



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2023 AT 11 AM.

Present: Councillors Adoh, Bagge, Carroll, Darlington (part), Exon, Fuller, Hopkins, Hussain, McLean, Rouse, Stuchbury, Waite 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), C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), S Tuffley (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), Group Commander B Ackerlay (Head of Operational Training and Assurance) Group Commander Steve Hawkins (Community and Business Safety Policy), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager), and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Chapple OBE Christensen, Hall and Lambert

Councillor Hopkins opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the Annual Meeting of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority.

Councillor Hopkins advised that although members of the public were able to attend and observe in person, following the meeting, a video recording would be uploaded to the Authority's YouTube Channel.

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

FA01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

(Councillor Hopkins in the Chair)

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Rouse be elected Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2023/24.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Rouse be elected Chairman of the Authority for 2023/24.

(Councillor Rouse in the Chair)

FA02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Fire Authority for 2023/24.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hopkins be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Authority for 2023/24.

FA03 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Fire Authority held on 28 April 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA04 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Chairman advised that there were the following matters arising from the previous minutes:

FA59 – Values and Culture in fire and rescue services - the Head of Human Resources had met with Councillor Waite and they had discussed various options of raising Whistleblowing concerns, such as texting and apps. The HR Advisory and Development Manager would also consult with the Occupational Health Committee regarding this.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chairman to write to HMICFRS giving feedback on what had been discussed and the action plan – this had been included in the Strategic Brief and also in discussions with the Inspectorate, it was also part of the evidence pack provided to HMICFRS.

The Chief Fire Officer to consider with the Chairman how to keep the MPs and local Members up to date - the Chairman advised that following this meeting, a further update would be provided to local members and MP's.

Chief Fire Officer

FA05 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

None.

FA06 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that:

In May, the sale of Great Holm Fire Station was completed, and the site was no longer the Authority's responsibility.

Officers were currently working on the Wholetime (Cohort 10) campaign, currently at interview stage. There had been 167 applications received, 105 applications had been shortlisted and 82 had been invited to the bleep and behaviour workshop, 51 had been invited for role related

tests, and 42 had been invited for interview/presentation. 18 candidates would be offered employment and commence on 27 September 2023. The Service would be able to create a pool of candidates should any of the 18 leave the course unexpectedly. 9 firefighter transferees had commenced on 5 June and would attend a three-week conversion course with Training School. All these recruitment activities were continuing to show the increase in numbers on establishment. The Workforce Planning Group were meeting monthly to ensure the global target of 300 was met (currently 293 and expected to be 312 in September).

Congratulations to Councillor Hussain on achieving 20 years' service as a Justice of the Peace. The Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Director of Finance and Assets and he had attended an event which celebrated this fantastic achievement.

The Authority had received an urgent request from the Home Office to supply critical water safety equipment to Ukraine to support the rescue efforts following on from the Kakhovka Dam incident. The Chairman was proud to report that the Authority supplied a wide range of equipment.

It is with the deep regret and personal sadness that the Chairman shared the news of the tragic and sudden death of our friend and colleague, Dave Evans.

Dave was a popular and valued employee, dedicated to serving the community with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service. He started his fire service career in 2010 as an On-Call firefighter based at Aylesbury, where he spent five years as an operational crew commander before more recently becoming one of the Service's blue light driving instructors.

Dave will be missed by everyone who knew him, and our heartfelt sympathy is with his family, friends and colleagues who need time to grieve at this difficult time.

(A minute's silence was observed in honour of Dave Evans)

FA07 MEMBERSHIP OF THE AUTHORITY

The Authority noted that the following Members had been appointed by the Constituent Authorities to serve on the Fire Authority for 2023/24:

Buckinghamshire Council (12)

Councillors Adoh, Bagge, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Christensen, Hall, Hussain, Lambert, Rouse, Stuchbury, Waite and Walsh

Milton Keynes Council (5)

Councillors Darlington, Exon, Fuller, Hopkins and McLean

FA08 COMMITTEE MATTERS

- (a) Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990

The Authority noted that the allocation of seats on the Authority was:

(i) Conservative Group:	11 seats	(64.70%)
(ii) Liberal Democrat Group:	3 seats	(17.65%)
(iii) Labour Group:	3 seats	(17.65%)

- (b) Committee Matters – Committee Appointments

RESOLVED –

That the following Committees be appointed, and seats be allocated, as follows:

Executive Committee (8 Members):

- (i) Conservative – 5 seats
- (ii) Liberal Democrats – 2 seats
- (iii) Labour – 1 seat

Overview and Audit Committee (9 Members):

- (i) Conservative – 6 seats
- (ii) Liberal Democrats – 1 seat
- (iii) Labour – 2 seats

RESOLVED –

1. That the following Members be appointed to the Executive Committee:

Councillors Christensen, Darlington, Hall, Hopkins, Lambert, McLean, Rouse and Walsh in accordance with the Group Leaders' wishes.

