



## BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

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### **REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY FROM ITS MEETING ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2009 TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

#### **MEETINGS**

Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority (CFA) held a meeting on 4 September 2009 at Dunstable Community Fire Station. The major issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

#### **1. CFO GRAEME SMITH**

The Chair announced that CFO Smith would be taking up his appointment as Chief Fire Officer of Warwickshire in the autumn.

CFO Smith had worked in Bedfordshire and Luton since 1991 and in a Principal Officer role since 2003. During that time he had made a huge contribution to the development and progress of the Fire and Rescue Service.

CFO Smith thanked Members and CFO Fuller for their past support and Members wished him every success in the future.

#### **2. OPERATIONAL PEER REVIEW**

Members received the IDEA report on the Peer Review of Operational Assessment which was designed to help the Service to assess its current achievements and capacity to change as part of the new performance assessment framework, known as Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which had been applied by the Audit Commission from 1 April 2009.

The key components of CAA for Fire and Rescue Authorities were:

- an 'Organisational Assessment' of each Fire and Rescue Authority which combined scored judgments on the 'Use of Resources' and 'Managing Performance', both of which were informed by an 'Operational Assessment of Front Line Service Delivery' undertaken on self-assessment basis but subject to rigorous and independent Peer Review.
- an 'Area Assessment' which would be a 'combined' inspectorate assessment of a local area reporting performance against Local Area Agreements and the new national indicator set.

The review team had visited the Service from 14 – 17 July 2009 and had held interviews and discussions with Members, Officers and Partners; undertaken visits to fire stations and the Emergency Fire Control Centre; and read documents provided by the Fire and Rescue Service, including a self-assessment of progress against the operational assessment Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs).

The report was structured around the following seven areas of the KLOEs:

- Community risk management
- Prevention
- Protection
- Response
- Health and safety
- Training and development
- Call management and incident support

The report was very positive and provided assurance to Members and the public that Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service was operationally effective and, where evidence had been provided, the review team was of the opinion that it was meeting its statutory duties.

In addition to the basic statement of robustness, the report provided a great deal of extremely positive feedback across all areas of assessment and highlighted many aspects of the Service's and Authority's work as notable practice. Indeed, a number of practices had been identified as potential exemplars which should be highlighted to the wider Fire and Rescue community.

The Peer Report also noted that the Service was on a sustained improvement trajectory, underpinned by strong officer and Member support, and had a clear commitment to provide civic leadership within its communities.

The team had been genuinely impressed by the affection for and pride in the Service shown by staff across all disciplines.

The Peer Report contained 24 areas for consideration which the Service had taken up for review and further report to the CFA via its Scrutiny Groups.

Members were pleased to note the continued improvement and the setting of national best practice by the Service as noted in the Operational Peer Review and requested monitoring/update reports be made to the Authority via its Scrutiny Groups on the areas for consideration included in the Operational Peer Review.

### **3. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2009/12**

The Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) had been published on the Service Website with copies sent to Stakeholders.

The CRMP provided an overview of the Service, its aims, priorities, strategic objectives and respective roles and membership of the Fire Authority and senior officers, as well as an analysis of the risks that would be present over the next three years.

The Plan also documented the work that the Service would undertake over this period in terms of major change projects, projects that enhance day to day service provision and a comparison of performance against the new national fire indicators.

The CRMP would be refreshed on an annual basis to include any changes to the Authority's key priorities and objectives.

#### **4. STANDARDS COMMITTEE: 29 JULY 2009**

New Standards for England (formerly the Standards Board for England) guidance on establishing joint standards committees allowed local authorities to form joint standards committees with other authorities.

It had been suggested that this would be most useful where standards committees needed to deal with cases involving Members' conduct more flexibly, or where resources were limited and could be shared to help the ethical standards framework operate successfully. Until the introduction of these regulations, authorities had not had the power to enter into joint arrangements on standards matters.

If appropriate, it was considered that the Authority's Standards Committee should forge joint arrangements with another single service authority, such as the Police Authority. The Standards Committee had requested the Secretary/Monitoring Officer to investigate other single authorities' views on joint arrangements.

