

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY**  
**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Director of Legal & Governance, Graham Britten  
Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service  
Brigade HQ, Stocklake, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1BD  
Tel: 01296 744441



---

**Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive**

Jason Thelwell

---

To: Members of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

30 November 2020

**MEMBERS OF THE**  
**PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Please note the content  
of Page 2 of this  
Agenda Pack

Dear Councillor

Your **remote** attendance is requested at a meeting of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY** to be held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 **online** on **WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2020 at 11.00 am** when the business set out overleaf will be transacted.

Your online remote access will be via Microsoft Teams.

Yours faithfully

Graham Britten  
Director of Legal and Governance

Chairman: Councillor Clarke OBE

Councillors: Carroll, Christensen, Cole, Exon, Hall, Hopkins, Hussain, Lambert, Mallen, Marland, McCall, McLean, Mills, Minns, Stuchbury, Walsh



**MAKING YOU SAFER**

**[www.bucksfire.gov.uk](http://www.bucksfire.gov.uk)**



## **To observe the meeting as a member of the Press and Public**

The Authority supports the principles of openness and transparency. To enable members of the press and public to see or hear the meeting this meeting will be livestreamed. Please visit: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

The Authority also allows the use of social networking websites and blogging to communicate with people about what is happening, as it happens.

## **Adjournment and Rights to Speak – Public**

The Authority may adjourn a Meeting to hear a member of the public on a particular agenda item. The proposal to adjourn must be moved by a Member, seconded and agreed by a majority of the Members present and voting.

A request to speak on a specified agenda item should be submitted by email to [gbritten@bucksfire.gov.uk](mailto:gbritten@bucksfire.gov.uk) by 4pm on the Monday prior to the meeting. Please state if you would like the Director of Legal and Governance to read out the statement on your behalf, or if you would like to be sent a 'teams' meeting invitation to join the meeting at the specified agenda item.

If the meeting is then adjourned, prior to inviting a member of the public to speak, the Chairman should advise that they:

- (a) speak for no more than four minutes,
- (b) should only speak once unless the Chairman agrees otherwise.

The Chairman should resume the Meeting as soon as possible, with the agreement of the other Members present. Adjournments do not form part of the Meeting.

## **Rights to Speak - Members**

A Member of the constituent Councils who is not a Member of the Authority may attend Meetings of the Authority or its Committees to make a statement on behalf of the Member's constituents in the case of any item under discussion which directly affects the Member's division, with the prior consent of the Chairman of the Meeting which will not be unreasonably withheld. The Member's statement will not last longer than four minutes. Such attendance will be facilitated if requests are made to [enquiries@bucksfire.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@bucksfire.gov.uk) at least two clear working days before the meeting. Statements can be read out on behalf of the Member by the Director of Legal and Governance, or the Member may request a 'team's meeting invitation to join the meeting at the specified agenda item.

## **Petitions**

Any Member of the constituent Councils, a District Council, or Parish Council, falling within the Fire Authority area may Petition the Fire Authority.

The substance of a petition presented at a Meeting of the Authority shall be summarised, in not more than four minutes, by the Member of the Council who presents it (as above). If the petition does not refer to a matter before the Authority, it shall be referred without debate to the appropriate Committee.

## **Questions**

Members of the Authority, or its constituent councils, District, or Parish Councils may submit written questions prior to the Meeting to allow their full and proper consideration. Such questions shall be received by the Monitoring Officer to the Authority, *in writing*, at least two clear working days before the day of the Meeting of the Authority or the Committee.