2. That the following Members be appointed to the Overview and Audit Committee:

Councillors Adoh, Bagge, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Exon, Fuller, Hussain, Stuchbury and Waite in accordance with the Group Leaders' wishes.

FA09 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Authority considered proposed dates for its meetings and meetings of its committees during 2023/24.

RESOLVED –

1. That meetings of the Authority be held on Wednesday 11 October 2023, Wednesday 6 December 2023, Wednesday 14 February 2024 and Wednesday 12 June 2024, all at 11 am.
2. That meetings of the Executive Committee be held on Wednesday 12 July 2023, Wednesday 13 September 2023, Wednesday 15 November 2023, Wednesday 7 February 2024 and Wednesday 20 March 2024, all at 10 am.
3. That meetings of the Overview and Audit Committee be held on Wednesday 19 July 2023, Wednesday 8 November 2023 and Wednesday 13 March 2024, all at 10am.

FA10 APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Authority considered the appointment of representatives to outside bodies having received nominations which were seconded:

RESOLVED –

1. That Councillors Hopkins and Walsh be appointed to attend the Local Government Association Annual Conference.
2. That Councillor Rouse be appointed as the Authority's representative (and Councillor Hopkins as the Standing Deputy) to the Local Government Association Fire Commission.
3. That Councillors Rouse and Hopkins be appointed as the Authority's representatives to the Local Government Association Annual Fire Conference.
4. That Councillors Rouse and Walsh be appointed as the Authority's representatives on the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee.
5. That Councillors Hall and McLean be nominated as substitute members of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee.

FA11 LEAD MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Each having been nominated and seconded it was:

RESOLVED -

That Members be appointed as Lead Members for 2023/24 as follows:

Responsibility	Lead Member
Service Delivery, Protection and Collaboration	Councillor Rouse
People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance	Councillor Hall
Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT	Councillor Walsh
Health and Safety and Corporate Risk	Councillor McLean

(Cllr Darlington Joined the meeting)

FA12 2020-2025 CORPORATE PLAN: YEAR 3 PROGRESS REVIEW AND YEAR 4 UPDATE

The Chairman advised Members that this report sets out the progress being made with the Corporate Plan and steps for the year ahead.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this was a review of progress made over the third year of the five-year Corporate Plan that the Authority approved at its Annual Meeting in June 2020. It also set out the programme for the remaining two years of the plan through to the end of March 2025. Progress made during the second year and a year three refresh were approved by the Authority in June and October of last year respectively. In light of progress made, the Authority had taken the opportunity to refresh the programme of activities that would be undertaken over the remaining two years of the plan in pursuit of the Strategic Objectives.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised that since Members last saw it, the plan had been updated to align with the Medium Term Financial Plan; include two new workstreams relating to readiness to deal with legislative and regulatory change and develop the Service's culture, the latter of which was linked to the HMICFRS' Values and Culture report which was considered at the Authority's Extraordinary meeting at the end of April. A summary of projects by status from which Members would see that three items had been completed and/or streamed into business as usual activity. Specifically, SO1.2 relating to the Safety Centre; SO1.3 dealing with collaboration with partners in relation to risk information and

SO3.9 the mid-term review of the current 2020-25 Public Safety Plan.

There were no items at red RAG status, the majority (19) were green which meant they were on track with only five at amber which meant they were a little off track but recoverable.

A Member asked about SE2.8 'Review / enhance overall Service resilience / business continuity management structures and processes' and asked for an update on the business continuity plans and ICT disaster recovery.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised that during Covid, the Service held off completing any business continuity testing but were able to put the business continuity plans into practice. The Service does complete penetration testing in line with the ICT strategy and ensured systems remained secure and more recently completed an external server health check, which was positive. Now that the wider area and local area networks had been migrated, officers would work with Buckinghamshire Council and the Business Continuity Officer, to build an action and testing plan including ICT and broader elements.

