



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2023 at 10.00 AM.

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

Officers: M Osborne (Interim 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), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), P Mould (Head of Response and Resilience), P Scanes (Head of Prevention and CRMP), S Tuffley (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), 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>

EX30 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX31 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Chairman advised on the following matters arising:

EX23 - PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q1 2023/24

A Member asked if a report explaining over the border mobilisation could be shared with Members – The Deputy Chief Fire Officer had advised that this would be covered in a forthcoming CRMP Members' Workshop.

(Councillor Darlington joined the meeting).

EX24 - UNIT 7 EXIT PROGRAMME

The Vice Chairman asked if increasing the power supply to HQ when the Service moves out of Unit 7 could be placed on the risk register – The Director of Finance and Assets advised that this had been done.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer advised Members there had been a good upturn in appliance availability recently which was a result of the investment the Authority had made into the recruitment campaign and getting people through training, and also the uplift in Crew Commanders and the Safe to Command course. There had been an increase in establishment and a decrease in bank costs of around 50% over the same period as last year.

The Interim Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed there had been a 50% reduction in October and consistent reduction over the summer period of between 25-36% month on month and appliance availability had been better than in previous years.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer also advised there were still 18 firefighters at the Fire Service College graduating in December, which would assist and boost recruitment.

A Member felt this was a really good news story and should be shared with the public.

EX32 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

EX33 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2023

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the report in Appendix A set out the Authority's revenue and capital spending position as at 30 September 2023, together with the projected outturn position for the financial year.

The budget of £36.450m compared to the forecast outturn of £36.131m gave a forecast year end underspend of £0.320m. Furthermore, the level of funding was showing a favourable variance of £0.024m which had resulted in an overall net underspend of £0.344m against the expenditure budget.

The underspend was predominantly due to a favourable variance being reported under employee costs due to vacant positions in the first two quarters of the year. 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 were currently projecting at least £0.450m additional interest returns higher than originally budgeted.

Members were reminded that officers were forecasting an underspend of just over £700k as at the end of the first quarter which had reduced by half in this latest update. The reason for this change was there had been an additional in year bid process submitted in August and all additional bids were approved.

A Member asked if the installation of flag poles at Wholetime Stations was a priority for the Authority to spend £10k on when there were so many other priorities that money should be spent on.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that there had been a process for bids through the Business Transformation Board and it had been run past senior leaders of the organisation. Some stations already had flag poles, and this was to have a consistent approach across all stations.

A Members said that one of the things discussed with HMICFRS was the lack of spending per head, how could this be increased.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that given the resident population, it would probably be around £10-12m on the budget. The issue was with the way the precept referendum limit worked, it would never catch up, especially when prior to the last two years, it was always on the percentage which was only going to get wider as the Authority's precept was the third lowest of any Authority. There were plans to have a more fundamental look at the way funding was redistributed amongst those services, but those plans had been delayed for a number of years. Whilst the Authority does not want to increase its expenditure for the sake of it, having more funding available to do more with and be closer to the average would be a good position to be in.

The Chairman advised that together with the Interim Chief Fire Officer he had written to Lee Rowley outlining the case for precept flexibility for this year and it was copied to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Chairman had received a reply confirming it had been noted and that they were going through the process. All the Ministers changed yesterday, so he would resend the letter, to ensure it did not get lost. The Chairman also advised that a number of local Members of Parliament had been lobbying on the Authority's behalf as well.

The Chairman advised that clearly the in year growth bids go through governance and it was right that officers were empowered to get on with doing what they needed to get done. The Chairman felt that setting out a clearer authorisation framework that triggers when in growth bids were of a magnitude and importance that

Chief Fire Officer
and Chairman

Members should have the ability to look at before they go through final sign off, would be beneficial. Could officers look at a process that Members could agree.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that in terms of a revised process, officers would liaise with the Chairman and Lead Member for Finance to agree what the triggers would be for various things to come to Members.

