

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2020 at 10.00 AM

Present: Councillors Clarke OBE (Chairman) [part], Hopkins, Lambert, Marland [part], McLean, and Teesdale

Officers: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), C Bell (Head of Service Development), D Norris (Head of Service Delivery), A Hussain (Principal Accountant) M Hussey (Principal Accountant) S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager) and C Jordan (Team PA)

Apologies: Councillors Roberts and McCall

EX20 MINUTES

(Councillor Hopkins presiding)

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 13 November 2019, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 13 November 2019, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

(Councillor Clarke joined the meeting)

EX21 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

(Councillor Clarke presiding)

(Councillor Marland joined the meeting)

The Director of Legal and Governance advised that the Authority was required to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances before the 1 April each year; and that his report was considerably shorter than the one considered by Members for the draft Scheme of Allowances for 2019/20 which had included a comparative analysis of allowances paid in other fire and rescue authorities.

Members were advised that according to the Forward Plan of Buckinghamshire Council's Shadow Executive it was due to receive its Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations at its meeting on 18 February and, that being the case, a copy should be published by 10 February. If so, copies would be made available for the Authority's meeting next Wednesday.

The recommendation would result in a 2% increase across all allowances.

A Member requested that the pagination in Schedule 1 of the draft Scheme of Allowances be corrected.

RESOLVED –

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

EX22 BUDGET MONITORING PERFORMANCE AND DEBT MANAGEMENT

Principal Accountant Asif Hussain advised that this report presented the provisional revenue and capital outturn position and debt management performance up until 30 November 2019 and forecast an underspend of £103k, against a revenue budget of £30.332m.

RESOLVED –

That the latest projected outturn forecast for the Authority as at 30 November 2019 be noted.

EX23 THE PRUDENTIAL CODE, PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION

The Lead Member for Finance, IT and Procurement advised that this report was being presented as the Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision policy statement were required to be approved by the Authority and to support the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Principal Accountant Marcus Hussey advised that a review of the Balance Sheet indicated that the Authority was currently in an over-borrowed position. Due to prohibitive penalties the early repayment of borrowing was not currently an option. It was confirmed that there were no plans for additional long-term borrowing in the foreseeable future in line with the current MTFP.

Due to the timing of third-party contributions relating to the Blue Light Hub it was recommended that an increase of £2m to the Authorised Limit for the current year be agreed immediate in-case short-term borrowing was required to effectively manage cashflow.

It was also recommended that the Authorised Limit for 2020-21 be set at £2m higher than the Operational Limit, to allow for the effective management of cashflow in relation to capital receipts from land sales.

Members asked where the Authority's short-term borrowing would be from and the Principal Accountant confirmed that it would be obtained from local authorities through a broker.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority be recommended to approve:

1. the Prudential Indicators for 2020-21;
2. an increase in the Authorised Limit for 2019/20 of £2m to £8.797m;
3. the Minimum Review Provision policy statement.

EX24

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

The Lead Member for Finance, IT and Procurement advised Members that this report presented the proposed revenue and capital Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the Financial Years 2020/21 to 2024/25.

The Principal Accountant Asif Hussain advised Members that a zero-based budget approach identified some key opportunities within the current budgetary constraints. These included 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 FTEs and introducing a Team Leader role and two further FTEs into the Prevention Team. Introducing a Head of Technology, Transformation and Programme Management Office (PMO) to manage, among other matters, the actions required following the Authority's inspection report.

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

Following the updated funding figures, there had been movement in the council tax and business rate funding, the Revenue Support Grant/Business Rates for 2020/21 had been revised upwards from £7.988m to £8.291m (an increase of £303k). Future years forecasts had been updated to account for the increase in the baseline amount (£140k) but not the movement from last year's deficit to this year's surplus position (a net increase of £163k).

The Council Tax surplus figure for 2020/21 had been revised downwards from £308k to £274k (a decrease of £34k). The surplus figure projected for future year's remained at £250k per annum. The Revenue Contribution to Capital budget for 2021/20 had been revised upwards from £1,046k to £1,315k (a net increase of £269k).

The Net Budget Requirement 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).