## **COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

1. To appoint the Authority's Standing Committees and Lead Members.
2. To determine the following issues after considering recommendations from the Executive Committee, or in the case of 2(a) below, only, after considering recommendations from the Overview and Audit Committee:
  - (a) variations to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
  - (b) the medium-term financial plans including:
    - (i) the Revenue Budget;
    - (ii) the Capital Programme;
    - (iii) the level of borrowing under the Local Government Act 2003 in accordance with the Prudential Code produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; and
  - (c) a Precept and all decisions legally required to set a balanced budget each financial year;
  - (d) the Prudential Indicators in accordance with the Prudential Code;
  - (e) the Treasury Strategy;
  - (f) the Scheme of Members' Allowances;
  - (g) the Integrated Risk Management Plan and Action Plan;
  - (h) the Annual Report.
3. To determine the Code of Conduct for Members on recommendation from the Overview and Audit Committee.
4. To determine all other matters reserved by law or otherwise, whether delegated to a committee or not.
5. To determine the terms of appointment or dismissal of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, and deputy to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, or equivalent.
6. To approve the Authority's statutory pay policy statement.

## **AGENDA**

### **Item No:**

**1. Apologies**

**2. Minutes**

To approve, and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 14 October 2020 (Item 2) **(Pages 9 - 20)**

**3. Disclosure of Interests**

Members to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in any matter being considered which are not entered onto the Authority's Register, and officers to disclose any interests they may have in any contract to be considered.

**4. Chairman's Announcements**

To receive the Chairman's announcements (if any).

**5. Petitions**

To receive petitions under Standing Order SOA6.

**6. Questions**

To receive questions in accordance with Standing Order SOA7.

**7. Recommendations from Committees:**

**Overview and Audit Committee – 11 November 2020**

**(a) Local Government Ethical Standards Best Practice Recommendations**

"That the Authority be recommended to:

1. Note the benchmarking report (Annex A) regarding the 15 Best Practice Recommendations in CSPL's Local Government Ethical Standards Report;
2. Approve that:
  - a. the Code of Conduct is reviewed on an annual basis commencing 2021/22; and where possible taking into account the views of the public, community organisations, and neighbouring and appointing authorities.
  - b. in any review of the Code of Conduct:
    - i. the outcomes of the LGA's consultation on its draft Code of Conduct be taken into account;
    - ii. the prohibition on 'harassment' be added to the prohibition of bullying;

- iii. definitions and examples of both bullying and of harassment be included; and
  - iv. the requirement on Members to comply with any formal standards investigation be included.
- c. the 'Procedure for the handling of allegations under the Code of Conduct against Members of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority' be amended to include a non-exhaustive list of public interest factors which will be taken into account at the filtering stage of a complaint."

The report considered by the Overview and Audit Committee is attached at Item 7(a) **(Pages 21 - 40)**

### **Executive Committee – 18 November 2020**

#### **(b) Capital Strategy**

"It is recommended that:

1. the Capital Strategy is recommended to the Authority for approval.
2. the Authority add, in its Terms of Reference, determining the Capital Strategy as set out at Appendix C."

Subject to the following amendment being made prior to publication:

- i) 9.3 "As at 31 September 2020, the long-term debt currently stands at £6.797m." be amended to "As at 30 September 2020, the long-term debt currently stands at £6.797m."

The report considered by the Executive Committee is attached at Item 7(b) **(Pages 41 - 66)**

#### **(c) Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2024-25**

"That the Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2024-25 is recommended to the Fire Authority for approval."

Subject to the following amendments being made prior to publication: i) Page 16 "unknow" to be replaced with "unknown" ii) Page 32 the following text to be added to the comments in the first row of the table "The decrease in the Bank of England base rate to 0.1% has had a significant impact on interest receivable. Also, during the pandemic the emphasis has increasingly shifted toward liquidity and faster payments to suppliers." iii) Page 10 Annex 1 (Appendix A) Row F2 "quantitate" to be replaced with "quantitative" iv) Page 14 Annex 1 (Appendix A) Row R1 the word "time" to be removed.

The report considered by the Executive Committee is attached at Item 7(c) **(Pages 67 - 124)**

## **8. Independent Persons**

To consider Item 8 **(Pages 125 - 130)**

**9. Annual Health, Safety and Well-being Report 2019/20**

To consider Item 9 (**Pages 131 - 164**)

**10. Date of next meeting**

To note that the next meeting of the Fire Authority will be held on Wednesday 17 February 2021 at 11am.