The Chairman asked about the significant increase in the Airwave contract cost and an update on the White Ribbon Accreditation.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised that in terms of the Airwave contract, Members were familiar with the Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), which unfortunately had been delayed and had a knock on effect on the Airwave contract. The Service had no control in terms of what the cost of Airwave would be. The Airwave contract was previously funded (about 80%) by the Firelink grant. The Government had reduced this over the last few years, rightly so because the expectation was that the Emergency Services Network (ESN) would be coming in and would come in at a lower cost. The cost was being managed within the MTFP process. The expectation was that as and when ESN starts, the cost would be significantly less and there would be a saving.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that with regard to White Ribbon. The Service was due to kick off with 16 days of action. The accreditation had been approved. The Programme Manager leading on the project, would be presenting an update to the Authority at the next meeting in December.

RESOLVED –

That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as of 30 September 2023 be noted.

EX34 SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM REMUNERATION AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW, AND ANNUAL REPORT ON EMPLOYEE BONUS SCHEME

The Head of Human Resources advised Members that the annual report comprised of the Senior Management Team (SMT) Remuneration and Performance Review and annual report on the Employee Bonus Scheme. This report provided information for Members' consideration in their review of the corporate and individual performance of SMT, and whether a performance related payment would be appropriate. A local pay review was conducted annually, and any changes were normally effective from

Director of
Finance and Assets

the preceding January. The last remuneration review was in November 2022.

The executive summary showed the posts covered, contracts, cost of providing services, background and context to pay and remuneration, national context, legislation, pay and gender pay, the financial position, the services provided, financial performance, budget monitoring and the Council tax precept. SMT do not play a part in the pay review process.

Appendix 1 showed comparative data of fire authorities council tax 2022/2023 (source council tax requirement forms) and showed the Authority was one of the lowest Council taxes.

Appendix 2 showed the SMB Performance and Achievements, for example technological workstreams to meet resourcing requirements; the workforce planning group achieving the 300 operational establishment target and the applications for supervisory managers being at their highest level. The Armed Forces Gold Covenant, exceeding national target of apprenticeship starters, SMT qualifications and higher investment returns than originally budgeted.

Appendix 3 showed the Equality Impact Assessment.

A Member felt they should be called merit awards and not bonus awards.

RESOLVED –

- 1 Performance related pay and bonus payments are not paid to the Senior Management Team (SMT) in the current financial year.
- 2 The SMT methodology is reviewed once the Chief Fire Officer recruitment process is complete.

EX35 HMICFRS ACTION PLAN

The Head of Technology, Transformation and PMO advised Members that on Tuesday 17 October the Service received its 2023-2025 HMICFRS Inspection report. As per requirements set out in the report covering letter to the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer (CFO) on 17 October 2023, a copy of the action plan must be submitted to HMICFRS within 28 days of the report.

The report was presented to the Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting on 24 October, with input from His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) Roy Wilsher. One of the recommendations at this meeting was that the Interim CFO be delegated to prepare and publish an Action Plan on behalf of the Authority in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice Chairman.

Following a review of the previous action plan, officers had taken a slightly different approach with the Round 3 action plan, the plan had prioritised on the actions needed to meet the recommendations; the associated actions were clear, measurable and achievable and the plan had been built with feedback from the Chairman and Vice Chairman, NFCC and other partners. Following sign off from the Chairman and the Interim Chief Fire Officer, the action plan would be submitted to HMICFRS and published on the Authority's website in due course.

Ongoing updates would be shared to the Overview and Audit Committee and the Authority to ensure there was ongoing scrutiny. These updates would include progress on the recommendations, impact on KPI's and capture progress on Areas for Improvement.

Officers would continue to have ongoing dialogue with HMICFRS at both a strategic and tactical level to ensure progress was in line with their expectations.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer thanked officers for pulling the Action Plan together so quickly and Members for their input. It had been a very quick turn around with a lot of effort and time gone into it. Officers had met with the Service Liaison Lead for HMICFRS last week to walk through the plan and the feedback was positive.

A Member asked if the Action Plan would be circulated to Members.

The Chairman mentioned that he and the Interim Chief Fire Officer had attended a 'chiefs and chairs' presentation by the HMI at which the importance of 'self-awareness' for fire and rescue services had been emphasised; and advised that he was happy for the Action Plan to be circulated to Members and regular updates would be presented to the Overview and Audit Committee who were delegated to scrutinise the Action Plan.

EX36 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.

EX37 APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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

EX38 SUCCESSION PLANNING UPDATE

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

EX39 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 September 2023, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX40 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 7 February 2024 at 10am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.00AM