



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2022 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Hopkins, Lambert, McLean and 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), S Tuffley (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) and C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager)

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

Apologies: Councillors Christensen, Hall and Marland

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>

EX21 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the Special meeting of the Executive Committee held on Friday 7 October 2022, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX22 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

EX15(b) The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development gave Members a brief update on the Summer Pressures report presented at the last meeting. The staff survey was still under way. The Local Resilience Forum debrief had not concluded yet, but once concluded, would form part of a broader, more comprehensive report that would be brought to the Authority next year.

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development also advised Members there was a question posed at the meeting around sharing information around the causation of the two major incidents. These incidents would be the subject of some form of challenge and investigation and insurance actions, and it would not be proper for the Authority to share information until all those matters had been fully concluded and resolved by all interested parties.

A Member asked if there were any interim lessons learned that could be implemented before the report was published.

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised that although the debrief had not yet concluded, some of the equipment being carried on appliances for rehydration, i.e. using electrolytes had already been implemented. The provision of welfare at incidents was being reviewed and the Service had accelerated the roll out of respirators (half masks) for firefighters (not breathing apparatus). Other areas around communications and support were being looked at. These would be progressed in due course when all information was available.

EX23 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

EX24 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2022 – SEPTEMBER 2022

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report sets out the Authority's revenue and capital spending position as at 30 September 2022, together with the projected outturn position for the financial year. The Authority was currently projecting an overall underspend of £847k, an increase of £713k compared to Quarter 1. The key events that had resulted in the increase in underspend were the announcement of the energy price cap for non-domestic customers, this had reduced the forecast spend for the year on gas and electricity by £400k. The Authority was previously forecasting utilities to cost in the region of £1.2m prior to the energy price cap being announced. The price cap was only for six months but was likely to stay in place for vulnerable industries beyond this point.

The Authority had also seen a sharp increase in investment returns from treasury activities. At the start of the financial year, the projected return was £30k with the base rate being under 1%. The recent increases in the Bank of England base

rate had increased the forecast income from treasury management investments to £250k. The remainder of the increase was predominantly due to higher operational leavers than originally forecast, as well as some new support staff vacancies.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that with regard to the Capital Section, key property works related to refurbishments works on several stations across the estate. Fire appliance and equipment predominantly related to the purchase of red fleet appliances and associated equipment. The current forecasts assumed a 2% pay award and as Members would be aware, the 5% offer was rejected by the Fire Brigades Union. Every additional 1% pay award would cost the Authority in the region of around £200k and therefore a significant amount of the current underspend would need to be utilised to cover the pay awards.

The Chairman asked about the progress towards the establishment figures for Wholetime firefighters currently showing 288 for the end of March 2023, and what action was being taken to get it back on track.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that the Workforce Planning Group were meeting on a monthly basis. There were 18 firefighter recruits due to join the Service in March 2023. The Service was continuing on the trajectory aiming for 300 wholetime firefighters. Also, looking forward, another 18 firefighter recruits would be joining the Service in October 2023.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that there had been some issues around the transferees. There were a number of transferees who had applied to join the Service, but looking at the skills gap analysis, some did not meet the standard required. This put pressure on getting the training scheduled with the Service's trainers and the Fire Service College. As a result, there were six transferees that would be joining an open firefighter development programme at the Fire Service College in January 2023. These six were not on the plan. Officers had also looked at the graph being extended out for another year. This would mean the numbers would be met in October 2023.

The Chairman asked if Members could see the longer term profile of the Wholetime Establishment Road Map in future reports and was advised that it would be included in the next report.

Deputy
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Finance and
Assets

The Chairman asked if the next Budget Monitoring update could include the impacts of some of the scenarios at year end.

The Chairman asked regarding the in-year growth bids, was there an update on progress of the Digital Marketing and ICT apprentices, and also the cost of the stands and marketing material seemed high, was they going through a competitive procurement process.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised that in terms of the Digital Marketing Apprentice, the person was now in position. With regard to the ICT Apprentice, there were only three people that were due to come for interview, and only one turned up and they unfortunately were not successful. This role had now been advertised again.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that in terms of recruitment, they had been working really hard with the Marketing Communications Team and had got quotes for stands that would be taken out for recruitment, apprenticeship shows etc. A suitable stand had not been found as yet, as it needed to be light enough to carry and transport easily.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that everything purchased had to meet the procurement rules before it would get approved from the Finance system.