If you have any enquiries about this agenda please contact: Katie Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) – Tel: (01296) 744633 email: [knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk](mailto:knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk)



# **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY**

## **ROLE DESCRIPTION**

### **LEAD MEMBERS**

1. To take a lead role in providing support and constructive challenge to senior officers in the development of strategies and plans and contributing towards the strategic direction of the Authority, within the Authority's overall policy objectives.
2. To act as a 'sounding board' for senior officers on issues within the portfolio and be supportive in dealing with any problems at a strategic level.
3. To review, in conjunction with senior officers, the service within the portfolio.
4. To keep abreast of related developments and policies at national, regional and local level.
5. To take the lead in reporting to the Authority, one of its committees, or panels on issues within the portfolio.
6. To attend the Overview and Audit Committee, at its request, in connection with any issues associated with the portfolio which is the subject of scrutiny.
7. To act as a spokesperson for the Authority on issues within the portfolio.
8. To represent the Authority on bodies, at events and at conferences related to the portfolio, as appointed by the Executive Committee and to feedback to the Authority any issues of relevance / importance.

(Approved 8 June 2007)

This page is intentionally left blank



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES  
FIRE AUTHORITY HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2020 AT 11.00  
AM

**Present:** Councillors Carroll, Christensen, Clarke OBE, Cole (part), Exon, Hall, Hopkins, Lambert, Mallen (part), Marland, McCall, McLean, Mills, Stuchbury and Walsh

**Officers:** J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), D Norris (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), C Bell (Head of Protection & Assurance), P Mould (Group Commander Protection), J Humphrey (Station Commander HR Projects) S Wells (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience), K Mercer (Station Commander Aylesbury and USAR), D Shaw (ICT Server Specialist), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer) and K Lole (Regional Employer Engagement Director, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire & Berkshire South East Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association).

**Apologies:** Councillors Hussain and Minns

Live webcast broadcast:

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

The Director of Legal and Governance confirmed the webcast was live.

**FA16**

**MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 12 June 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**FA17**

**EXEMPT MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 12 June 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**FA18**

**DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Clarke OBE and McCall both declared an interest in Agenda Item 4 Chairman's Announcements, the national Armed Forces Covenant.

**FA19**

**CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that:

Signing the national Armed Forces Covenant is the Authority's promise to actively support the armed forces community. It

acknowledges that the Authority recognises the value serving personnel, reservists, veterans and military families can bring to our Service. It also indicates that the Authority will, through its business dealings, work to ensure they are treated with fairness and respect within both the local community and wider society and help remove any disadvantages they may encounter in their day-to-day lives. By signing the covenant, the Chief Fire Officer has pledged that the Authority will seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, where it can, by:

- Promoting the fact that we are an Armed Forces friendly organisation.
- Supporting the employment of veterans of any age and working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) on establishing a tailored employment pathway for service leavers.
- Supporting the employment of Armed Forces spouses and partners, and advertising job opportunities through armed forces friendly recruitment agencies and charities.
- Recognise relevant military qualifications in our recruitment/application processes.
- Offering a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Armed Forces spouses and partners.
- Supporting our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, by accommodating their training and deployment where possible.
- Offering support where possible to our local cadet units, either in our local community or in local schools, and encouraging our employees to be cadet helpers or instructors.
- Actively promoting and when possible participating in Armed Forces Day.

Kate Lole, Regional Employer Engagement Director – Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire & Berkshire South East Reserve Forces' & Cadets' Association had joined the meeting and gave Members a brief overview of the national Armed Forces Covenant.

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescues Service (BFRS) hosted and took part in a National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) exercise on the 9 September 2020 along with USAR teams from Essex, Leicester, West Midlands and Norfolk Fire and Rescues Services. All these services form part of the National Zone 2 USAR capability and supports the other 3 zones that make up the 20 teams across the country. In addition, other emergency responders and agencies took an active part in the exercise and these included, NHS Hazardous Area Response Teams (HART), South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) teams from the Police Force, Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) and local council officers and officials.

