



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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

Present: Councillors Adoh, Carroll, Chapple OBE, Christensen (part), Exon, Fuller (part), Hall, Khan, McLean, Rouse (Chairman), Stuchbury and Waite

Officers: M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), A Carter (Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO), D Buchanan (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager), O Finch (Station Commander – HR Projects) and S Grosse (Group Commander – Service Delivery South)

Apologies: Councillors Bagge, Darlington, Hussain, Lambert and Walsh

The Chairman 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>

FA18 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 14 June 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA19 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

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

FA13 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives 2020-2025 Year Three Update - The Chairman asked for a list of identified works needed to upgrade premises in line with EDI objectives – the Deputy Director of Finance and Assets had circulated this list to Members.

The Operational Assurance Improvement Plan which included recommendations from Grenfell and Manchester Arena

would be presented at the next Authority meeting in October
– This had been deferred to the December Meeting

FA14 - Exploring our Culture - Split out the two actions from recommendation 4. Review RAG on recommendations 20 and 21. Review narrative and presentational aspects. The plan had now been updated and furthermore the Service was looking to rollout standardised RAG ratings across all areas following an assurance review undertaken by Internal Audit.

FA16 - Performance Management – Q4 2022/23 - 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 climate change metrics had been updated for the Q1 report and the Service continued to emphasise the importance of the completion of appraisals and mandatory elearning.

Elearning / Appraisals should be the next key focus. This was a priority for the OD team and 360 appraisals had been completed at SMT level and were currently being rolled out to middle managers.

FA17 - Recent Changes to Fire Safety/Building Safety Legislation and Regulations - Protection workshop hybrid/virtual once new NFCC guidance on enforcement is finalised.

A Member asked if the slides from the presentation by the Group Commander Community and Business Safety Policy to the Annual Meeting could be circulated to Members.

(Councillor Fuller joined the meeting)

FA20 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

None.

FA21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that:

Doug Buchanan was attending his first meeting of the Authority since his appointment into the role of Area Commander Protection, Assurance and Development in September 2023. Doug joins from Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, where he was Head of Response and Resilience.

Head of Protection,
Assurance and
Development

Group Commander
Community and
Business Safety Policy

Today the Prince of Wales is visiting the Blue Light Hub to highlight the importance of supporting the mental health of emergency responders during the week of World Mental Health Day. The Prince will meet with a group of young people who have recently joined the emergency services. His Royal Highness will hear first-hand from those in the early stages of their careers about the challenges they face. The conversation will be focussed on the vital importance of equipping those working in the emergency services with the skills to help protect their mental health and build their resilience, and will be joined by broadcaster, journalist and psychologist Dr Sian Williams. Supporting the mental health of this community is a cause close to the heart of The Prince of Wales, as he saw first-hand the challenges emergency responders face on a daily basis whilst serving as a pilot with RAF search and rescue and East Anglian Air Ambulance.

Seven Apprentice Firefighters commenced on 29 August and a further eighteen started on 27 September. This brings the operational establishment to 314, the first time it has been at this level for ten years. The recruitment campaign for eighteen Apprentice Firefighters is open until 5 November to allow for a more targeted campaign and increased lead time for applications to be submitted. Successful applicants would start in late May 2024.

The service advertised for Crew Commander and Watch Commander transferees and invited three Crew Commanders to the Organisational Development Selection process on 2 October and a Watch Commander to the process on 5 October.

Members will have seen in the news reports that Luton Airport was closed overnight due to a significant fire in one of the short stay multi-story carparks. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service received calls to a fire involving a car on level three of the multi-storey car park at 8.47pm.

It is believed that the fire started in a vehicle that would have arrived shortly before this time, which rapidly spread to other vehicles and the building, in all affecting over 1200 vehicles and causing significant structural collapse of the car park.

Just after 10pm last night, Thames Valley Fire Control were contacted by Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service Control, requesting Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (BFRS) resources to assist with this declared major incident.

