



## **BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

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### **REPORT OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY FROM ITS MEETING ON 7 FEBRUARY 2019 TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) held a meeting on 7 February 2019 at Dunstable Community Fire Station, Brewers Hill Road, Dunstable. The major issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

#### **1. COMMUNICATIONS**

##### **Police Community Cohesion Awards**

The Vice Chair reported that he, Councillor Atkins and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer attended the Community Cohesion Awards on 1 February 2019, where a number of individuals and community groups were recognised for supporting the communities of Bedfordshire.

#### **2. AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE 6 DECEMBER 2018**

Councillor Headley introduced the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 6 December 2018. The Committee had received the Statement of Assurance at the meeting and had suggested a number of amendments to the Statement. The updated Statement had been circulated with the Minutes and the Committee had recommended that this be signed by the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Headley reported that the Committee had received an update from the internal auditors and had been advised that the cyber security audit had been delayed as a joint audit with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service had been planned but Cambridgeshire no longer wished such an audit to be conducted. The Committee had expressed the view that, given the growing importance of cyber security, it did not wish to see this audit removed from the Service's audit plan.

The submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 6 December 2018 were received and the Chair of the Authority and the Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee were authorised to sign the final Statement of Assurance on behalf of the Authority.

### **3. HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP 10 JANUARY 2019**

Councillor Waheed submitted the draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group that was held on 10 January 2019.

She reported on performance against the indicators that had been rated amber or red for the second quarter of 2018/19, such as EQ1a (percentage of new entrants to the retained duty system to be women) and EQ2 (recruitment of black and minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation). It was hoped that the current recruitment campaign would result in a workforce that was more representative of the communities in Bedfordshire.

HR3 (appraisals completed by 30 September) had missed its target as a result of management vacancies and, in some cases, the second line manager not signing the appraisal off even though it was completed. It was anticipated that performance would improve against this indicator.

Performance against H1(number of serious accidents (over 28 days) per 1000 employees) and H2 (number of working days/shifts lost to accidents per 1000 employees (excluding Retained Duty System employees) had been adversely affected by two accident injuries. Both individuals had now returned to work.

The Committee had also received the Public Sector Equality Duty Report. This detailed the large amount of work undertaken by the Service, including the positive action campaigns to seek to ensure that the recruitment campaign was targeting the best candidates from all the local communities in Bedfordshire.

It was noted that the Committee had resolved to send a letter of thanks to the former Assistant Chief Officer and it was suggested that this should be written on behalf of all Members of the Authority.

Councillor Waheed also advised that the Committee's report on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) audit had been deferred to the Group's June meeting as the audit would be taking place after the Group's March meeting.

The submitted draft Minutes of the meeting of the Human Resources Policy and Challenge Group held on 10 January 2019 were received.

It was agreed that the Chair be requested to write a letter on behalf of all Members of the Authority, thanking the former Assistant Chief Officer for her support and wishing her well in her future endeavours.

#### **4. 2019/20 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Members received a report on the proposed revenue budget and capital programme. The draft revenue budget requirement had been updated as the three unitary authorities had recently submitted their business rate returns and some of the figures had changed. A revised appendix setting out the final budget was tabled for the Authority's approval.

A Council Tax increase of 2.99%, below the cap level of 3%, was being proposed. This equated to an increase of £98.45 per Band D property.

In addition to the final budget, the Authority also received the medium term savings and efficiencies, the Capital Programme, the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Reserves Strategy and the Treasurer's Statement on the adequacy of reserves and robustness of estimates.

The final settlement had been issued and there had been no changes to the figures previously indicated to the Authority. The continuing reduction in Revenue Support Grant, from £2.6 million to £2.283 million, was noted.

It was noted that 2019/20 was the last year of the four year funding settlement from Government and highlighted the uncertainty in the 2020/21 budget arising from the formula funding review, changes to business rate retention and the spending review.

Changes to the original budget included the business rate baseline (line 52) and the separate reporting of the transformational reserve for investment into the Control Mobilisation Project (line 76). The annual use of transformational reserve for strategic projects and improvements (line 77) was set at £250,000 from 2019/20. After the next four year period, this would leave the earmarked reserve at £1.946 million. This was in line with a general principle of reducing the level of reserves.