The exercise took part at Westcott Venture Park, just outside of Aylesbury. The exercise was designed to demonstrate our

capabilities and interoperability arrangements with our USAR Zonal Partners and other emergency responders in preparedness for a major incident of this type. The exercise was audited by the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) who are commissioned by the Home Office to ensure all USAR teams are providing the capability against set Key Performance Indicators.

The exercise proved to be a huge success with all the teams working very well together, we have received very positive feedback from all involved, including NRAT which has shone a positive light on BFRS. The official results from NRAT are not yet released but will be very soon.

Station Commander Aylesbury and USAR joined the meeting and gave Members a presentation on USAR and their recent training exercise.

(Councillor Mallen joined the meeting)

Councillor McLean had taken part as a casualty at the exercise and gave Members an overview of his day. He thanked the Station Commander Aylesbury and Daniel Cadwell, Health and Safety Adviser, for their parts in arranging his participation.

A Member asked that with a lot of the USAR equipment coming up for 20 years old, what was the expectation if USAR carried on after the 2024 refresh. Would it be a requirement for the Service to take over funding or would it still be funded by government.

The Station Commander Aylesbury and USAR advised that this would be the subject of the whole national capability review, no final decision had yet been reached.

The Chief Fire Officer asked if all Members could agree, cross-party, that this was a resource that should be kept in Buckinghamshire.

A Member asked how does the utilisation of the Authority's USAR team compare to the other 19 teams across the country, and was advised that there was a range of performance indicators used for all USAR teams, and whilst the USAR capability was housed in Buckinghamshire, it could serve anywhere in the country as part of a whole nationwide response and capability was kept under regular review.

A Member asked if the uncertainty around funding and multi-year settlements affected the planning, delivery and recruitment for the Service.

The Chief Fire Officer responded that it did affect the planning, the Authority discussed USAR funding every year because the funding was rolled over every year. Moving forward the current planning assumption was that the Service would keep the funding up until 2024.

The Chief Fire Officer hoped that any review would not just look at the number of teams, but at the equipment involved. An equipment refresh was needed due to the age of the equipment. Looking forward, the Authority would like to keep this team in Buckinghamshire. Also, the Service had an excellent training record, not just internally, but nationally and with other agencies across the country.

## **FA20**

### **PEOPLE STRATEGY 2020 - 2025**

The Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance introduced the report and advised Members that the People Strategy 2020-2025 sets out a framework for engaging and developing employees to enable the cultural changes which would help the Service better deliver its vision and strategy priorities.

The Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance also thanked the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group (ED&I) within the Service. This group come together regularly to help put together the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

The Station Commander Human Resources Projects advised Members that the People Strategy had been revised to align to the Public Safety Plan and Corporate plan and set out a framework for engaging and developing employees of Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service over the next five years. The Strategy had been developed through engagement with the Lead Member for People, Equality, Diversity and Assurance; Stakeholders for each key area; representative bodies and through internal employee consultation. The strategy document has therefore had been updated considering the feedback from the consultation process which could be found in Appendix 1.

The Station Commander Human Resources Projects highlighted the key updates within the strategy; the signing of the national armed forces covenant and promise to support the armed forces community; the focus on senior management talent identification and development; workforce and succession planning; and the Service pledge to continue to increase diversity at all levels.

Work to develop the strategy would be ongoing and would be achieved through a refreshed communication strategy including employee engagement and understanding the strategy's effectiveness.

The Strategy had been developed to provide flexibility to adapt to any changing circumstances to staff availability and funding, as outlined in the corporate risk register. Subject to approval, the new strategy would become effective from November 2020.

A Members asked if this would be a 'live' document and was advised that it would be constantly reviewed. The current

strategy had built on experience from previous years, both learning from the ED&I Group, the contribution from the Learning and Development Team, the Health and Well-being Board, and the Culture Surveys that had been carried out over recent years, and also learning from our HMICFRS Inspection report.

RESOLVED –

1. That the People Strategy 2020 – 2025, Annex A, be approved.
2. That the consultation feedback in Appendix 1 was noted.