A Member asked how many ex police officers had been employed or had come forward to apply and did they need the same training as other recruits.

The Head of Human Resources would come back to Members on the numbers who had applied but advised they would need to undertake exactly the same training as all recruits.

A Member asked if Members could be sent a briefing note following the budget statement due the following day.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets would ensure all Members received this by the end of the week.

RESOLVED –

That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as of 30 September 2022 be noted.

EX25 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q2 2022/23

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised Members that there had been one new measure added in the response section, which was there was now site specific risk information (SSRI) high-risk sites completion rate and the

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following work in progress measure had been populated. In the public value sector, percentage of compliance and standing orders relating to contracts. All other work in progress measures would be populated by the end of the financial year.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager firstly apologised to Members that in the printed copy, some of the 'monitoring measures' did not show on the report but could be seen on the soft copy. Also, there was an individual page in front of Members, to correct an error on the printed copy, that was now updated.

The Data Intelligence Team Manger advised Members that the Key Performance Measures report helps the Service understand how it was performing. It also enabled certain measures to be highlighted to Members and staff. Based on feedback from quarter one, an additional page had been added which reflected on the previous quarters highlighted measures. Reading the summary pages, Members might feel that there were many measures showing outcomes not in line with expectations and targets. It was worth remembering, that during this reporting period, the Service experienced two heat waves that saw extreme demand.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members that there was only one highlight measure in Q2 – Public Impact: Average attendance time to all incidents. This identified how the Service's average attendance time to all incidents had increased from being within three seconds on previous years in Q1 to being 36 seconds slower than the previous years. The above was a common theme across a number of measures, most of which would be covered within the Summer Pressures final report.

A Member asked regarding the people measures and the high response rate through the summer fires, and the difficulty of recruiting On Call firefighters, which was also reflected within the HMICFRS report. Had the Service moved further forward with this, in the narrative it doesn't mention these stations, that while they were operational they were not always crewed. Would this change the figures?

The Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience advised that On Call recruitment had been a challenge for a number of years, and there was a focus on recruitment for On Call Stations, but there was limited success in terms of daily availability. Early data coming out of the heat wave in the Summer indicated that resilience was very effective and there

were a lot of additional appliances on the run during the heatwave. It could be done, but it was getting the resilience guaranteed.

A Member asked regarding the Compliments, Complaints and Concerns, there were four complaints and one compliment for September, was there any narrative to it.

The Director of Legal and Governance would provide the detail. The annual report had just been presented to the Overview and Audit Committee last week. There was a very robust procedure for complaints and every one was investigated, not all were upheld.

The Chairman asked if the trend against previous years could also be included and an extraction of the upheld measure as well.

A Member asked why appraisal completion and completion of mandatory learning packages was low. If it was mandatory, why was it not being completed.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised Members in the absence of the Head of Protection, Assurance and Development, that appraisal completion continued to be monitored and championed, but she would ask him to provide Members with more details in terms of completion of appraisals.

The Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience advised that the system previously updated Managers and staff with what was outstanding, but it had stopped sending reminders. This was being worked on and hopefully Members would see an increase in appraisals undertaken in future reports.

The Chairman asked that in the next report could Officers provide more detail on the actions being taken on appraisal completion and completion of mandatory learning packages.

The Chairman asked about confidence around the fire and wellness visits improving in Q3 and Q4 and what the outcome would look like against the measures in the report.

The Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience advised that there had been a lot of recruitment within the Prevention Team this year and there was also an onboarding process of training which took around six months, so there was some delay in getting the output required. With the rewritten Prevention Strategy and the Prevention Improvement Plan which was now making good progress. The coordination across stations to increase the amount of fire and wellness visits they were

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undertaking was working really well. It was hoped that the numbers would be increased by the end of this financial year.

