



## BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

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### **REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY FROM ITS MEETING ON 30 JUNE 2009 TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

#### **MEETINGS**

Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority (CFA) held its Annual General Meeting on 30 June 2009 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters. The major issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP**

Following the recent local government elections and the constituent authorities' AGMs, the 12 Members comprising the CFA were:

Bedford Borough Councillors:

Colleen Atkins, Roger Gwynne-Jones and Michael Headley

Central Bedfordshire Councillors:

Anthony Brown, Anthony (Tony) Green, John Saunders, Peter Snelling and John Street

Luton Borough Councillors:

Mohammed Ayub, Norris Bullock, Roy Davies and Sian Timoney.

Councillors Sian Timoney and Roy Davies were elected as Chair and Vice Chair respectively for 2009/10.

#### **2. NATIONAL RESEARCH ON PREVENTION AND PROTECTION MATTERS**

- a) **Civil Contingencies Act 2004 – Enhancement Programme**
- b) **Home Fire Safety**
- c) **Initial Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; Fire Research 3/2009**
- d) **Research Report on Response Times**

Members received an update of recent national research on the above programmes and a progress report by the Service's on how it was dealing with the programmes at a local level.

A national programme for the review of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA) was proposed for completion in 2011.

Over the past few years, the Government had invested £25m capital funding and £11.4m resource funding to support the Home Fire Risk Check Grant initiative (HFRC) and Fire Prevention Grant Scheme.

During the three year grant period fire and rescue services carried out just under 2 million HFRCs and installed over 2.4 million smoke alarms in England.

The alarms installed under the HFRC grant contributed greatly to a fall in accidental fire deaths, accounting for 57% of the fall in accidental fire deaths.

In 2008/09, nearly 10,000 homes in Bedfordshire and Luton had received a professional fire risk assessment and over 13,000 smoke detectors had been installed in those homes providing an early warning in the event of fire. If this level of activity continued in the years to come the trend of fire deaths and injuries and accident dwelling fires being reduced would continue.

The figures represented a major step change and reflected both the hard work put in by all staff and the benefits from the more efficient working practices now used to undertake this activity.

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service had undertaken a great deal of work to ensure a smooth implementation of the Regulatory Reform - Fire Safety - Order 2005 (RRFSO) but officers recognised the need to continually audit and review its policies and procedures to provide robust but fair enforcement of the legislation.

However, it was generally accepted that smaller businesses were most likely to be unaware of their responsibilities under the RRFSO. The Service had been proactive in supporting them and had run several seminars across the county targeted at small businesses, farms, factories and bed and breakfast accommodation providers, which had proved very popular.

The Service was also investigating, in liaison with the Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce, a small business advocacy service as advised at the Authority's meeting on 27 March 2009. The Service website had also been updated to ensure that comprehensive information on risk assessment was available and gave examples of ways to comply with the legislation.

### **3. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

Tribal Business Assurance, the Authority's Internal Auditors, presented the 2008/09 Annual Report on the Authority's Internal Control Environment.

Substantial assurance had been given on the main financial systems and payroll, with reasonable assurance given to anti fraud measures and station financial management.

### **4. TREASURY MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

On 1 April 2004 the Fire Authority adopted the Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). One of the requirements of the CIPFA Code was for an annual report on treasury management to be presented to the appropriate committee.

An annual report for 2008/09 was submitted detailing activity on borrowing/investment, prudential indicators and performance measurement.

### **5. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2008/09**

Subject to audit, Members adopted a Statement of Accounts for 2008/09.

Before 30 September 2009, the District Auditor was to carry out a formal audit of the accounts and issue an Audit Certificate. The Statement would then be made available for public inspection.

The Auditor would be starting the formal audit on 27 July 2009.

## **6. REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY**

Members agreed a Revenue Budget Strategy for 2010/11.

Subject to the caveats contained in the report, it was the intention that there would be a nil percentage increase in the Authority's Council Tax levy in 2010/11.