## **FA21**

### **FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES BECOMING STATUTORY CONSULTEES IN THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS – CONSULTATION BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the purpose of this report was to apprise the Authority of a consultation launched by the Welsh Government on 28 July 2020, about its proposals to make the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities statutory consultees on planning applications relating to specified developments; the current position in England in respect of consultation and fire and rescue authorities; and proposals for England contained within the draft Building Safety Bill.

Responsibility for legislation concerning town and country planning; building regulations and fire safety was devolved to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government's proposals would require pre-application and post-application consultation with the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities, by developers and planning bodies, for certain types of development. The types of development which would be subject to the requirement to engage with fire and rescue authorities were set out in paragraph 4.15 in the Welsh Government's document, These would be planning applications for development comprising, waste sites; 10 residential units or more; or of over 0.5 hectare; buildings with floor space of over 1,000 square metres; or sites of 1 hectare or more. The report maps the current legal regime in Wales across to the regime in England.

In England under town and country planning legislation, a Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) was only a statutory consultee where a proposed development was a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project', such as a power station, fuel storage or a fuel pipeline, transport hub, or highway or railway. However, there was nothing to preclude local planning authorities from adopting local policies under which they could consult fire and rescue authorities about planning applications. Changes to the legislation of the type contemplated in Wales would require the necessary levels of staffing and competency within the FRA to enable it to comply with a duty to provide a "substantive response" within a 21-day period; and require the FRA to publish annual compliance data.

In England, council's building control services, or approved inspectors, were responsible for checking for compliance with the requirements of Building Regulations. Building Regulations were concerned with building work and with material changes of use (which may give rise to requirements for building work).

The requirements for fire safety would apply to most buildings. Fire safety requirements were set out in Part B of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations. These cover means of escape, means of early warning, internal and external fire spread, and access and facilities for the fire and rescue service. Ways of meeting the requirements were given in statutory guidance issued in England and separately in Wales as 'Approved Document B'. At present, FRAs were consulted on applications for Building Regulations approval when required under Approved Document B.

The Welsh Government's proposals were in response to the Grenfell Fire, however the legislation proposed for Wales was not limited to high rise residential buildings.

In England a different approach had been adopted. On 20 July 2020 the Government published the draft Building Safety Bill. The stated intention of the Bill was to create a more stringent regulatory regime for 'higher-risk' residential buildings and was part of the Government's response to the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, led by Dame Judith Hackitt.

The Bill introduced a 'Building Safety Regulator' as a new role to be undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive. The Bill would amend the Building Act 1984 to create a new 'Gateway' regime for 'higher risk buildings'. The Government had signalled its intention that it proposed to define a 'higher-risk building' as: A building 1) 18 metres or more above ground level; or in which there were more than 6 storeys above ground level and 2) contains: a) Two or more dwellings; b) Two or more rooms for residential purposes, or c) Student accommodation.

Clause 13 of the Bill enabled the Building Safety Regulator to call on assistance from local authorities and FRAs when regulating higher-risk buildings.

Clause 14 places a duty on FRAs and local authorities to only use staff with the 'appropriate skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours' when supporting the Building Safety Regulator.

The Bill intends to introduce a Gateway process for applications to construct 'higher-risk buildings'. The first Gateway was the 'Planning Gateway' under which those applying for planning permission would need to submit to the Local Planning Authority, with the planning application, information that demonstrates fire safety requirements had been considered at an early stage and incorporated into the proposals.

The Building Safety Regulator would become a new statutory consultee to provide specialist fire safety input on the proposals

to assist the Local Planning Authority in their decision-making process. However, where a planning application was not currently required (i.e. it was permitted development under the General Permitted Development Order), the requirements of the Planning Gateway would not apply, and development proposals would proceed straight to Gateway two.

The Bill proposed that Gateway two occurred prior to construction work beginning. It was intended to bolster the current building control 'deposit of full plans' stage.

Gateway two was intended to provide a 'hard stop' where construction cannot begin until the Building Safety Regulator was satisfied that the building's design meets the functional requirements of the building regulations and does not contain any unrealistic safety management expectations. At either or both Gateway 1 and 2 the Building Safety Regulator could request, or direct, a FRA to provide its employees to give assistance and support.

