

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES
FIRE AUTHORITY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 11.00 AM

Present: Councillors Brown, Carroll, Clarke OBE (Chairman), Clare, Exon, Glover, Hopkins, Lambert, Marland, McCall, McLean, Minns and Teesdale

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), C Bell (Head of Service Development), D Norris (Head of Service Delivery), A Hussain (Principal Accountant), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager) A Chart (Health and Safety Manager), Faye Mansfield (HR Advisory and Development Manager) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

3 Members of the Public

Apologies: Councillors Christensen, Cranmer, Roberts and Watson

FA34 MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 23 January 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

FA35 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman's Announcements had been circulated in advance.

The Chairman asked the Chief Fire Officer to update Members on a couple of important items.

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the Coronavirus and the work that had been happening within the Authority and asked the Head of Service Delivery to brief Members on the planning that's in place.

The Head of Service Delivery advised Members that last Thursday (6 February) the Authority had been advised that there was a plan to bring in approximately 150 passengers from affected areas to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire. On Sunday 9 February, the passengers would be transported to Kents Hill Park Conference Centre in Milton Keynes. Kents Hill Park Conference Centre had been repurposed as a temporary isolation site. As part of the planning, there had been various multi agency partnership meetings, tactical coordination group meetings and strategic coordination group meetings which the Authority had been involved in. That was one part of planning, the other part was the Authority's business continuity should the development of that particular situation spread further across the country. Staff briefings had been held regularly so that the Authority could continue to provide a good level of service.

The Head of Service Development assured Members that the Authority had been well informed, well briefed and continued to work well with all its partners across the Thames Valley; as well as counterparts who were dealing with similar issues in Merseyside.

The Chief Fire Officer wanted his thanks passed onto the Chief Executive of Milton Keynes Council for all his work regarding this matter.

The Chief Fire Officer also updated Members on a recent fire in Olney. The crews had done a fantastic job, they had rescued a family from a house fire, performed CPR on members of the family including an 11 week old baby. The police had reported that the baby was now out of hospital and the Chief Fire Officer wanted to record his thanks to all involved.

FA36

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2020

(A) MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

The Chairman advised Members, that since this report had been published, the Buckinghamshire Shadow Authority had now published the report of their Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) and this had been circulated to Members. Also, as agreed at the Authority meeting on 14 December 2011, the index linking for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15 be the pay award for the Authority's staff on National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire and Rescue Services, Scheme of Conditions of Service (Grey Book) and it was recommended that the Authority continued this indexation for the period 2020/21 and the effects of a 2% pay increase were reflected in the Members' Scheme of Allowances for 2020/21.

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that this report was a recommendation from the Executive Committee, and recommended a 2% increase for all allowances. As mentioned by the Chairman, there was a need for Members to consider the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel report from the Buckinghamshire Shadow Authority. Following receipt of this IRP report, there would be one small cosmetic change to the Scheme of Allowances on page 32, under 'Subsistence' there was a reference to Buckinghamshire 'County' Council, and the 'County' would be deleted for clarity.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority be recommended to adopt a Scheme for Members Allowances for 2020/21 (Appendix B)

(B) THE PRUDENTIAL CODE, PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION

The Principal Accountant advised Members that due to the uncertain timing of third-party contributions relating to the Blue

Light Hub, it was recommended that the Authorised Limit for the current year was increased by £2m, with immediate effect, in case short-term borrowing was required to effectively manage cash flow. It was also recommended that the Authorised Limit for 2020/21 was set at £2m higher than the Operational limit to allow for the effective management of cash flow in relation to capital receipts from land sales.

A Member asked, regarding increasing the limit due to uncertainties when the money would be received from other authorities, was that it was not clear when the contributions would be paid, or if the contributions might be later than expected and if they were later than planned, if the Authority had any recourse against the other authorities to help with the cost of borrowing.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that the uncertainty around the timings of contributions related to once the Blue Light Hub was finished and if the payment would be in this current financial year, or the next one. There was also uncertainty on the Milton Keynes Development Partnership's option on Bletchley. If taken up, the Authority would sell Bletchley fairly quickly, if not, it would be a much longer term sale. The cost of the borrowing would be on the Authority, but as it was short term, it would be a low interest rate.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Prudential Indicators for 2020/21 be approved;
2. that an increase in the authorised limit for 2019/20 of £2m to £8.797m be approved; and
3. that the Minimum Revenue Provision policy statement be approved.