An Aerial appliance supported by a Rescue pump was mobilised from West Ashland and remained on scene for a number of hours, until relieved by the Aerial Appliance from High Wycombe and Rescue Pump from Amersham. Officers from BFRS were also mobilised to support BFRS resources.

BFRS resources were stood down at around 4am this morning.

At its peak there were 15 Rescue pumps, three aerial appliances and over 100 firefighters on scene at this incident. Resources from Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, and London Fire Brigade, along with Bedfordshire Police and East of England Ambulance all supported this incident. Bedfordshire FRS will remain in attendance for a significant amount of time, BFRS will continue to support if further requests are received.

Reports state that a number of firefighters were treated for smoke inhalation, but all have thankfully been released from hospital (no one from BFRS treated).

Another great example of cross border working, where BFRS had supported over the border colleagues.

(Councillor Christensen joined the meeting)

FA22 MEMBERSHIP OF THE AUTHORITY

To note that Milton Keynes City Council appointed on 19 July 2023 the following Members to serve on the Authority:

Milton Keynes City Council (5)

From: Councillors Darlington, Exon, Fuller, Hopkins and McLean

To: Councillors Darlington, Exon, Fuller, Khan and McLean

FA23 COMMITTEE MATTERS

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

Conservative Group:	10 seats	(58.82%)
Labour Group:	4 seats	(23.53%)
Liberal Democrat Group:	3 seats	(17.65%)

(b) Committee Appointments

RESOLVED –

That seats to the following Committees be allocated as follows:

Executive Committee (8 Members):

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

Overview and Audit Committee (9 Members):

- (i) Conservative – 5 seats
- (ii) Labour – 2 Seats
- (ii) Liberal Democrats – 2 seats

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

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

FA24 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

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

RESOLVED –

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

FA25 LEAD MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Each having been nominated and seconded it was:

RESOLVED -

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

Responsibility	Lead Member
People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance	Councillor Adoh
Health and Safety and Corporate Risk	Councillor Hall

FA26 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

Overview and Audit Committee – 19 July 2023

(a) Protocol on Member and Officer Relations

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that this report was being presented to the Authority as part of the quadrennial review of the Authority's Protocol on Member and Officer Relations. The Protocol complements the Authority's Members' Code of Conduct. The report was recommended by the Overview and Audit Committee, and was reviewed by employee representatives via the Joint Consultation Forum at its meeting on 1 March 2023 who were in agreement that the Protocol should include reference to the five ethical principles from the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services, which were also subsequently incorporated into the updated employee Code of Conduct 2023 when approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 22 March 2023.

RESOLVED –

That the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations be approved for adoption.

Executive Committee – 13 September 2023

(b) 2025-30 CRMP Listening and Engagement Consultation Outcomes

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this Consultation was carried out as part of wider consultation and engagement activities with other key stakeholders, including the Authority's own staff and partner organisations, the findings from which would be included in summary form in the draft CRMP ahead of the formal public consultation stage.

Officers carried out initial consultations at an early stage in the CRMP development process in order to comply with the National Framework and Fire Standard requirements and, also, those long established by the Gunning Principles, as they set out the legal tests that define what constitutes a legitimate consultation. Including, for example, that proposals were consulted on when they were still at a formative stage, to ensure that decisions had not been subject to pre-determination; and, that there was sufficient

information to enable intelligent consideration resulting in an informed response.

These requirements tend to favour qualitative methods of consultation when dealing with complex issues, hence the use of independently and expertly facilitated focus groups that allowed participants to discuss and consider CRMP related issues and proposals in depth.

