematic as to who was responsible between local authorities and other public bodies and making sure they were not duplicated or in conflict with each other.

RESOLVED –

1. The content of the draft responses to the white paper consultation document submitted on behalf of the working group (comprised of the Group Leaders, the Vice Chairman, and Lead Members) be noted.
2. The draft responses be approved for submission to the Home Office on behalf of the Executive Committee.
3. The Chief Fire Officer, subject to approval given above, be authorised to make amendments (to only the narrative text of the responses) in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman.

EX10

OPERATIONAL KPIS

The Chairman advised Members that he had asked officers to produce a performance dashboard that showed the key indicators across recruitment and retention, operational KPIS, financial KPIS, projects etc., this would be in conjunction with Lead Members and would be brought to the Authority meeting in October. This would be an ongoing update at future meetings, looking at the overall performance of the Service.

EX11

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 14 September 2022 at 10.00am (at the Oculus, Aylesbury).

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10.34 AM.