The Chairman asked what was driving the amber rag status on the culture and values work, and what assurance could be given that it would be tracking to green and not to red.

The Head of Human Resources advised that when she presents the report further down on the agenda, Members would be able to see the progress that was being made. There was still work to be done, but it was moving forward. The date had been reviewed and although it was amber at present, it was expected to move to green.

The Chairman asked about progress with the improvements to records management, and what was the plan to get this on track to green.

The Director of Legal and Governance advised that the Service had engaged with an external provider, Buckinghamshire Council, and there had been dialogue with its Data Protection Officer, and members of its Information Security Team were currently engaged in scoping out a training package which once approved by the Training Strategy Group, would be delivered to nominated staff.

RESOLVED –

That the 2020-25 Corporate Plan Progress Review and Update be noted by the Authority.

FA13 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OBJECTIVES 2020-2025 YEAR THREE UPDATE

The Chairman advised that this report set out the progress on the equality, diversity and inclusion objectives and also included some updates to those objectives and looked at the year ahead.

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that this report was to update on progress made on equality, diversity and inclusion and the equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. The themes for 2023 were set against agreed objectives and had been amended to ensure the refreshed Corporate Plan priorities and the HMICFRS report recommendations and learnings, were aligned with it. Recommendations from both the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade and more recently the HMICFRS values and culture in Fire and Rescue Services had been cross referenced. Separate reports had been presented to the Executive Committee and Fire Authority.

Appendix 1 introduced the statutory duties outlined by the prevailing legislation, and the overarching objectives. Appendix 2 showed a summary of the equality, diversity and inclusion headlines and what had been achieved in 2022/2023. Appendix 3 illustrated equality, diversity and inclusion workforce data in the form of charts in comparison to the latest census data (2021) for the population of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. The service had reviewed the way it collected and presented data; this had been refreshed and was captured in the latest data report. Appendix 4 showed the refreshed objectives, noting the themes for 2023/2024 - Leadership, Community Engagement, Neurodiversity, Recruitment, and Facilities and Welfare Provision. They were set out against themes, activities, and the overarching objective so they could be effectively measured and reported on in future.

A Member asked about facilities and welfare provision, there was no timeline to show when the work identified would be completed.

The Head of Human Resources advised that work had already started, the plan was to look across all of the estate to see what was needed throughout and to be consistent. There was

an equality, diversity and inclusion budget of £25k per annum.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that he was working with the Property Manager, to understand what a standard fire station should look like, and what needed to be undertaken at each fire station. The Property Manager had been invited to attend the equality, diversity and inclusion group meeting to update on what was being done.

Members would like to see a list of identified works needed to upgrade premises in line with EDI objectives.

A Member asked about the gender pay gap and would the Authority hit the target.

The Head of Human Resources advised that the Authority reported on gender pay annually, and there was an action plan in place. In terms of equality on equal pay, an audit was carried out in 2020 that showed the Authority was doing everything it should and there was not any equal pay issues. As well as gender pay, the Authority would be looking at reporting on ethnicity pay moving forward.

A Member asked about the equality, diversity and inclusion recommendations that came out of the Grenfell report.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that once all the Grenfell recommendations had been received, they would be worked on and included in the Authority's policies and procedures. Regular updates were brought to Members, and the next report would highlight the equality, diversity and inclusion recommendations. The Operational Assurance Improvement Plan which included recommendations from Grenfell and Manchester Arena would be presented at the next Authority meeting in October.

The Chairman advised there was good progress in ethnic diversity in wholetime recruitment, but there had been a drop in gender diversity and asked what was being done to mitigate this.

The Head of Human Resources advised that in terms of gender challenges, in the last cohort of apprentices, of the 18 that had been selected, there were four females. Each recruitment the Service was looking at being as reflective of its communities as possible. Officers would run various reports at different stages of the application process, to see who applied, different dropout rates and was there anything

Director of Finance
and Assets

Head of Protection,
Assurance and
Development

that could be done in terms of the selection procedures and role related testing.

RESOLVED –

1. That the contents of the report, Introduction; Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) 2020 – 2025 Appendix 1 the BMKFA Headlines in Appendix 2 and EDI workforce data in Appendix 3 be noted.
2. That the revised EDI objectives in Appendix 4 be approved.