#### **5. FRS CIRCULAR 42/2009 – CONSOLIDATION OF COUNCIL TAX DEMAND NOTICE REGULATIONS INCLUDING EFFICIENCY INFORMATION: CONSULTATION**

The Performance Achievement Scrutiny Group had considered this CLG consultation and the Authority agreed its recommendation that:

1. the publication of fire authorities' efficiency information should be restricted to the fire authority's own accompanying information leaflet and the Council Tax demand notice issued by the billing authority. In the case of the latter, all authorities' efficiency information should be restricted to statistical data only.
2. Police authorities should include their efficiency information on the same basis.
3. if constituent authorities were to be permitted to include fire authority's efficiency information in their information leaflets, fire authorities should have the right to give explanatory information for inclusion with the statistical data.
4. whatever is decided, clearer guidance is required to authorities on these matters.

#### **6. REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL**

The Community Risk Management Planning Scrutiny Group had noted the further slippage of the Regional Control Project to 2011.

In view of the reported difficulties in maintaining the Service's current system, the Authority agreed its recommendation that officers should report to the next meeting on the sustainability of the Service's existing mobilisation system.

#### **7. REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING – 2009/10**

Members received the second budget monitoring report for 2009/10 and noted the position of the revenue and capital programmes.

£40,900 had been allocated from the Prices Contingency of £180,000. No agreement had yet been reached on the APT&C Staff pay award due on 1 April 2009, but agreement had been reached on the Firefighters' Pay Award due on 1 July 2009 of 1.25%. This would generate a saving of £156,000 from the provision included in the Contingency for Firefighters, Retained and Control Staff Pay and Associated Costs, which was to be transferred to General Reserves.

The first tranche of the Fire Capital Grant of £633,240 had been received. The use of this funding had been considered by the Service's Capital Strategy Team, and proposed projects were submitted for Members' consideration.

Members also noted action taken with regard to Pandemic Flu planning. A provision of £100,000 had been made in the Authority's Strategic Risk Register to meet a 'sudden and unexpected absenteeism of a large number of personnel across the whole of the Service due to a pandemic or similar', and £53,260 had been used to alleviate reduction in service through possible swine flu impact.

## **8. FIRE AUTHORITIES' MUTUAL LIMITED (FRAML) – WINDING UP**

Members noted the requirements for an indemnity relating to the winding up of FRAML and authorised the provision of such an indemnity to Charles Taylor Consulting on the basis of final terms to be agreed between all the authorities in FRAML and approved by the Chief Fire Officer, Secretary and Treasurer in consultation with the Executive Members.

## **9. STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY: CONSULTATION**

Members considered the CLG publication 'Strengthening Local Democracy: Consultation'.

So as Fire Authorities were concerned, the consultation document proposed that councils be offered greater scrutiny over them to make sure their plans fully reflect the right balance of protection, prevention and response for different communities; and to examine performance of individual fire and rescue authorities against their published equality and diversity plans.

One of the consultation questions raised was 'Should Councils have a power to engage in mutual insurance arrangements?' Members considered this had particular reference to the Authority with regard to FRAML.

It was agreed that, following consultation with the Executive Members, the Chief Fire Officer would respond to the consultation document.

## **10. DONATION OF LIFE SAVING FIRE EQUIPMENT TO KENYA**

On 4 September 2008, the Combined Fire Authority had supported the donation of an old fire appliance to Meru Town in central Kenya.

Meru Town had a population of 500,000, with an area similar to that of Luton, but no fire service. In 2006, fire had destroyed over 100 family homes with multiple fatalities, many of whom were children and the town was trying to provide a fire engine and training to establish a volunteer fire service.

The Onset Trust, an organisation based in Dunstable, had agreed to fund all expenses relating to shipping and training of the local firefighters in Meru to use any appliance donated by the Service.

Members received a presentation from Mr Ray Willett, Service Transport and Engineering Manager, who had led a small team of Service volunteers to deliver the old fire appliance and provide basic firefighting training to Meru Town.

The meeting also received a letter of thanks from Municipal Council of Meru.