Consultation on the budget had been undertaken with approximately 1120 responses received. 84% of respondents supported the proposed 2.99% Council Tax increase. 73% had also supported the Service going to referendum for a level of Council Tax exceeding the current capped level of 3%.

In relation to the assumptions made on pay, a generous 9% increase over the medium term period had been budgeted for. Members were assured that these pressures were reviewed every year. Detailed inflation figures for gas, water, electricity and derv had also been included in the budget (line 33).

The prudent use of reserves to support the budget setting process was recognised.

The Authority agreed that:

- a. A Revenue Budget requirement is set at £29.832 million, met as indicated in paragraph 3.8 of this report.
- b. In meeting this budget requirement, the Authority's Precept be set at £20.971 million and that as a consequence, a council tax increase of 2.99% up to £98.45 per Band D equivalent property, calculated as shown in Paragraph 3.8 of this report.
- c. In order to meet the Precept requirement, the Head of Finance/Treasurer be authorised to issue Precepts in the necessary form to each of the Unitary Councils and for the amounts indicated in Paragraph 3.11 of this report.

The Medium-Term Revenue Plan, the 2019/20 savings and efficiencies, the Medium-Term Capital Programme, the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Reserves Strategy were approved.

It was agreed that the 2018/19 year-end underspend be allocated to the Transformation Reserve.

In considering the above recommendations, the Treasurer's statement on the robustness of estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides, was noted.

The Authority delegated any budget amendments, following receipt of the final settlement figures, to the Treasurer and Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

## **5. SHARED PRINCIPAL OFFICER COVER**

The Authority received a report on opportunities to extend the existing collaboration between the Service and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service for sharing Area Commanders to also include the sharing of Brigade Managers, thereby further enhancing the resilience of the strategic operational command structure within both services. This would be especially important in the event of a large incident such as the Novichok poisoning in Salisbury.

Members were assured the Brigade Management responsibilities for incidents in Bedfordshire would be retained by the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer and that the Principal Officer cover would only be shared in the event of a large incident.

Members were assured that these were not cover arrangements, as was the case at Area Commander level, but an agreement to strengthen resilience arrangements. Any further extension of the arrangements would be submitted to the Authority for approval.

The establishment of formal arrangements to share Brigade Manager operational cover between Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services was agreed and the development and implementation of these, including any appropriate legal agreements, was delegated to the Chief Fire Officer.

## **6. BREXIT “NO DEAL” PREPARATIONS**

The Authority received a report providing an update on the work the Service had been undertaking in preparation for a ‘no deal’ Brexit, both internally and working with the multi-agency partners of the Bedfordshire Local Resilience Forum (BLRF).

BLRF had begun its preparations in September 2018 and was now meeting on a weekly basis.

Guidance received from the National Fire Chiefs Council had set out the following three areas of focus for Brexit preparations: procurement or supply chain issues, operational impacts and support which may be provided to assist the Police. Command and control arrangements were being implemented as there was the potential for large-scale disorder.

The content of the report and the continued efforts to minimise the impact of a 'no deal' Brexit were acknowledged

## **7. LOCALISM ACT – PAY POLICY 2019**

In accordance with the requirement to agree and publish an annual pay policy statement and its constituent parts for the financial year 2019/20, the Chief Fire Officer presented the Service's Pay Policy for 2019. This incorporated the changes to spinal column points and pay increases that had been awarded.

The submitted proposed pay policy statement for 2019/20 was approved, subject to additional text being added regarding abatement and re-engagement as follows:

1. that "and in line with all Government guidance" be added to the end of the first paragraph under section 6; and
2. that the following new sentence be added to section 6: "From 2019, the service will not reappoint Principal Officers after retirement to their previous, or a similar, post save for in exceptional circumstances when such a decision is necessary in the interests of public safety. Any such appointment must be transparent, justifiable and time limited."

## **8. HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE**

The Authority received the outcomes of the inspection process in 2018 conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

All reports from the first tranche of the inspections were available on the HMICFRS website and a "State of Fire" report would be produced when all fire and rescue services had been inspected. The effectiveness of the Service had been judged as "good" with efficiency and people being judged as "requires improvement". A number of the areas of improvement had been identified by the Service in its self-assessment. The inspection had not identified any causes for concern.

