



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2023 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Darlington, Hall, Lambert, McLean Rouse (part) and Walsh

Officers: M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), A Carter (Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO), P Mould (Area Commander Industrial Action), D Buchanan (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), S Tuffley (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager), A Collett (Organisational Development Manager) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

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/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vliv7bh1Q>

EX15 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 12 July 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX16 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

RESOLVED -

That Councillor McLean be appointed Vice Chairman for the meeting.

The Chairman announced that, by reason of special circumstances, an additional item 'Succession Planning' would be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. It would be taken in exempt session.

EX17 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED –

It was moved and resolved that the public and press representatives be removed from the meeting by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report and minutes contain information relating to any individual; and Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report and minutes contain information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person (including the Authority); and on these grounds it is considered the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

EX18 SUCCESSION PLANNING

RESOLVED –

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

EX19 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 12 July 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman left the meeting, and the Vice Chairman took the Chair. All officers rejoined the meeting.

The Vice Chairman welcomed the Head of Protection, Assurance and Development to his first meeting of the Authority.

EX20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Vice Chairman advised on the following matters arising:

EX06 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – The Director of Finance and Assets had advised Members it was not appropriate for him to disclose information about the legal position regarding the pursuit to recover some of the increased costs incurred during the build of the Blue Light Hub from the professional design team but had updated Members following the meeting.

The Chairman asked that a proposal be brought back to Members on the top floor of West Ashland, the Director of Finance and Assets advised that this would be presented later this year.

The Chairman asked for an update on the business as usual work property spend that was being undertaken on station – this was included as an appendix in the Budget Monitoring report today.

EX08 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION PLAN UPDATE – The Chairman was impressed with the work on the zero carbon electricity contract and felt it would be good for the Authority to promote this and the environmental and climate action plan update. A draft communication to be given to the Chairman and Vice Chairman to approve before publication. Subject to approval, this would be published later this month as part of a mid-year update on the Plan.

The Chairman asked if the business case for Unit 7, setting out the options for exiting the building, could be presented to the Executive Committee in September, this was being presented today.

EX09 FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (NO2) - The Director of Finance and Assets would circulate the Masterclasses to Members, as well as looking at potential self-assessments. The Director of Finance and Assets was awaiting a response from a third party regarding the self-assessment tool.

EX10 UPDATE FLEET AND PROPERTY STRATEGIES TO 2025 – The Chairman asked if officers could speak to Councillor Hall regarding his knowledge and expertise in the disposal of fleet vehicles. This meeting had now taken place and the Service would utilise existing channels to better publicise when selling vehicles at auction in order to maximise the potential interest and selling price.

EX21 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

EX22 2025-2030 CRMP LISTENING AND ENGAGEMENT CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this was the report on the outcomes of the ‘listening and engagement’ CRMP consultation carried out with members of the public in June. Consultation at this very early stage in the CRMP development process was to comply with National Framework and new Fire Standard requirements and also, very importantly, the Gunning Principles.

Officers pay particular attention to these as they set out four legal tests that define what a legitimate consultation looks like, including: that proposals are consulted on when they are still at a formative stage to ensure that decisions had not been subject to pre-determination; and, that there was sufficient information to enable intelligent consideration resulting in an informed response. These requirements tend to favour qualitative methods of consultation and engagement when dealing with complex issues,

hence the use of independently and expertly facilitated focus groups that allow participants to reflect in depth about the issues, and to receive and question relevant information.

Also worth noting was the effort that Opinion Research Services (ORS) go to recruit a diverse and representative sample of the public. Members would see the effects of this from the statistics in the report, and as a result of this, ORS advise that the outcomes of the consultation were broadly indicative of how the public at large would incline if the Service was able to engage with a much larger proportion of the population in this way.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that the consultation was structured into two main parts. Firstly, an exploration of the participants perceptions of risk in their communities and also how they see the Service and their awareness of what it does. As with previous consultations of this type, fire was seldom mentioned spontaneously as something that the participants worry about even though they know that the consultation had been commissioned by the fire and rescue service. However, there was a good exploration of perceptions of some currently topical issues such as wildfire and lithium-ion battery risks.

In the second part, it starts to explore some of the challenges the Service faces and some potential ways it might respond to them. These included key issues raised by the HMICFRS in their Round 2 inspection report such as: the future of on-call service; automatic fire alarms; and workforce diversity.