(C) MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) 2020/21 TO 2024/25

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that as discussed at the Executive Committee, essentially this year's settlement from the government was a one year roll over, rather than a full comprehensive spending review. The Authority had not got the three year certainty it was hoping for to set up the budget accordingly. In spite of the Authority's responses to the Consultation, the referendum limit for council tax remained at 2% maximum. The Authority was actually proposing a rise of 1.98%. When HMICFRS published its inspection report in December, they noted that without additional funding, it would be hard to see where improvements could be made. The Authority had not got additional funding, but it would do everything it could to try and make those improvements.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that this year the Authority had adopted a zero-based budget to make sure it was spending every pound in the most effective way possible. There

was still uncertainly around the pensions grant funding. When it was received last year, the Authority was told it was for one year only. Fortunately, as the government had rolled over the budget, they had also rolled this over for one year as well. This had now been officially confirmed.

The Principal Accountant advised Members that a zero-based budget approach had identified some key opportunities within the current budgetary constraints. Some of these key opportunities were as follows; increasing the wholetime establishment by up to 20 firefighters in 2020/21, with the potential to increase by a further 10 in the following year (depending on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review); increasing the Protection Team by 4 full time employees and introducing a Team Leader role and two further full time employees into the Prevention Team. Introducing a Head of Technology, Transformation and Programme Management Office (PMO) to, among other responsibilities, manage the actions required following the Authority's inspection report.

As stated in the summary, the council tax and business rate figures were provisional as the statutory deadline for billing authorities to provide this was 31 January. These had now been finalised and therefore updated appendices 1a, 1b and 2 had been circulated and presented to Members.

The Appendices referenced in the recommendations were therefore references to the updated Appendices all dated 5 February 2020.

As a result of the updated funding figures, there had been movements in the council tax and business rates funding which were as follows; the Net Budget Requirement shown in Appendix 1(a) and 1(b) for 2020/21 had therefore increased by £269k, as had the opening Base Budget for 2021/22. The Net Budget Requirement from 2021/22 onwards had increased by £140k per annum (reflecting the increase in business rates baseline). The key difference between model 1a and b was the assumption being made on the pension grant. Model 1a assumed that the Authority would receive the pension grant throughout the medium term financial plan up until 2024/25. However, model 1b assumed the pension grant would discontinue from 2021/22 onwards. This would inevitably have an impact on the reserves position as with the pension grant, model 1a estimated the reserves position to be £6.349m by 2024/25. However, if the pension grant was to stop from 2021/22 then the reserves would reduce to just over £1.5m.

RESOLVED:

1(a) That the report and Statement of the Chief Finance Officer (see section 8 of Annex A) be noted.

1(b) A Council Tax precept of £65.85 for a band D equivalent property (a 1.98% increase from 2019/20 – equal to 2.5p per

week) and the revenue budget as set out in Appendix 1(a) be approved.

1(c) Approve the capital programme as set out in Appendix 2.

2. That a referendum to increase Council Tax above the 2% threshold for 2020/21 not be held.

3. That a referendum may need to be considered for 2021/22 depending on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review be noted.

Details of the recorded vote for resolutions 1(a) to 1(c) are set out below:

	For	Against	Abstained
Brown	✓		
Carroll	✓		
Clarke OBE	✓		
Clare	✓		
Exon	✓		
Glover	✓		
Hopkins	✓		
Lambert	✓		
Marland	✓		
McCall	✓		
McLean	✓		
Minns	✓		
Teesdale	✓		

(D)2020-2025 PUBLIC SAFETY PLAN CONSULTATION: FEEDBACK & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Head of Service Development advised Members that the Public Safety Plan or Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), sets out the strategic approach to the way in which the Authority managed risk. There was a statutory requirement for all fire and rescue authorities in England to produce an IRMP that conformed to the National Framework requirements.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this report was in three parts. Firstly, the feedback from the public consultation exercise that was undertaken over an eight-week period between 23 September and 18 November 2019, following approval to do so by the Authority at the 18 September 2019 meeting. This was in the form of a report from Opinion Research Services (ORS) detailing the findings both from the focus groups that they facilitated and the online feedback channel, which was also hosted by ORS. The second part Members would see the Authority had drawn out all the main issues and suggestions that had arisen out of the consultation process and provided responses to it. The third part of the pack contained the finalised Public Safety Plan which had been updated to reflect the fact that the consultation process had now concluded and in readiness for the Authority's decision on the recommendations.

The Corporate Planning Manager briefly summarised for Members the main outcomes of the consultation and what the Authority proposed to do with the detailed findings.

A Member asked with the building of HS2, if firefighters would need further skills/training.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that there had already been a National Fire Chiefs Council group set up looking at the infrastructure and this Authority had been involved from the early stages. London Fire Brigade was leading on the fire safety and operational perspective. The construction phase was going to be a real challenge for the service for the next 10 years and that new skills may be required for firefighters regarding responding to incidents in tunnels and at heights.