FA14 EXPLORING OUR CULTURE

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that a report was presented to the Executive Committee in March which showed the work to date and the planned work, and this report was an update on the work to date. In March 2023 HMICFRS published the 'Values and Culture in Fire and Rescue Services' report. An Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting was held on 28 April 2023 where the HMICFRS recommendations were approved. The plan was to combine the action plans from the two reports and base them on the draft National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Culture Action Plan. Updates on progress would be presented in due course. Appendix 1 showed an updated version of work to date and planned work. Appendix 2 showed the DBS letter sent to HMICFRS in March. Appendix 3 showed the Equality Impact Assessment and Appendix 4 showed the updated HMICFRS values and culture in fire and rescue services recommendations and update.

A Members asked why action 16 – 'Review of Vision and Values to include Code of Ethics' was in red.

The Head of Human Resources advised that it was in red as it had not yet been started and was due to commence in quarters 2 and 3.

The Chairman asked about the HMICFRS action plan and why concern 4 was marked as off track and had a moved due date of 1 January 2024. The due date was 1 June 2023 for Chief Fire Officers to assure themselves on how concerns were being raised. The Chairman asked the Chief Fire Officer if he had assured himself against the 1 June target and was the off track date because of the work being undertaken with the professional standards.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that he was assured he was aware of everything going on within the organisation,

he was assured that people coming forward were dealt with, and that they were dealt with in the appropriate way, and this was followed up.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that in terms of the professional standards function, there were ongoing discussions looking at collaboration in the Thames Valley, and with other fire and rescue services.

The Chairman suggested that the action was split into two. That phase one of the action had been completed on time, the next phase was in progress, rather than off track, and a target of 1 January 2024 had been set. This was also the case with items 20 and 21.

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised Members that the reason it was showing as off track was that the date had been revised, and in the next report it would not be showing as off track.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that in terms of evidencing this, confidentiality was key in encouraging people to come forward, so it was difficult to provide evidence more broadly to HMICFRS. Anything that was of concern had been notified to HMICFRS, but the detail was not shared.

RESOLVED –

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

FA15 SUMMER PRESSURES RECOMMENDATIONS

The Group Commander Head of Operational Training advised Members that an initial Summer Pressures report was presented to Members on 12 October 2022, which informed on the pressures experienced by the Service between the months of July and August 2022, which brought record high temperatures and dry weather and presented many challenges for fire and rescue services and other emergency responders across the country. The purpose of this report was to provide a further update on the assurance, debriefing and review of activities carried out in relation to summer pressures and to highlight areas for consideration which had been derived from a Service wide Extreme/Adverse Weather Survey. This survey was aimed at capturing the views and thoughts of all staff groups that were involved during those periods of extreme weather under nine specifically chosen headlines. 65 staff responded to the survey. The table containing the themes was complete with examples of areas

Chief Fire Officer /
Head of
Technology,
Transformation
and PMO

to consider. The progress column highlighted the ongoing work streams which would ensure the recommendations were delivered.

In conclusion, staff were able to service the needs of the summer pressure incidents whilst maintaining operational fire cover. Some of the areas to consider could be addressed relatively rapidly and simply, however, most themes and areas highlighted would require further work, thought and financial support over a longer period. Action owners had been assigned to each area at the appropriate level and time scales discussed, resulting in regular updates through the Operational Assurance Group (OAG). Updates would be captured through the Operational Assurance Improvement Plan (OAIP).

A Member had attended one of the incidents in Milton Keynes and asked if the local authority worked well together with the fire service.

The Group Commander Head of Operational Training advised Members that one of the recommendations within the report was how communication both internal and external was brought back into the Service and through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF). The Service now had a representative that sat on the group.

A Members asked if officers had knowledge of where water courses were in rural areas and also if the Service had the right equipment to deal with wildfires in rural areas.

The Group Commander Head of Operational Training advised Members that staff were trained to go out and site specific risk assess areas regarding access of water courses as it could be difficult in a real situation to find water. Through work being undertaken in the Thames Valley, the Wildfire Tactical Advisor, had been given the task of highlighting where the risks were for wildfires. Staff were very highly trained with the equipment that was on the appliances to deal with any situation. New 4x4 equipment had been purchased to repurpose two 4x4 vehicles to get water and staff to areas where water may be a problem.

A Member asked if there was a mapping system of where water was.

The Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience advised that the data terminals had hydrant mapping on them, although it does become challenging in some areas, but the

mapping would also show access to open water supplies. When at incidents, crews do rely on some local knowledge. The site specific risk information had been developed over recent years to include wildland areas as a risk.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Service had also engaged with the National Farmers Union and from feedback had now included adapters that allowed crews to access water supplies that were currently on farms and had also engaged on a prevention basis with farmers to limit and reduce the spread of wildfires.

The Chairman advised that following the summer incidents last year, Members were really clear they wanted the Service to ensure it was equipped and able to cope with any future events. Looking at this report, there were a number of actions outstanding where officers were going through growth bid submission, or it was part of a broader review. Could officers give Members assurance that processes would not hold up firefighters being equipped to cope with summer incidents this year. How well equipped and how ready was the Service to deal with a repeat of events or indeed worse events than happened last year.

The Group Commander Head of Operational Training advised Members that since the inception of this table, things had moved on. The growth bid process came to a conclusion two weeks again a lot of work had been in progress since then.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that work had been ongoing and was progressing well. Also, the Service was employing more staff, going from 268 to nearly 300 operational staff would make a difference this year. The Service coped last year and was now in a better position than it was last year.

RESOLVED –

That the content and recommendations detailed within this report were noted.

FA16 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q4 2022/23

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised this was the fourth time sharing with Members the key performance measures report for 2022/2023. The commentary within the report had been completed slightly differently to reflect both the performance in quarter four and the performance over the year. As in previous quarters, officers had highlighted and provided commentary on measures to enable a better

understanding of captured outcomes, whilst also reflecting on previous reports. While many improvements to the report were made during the year, there were several suggestions that had been held until 2023-2024, these would be implemented for the next Authority meeting.

A Member asked around GP1.10 – grievances and disciplines processed, given that the Service was trying to encourage more people to speak out, was this the right way to reflect this.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager agreed there were a couple of measures where it was difficult and one of the recommendations from the previous report was to include a better narrative of each of the measures.

The Chairman suggested that the Data Intelligence Team Manager go through all the measures with the Lead Members to see if they were the correct measures and to refresh if necessary, as these had now been in place for a year.

A Member asked about non-domestic and domestic fires.

The Data Intelligence Team Leader advised that this was a good example of how this report worked well, for non-domestic properties, when officers looked at this more in depth, it showed that most of the non-domestic fires were prison related. The Service was now working with prisons to understand how this could be reduced.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and felt it had improved over the year and was an important part of Members scrutiny. It was also important to note the improvement with fire and wellness visits. The challenges for the year ahead were to improve the ‘great place to work’ performance. It showed that fewer appraisals were completed this year, and a slight improvement in mandatory elearning but still some way to go. The Chairman asked if these could be elevated up as the focus. Also, it was very important to get some climate change metrics in place.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that a report would be going to the Executive Committee meeting in July, and the carbon emissions base line had been set which would give a baseline to measure improvements against.

RESOLVED –

That the Performance Management – Q4 2022/23 be noted.

Head of
Technology,
Transformation and
PMO / Director of
Finance and Assets

FA17 RECENT CHANGES TO FIRE SAFETY / BUILDING SAFETY LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy gave Members a presentation on the recent changes to fire safety / building safety legislation and regulations.

A Member asked if this covered commercial properties or just residential properties.

Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy advised Members that all the legislation was around buildings that had at least two minimum residential properties within the building.

A Member asked about the planning implications, as there was a move towards many more high rise residential developments in Milton Keynes, and also did the Service have the equipment moving forward for fire in a high rise building, for example on the 27th floor.

The Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy advised Members that the Service did get involved with the planners and approval inspectors and all that work was going ahead as normal. There were a number of level 5 Fire Engineers, someone taking a degree in level 6, and there were three level 7s at regional level. With regard to having the necessary equipment, if everyone followed the legislation, there would not be a need for specialist equipment.

A Member asked who was responsible for enforcement.

The Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy advised that the Authority was responsible locally.

A Member asked about houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs).

The Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy advised that HMOs were regulated by the local authority, and they have authority over them.

A Member asked about 'responsible persons'.

The Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy advised that the responsible person for the building from a legal perspective was responsible.

A Member asked if there should be a media promotion for local residents.

The Group Commander Community and business Safety Policy, said that this was something that would be looked at, the National Fire Chiefs Council would be looking to do something nationally.

The Chairman advised Members that there would be a training workshop put in place on this subject for Members.

Group Commander
Community and
Business Safety Policy

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 1.10 PM.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.15 PM.