## **11. 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 of Luton** expressed thanks to Ray Spry:

*.....'I am writing to thank Mr Ray Spry for his visit to assess our home with regard to fire safety and fire alarm instalment.*

*Mr Spry was friendly and very efficient. He explained the problems found in each room (regarding block plugs) and how he could improve our fire safety within our home. We were then amazed to find that he supplied and fitted two fire alarms in the right place on the ground floor and first floor of our property. The information leaflet given to us remains in our kitchen in an easy reach place in case we ever need it; our daughter loves to read the children's booklet. This is a superb service and has made us feel much safer in our own home. It has also raised our awareness around plugs and leaving appliances on unnecessarily.*

*I have been telling friends and colleagues about this excellent service in the hope they will take advantage of this service that may save their lives. Thank you once again.'.....*

**The Southill Estate** wrote to Group Commander Laurence Mitchell thanking the personnel who carried out an exercise on the estate. The exercise was organised by Watch Commander Martin Smith and Watch Commander Dave Bland and attended by Shefford, Biggleswade, Bedford Retained, Bedford White Watch, Harrold, Toddington and Kempston Retained.

*.....'Thank you very much for organising the exercise at Southill House on the evening of Thursday 21 May 2009. We were extremely impressed by the overall organisation and the amount of equipment and men who attended the exercise.*

*We very much hope that you will not be called on for an emergency, but in the unfortunate circumstance that you are, hopefully these types of exercises will assist in minimising any problem. Our Salvage Team definitely learnt a lot from the evening, not only from the professionalism of the Fire Service, but also on some of the procedures. Thank you very much for sparing the time, and should you ever wish to come back and do another visit, you would be more than welcome.'.....*

Kempston White Watch received a letter of thanks from **a resident of Elstow**:

*.....'My in-laws who are in their 80s had locked themselves out of their 3rd floor apartment. Locksmiths were called but the earliest arrival was two to three hours. Given it was about 9 pm they naturally became very anxious and concerned.*

*A call to the Fire Service met with a very quick response. Polite and understanding, the crew appreciated the worry of these elderly residents and reassured them immediately. Their assessment soon resulted in them gaining access by foot across the building site carrying several sections of a heavy ladder to the rear of the six storey building. Assembling the sections they leaned it against the appropriate balcony. Fortunately the double balcony door into the property was open. This exercise was carried out in darkness using powerful torches. They operated efficiently as a co-ordinated and effective team. Please convey our gratitude to them for a professional job done.'.....*

Chief Fire Officer Smith received a letter from **a couple from Wilden** expressing thanks to David Lynch:

*.....'We had requested this inspection from receiving your flier through the door in Wilden. David did a thorough inspection and we were both extremely impressed with his very professional manner, his excellent advice and his friendly polite attitude which is credit to this young man.*

*We have two smoke alarms which were very old so he fitted new modern ones which have a ten year life cycle with no need for battery changing. This is very much appreciated as I am 73 years old and find reaching up to our high ceilings very difficult. During his inspection, David noticed that I wear two hearing aids. After the new smoke alarms were fitted, he asked me to go into a room with the door shut, take out my hearing aids and see if I could hear the alarms which he set off. I could not hear the alarm, so David kindly gave me an electric visual alarm plus vibrating pad. He fitted it to my bedside table and demonstrated how it works. Very impressive! All of this service was given to us FREE and we wish to congratulate David on his great performance here for the very valuable advice he gave and for fitting us with modern equipment. We would be very grateful if you would pass on our thanks to David and thank you for organising this free service to the people of Wilden; very much appreciated!.....*

Chief Fire Officer Smith received a letter of thanks from the **Chair of Mityana Community Foundation** following Jocelyn Goodman's visit to Uganda:

*.....'Can I complement your Service for the excellent work which Jocelyn carried out with the Charity in Uganda recently? Working largely on her own, in a quite markedly different environment and with only the most basic support, she engaged with over 4,000 children to provide a professional programme of training in fire safety, basic science and evacuation drills.*

*Her enthusiasm, good humour and flexible approach ensured that all the schools she visited were delighted with her practical approach and were requesting that she return to Mityana to continue the cascade of information. I was also delighted to receive word from the elected Chairman of the District on the positive feedback he has received from across the District. Uganda has lost many of its children to candle fires in schools and it is only through the work of volunteers such as Jocelyn that we have been able to provide the necessary education and protection to those within the Mityana District. A hand up rather than a hand out.*

*Working in searing heat, surrounded by dust and even then with a smile on her face, she has made a real and tangible difference and is a delight to work with. She is a credit to your Service; thank you for releasing her.'.....*

CFO Smith commented:

*.....'Well done Jocelyn. It must be satisfying to make such an important contribution to these young lives in Uganda.'.....*

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