RESOLVED:

1. That the 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan be adopted.
2. That Officers be directed to proceed with the further development of the strategy proposals set out at page 32 of the 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan (Annex 3) having regard to the consultation feedback as they are progressed and to undertake further consultations with stakeholders potentially affected by any specific changes arising from their implementation.
3. That the Chief Fire Officer be granted discretion to determine the sequencing and timing of the work required to further progress the proposals.

FA37

ANNUAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING REPORT 2018/19

Councillor Teesdale the Lead Member for Health and Safety and Corporate Risk introduced the report and advised Members that 2018/19 was another good year in terms of health and safety performance. Significant progress had been made in terms of well-being, with the training of 19 Mental Health First Aiders and

14 Mental Health Champions. These mental health advocates were becoming embedded throughout the Service and their skills were being utilised.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that 2018/19 had been a very busy year for the Health and Safety department with the development and implementation of the Health and Safety strategy. This document set out the strategic direction for health and safety for the next three years (2019-22). A programme of face to face communications with staff had been undertaken in an effort to obtain staff buy in to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

The Health and Safety Manager advised that whilst there had been an increase in the number of safety events in five of the six performance areas, it should be noted that the other fire and rescue services in our peer group had also seen increases, some of which were significant. Additionally, there had been an increase in the number of incidents attended by 537 and an increase in the number of fire appliance mobilisations by 406.

However, what was extremely pleasing was the significant increase in the number of 'near misses' reported in 2018/19 from 27 to 61 a percentage increase of 126%. Near misses were events that occur, which do not result in injury, damage or loss but have the potential to do so. In this Service they were reported and investigated to determine what measures could be put in place to prevent injury or damage occurring should the same situation arise again.

The Health and Safety Manager advised that nationally for the year 2018/19, there were 58 instances of physical and 577 of verbal abuse events against firefighters. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service encountered one act of physical abuse for this year compared to zero last year.

Whilst there had been an increase of 25% in the number of working days lost to sickness absence for Wholetime staff and a reduction of 30% for Support staff, consideration should be given to the type of injury and whether the individual was able to work with that injury. For example, if a Support member of staff had a broken finger he/she would still be able to come to work whereas an operational member of staff would not.

The Head of Service Development advised Members, that one of the reasons that health and safety was in such a good position, was the investment put into this area by the Authority approving the one year contract for a Health and Safety Technician for the department.

A Member commented that the rise in 'near miss' reporting was very positive, but why was the increase in injury rates, accident/injuries, vehicle damage etc., being reported as positive news.

The Health and Safety Manager advised that although some of the figures had risen, the Authority's performance against its peer groups was still very good. Ideally the Authority would prefer there were no increases in these rates.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that looking at the results in context, it was the busiest summer in 20 years, a lot of the injuries were very minor and a lot of the equipment damage was very minor and that the service always strived to have fewer injuries.

A Member asked, regarding the firefighter that had been abused, if the perpetrator was prosecuted and was advised that they had been.

A number of typographical amendments to the Health, Safety and Well-being Annual Report 2018-19 were requested by Members.

RESOLVED –

That the performance of the Service in terms of Health, Safety and Well-being be noted.

FA38

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

The Principal Accountant advised Members that this report was being presented as the Authority was required to approve the Treasury Management Policy Statement, Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy. These documents all support the Medium Term Financial Plan. The current strategy was operating effectively and outperforming the benchmark targets. For 2019/20, the Authority had set a budget of £150k and was currently projecting return on investments in the region of £180k which was an over achievement of £30k against the budget. There was no significant change from the previous strategy. The rationale for this was due to the current cash flow position with a considerable amount being spent on the capital programme which had resulted in a reduction of funds being available to invest in comparison to previous years.

A Member asked if there would be any changes in interest rates charges due to the Coronavirus and was advised that officers did not foresee any short term impacts in terms of interest rates changes at this time.

RESOLVED –

That the Treasury Management Policy Statement, Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2020/21 be approved.

FA39

FIRE AID

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that FIRE AID was a UK registered charity which brought together members to provide ethical and sustainable donations of fire and rescue equipment and training to over 50 countries worldwide, with the

aim of improving fire safety. Their work relies on donations from fire services within the UK. The Authority was looking to change its Contract Standing Orders to allow the donation of an asset as a way of disposal. The second-hand market for fire engines was becoming more restricted and it was harder to sell them. Recently the Authority had had three Volvo appliances which were about 15-20 years old each on the market for about 6 months. It had just managed to sell two of them, but one just wouldn't sell and this could be put to really good use elsewhere. If they do not sell, they still had to be insured, and there was limited space in workshops to keep them.

A Member asked if the book value of £10k or less was an arbitrary threshold, and was advised that by the time they become unserviceable and no use to the Service, most of them would have zero book value after depreciation of 15 to 20 years. In the first instance the Authority would do its duty to the tax payer and try and sell them, but if they were not sold in a reasonable time, they would start to cost the Authority money and at that point, it would now look at donating them.

