



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 10.00 AM.

**Present:** Councillors Clarke OBE, Hall, Hopkins, Lambert, Marland, McLean, and Walsh

**Officers:** J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), E Hilling (Communications, Marketing and Engagement Manager) and C Jordan (Team PA)

**Remotely:** M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets) A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets) S Tuffley (Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer), C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance & Development), A Collett (Organisational Development Manager) and A McCallum (Executive Assistant to CFO)

**Apologies:** Councillor Christensen

The Chairman advised the Committee that the meeting was being recorded and would be uploaded on to the Authority's YouTube channel after the meeting.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

## **EX09 MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 14 July 2021, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## **EX10 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL – JUNE 2021**

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the budget monitoring report being presented today was up to the end of June 2021. Appendix A provided an overview of each directorate's budget and forecast outturn. The current expenditure forecast of £31.6m against a budget of £32.277m resulted in an underspend of £677k. However, due to additional funding of £384k in relation to

protection grants and local tax income guarantee, there was a net overall underspend of just over £1m. Due to the underspend, the Authority no longer needed to fully utilise £1.1m planned use of reserves and instead was intending to transfer £52k from reserves to balance the funding requirement. Any fluctuations in the figure throughout the financial year would be captured and monitored to ensure the use of reserves was minimised and offset against any underspend identified within the expenditure.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets highlighted underspend seen within the Finance and Assets, Service Delivery, Corporate Development & Planning directorates. Within Finance and Assets, the £256k underspend related to a rebate received following a business rates review. The review was carried out by external specialists who identified reductions in the rateable value of several stations and was backdated to 2017. The other area with high levels of underspend was predominantly employee costs.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets updated Members on how the Authority had utilised £801k of Covid funding since March 2020. Funding had been used to cover additional employee costs, protective equipment, and IT upgrades. Based on current projections, the Covid funding would be fully utilised by September 2021.

The Capital programme budget for 2021/22 was £2.402m. Property capital funds were utilised to carry out planned capital projects as per the condition surveys. Most of the fire appliance and equipment budget would be utilised to purchase red fleet appliances and the related operational equipment. A slippage of £369k had been forecast due to delays in the delivery of the 2021/22 fire appliances.

A Member asked if the delivery delay of new appliances had a negative impact on operations. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets assured Members that the delay in delivery had not affected operations as Workshops had a robust servicing plan.

Members discussed the increased National Insurance contributions. The Director of Finance and Assets assured Members that there should be no additional costs to the Authority as the Government had announced that national Insurance increases would be met by central government for all local government organisations. The logistics of the national insurance increase and payments were still being investigated.

A Member enquired about the consolidation of staff and if this was carried out regularly. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets

informed Members that new software had enabled Finance and Human Resources to introduce more efficient ways of working and this had enabled the reduction of staff. In future, any new positions had to be agreed by the Senior Management Team and signed off by the Director of Finance and Assets.

Members asked about the long-term use of Reserves and if rising costs and inflation were considered when setting next year's budget. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets informed Members that the use of reserves would be needed to cover the 2022/23 budget if no additional funding was given. When setting budgets, inflation was considered and was reflected in the final figure. It would also be hoped that when the government issued final settlements, inflation would be taken into account.

RESOLVED –

That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as of 30 June be noted.

**EX11**

#### **THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE (TVFCS) MOBILISING SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) went live in April 2015 and the agreement was for a 15-year period, expiring in April 2030. TVFCS utilised the 'Vision 4' mobilising system, which was provided by Capita Secure Solutions and Services (SSS) Ltd. Within the current mobilising system contract, the initial service period was set for seven years, expiring in April 2022, with options to extend service support provision for up to eight years (a maximum total of 15 years).

The contract review point aligned to the requirement of the agreement that "as soon as reasonably practicable following the fifth anniversary of the commencement date Fire Authorities shall discuss whether the contract should be extended together with any upgrade, modification or refresh to the system".

Principally, due to each Services' response to Covid-19 and timelines specified within the contract, presentation of these recommendations to the TVCFCS Joint Committee was not practicable prior to a meeting held on the 12 July 2021. As detailed within the agreement, the Joint Committee, created by the three fire and rescue services, provides overall strategic direction and oversight for the TVFCS. The interests of the Authority were currently represented by Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE and Councillor Steven Lambert.

The recommended one-year extension to the contract from April 2022 to April 2023 enables the Authority to monitor and react to the outcome of the sale of Capita Secure Solutions and Services (SSS) Ltd, which was expected to take place imminently. The one-year extension also allowed the Authority the opportunity to consider the associated activity towards implementation of the Emergency Services Network (ESN), the replacement for the current Airwave communications system, which had on several occasions, seen extensions to project timelines. The costs associated with extending the service contract by a further year was detailed within the report. Any periods of extension to the service contract, require Capita Secure Solutions and Services (SSS) Ltd to provide a 'system report'.

The system report sets out expected performance levels and recommended hardware upgrades and refresh options that would be necessary for TVFCS to maintain an appropriate, robust, and resilient level of technological capability.

Detailed within the report was the projected expenditure from the TVFCS Renewals Account commensurate with the requirements detailed within the Capita 'system report'. Whilst this expenditure was significant, the reserve, which includes the accumulated annual contributions of £50,000 from each Service, plus a one-off contribution at implementation, now stands at circa £1.8 million.

Members discussed the risks involved with this contract going forward. The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets informed Members that the one-year extension would enable TVFCS to establish if the new owners of Capita Secure Solutions and Services (SSS) Ltd would be able to provide the same level of service. The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the contract and budget would be discussed and reviewed at a meeting scheduled for February 2022.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted to Members that this was a national risk as 60% of fire control services used the same software. This risk was being monitored by the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council. The Chief Fire Officer would enquire from the Chief Fire Officer of Oxfordshire (who was leading on this piece of work) to ascertain the latest position.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer extended an invitation to all Members to visit the TVFCS control room. The dates, times and numbers were limited but if Members wished to visit, they should contact the Democratic Services Officer.

RESOLVED -

That the TVFCS Mobilising system contract be extended for one year, from April 2022 to March 2023.

That the project expenditure from the TVFCS Renewals Account commensurate with the requirements detailed within the Capita 'system report' which are summarised within the paper be noted.

**EX12 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED –

It was moved and resolved that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 as the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person (including the Authority); and on these grounds, it is considered, at this moment in time, that the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**EX13 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE – SUCCESSION PLANNING**

The Committee considered the report and appendices, details of which were noted in the confidential/exempt minutes.

RESOLVED –

That the report and appendices are noted.

**EX14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.15 AM.