An action plan to address the areas requiring improvement had been prepared and would be monitored by the Corporate Management Team.

The Authority was advised of apparent inconsistencies that would be addressed in a meeting with Inspectorate officials. This included statements in the report that indicated that the Service had a budget deficit. Members, having just received and agreed the budget proposals for 2019/20, noted that this was not the case.

Members recognised the opportunities for improvement provided by the inspection process but expressed concern about the apparent inconsistencies with some of the statements included within the inspection report.

The content of the report and the findings of the HMICFRS inspection of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service were acknowledged and Members committed to supporting initiatives that provided a response to any recommendations to benefit further improvement across the Service.

## **9. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2019/20**

The proposed calendar of meetings for 2019/20 was submitted for approval. The calendar was based upon a new governance structure that would be submitted to the Authority for approval at its next meeting. This included a change in the structure of the Policy and Challenge Groups to align with the themes of the HMICFRS inspection regime, with a Group for Effectiveness and a Group for Efficiency and People.

The submitted provisional calendar of dates for meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its associated Committees and Groups for the forthcoming year was approved, subject to consideration of the Governance Review paper to be received in March 2019.

## **10. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2023 UPDATE**

Members considered a report on the progress made toward the completion of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2019-2023, including the associated consultation process.

A significant amount of work had been undertaken to prepare the CRMP, including the development of a detailed Community Risk Analysis, and it was now ready to go out for public consultation to allow the final draft to be considered by the Authority at its next meeting. Public consultation would include face to face consultation and online surveys. There would also be extensive internal consultation. This would enable the CRMP to be published by 1 April 2019 as was required by the National Framework.

All the actions arising from the HMICFRS inspection were included within the CRMP. There was a greater focus on data quality and the use of data. There were also links to a number of other Service documents and policies.

Members were referred to the proposed consultation questions which were set out in full in the appendix to the report and asked for views on the Service's mission to provide outstanding fire and rescue services to help make Bedfordshire safer, the revised aims of the Service and a number of questions on the specific plans for 2019/20.

It was noted that there were no proposed changes to the response standards.

The initial draft Community Risk Management Plan and the revised consultation arrangements were approved.

## **11. COLLABORATION WORKING GROUP**

Members received update on progress with key collaboration initiatives as managed by the Blue Light Collaboration Strategic Group which included the following:

- The appointment of a joint project manager to lead on the joint headquarters work was progressing.
- A workshop with all blue light partners on managing community risk had been arranged for later in February 2019.
- The improvement works had been completed at Leighton Buzzard Community Fire Station and a meeting to explore the Police use of Toddington Community Fire Station had been arranged.
- Discussions with the Ambulance Service on the feasibility of further opportunities for co-location were ongoing.
- The Service continued to explore the use of What3Words, a geo-application that had been adopted by the Police in December 2018.
- Training on the use of the drone had been completed and the drone had been deployed during the incident on Kimbolton Road earlier in the year.
- The red route pilot continued.
- The Service had been authorised by the College of Policing to train Police motorcyclists for blue light response and work was continuing to establish a cohort of Trainers which could enable an expansion of training activities.
- The Service would be meeting with the Police to explore opportunities to collaborate on procurement, recognising that the Police were involved in a tri-force agreement with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire.
- Work was underway to detail and map current shared training provision with the Police. The second stage of the exercise would review the capacity and usage of training spaces and facilities to seek further joint provision.

The content of the report and the continued efforts to pursue collaboration with the Service's blue light partners were acknowledged.



**12. INFORMATION BULLETIN**

Members received the information bulletin for the period covering 1 October to 31 December 2018.

In response to a question about the short length of service of a firefighter at Leighton Buzzard Community Fire Station, the Chief Fire Officer advised that he would investigate.

It was noted that the Executive Committee had recently attended the presentation to Derek Holt, the Station Commander at Kempston Station, who was retiring after 30 years of service.

**COUNCILLOR DOWNING  
MEMBER OF BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**