A Member felt it was important to take note of the views and comments around diversity and how the Service connects with various communities to show that the fire service is a place for them.

A Members asked if the consultation was reaching enough of the population within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised that ORS were reasonably confident it had engaged with a broad selection of the public, which well represented a larger selection of the public. When consulting on the draft plan, the focus groups may be rerun, there would be an online facility for anyone to respond, and a social media campaign, to make everyone aware of the consultation and encourage participation. There had also been a staff consultation.

RESOLVED –

That the report be submitted to 11 October 2023 Fire Authority meeting for information and noting.

EX23 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q1 2023/24

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members that he was pleased to present the Key Performance Measures report for Quarter 1 2023/24. There had been a number of changes based on feedback received throughout the last year of reporting. The most notable changes were, the layout of the report, which now included room for commentary for each measure, and more room to provide a better description for each measure. Also included were some new measures, the details of which could be found in the cover report.

It was also worth noting that feedback had already been received regarding the two measures in relation to the Environment and these would be updated prior to the next quarters performance report.

As for the performance detailed within the report, it was encouraging to see that impact of incidents in the home and in the workplace were generally where they were expected to be, based on the targets set. However, It would be remiss not to highlight the area detail response model. This area primarily details the availability of appliances across the wholetime fleet and on-call. As seen in the report, this area had yet to reach its expected position.

In relation to the Wholetime figures, there were a number of reasons that had been attributed to these figures, however, the Service had identified the largest impact on these numbers was a skills gap within the current workforce, primarily in relation to drivers and junior officers. As mentioned within the commentary, a range of initiatives had been agreed by the senior management team to improve the resilience of front-line resources.

A Member asked why over the border mobilisations into Buckinghamshire continued to be red, were there plans to improve this.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the response model was under review and one of the issues was around the on call stations availability and the issues with on call recruitment, which still remains one of the Services priorities. The Service does work closely with neighbouring services, and arrangements were in place and enshrined in law. Figures did increase last year due to the hot summer. Also, through Thames Valley Fire Control, the nearest available pump would always be mobilised, which wasn't the case in the past.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members that as part of the CRMP, there was a complete review of resources, looking at where resources were placed, the impact of over the border mobilisation and whether it could be mitigated. A lot was due to geography and not cost.

A Member asked if a report explaining this could be shared with Members.

A Member felt that looking at increasing wholetime availability would be useful.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that this was being reviewed as part of the CRMP.

RESOLVED –

That the report and recommendations below be approved for submission to the Authority:

1. It is recommended that the Performance Management – Q1 2023/24 be noted.

EX24 UNIT 7 EXIT PROGRAMME

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT introduced the report and advised it had been a huge part of his role that the Service exited out of its one leasehold property, as soon as possible, which had the benefits of not only reducing the day to day costs but would also reduce the environmental impact to the Service. The proposal provided significant funding to improve the estate and to ensure USAR continued to be based at Aylesbury.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the exit from Unit 7 formed a key part of both the recently approved update to the Property Strategy and the Service's Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

The Director of Finance and Assets apologised for an error, the annual charge was understated by £4,000 as the last line before the total was erroneously excluded from that figure, and to reassure Members it would not significantly affect the decision, and if anything the saving was slightly better than quoted.

Unit 7 costs circa £180k per year to run and houses 26 staff, stores, USAR kit, ceremonial uniforms, a host of other miscellaneous items (including a life-sized model of a horse), and meeting rooms. Since the pandemic, the Service had adopted a hybrid working policy. Desk space that was previously fully utilised had capacity freed up, allowing the chance to rationalise the estate and make savings.

Deputy Chief Fire Officer

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members there were four main components of this proposed project, Stores, USAR, HQ works and ICT infrastructure. In terms of legal considerations, the most recent deed of variation allowed notice to be served at the end of any calendar month. Previously, this was restricted to the end of March each year to vacate by the end of the following December.

The Proposal was to serve notice following approval, and to fully vacate the building on 30 September 2024. The reason for proposing the notice was longer than 9 months, was to allow for all the work required to be completed, and to allow time to market the building in its current condition. If a new tenant can be found who would take it 'as is', it would remove the need to pay for dilapidation costs, or at least mitigate some of them. Or, if that was not possible, it would allow time to undertake dilapidation works if the freeholder was unwilling to accept payment in-lieu.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that there were significant financial benefits to this project, although there was a one-off cost of £369k, £500k had provisionally been set aside in the MTFP as part of the approved capital programme so this would free-up £130k of funds. The payback period was just over two years excluding dilapidations or under 3.5 years if these were included.

A Member asked about USAR as the decision to extend USAR funding only went up to 2025 and this would mean moving out six months before any future funding was known and he was concerned about moving out before the decision on USAR had been finalised by the government.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that officers shared his concern, but a review of USAR had been imminent for the last 4-5 years, also whether the comprehensive spending review would happen if there was an election, or if it would roll over again, was not known, but a decision was needed on Unit 7.

A Member asked if USAR was in the correct location in Aylesbury.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised USAR locations were agreed nationally through national resilience and were placed at strategic geographical locations. This was not just a Service decision.

A Member asked if the option of using the additional floor at the Blue Light Hub was considered.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that the Blue Light Hub option had been considered, but it was discounted due to the primary cost, as part of the condition of occupation of the top

floor, under planning conditions, was that a decked car park be built. This would cost approximately £1m. Also, when looking at the desk requirements in HQ and the number of people, no more physical space was required. A lot of the HQ work and fit out was around storage and this would be needed if the Blue Light hub was used too. Also considered was the cost to staff of driving to the Blue Light Hub.

The Vice Chairman suggested that regarding increasing the power supply at HQ, it needed to be requested with the power company sooner rather than later, as the power network could take a long time to be provided.

The Vice Chairman asked that it was put on the risk register.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee approve to serve notice to allow the exit of Unit 7 on 30 September 2024, and undertake the necessary enabling works as detailed in the Appendices.

EX25

**BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2022 – MARCH 2023
(PROVISIONAL OUTTURN)**

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report at Appendix A set out the Authority's revenue and capital spending position as at 31 July 2023, together with the projected outturn position for the financial year.

The budget of £36.450m compared to the forecast outturn of £35.749m gave a forecast yearend underspend of £701k. Furthermore, the level of funding was showing a favourable variance of £24k which had resulted in an overall net underspend of £725k against the expenditure budget. The underspend was predominantly due to a favourable variance being reported under employee costs due to the vacant positions. Furthermore, due to the significant increase in the Bank of England base rate since the budget was approved, the investment returns had been revised upwards and currently projected at least £350k additional interest returns than originally budgeted.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that as requested at the meeting of the Executive Committee on 12 July 2023, Appendix B contained details of all property works currently planned across the estate during 2023-24.

A Member asked about Stokenchurch, which was an on call station and difficult to provide continuous cover. Was it value for money to refurbish the drill tower and not to do Princes Risborough first.

Director of Finance
and Assets

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that with regard to the drill towers, the Service went out to tender as a block, and didn't get any responses, so were now trying to engage with local businesses to take them on. On the schedule if they need work doing, it does not mean they can't be used. The refurbished Aylesbury drill tower, may be put in at Princes Risborough, subject to planning consent.

RESOLVED –

That the progress detailed in the Workforce Resourcing and Development Update be noted.

EX26 WORKFORCE RESOURCING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Organisational Development Manager advised Members that this report provided an update on the Authority's progress in relation to workforce resourcing and development, ensuring the right people in the right roles, with the right skills, knowledge, and behaviours. It offers reassurance to Members that the necessary safeguards and contingency plans were in place to future proof the Service, mitigate risk and optimise opportunities during a period of significant change and increasing demands; all to continually provide the best service possible to its communities.

Appendix A detailed the range of new ways of working being implemented to enhance operational resilience and improve staff training, learning and development. These aim to increase appliance availability; help navigate workforce planning challenges, whilst minimising the potential impact on the workforce. All of these developments promote staff retention, increase levels of engagement, and improves communication. Resulting in a confident workforce that feels valued and invested in.

This report showcased the positive, meaningful change being implemented, informed by staff feedback and organisational needs, that is moving the service forward.

RESOLVED –

That the progress detailed in the Workforce Resourcing and Development Update be noted.

EX27 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 at 10am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.45PM

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