A Member asked what price was received for the two appliances that sold recently and was advised that they were sold for approximately £4/5k each.

RESOLVED –

1. That FIREAID be approved as a potential donee of end-of-life appliances and equipment.
2. The following amendments to Standing Orders Relating to Contracts, paragraph 21, be approved:

(a) The deletion of the text at subparagraph 21.3:

"21.3 Disposal must be either by public auction or by obtaining three quotes from suitable contractors"

And the substitution of the following text:

"21.3 Except in circumstances in which the Chief Finance Officer is authorising disposal in accordance with 21.2 in which case donation to a charity approved by the Authority may be considered, disposal must be either by public auction or by obtaining three quotes from suitable contractors"

(b) The deletion of the text at subparagraph 21.4:

"The officer responsible for the disposal must ensure that the Authority is receiving value for money; that the contractor used is reputable; and that the necessary anti-money laundering checks are in place by reference to the Chief Finance Officer."

And the substitution of the following text:

"21.4 The Officer responsible for the disposal must ensure that the Authority is receiving value for money, except in circumstances in which the Chief Finance Officer is authorising disposal in accordance with 21.2; that the contractor used is

reputable; and that the necessary anti-money laundering checks are in place by reference to the Chief Finance Officer.”

FA40 PAY POLICY PRINCIPLES AND STATEMENT 2020-21

The Lead Members for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance introduced the report.

The HR Advisory and Development manager advised Members that the pay policy was required to be updated each financial year and was therefore being presented today as the 2020/21 pay policy for the Authority. The pay policy was based on the current 2019/20 pay policy and had been updated and minor amendments made where appropriate.

The pay multiples and ratio of highest to lowest pay continued to fall for the eighth year which was positive, seeing the ratio improving by 2% from last year and by 26% since 2012.

Within the 2018/19 and 2019/20 pay policy cover reports, a note was made to the introduction of a public sector exit payment cap and 'claw back' for termination payments. Firm implementation dates for these provisions had not yet been announced. The Authority would continue to await the final details of any Regulation changes and implementation dates. It was recommended the 2020/21 pay policy as outline in Annex A be approved for publication.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager also advised Members as a final point, that the Authority had just commenced an equal pay audit, as this was the most effective way of checking that the service was complying with its equal pay obligations, ensuring delivery of a pay system free from gender bias. Over the next couple of months, data would be analysed, analysing the different employment groups, e.g. Support Services, Wholetime and On-call operational staff by gender. Additional analysis would also be carried out for additional protected characteristics of age, ethnicity and disability. Once all the data had been analysed a report would be produced, which would include a number of findings and recommendations. Part of this would include reviewing the current support services staff pay scales, and in particular the lowest scales, to ensure our pay scales were fair and remained fit for purpose.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Pay Policy Principles and Statement as set out in Annex A as the statutory Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21 be approved.
2. That the pay multiple ratio continues to fall for the eighth year running, with the eight-year period seeing the ratio improved by 26 per cent since 2012 be noted.

FA41 HMICFRS INSPECTION FINDINGS REPORT – ACTION PLAN

The Head of Service Delivery advised Members that at the Extraordinary meeting on 23 January 2020, the Authority received the HMICFRS Inspection Report into this service and had requested an Action Plan addressing the matters raised in the report. The inspection methodology considered the fire service against three pillars, efficiency, effectiveness and people and judged each service in terms of four judgements, either outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. There was no overall judgement for the service. In terms of effectiveness and efficiency the Service was found to be requiring improvement. In terms of people it was found to be good. Depending on the severity of the matters found by HMICFRS, they may suggest areas for improvement, or potentially cause for concern, and causes for concern were always accompanied by recommendations. In this Service's report, there were 11 areas for improvement, and one cause for concern, which was accompanied by two recommendations. In terms of legislation, the fire and rescue service National Framework required fire and rescue authorities to prepare, update and regularly publish an Action Plan detailing how those recommendations would be actioned or give reasons for not doing so.

The Head of Service Delivery advised Members that the second phase of the inspection process would commence later this year. This Service was in Tranche 3 and would be visited again in June and July 2021, for both discovery and field work. HMICFRS had just released a programme and framework which had been approved by government and that enabled round two of the inspection programme. HMICFRS had released their next set of judgement criteria and there were some amendments from the current version.

RESOLVED –

1. That the HMICFRS Inspections Findings Action Plan (Appendix A) be approved;
2. That progress against the Action Plan be reported regularly to the Overview and Audit Committee, and onwards to the Authority.

FA42 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Authority noted that the next meeting of the Fire Authority was to be held on Wednesday 10 June 2020 at 11am.

The Chairman thanked all Members for their contributions during 2019/20.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12:25 PM

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