The Chairman asked around the Internal Audit overdue audit actions which seemed to be on a worsening trend and how it was getting back on track.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that there were a number of outstanding actions which were monitored by the Overview and Audit Committee. This report does not go into detail as to what was high, medium or low priority. There were a lot of actions listed separately but would be resolved by one action. For example, the Procurement Strategy to be presented at the Fire Authority meeting in December, would take off six of those actions.

The Chairman felt it would be helpful to have the carbon emissions and recycling measures in place and it would be helpful to have a target date.

The Chairman advised that officers were sharing the highlighted measures with Members, largely those measures that were of concern or impact, but it would also give Members assurance to see those measures that were going really well because the Service should also celebrate success.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that with regard to the carbon emissions and recycling measures within the Climate Action Plan, there were a number of actions for each financial year. One of the actions for this current financial year was to look at baseline of carbon emissions. The target date was the end of this financial year and would be the baseline going forward.

RESOLVED –

That the BFRS Performance for Q2 2022/23 is noted.

All Officers left the meeting apart from the Chief Fire Officer, Head of Human Resources and the Democratic Services Officer.

EX26 SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM REMUNERATION AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW, AND ANNUAL REPORT ON EMPLOYEE BONUS SCHEME

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that this was the annual Senior Management Team Remuneration and Performance Review and Annual Report on Employee Bonus Scheme. The executive summary showed the posts covered, contracts, cost of providing services, background and context to

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pay and remuneration, the national context, legislation, pay and gender pay and the financial position, budget monitoring, HMICFRS recommendations and the Council tax precept.

The Senior Management Team do not play a part in the pay review process. Previously they had not seen the report due to its confidentiality. The Senior Management Team had seen this report after it was sent to Members, as it was not now deemed exempt.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that Appendix 1 Comparative Data of Fire Authorities Council Tax Precept 2021/2022 (source Council Tax Requirement Forms) showed that the Authority had one of the lowest Council Tax Precepts. Appendix 2 showed the Senior Management Team performance and achievements, for example achieving the Armed Forces Covenant, high level external qualifications, EDI performance and reduction in business rates. Appendix 3 was the Equality Impact Assessment which showed neutral impacts for the Senior Management Team and employees.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that this report had been formulated while he was out of the Service. Members would know the history that over a number of years, the Authority decided to award bonuses and then in his tenure, he had tried to move away from that system. Over the last few years, in conjunction with the previous Lead Member, it didn't seem right or proper to be awarding bonuses with the difficult financial restraints. The current policy had remained in place, and the Authority had chosen not to award bonuses which was the right decision. Moving forward, however, on this paper, there was a recommendation to say do we actually want to remove the bonus scheme in its entirety and bring a further proposal back to the Authority.

The Chairman advised that this was the first year he had seen the report and its bonus scheme. He felt that as there wasn't a set of measures and clear outcomes, it would be incredibly demotivating for officers to know something exists, but to not know until the end of the year whether they achieved it or not. Also, one of the issues was the Authority does not budget for this bonus scheme. There was also a need to draw attention to the great job that officers had done in delivering over the year, and the performance output should not be missed.

A Member welcomed the recommendations but felt that one of the recommendations should be removing it as a policy completely.

The Head of Human Resources asked Members if they were meaning just the Senior Management Team or were they including the employee bonus, because the employee bonus forms part of the Pay Policy, which would be presented to the Fire Authority meeting in February.

A Member asked regarding the employee bonus scheme, was there an opportunity to invite firefighters to undertake things they were not currently doing like eLearning and appraisals to get a bonus.

The Head of Human Resources advised that undertaking eLearning and appraisals was part of the job. The way the bonus scheme was set out in the Pay Policy was an application process for managers to apply when someone/or group had gone over and above what they should be doing as part of their role. The last time this took place was back in 2018. Once submitted, all the applications go forward to a SMT panel to look at and decide if, and at what level, they were awarded.

RESOLVED –

1. That performance related pay and bonus payments are not paid to the Senior Management Team in the current financial year.
2. That Performance related pay and bonus payments are reviewed in the next financial year.
3. That the Head of Human Resources be tasked to review the SMT remuneration methodology and employee bonus scheme in consultation with the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer.

EX27 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 8 February 2023 at 10.00am in Meeting Room 1.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10:55