



## **BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**

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### **REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY FROM ITS MEETING ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2012 TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority (CFA) held a meeting on 25 September 2012 at Dunstable Community Fire Station. The major issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

#### **1. COMMUNICATIONS**

- The Chairman advised that the new Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis, was to meet with the Local Government Association to discuss the future of the fire and rescue service;
- Members were invited to complete a survey on the proposed Community Risk Management Plan 2013-17 (CRMP) which had been issued to employees and the citizens' panel. They also noted proposed details for consultative forums to be held with regard to the CRMP in November 2012 and January 2013; and
- The Chief Fire Officer circulated and discussed a Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) report entitled 'Fighting Fires of Firefighting: The Impact of Austerity on English Fire and Rescue Services'. This report publically expressed CFOA's concerns about the impact of fire and rescue service funding cuts on the safety of local communities.

#### **2. POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETINGS**

The respective Policy and Challenge Group Chairs, or their representatives, presented the draft Minutes of the Corporate Services, Human Resources, and Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Groups.

The Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group had requested that the Members' Budget Workshop on 15 November 2012 should include presentations on the Business Rates Retention and the localisation of Council Tax Schemes.

Responsibility for management of firearms incidents lay with the Police Service and in the majority of instances the fire and rescue service would have no involvement. However, some types of incident might require a fire and rescue service response and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service had developed a specialist capability to assist in this type of operation. This capability was known as the Fire Special Operations Team (FSOT) and Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group were introduced to a member of the FSOT who discussed the Team's capability and the equipment used.

It was agreed that a report on the future role of the Fire Special Operations Team would be made to a future meeting.

As requested at the their last meeting, the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group received a report on the feasibility of introducing childcare facilities to aid the recruitment of Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters.

Members considered the matter but, as none of the options appeared to offer a viable way forward, had agreed that the provision of childcare should not be pursued at this time; and that the Service continued to use positive action measures in order to encourage higher numbers of female firefighters to join the RDS service.

### **3. REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT**

*Councillors Atkins and Mingay declared a possible interest in this Item insofar as the report made reference to a proposed workshop partnership and building development with Bedford Borough Council.*

The forecast salary underspend at the year end was £180,000 due, mainly, to forecast underspends within the non-uniformed and uniformed pay budgets. These were partly offset by forecast overspends in Control and Retained pay. The budgeted pay award that had been estimated for firefighters at 1% when setting the 2012/13 budget currently looked likely to be awarded but the 1% for non-uniformed staff, which had also been budgeted, was not to be awarded in line with the current pay freeze.

A total forecast underspend, including both the non-salary and salaries budgets, was anticipated at £422,000.

Following the successful bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for the Replacement Mobilising System grant, the £400,000 Capital Programme expenditure which had been approved in February 2012, had increased by £100,000 to £500,000. This was due to a £1m grant awarded by the DCLG, split between capital £500,000 and revenue £500,000.

The scheme to resurface the drill yard and car park at Harrold Station, including the introduction of additional parking spaces, was forecasted at £43k. As this was over the 10% limit, the Fire Authority was requested to approve an additional £8k for the scheme, to be funded by existing loan. Members noted that the drill yard and car park had continued to deteriorate since the scheme was approved in February 2012, with sunken areas pooling water.

The Heads of Service budget scrutiny meetings for 2013/14 had taken place. The Service's Corporate Management Team were now to review the overall position of funding the budget gap, and savings/efficiencies to close the gap, for report to the first Members' Budget Workshop to be held on 15 November 2012.

As previously reported, DCLG had released a technical consultation on the Business Rates Retention Scheme. Members had been contacted regarding a proposed response by the fire and rescue service, which had been submitted by the closing date of 24 September 2012.

### **4. LOCALISM ACT 2011 – REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS**

Members agreed consequential amendments to the Fire Authority's Standing Orders required by the Localism Act 2011 and the changes to standards arrangements.

The Fire Authority's Code of Conduct required a Member who had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) to disclose its nature and existence and to withdraw from participating in the

meeting. The Localism Act enabled a Standing Order to be made to require the Member to leave the room during this part of the meeting and, for the avoidance of any doubt, it was agreed that this provision be adopted.

#### **5. LOCALISM ACT 2011 – DISPENSATIONS RELATING TO DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

It was agreed that:

1. A general dispensation be granted to all Members of the Fire Authority under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 allowing them to participate and vote at meetings when the setting of Council Tax or a precept were under discussion;
2. Subject to (3) below, the dispensation granted under (1) above shall apply to the period between the date on which the dispensation is granted and the first ordinary meeting of the Fire Authority following the elections to the constituent authorities;
3. This dispensation be reviewed in the light of experience and having regard to the requirements set out in Section 33 of the Act; and
4. In respect of requests for specific dispensations under Section 33 of the Act, written notice be given to the Monitoring Officer and an item relating to the request be included on the next meeting agenda, subject to the Monitoring Officer being authorised, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee, to grant a dispensation in an appropriate case with a report being made on the matter to the next meeting.

#### **6. LOCALISM ACT 2011 – APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS**

The standards provisions of the Localism Act 2011 required the Fire Authority to put in place arrangements for the appointment of at least one independent person, whose views were to be sought and taken into account before the Fire Authority could take any decision on an allegation it had decided to investigate. The views of the independent person might be sought in relation to an allegation at other stages in the process, and might also be consulted by a Member who was the subject of an allegation.

At its meeting on 31 May 2012, the Fire Authority had agreed proposed arrangements with the constituent Councils, Milton Keynes Council and Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire Fire Authority for the recruitment of a joint Panel of Independent Persons.

Twenty one applications had been subsequently received and Councillors from each of the four local authorities had been involved in the selection process and recommended the appointment of 10 persons.

It was agreed that:

1. The 10 independent persons noted in the report be appointed to a panel of independent persons;
2. Subject to transitional provisions contained in the Localism Act 2011 (Commencement No. 6 and Transitional Savings and Transitory Provisions) Order 2012, the persons be appointed for a period of four years;
3. The Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Treasurer and Executive Members of the Fire Authority, be authorised to agree the detailed terms and conditions on which the

appointments are made with Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Councils, and Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire Fire Authority and, once they had been approved by the joint authorities, to make the appointments on that basis. This to include what allowance should be paid to independent persons and how the costs would be shared; and

4. All independent persons to have appropriate training before being approached to take part in any proceedings relating to Code of Conduct complaints.

#### **7. TREASURER**

*Mr Osborne, Treasurer, left the room whilst this Item was discussed.*

It was agreed that the appointment of the current Treasurer be extended for a period of 12 months from 1 October 2012, after which a further appraisal of arrangements should be made by the Fire Authority.

#### **8. CYCLE TO WORK SCHEME**

As a demonstrable commitment to protecting the environment and improving the health and well being of staff, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service had introduced a Cycle to Work Scheme in 2008.

Following updates to the system, Members approved making a further Cycle to Work Scheme available to employees.

#### **9. INFORMATION BULLETIN**

Members received a Bulletin containing information on various matters relating to the Fire and Rescue Service.

**COUNCILLOR DAVID McVICAR  
CHAIRMAN OF BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY**