



## **BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

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### **REPORT OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY FROM ITS MEETING ON 21 OCTOBER 2015 TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) held a meeting on 21 October 2015 at Dunstable Community Fire Station. The major issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

#### **1. COMMUNICATIONS**

##### **Government Consultation**

Both the Authority and Service had received the Government consultation document "Enabling closer working between the Emergency Services". This would be discussed later in the meeting.

##### **Chairman's Communications**

The Chairman reported on the Awards Evening which had been held on 20 October 2015.

The Chairman advised that the Service had been awarded "Fire Service of the Year" at the Spirit of Fire Awards. Two firefighters, Greg Magill and Matt Blanchard, had been nominated for Firefighter of the Year and the Service had received a further nomination, jointly with Cambridgeshire, for the work of the team behind the ladies driving challenge, a successful annual fundraiser for the Firefighter's Charity.

##### **Campaign for Tougher Fire Safety Standards for Children's Fancy Dress Costumes**

The Chief Fire Officer briefed Members on the Service's involvement in the campaign for children's fancy dress costumes to comply with fire standards for children's nightwear and to raise awareness of fire safety. ITN was trying to arrange filming on Friday and the Trading Standards Departments of the constituent councils would be filming at Fire and Rescue Headquarters on Thursday to develop their own material to be posted on the Council websites warning the public of the flammability of children's fancy dress costumes.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have empowered Trading Standards Officers to conduct spot checks of children's fancy dress clothing at the point of supply to ensure that they were compliant with the relevant regulations.

## **Positive Action Campaign**

Two recent positive action events had targeted women and individuals from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. These had attracted approximately 40 individuals and these individuals would be tracked through the process to identify if the campaign was resulting in successful recruitment.

## **Fire Leadership Skills Course**

Councillors Atkins and Downing updated Members on the Fire Leadership Skills course run by the Fire Commission that they recently attended. This included sessions on the roles and responsibilities of Fire Authority Members and media skills.

In relation to the media, Members noted that the amount of positive press coverage that had been generated by the Service's press officer had greatly improved and helped them in their role of promoting and raising the profile of the Service.

## **2. RESIGNATION OF FRA MEMBER**

The Authority made a number of appointments to fill vacancies which had arisen following the resignation of Councillor Castleman from the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor Mingay was elected as Chair of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group.

Councillor Waheed was appointed as the Fire and Rescue Authority's reporting Member to Luton Borough Council.

The Secretary and Monitoring Officer was given delegated authority to appoint the Member confirmed by Luton Borough Council as Councillor Castleman's replacement at its meeting on 10 November 2015 to the Corporate Services and Human Resources Policy and Challenge Groups.

The appointment as the Fire and Rescue Authority's representative on the Local Strategic Partnership for Luton for 2015/16 was deferred to the next meeting of the Authority.

## **3. CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP 16 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Councillor Brown submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group held on 16 September 2015.

At the meeting, the Group had recommended that the forecast outturn be noted and that £48,000 be added to the Capital Programme to enable the purchase of three fire appliances from lease.

Councillor Brown reported on the positive performance report that had been

presented to the Group and suggested that the targets may be revised upwards during the Group's annual target-setting meeting.

The Group had also received reports on utility usage and procurement which had highlighted a number of anomalies that would have to be investigated further. The installation of Automatic Meter Readers would also assist the Service in identifying exceptions more quickly to ensure that they could be investigated and resolved.

The Group continued to trial paperless meetings and it was noted that this issue would be explored further on the Members' Development Day on 4 November 2015. During this session, both the training and equipment needs of Members would be identified.

Members noted the forecast outturn as at 31 August 2015 and approved the addition to the Capital Programme.

#### **4. SERVICE DELIVERY POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP 17 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Councillor Mingay submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group held on 17 September 2015.

Service Operational Commander Roberts provided an update on the Replacement Mobilising System (RMS). The latest version of the software had been released and was currently being tested by Essex Fire and Rescue Service. A network specialist had been engaged to resolve issues with the network and a new solution was being tested. It was anticipated that Essex would cut over to the new RMS at the end of January 2016, with this Service following two weeks later to enable any teething issues to be resolved.

Councillor Mingay reported on a number of indicators that demonstrated the high level of performance achieved by the Service. Primary fires had decreased by 22%, with deliberate (arson) fires reducing by 24%. He drew Members' attention to the reduction in accidental dwelling fires that had been achieved as a result of preventative action targeted in hot spots of urban areas of Bedford and Luton following a spike in incidents in 2014/15.

The Service continued to achieve high levels of both customer satisfaction, with 97% of respondents being very or fairly satisfied with the Service during 2014/15, and response rates, ranging from 60-79%. These high levels had also continued into the 2015/16 reporting year.

Over 3,500 smoke detectors received from Government had been distributed to private sector landlords in Bedfordshire following the recent change in legislation. The number of fire alarms installed exceeded this number.

## **5. AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE 24 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Councillor Headley submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 24 September 2015.

The Committee had considered and approved the Statement of Accounts and discussed the annual review of the Fire and Rescue Authority's effectiveness. It had been agreed that the questionnaire used in previous years be used for this year's review as there were a number of new Members on the Authority, although this may need to be reviewed in future years.

Members would be asked to complete the questionnaire prior to the discussion at the relevant Policy and Challenge Group/Committee meeting.

## **6. HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP 29 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Councillor Downing submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 23 June 2015.

He reported that, following a number of coffee mornings held at fire stations, six women had applied for roles within the Retained Duty System and were at various stages within the recruitment process.

The Chair commented that there were also a number of young women who had joined the Cadets and that this offered another route into the Service.

Councillor Downing advised that a number of performance targets had been impacted by small numbers. An example of this was one accident that had resulted in 46 days lost.

Members' attention was drawn to the percentage of working time lost to sickness. This was currently 3.21% which was out-performing the stretch target of 3.6%.

The Employee Survey results had improved from the previous survey in almost every survey area. It had also been noted during the meeting that the working environment for women in the Service had improved considerably over the years.

## **7. PENSION BOARD UPDATE**

Members received an update on the establishment of the Authority's Local Pension Board. This had been established with effect from 1 April 2015 and had met three times since then.

A training needs analysis had been undertaken and additional training for members of the Pension Board would be provided.

## **8. REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2015/16**

Members received the revenue and capital programme monitoring report which set out the forecast year end budget monitoring position as at 31 August 2015.

The forecast non –salary underspend was £11,000 and the forecast salary underspend was £255,000. This comprised the lower than budgeted pay award for firefighters (£120,000), vacancies (£35,000) and an underspend on the Retained Duty System (£100,000).

Additional funding of £74,000 was being sought to support the HR System project. Capital funding of £100,000 had already been approved for this project and it had originally been envisaged that the project could be resourced internally. However, given the workload pressures on the HR Team, this internal resource could no longer be allocated to the project.

Possible opportunities for collaboration on the project were being explored and the system was able to expand to include other databases, subject to compliance with procurement rules.

Members acknowledged the forecast outturn and approved the additional funding relating to the HR system for inclusion in the Capital Programme.

## **9. INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

Members received an update on the establishment of insurance pooling arrangements with eight other Fire and Rescue Authorities that would commence on 1 November 2015. These arrangements could potentially result in an annual surplus of £500,000 across the nine authorities. There would also be the potential for further savings and efficiencies.

Traditional insurance arrangements were being maintained to provide cover for high-value claims.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was responsible for developing the website for the insurance pool and further information on this would be circulated to Members of the Authority when it was available.

## **10. FIRE HYDRANT PLANNING**

Members received a report on the provision of and funding for fire hydrants which had arisen from a request made by a Member of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group.

At the meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group, reference had been made to a legal case where the use of Section 106 funding to provide fire hydrants on a development had been challenged successfully in court. Research into this had identified that there appeared to be no such case involving a Fire and Rescue Service, although there was the potential for challenge in using this method to obtain funding for fire hydrant provision.

It was acknowledged that the Fire and Rescue Service had a legal duty under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to secure an adequate supply of water; however, a number of other Fire and Rescue Services had been successful in working with the local planning authority to introduce planning conditions requiring the developer to fund the cost of fire hydrants on new development, thus transferring the cost from the local taxpayer to private developers.

The report proposed that Members of the Authority liaise with the local planning authorities in Bedfordshire to adopt a similar approach locally.

A letter to the Fire Minister requesting the development of legislation to standardise processes for the provision of fire hydrants was attached as an Appendix to the report at the request of Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group. It was agreed the letter would not be sent at this time, pending the outcome of negotiations with the local planning authority.

The view was expressed that Officers of the Authority were better placed to approach the planning authorities in the three constituent Councils, as there were already links through the planning process and, as such, the Service Operational Commander, Head of Operational Support, was authorised to approach the local planning authorities in Bedfordshire with a view to agreeing a new policy for developers to fund fire hydrants as part of planning conditions.

Members requested an update on the outcome of the discussions authorised above to be provided to the next meeting of the Authority.

#### **11. CONSULTATION – ENABLING CLOSER WORKING BETWEEN THE EMERGENCY SERVICES**

The Chairman advised that the consultation on Enabling closer working between the Emergency Services concluded on Friday, 23 October 2015 and a response from the Authority needed to be submitted by that date. A draft response had been produced following a meeting of the Authority's Executive Members and was tabled for consideration.

Members also received the Local Government Association's response, which had been endorsed by the Fire Commission. Members wished to refer to the LGA's response in the Authority's response. It was suggested that a form of wording be adopted to state that the consultation response was specifically from the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority but that it should be read in conjunction with the LGA's response as the Authority fully supports the LGA's proposals. Members also wished to highlight that the response had unanimous, cross-party support.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service may submit an additional Officer response. This would focus on the practical issues and it was noted that some of the responses may differ from those agreed by the Authority.

With the changes made at the meeting, the consultation response was unanimously approved.

## **12. INFORMATION BULLETIN**

Members received the information bulletin.

Members' attention was drawn to the flat fire in Richbell Court, Queen Street, Bedford on 28 September 2015 as an example of the flexible mobilisation arrangements operated by the Service. The first pump to respond to the incident was from Dunstable, as it had been covering Bedford Community Fire Station whilst that crew was receiving water responder training in Hertfordshire. The Aerial Platform from Luton had also attended, as it had been at Service Headquarters in Kempston for an oil change.

**COUNCILLOR McVICAR  
CHAIRMAN OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**