Members would see in the report a diverse and broadly representative sample of the population was recruited to participate in the consultation. Because of this, Opinion Research Services, who carried out the consultation, advised that the outcomes were broadly indicative of how the public at large would incline if engagement with a much larger proportion of the population was undertaken.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that the consultation was structured into two main parts, firstly, an exploration of the participants' perceptions of risk in their communities and of BFRS as a Service, covering things like their awareness of what it does, whether it was value for money etc. As with previous consultations of this type, fire was seldom mentioned spontaneously as something that the participants worry about on a day to day basis, even though they knew that the consultation had been commissioned by the fire and rescue service. However, there was a good exploration of some topical fire risks later on in the discussions such as wildfire and those related to lithium-ion batteries.

The second part explored some of the challenges that the Service faced and potential ways that it might respond to them. These included key issues raised by the HMICFRS in their Round 2 inspection report including the future of on-call services, automatic fire alarms and workforce diversity.

The Chairman asked about workforce diversity and setting out the perception challenge that the Service had, both around the importance of diversity and how it attracted different parts of the community that it serves, as well as informing the CRMP process. It was important to include it in the ongoing communication and recruitment activity.

The Head of Human Resources advised that with regard to recruitment, the Workforce Planning Group met on a monthly basis, and now the Service had reached the establishment target, were looking at what to focus on next. The five key areas were diversity, communication,

recruitment, succession and talent management and retention.

The Chairman asked about on call availability and the future of the on call service, and stated he was surprised that options were being explored with residents as it did not need to go through formal consultation. The Chairman felt there were things the Service could be doing now and asked officers what they could be getting on with as there was significant challenge with on call availability.

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised there were currently on call trials which were trialling different things at different stations. At some stations the traditional on call model was extremely challenging, and the trials were making the most of the number of on call firefighters rather than the number of on call stations. The CRMP was key to future delivery, but Officers were doing work in the meantime to seek improvements around response.

The Chairman asked for a report on the on call strategy to be brought to a future Executive Committee meeting and then Fire Authority meeting.

A Member asked in terms of recruitment of diversity, in Milton Keynes 46% were from a diverse background how was the Service targeting young people from different backgrounds.

The Head of Human Resources advised that the current recruitment campaign was focused on women. Previously work was done on the South Asian community. When a recruitment campaign was undertaken, reports were run on who was applying, their protected characteristics and when they were falling out of the application process. This gave information on what needed to be targeted.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

(c) Performance Management – Q1 2023/24

The Data Intelligence Team Manager was pleased to present to Members the key performance measures report for Q1 2023/24. As Members would see, there had been a number of changes based on feedback throughout the last year. The most notable changes were an improved layout of the report which allowed for more detailed measure descriptions and increased commentary. There were also some new measures

Interim Chief Fire Officer

added, including prison fires, forecast-outturn, website engagements, carbon emissions and printing.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members that with regard to performance within the report, it was encouraging to see the impact of the incidents in the home and workplace were generally where they were expected to be based on the targets set. However, it would be remiss not to highlight the area detailed in the response model. This area primarily detailed the availability of appliances across the wholetime fleet and on call. As seen in the report, this area had yet to reach its expected position. In relation to wholetime figures, there were a number of reasons that attributed to these figures; however, the Service had identified the largest impact of these numbers was the skills gap within the current workforce, primarily in relation to drivers and junior officers. As mentioned within the commentary, a range of initiatives had been agreed to improve resilience of front line resources.

A Member asked how bank shifts worked, the risk of attacks on staff members and vehicle accidents.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that with bank shifts there was a direct correlation between numbers of wholetime staff and the number of bank shifts required. Now that the Service was above establishment with the current new apprentices, looking at the figures for the same period last year, the Service was 36% down on bank shifts requirements which was positive.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that with regard to the risk of attacks on staff members, thankfully the numbers were very low, and Officers engaged with the public a lot on this matter, and any attacks would always be reported to the Police. There was also a new law that had come out regarding attacks on emergency workers. A report that came out in June this year, reported attacks on firefighters had increased significantly.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the information on vehicle incidents was captured in other reports. The Health and Safety Committee drill down into every vehicle incident to see if it could have been avoided.

A Member asked around the format of the report as there were different types of targets and methods of comparison, some targets were aspirational and some were there to ensure minimum standards were met. Would it be possible to

mark out clearer which were aspirational, and which were minimum standards.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that this was something officers could look at.

The Chairman advised that the report was showing deteriorating availability of wholetime pumps and the on call response model was way off where it needed to be which feeds through to the issue of a serious deterioration in the over the border mobilisation from supporting services. When will the investment made in resourcing feed through into appliance availability and reduced the use of other services. When would Members start to see that and what more needs to be done to get availability where it needs to be and significantly reduce the over the border reliance.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised he had already started looking at Q2 and the benefits were already being seen. Response times were not good in Q1 but in Q2 were looking very good.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that availability was improving, although there was an issue around skills, with supervisory officers and drivers, and these were being addressed in a number of ways. A new area was being trialled called a 'safe to command' approach, whereby firefighters who had aspirations to be Crew Commanders, could command an appliance and an incident which gives the Service greater resilience. Also, when the 25 firefighters currently at the Fire Service College, were on station, this would be a further improvement.

RESOLVED -

That the Performance Management – Q1 2023/24 be noted

FA27 PEOPLE STRATEGY 2020-2025 – YEAR THREE UPDATE

Station Commander – HR Projects advised Members that the People Strategy 2020-2025 was approved at the October 2020 Fire Authority meeting. The Service reviewed progress and provided an update to Members on an annual basis.

Key area one – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I), the Service secured a Change 100 Intern working within the Resource Management Team. The candidate started on 10 July 2023, additionally the Service had delivered bespoke ED&I training for all employees to embed ED&I throughout

the Service. The Service had also been awarded the ENEI Silver accreditation.

Key area two – Employee Engagement, the Culture Survey Working Group had evolved into the Employee Engagement Working Group and was made up of employees from across the Service. The group continued to use the feedback loop as a tool to encourage idea generation and capture feedback and crucially ensure the Service remains focussed on completing the cycle by offering feedback and celebrating success. The People Awards were held in July to celebrate employee achievements.

Key area three – Organisational Development and Resourcing the Organisational Development Team were developing a BFRS staff development pathway project which was being designed to align to the NFCC's Core Learning Pathway and Leadership Framework. The Pathway will provide clarity to employees looking to develop themselves either within their existing role or with aspirations for the next level role within BFRS or another organisation.

Key area four – Training, Learning and Development there had been a significant commitment delivering a range of wholtime recruitment, transferee and on call firefighter courses supporting the Service's strategic objective of increasing the operational establishment. This had been delivered alongside recruitment for support roles.

Key area five – Employee Health and Wellbeing the Service's mental health support network, had been reviewed and updated providing a robust support structure across the Service. 37 mental health champions had been trained to provide a range or support to employees. Trauma support training had been provided for 12 new debriefers, bringing the cadre of available trauma support debriefers to 22. The purpose of trauma support was to provide reassurance about natural reactions to traumatic situations and an opportunity to discuss coping strategies.

The paper identified future opportunities of the Strategy for year four. These opportunities would allow the Service to measure and record progress made in each key area, identify further opportunities to develop the People Strategy, and improve how both existing and future employees are developed.

A Member asked about the Equal Pay Act, and the section on diversity and also that the strategy did not mention the unions.

The Head of Human Resources advised that there was a Equal Pay Audit in 2020, and that report was presented to Members. The gender pay gap was reported every March and next year the Service would also be looking at the ethnicity pay gap. The People Strategy goes out to the Trade Unions through the Joint Consultative Forum, to get their input.

The Chairman asked about the equality impact assessment, a number of areas were assessed as a positive impact from the strategy, but there were two that stood out where it was highlighting no negative impact and asked why. Also, the staff survey was due to take place in January, had altering the month been considered.

The Head of Human Resources advised that in terms of the equality impact assessment, and those areas shown as neutral, this was only for the People Strategy.

In terms of the survey, the last two surveys had been undertaken in January and also it had been balanced against the HMICFRS survey which was part of the HMICFRS inspection and so it did not clash at the same time. It was also trying to be set at the same time each year, so staff knew when to expect it. January had been chosen as it allowed the results to be fed into next year's plans.

The Chairman requested that consideration be given to having the staff survey later in the calendar year as it has been noted in some sections surveys in January can produce more negative responses.

Head of Technology,
Transformation and
PMO

RESOLVED -

That the contents of the update and progress made in the key areas are noted.

FA28 EXTEND THE TIME PERIOD OF THE BFRS RESPONSE STRATEGY

Group Commander – Service Delivery South advised Members that the current BFRS Response Strategy had been live since 2018 and was due to end in 2023. The strategy had been reviewed and officers were content that it was still fit for purpose for an extension period. A new response strategy could be written now, but with the CRMP consultation currently underway, and with the good engagement and information currently being heard from the community, it would be used to better understand future needs of the

community. It was important that the response strategy aligns with this new CRMP. The risks for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes were being considered, work had progressed with the high rise response, wildfire provision and also engagement with battery energy storage systems which were appearing across the county. There was also an Emerging Risk Group to look at risks within the area.

The Chairman asked that it be reviewed regularly if the circumstances around it changed. Part of the issue around this Response Strategy was that it was put in place in 2018 and should have been updated with the 2020 Public Safety Plan. When the CRMP was launched, the Response Strategy should be aligned to it.

A Member stated that his support for the recommendation was contingent on the Strategy being submitted to the Authority for review and approval in 12 months' time.

A Member advised that some people who had solar panels had batteries in their houses. He knew the Service did risk assessments on commercial buildings but was the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) doing anything about domestic properties. Should the solar panel companies have a database that could be accessible by the fire service.

The Group Commander - Service Delivery South advised that there was a lot of new technology coming out and the Service was beginning to gain information on larger solar farms, private installations. It collected certain amounts of information on domestic dwellings but not solar panels or lithium batteries in private houses.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that after every incident the Service attended, Officers complete an incident report, which was currently being reviewed by the Home Office. This was probably their hottest topic on how this information was captured so that trends could be seen and pushed back onto the industries. It was also a hot topic for the NFCC too.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that there was a dedicated resource within the NFCC working on this whole area and there were a number of competing priorities around electric vehicles, e-scooters, e-bikes as these were the greatest risks moving forward, where people were charging them in hallways etc., there was a huge emerging risk around those areas. With regard to the domestic energy battery storage, there were companies that were very reputable,

who do inform a register that the Service can access, but equally, people were buying batteries off ebay etc., and installing them themselves in airing cupboards, crews would not know what they were facing until they get there. The crews were well trained in identifying this and there was operational guidance in place around attending premises where there were solar panels and a potential for that risk to be there. Training packages were also being developed around battery energy storage systems and how to tackle those fires.

The Chairman asked if there was an awareness campaign that the Service could run about storage of solar panels etc. and provide advice to people on how they best protect themselves.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that it would form part of the Prevention Strategy moving forward. There were national campaigns, but this could also be look at locally as it was one of the emerging risks.

RESOLVED –

That the extension of the Response Strategy be approved, so that the strategy aligns with, and is informed by, the new Community Risk Management Plan (and be reviewed by the Authority in 12 months' time)

FA29 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.

The Corporate Planning Manager, Data Intelligence Team Manager, Station Commander – HR Projects and Group Commander – Service Delivery South left the meeting.

FA30 SUCCESSION PLANNING

RESOLVED –

Head of Protection,
Assurance and
Development

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

FA31 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Fire Authority will be held on Wednesday 6 December 2023 at 11 am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.40PM

DRAFT