Members were concerned as to how funding could be increased in future years. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that lobbying government would continue independently and in conjunction with the LGA and NFCC. It was also confirmed that meetings with local MP's had been arranged.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the State of the Fire report confirmed that a multi-year settlement would enable fire and rescue authorities to budget with more certainty.

Members were concerned about capital spend and what would be sacrificed if the budget did not increase. The Director of Finance and Assets confirmed that one project that was not currently included in the programme was a major overhaul of High Wycombe Fire Station.

Members asked if it might be better to look for one off capital funding opportunities from the government, for example the upgrade of one fire station. The Director of Finance and Assets agreed to look into this and would bring a paper to a future meeting with options regarding funding for capital spend.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority be recommended to:

- 1(a) Note and have due regard to the report and Statement of the Chief Finance Officer (see section 8 of Annex A).
- 1(b) Approve 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).
- 1(c) Approve the capital programme as set out in Appendix 2.
- 2 Not hold a referendum to increase Council Tax above the 2% threshold for 2020/21.
- 3 Note that a referendum may need to be considered for 2021/22 depending on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

EX25

RESPONSE TO THE PROVISIONAL LOCAL AGOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2020/21: CONSULTATION PAPER

The Director of Finance and Assets informed Members that the Consultation was published on 20 December 2019, with a deadline for responses of 17 January 2020 and in accordance

with the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, the response had been discussed with the Chairman and Lead Member before submission.

The response to the Consultation also included evidence, not available at the time of the Technical Consultation, namely the Authority's HMICFRS inspection report. This report notes serious concerns as to whether the Service had the resources it needed to meet its foreseeable risk, despite being highly efficient and having an innovative deployment model which, if better funded, would be a cost-effective way of keeping people safe.

RESOLVED –

That the response to the consultation be noted.

EX26

2020-20205 PUBLIC SAFETY PLAN CONSULTATION: FEEDBACK & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Head of Service Development introduced the report and the Corporate Planning Manager explained how the Authority undertook the public consultation. The final Public Safety Plan had been updated to reflect the public consultation process and would be presented for approval at the next Authority meeting following any recommendations made by this Committee today.

The Corporate Planning Manager was thanked for his detailed and informative explanation of the consultation process and the way in which the feedback received, and the responses to that feedback, had been collated. Typographical errors were noted in the report submitted by Opinion Research Services.

Members asked how the Authority would move forward. The Chief Fire Officer accepted that moving forward the Authority would need to be financially driven, with all proposals put to the relevant Committees. The culture within the Service was strong but would need to be built on. The Chief Fire Officer also highlighted that at present, Buckinghamshire was the only service within the Thames Valley that responded to all automatic fire alarms. Moving forward, the service may need to review this.

Members enquired if the service was looking at alternatives to the use of petrol/diesel vehicles, the Director of Finance and Assets confirmed that the service had looked at other vehicles, but at present the cost was too prohibitive.

Members mentioned current legislation regarding attending electrical fires, this was especially relevant due to the eventual phasing out of gas in domestic premises and enquired if the Authority was lobbying for more electrical safety. The Chief Fire Officer advised that following the Grenfell enquiry, some legislation would change and the LGA would also be lobbying for change.

Members asked how involved was the Authority with regard to building regulations when planning permission was being granted by Councils. The Chief Fire Officer agreed that fire and rescue services should be more involved and a report could be brought to a future meeting showing what involvement the Service had during the planning process.

Members enquired about response times in relation to the HMICFRS report and if response times were improved, would the Service receive a better report. The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that national response times had been abolished in 2004 and all fire and rescue services set their own response times.

Members asked if the public had been asked what they expected from the Service regarding response times and the different risks. The Corporate Planning Manager confirmed that the public had been asked about response times and risks, including responses to rural fires.

The Chairman proposed that the issue of response times and other matters could comprise part of a future Members' workshop.

RESOLVED –

1. That the 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan be adopted by the Authority;
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; and
3. that the Chief Fire Officer be granted discretion to determine the sequencing and timing of the work required to further progress the proposals.

EX27

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 25 March 2020 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11:37 AM