## **7. FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES MUTUAL LIMITED (FRAML) - UPDATE**

The Fire and Rescue Authorities Mutual Limited (FRAML) had been established in 2007 following Counsel opinion that this would be within the authorities' powers and the Combined Fire Authority has since received periodic progress reports.

The company was initially highly successful in securing savings for the participating authorities, and the initiative had been highlighted as innovative good practice by the Audit Commission in its recent 'Rising to the Challenge' national report on efficiency in the fire and rescue service.

However, a court case brought against the London Borough of Brent and the London Authorities Mutual Limited (LAML) resulted in the need for FRAML to cease underwriting insurance cover with effect from 21 April 2008 and FRAML was likely to be wound up.

The Chair was authorised to write to the Secretary of State of Communities and Local Government urging him to put in place, as soon as practically possible, legal powers that would enable local authorities to participate in the operation of an insurance mutual.

## **8. INFORMATION BULLETIN**

The Combined Fire Authority received a Bulletin containing information on various matters relating to the Fire and Rescue Service, including incidents of note and compliments.

Amongst the items reported were:

**A resident from Clapham** sent thanks after attending a fire risk workshop:

*.....'Yesterday my wife and I attended the Fire Risk Workshop at Dunstable. We both found this three hour presentation really excellent.*

*The experienced team of Officers who took part were clearly very high quality, and good ambassadors of your Service. Not only did we find this very valuable in respect of our B & B, but also as active members of the community. Had we attended this seminar last year our village hall could have saved over £2000. I am an ex County and Borough Councillor and my wife is still a Borough Councillor. Yesterday's workshop was not only valuable but excellent PR on behalf of your Service. Although we both appreciate that Officers' time is at a premium, it would be very beneficial if visits could be made to the local communities. Many thanks to all concerned.'.....*

**A couple from Sandy** expressed thanks to the Sandy crew:

*'Thank you for coming out to check our overheating storage heater and for the new smoke alarms. Also big apologies to you all (and to your respective families) that you had to get out of your beds and respond to a call in the early hours on one of the coldest nights of the winter! The electrician is replacing the thermostat in the heater and everything else in there seems fine. Many thanks again.'*.....

**A member of the public** sent thanks to Bedford and Kempston Green Watch:

*'I wanted to write to thank you for your help at the scene of the accident, I felt at ease and confident I would get out of the car unharmed. The Fire Service arrived promptly and worked very hard to get me out of the car with great perseverance. I am recovering well and have not sustained any long term injuries. Once again thank you for your help, it was greatly appreciated.'*.....

**A resident from Toddington** expressed their appreciation to Toddington crew:

*.....'I would like to thank you for helping Luke on Saturday night (car crash on the green). He is OK apart from a few aches and bruises.*

*You do a fantastic job and I just wanted to say thanks.'*.....

**A resident from Leighton Buzzard** telephoned the Service to pass on his thanks to the Leighton Buzzard crew who attended a fire at his property. He wished to thank them for their professionalism both in dealing with the fire and minimising the damage to his house.

Kempston and Bedford Blue Watch received a letter of thanks from **a resident from Willington**:

*.....'Thank you all so very much for rescuing my horse (fallen in its stall). Thank you for your quick thinking, strength and determination in getting him up. If it wasn't for you he wouldn't be here today. He has made a good recovery from his ordeal. It's nice to know that you are trained to work well with animals*

**Assistant Chief Constable John Fletcher from Bedfordshire Police** sent a letter of thanks to Chief Fire Officer Smith following an incident attended by Stopsley and Luton White Watch:

*.....'I am writing in connection with the response and action that was taken by your staff who attended the fatal road traffic collision that occurred on the M1 at Junction 11 on Saturday 18 April 2009.*

*This was an horrific collision and the dedicated professionalism that was shown by those who attended the scene during this traumatic time was a credit to your Service. The close working relationship that was evident between all the emergency services and HATO ensured that in times of tragedy our agencies are able to work together to provide a service to the community of Bedfordshire and those travelling through our County.*

*Please pass on my personal thanks to all those involved.'*.....

**COUNCILLOR J STREET**  
**EXECUTIVE MEMBER OF THE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**