

Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 22 MARCH 2023 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Christensen, Darlington, Hall, Hopkins, McLean, Rouse (Chairman) 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 Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), A Carter (Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), F Mansfield (HR Advisory and Development Manager), P Mould (Area Commander Industrial Action) C Jordan (Team PA), E Hilling (Communication, Marketing & Engagement Manager), C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager)

Remotely: C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development)

Apologies: Councillor Lambert

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 of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 8 February 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX40 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Chairman advised that there were three matters arising:

EX28 Code of Conduct review will be picked up in Item 6.

EX33 The Director of Finance and Assets confirmed that the Reserves Strategy would be presented to the Executive Committee meeting in July.

EX38 It was confirmed that the Authority's insurance would cover military and other staff that may have provided assistance during any industrial action.

EX41 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

EX42 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

Overview and Audit Committee – 15 March 2023 Updated Code of Conduct (V4.0)

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that the Code of Conduct has been updated and went through a formal consultation process in September and October 2022. The revised Code of Conduct was presented to the Overview and Audit Committee on 15 March 2023 and was being presented to the Executive Committee to be approved.

Updates made to the Code of Conduct included the NFCC Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services based on the Seven Principles of Public Life in Section 3. Section 8 now included further information regarding smoking in vehicles and Section 9 was updated to include data and information security. Section 15 was updated to include new information regarding dress, the wearing of jewellery and adornments, and advice regarding hair styles to ensure the wearing of PPE was not impeded. The section on tattoos had been reduced, but guidelines were still in place.

Section 22 covered the acceptable use of technology and section 22.4 online and social media platforms had been updated to include the inappropriate use of this technology, and made employees aware that out of hour's activity was included. The section on Cyberbullying had been updated with examples given being more relevant.

Due to the national focus on conduct in the fire and rescue sector, the review of the updated paper also underwent scrutiny from outside organisations and further updates were made following feedback from South East Employers. This included introducing an additional point of contact when reporting breaches of the Code of Conduct, more information regarding fitness assessments and substance misuse. The definition of relationships in section 16 now included 'colleagues dating' to reduce the risk of sexual harassment claims. The implementation of the updated Code of Conduct formed part of a wider culture review and would be discussed later in the meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. the Code of Conduct, as detailed in Appendix one, was approved for adoption.
2. the consultation feedback, as detailed in Appendix two, be noted.

EX43 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2022

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that all data shown in the report was based on data as at 31 March 2022 and explained how the report was compiled. The gender pay gap for 2022 had decreased by 0.4 percentage points to 13.4 per cent, which was below the UK average percentage. However, when comparing the median (mid-point) the gender pay gap had increased from 9.0 per cent in 2011 to 11.7 percent in 2022. This was mainly due to the high number of male employees in senior management roles and this was not expected to change in the short term. The action plan had been put together to highlight areas where work could be done to decrease the pay gap but this would take time to implement gender parity. The organisation would continue to work to achieve this.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager informed Members that the Government had discussed Ethnicity reporting but as yet it had not been made compulsory. Some organisations had started to publish their Ethnicity Pay Gaps and the Authority would look at publishing this next year.

A Member shared their concerns about the length of time it would take female workers to reach parity with their male colleagues and asked if decisions made in the past had effected the current situation.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that efforts had been made to reduce the pay gap, but when one female member of staff left a senior role within the organisation it made a huge difference. The action plan had been put in place to try and increase the diversity of female roles and decrease the percentage.

The Chief Fire Officer was glad that overall the pay gap was reducing year on year but acknowledged that more work needed to be done.

A Member asked for reassurance that men and women doing the same role were being paid the same amount.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager reassured Members that the pay structure within the Authority ensured that all staff doing the same role were paid the same and there were no equal pay issues within the organisation.

A Member asked for more information on the Mean Bonus Gap figures as the figures varied for both genders.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager explained that payments made to employees at the Long Service Awards (25 years in service) were included on the report.

Members requested that in future the Gender Pay Gap Action plan takes a more holistic approach to inputs by referencing cross-cutting across other people-centred action plans; that in future the ethnicity pay gap be reported annually; requested that the LGA/NFCC be lobbied with a view to ensure a consistent methodology across the sector for gender pay reporting; and that, once all of the gender pay gap data from fire and rescue authorities for 2022 has been published and captured, a report be brought to a future meeting in 2023 to show where the service sits in comparison to other services. The Chairman suggested that more information could be included in Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) to show how decisions could have an impact on the gender pay gap.

Head of
Human
Resources

RESOLVED –

That the content of the Gender Pay Gap Report 2022 was noted and approved for submission to the Government's website (gov.uk) as per reporting requirements.

EX44 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q3 2022/23

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members that the Key Performance Measures report gave a rounded and balanced picture on how the Service was performing at a local level up to December 2022.

The Chairman asked if there were up to date figures for wholetime firefighters available.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that at the beginning of March, the figure for wholetime firefighters stood at 289.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that a further intake of transferee firefighters were due to start in June which should bring the workforce up to 300, depending on leavers. Further courses were also planned for September and October.

The Chairman enquired about Fire and Wellness visits and the December figures being well below the 300 target.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager informed Members that figures for January were 295 visits, February 326 visits and March already stood at 269 visits.

The Chairman expressed concern that average attendance times were being shown as red in some months and asked for an overview on the cause.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager explained that the lack of wholetime firefighters meant pump availability was affected, but as discussed earlier, the number of firefighters had now increased. Also, the extra pressure on the Service during the summer months had led to a higher number of calls and some fires were in more rural locations. Response times to major incidents were still good, but calls to minor incidents had suffered due to the above pressures.

A Member raised concern that the 'Great Place to Work' section was showing a large amount of red.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO informed Members that a budget had now been approved to carry out more regular culture surveys which would help to give a better understanding of any problem areas.

A Member asked about lesson learned from the summer fires and if any new equipment had being sourced.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Authority had been engaging with other fire and rescue services regarding lessons learned. Firefighters from the Service had attended training courses run by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service on tackling wildfires. Work on improving response to flooding incidents was ongoing.

The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the property footprint was in a good place, but the Service needed to be aware that in future, it may need to move appliances around depending on the demand and the time of year.

A Member asked when the environment and emissions targets would be populated. The Director of Finance and Assets confirmed that the figures would be updated in 2023/24.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised Members that the performance figures for 22/23 would be reviewed and going forward, any updates requested by the Committee (whistleblowing events; staff retention/turnover;

Director of
Finance &
Assets

Head of
Technology,
Transformation

additional narrative about response times/appliance availability and health & safety e-learning completion) would be considered for inclusion in future reports. and PMO

RESOLVED –

That the recommendations below be approved for submission to the Authority:

That the Performance Management – Q3 2022/23 be noted.

EX45 EXPLORING OUR CULTURE

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that this report was put together following the Culture Review at London Fire Brigade in November 2022 and news articles regarding other Services.

The Head of Human Resources highlighted key areas in the People Strategy that supported culture changes and assisted in the delivery of vision and strategic priorities to ensure the behaviours, values and standards were followed.

The current area of focus was to ensure that all staff knew how to raise an issue and were aware of the Whistleblowing process, and that all allegations were dealt with robustly. Officers had engaged with HMICFRS to provide historic grievance/disciplinary information and work carried out on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) procedures.

The Head of Human Resources informed Members that Appendix 1 linked into the quarterly performance figures, and that the Whistleblowing process had been reviewed internally and externally and a 'Speak-Up' campaign was being put in place for all staff. Consultation with staff was ongoing and the culture programme would be discussed at as many internal meetings as possible.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised that this Service was the only service carrying out enhanced DBS checks on all staff, and moving forward, hoped that other services would follow.

The Chairman requested the status line in Appendix 1 be changed to blue for complete, green on track, amber if slightly off track and red not progressing.

The Chairman asked if the Code of Conduct and the People Strategy process could be made into an e-learning package.

The Head of Human Resources confirmed this was being looked at along with other options.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised that

Head of
Human
Resources

Head of
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a Whistleblowing communications package was being put together and other programmes would follow.

The Communication, Marketing and Engagement Manager presented the 'Speak Up Campaign' presentation.

A Member felt the presentation was moving in the right direction and would be a useful tool but was concerned about what was done once a complaint had been made and the follow up procedure.

The Chief Fire Officer advised there were issues regarding staff speaking up even though procedures were in place. Many issues only came to light when people were leaving. Managers/colleagues need to encourage staff to come forward when issues occur so that action can be taken immediately.

A Member asked how culture change was going to be measured moving forward and what were the next steps.

The Communication, Marketing and Engagement Manager informed Members that numbers for all e-learning and marketing campaigns could be monitored, and Culture Surveys would be used to measure improvement. Feedback from station visits would also be assessed.

RESOLVED –

That the work carried out to date and the planned work in respect of exploring our Culture be noted.

EX46 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED -

It was moved and resolved that the public and press representatives be removed from the meeting by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report contains information relating to any individual; and Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report contain information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person (including the Authority); and on these grounds it is considered the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(All officers left the meeting with the exception of the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Director of Finance and Assets, Head of Human Resources and minute-taker Team PA).

EX47 'GOLD BOOK' REMUNERATION

The Committee considered the report, details of which were noted in the confidential/exempt minutes.

EX48 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 8 February 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11:29AM