The Group Commander Protection advised Members that the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) had produced and reviewed the National Competency Framework for Fire Regulators and consultations fall under the top tier of that qualification. The aspiration was that only those with the highest level of training, which was a Level 4 Diploma and external accreditation with an organisation such as the Institute of Fire Engineers. One of the challenges for the future was maintaining competency skills and knowledge and accreditation and that would be a significant challenge to all fire services.

With regard to the actual consultations, the Authority is consulted on five categories. One of the first categories was under the Licencing Act 2003, where the Authority received regular applications. The Authority was also a consultee on weddings and civil partnerships, new premises and clubs and minor variations.

The Authority works closely with the local authority on houses of multiple occupation consultations under the Building Act 1984 and the Building Regulations 2010.

The Authority works with the water authorities under the Water Industry Act 1991 regarding plans for any significant new developments and also gets the opportunity to state requirements for water supplies.

Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Authority was a non-statutory consultee and responded where it could on significant developments.

The main work stream and biggest workload for staff was around building regulations consultations, working under the Building Act 1984 and the Building Regulations 2010. The Authority generally processed around 1200 consultations a year.

Under consultations the Authority got to comment on means of escape, emergency and safety lighting, access and facilities for the fire service, notice and signs and fire alarms and detection. One of the biggest challenges at this point was that the Authority was not the enforcing authority, but a consultee. The first opportunity to actually work under the regulations was once the development had been built and was occupied, then the premises can be inspected to ensure they have actually complied with all of the regulations and stipulations.

A Member asked if England was to replicate the Welsh government's forward-thinking legislation what would be the cost to the Authority and did the Authority have the resilience to do it.

The Group Commander Protection advised that capacity and growth would be a challenge, but the Authority was monitoring it. The opportunity to be involved in the planning and consultation at the early stages could actually reduce the demand on the team at later stages. If the powers were a little stronger, and there was a stop point whereby they couldn't commence until it was compliant, this could actually reduce some of the demands in future. The Authority had over the last two years approved additional funding for the protection teams. There had been a slight delay in fulfilling some of those posts due to restrictions on recruitment and training, but the process had now started.

A Member asked a question regarding a situation relating to two properties 'The Gables' and 'Mellish Court' in Milton Keynes. "Following a recently completed safety audit report for both properties were the dangers and/or risk levels highlighted in the report sufficient that you would advise residents to be rehoused from both premises at the earliest opportunity."

The Group Commander Protection advised that the Service, as the Regulating Authority for the Fire Safety Order, had been working hard with Milton Keynes Council (as the Responsible Person for the premises) for maintaining the safety of the building. In-depth audits had been carried out, following the NFCC's framework, and part of the Enforcement Management Model included significant interim measures being put in place by the Responsible Person. Any risk assessment undertaken would be expected to take into account any control measures put in place. The measure introduced at the two sites were interim measures, and they would be required to be reviewed on a regular basis by the Responsible Person. The Protection Team for the Service would continue to liaise and monitor those situations and circumstances and keep it under review.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service employed a range of interventions for the enforcement of fire safety legislation. These interventions range from informal action, which can include notices suggesting fire safety measures, to formal action which can include prohibition of the premises and/or prosecution of the Responsible Person. When enforcing these regulations, the Service would employ these actions, and does so on a regular



basis. The Responsible Person had responsibility for the implementation of any fire risk assessment and this issue would be kept under constant review.

The Member also asked that the Chief Fire Officer updated Members of the Authority on a regular basis as and when actions were required to be taken/or were planned to be taken as was fitting of those actions that can be released in the public domain and to ensure that the Chairman and Vice Chairman receive regular briefings, as this was a very important topic in Milton Keynes.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that even if the responsible person was a local authority or business owner in the community, all would be treated in the same way. The Service had a track record of enforcement through informal action and it also had a track record of enforcement through prosecution and that was a matter for public record.

A Member asked where the Grenfell Inquiry had reached and also what effect it would have on this and was advised that the Grenfell incident had been the genesis for a great deal of change, not just operationally but also in terms of fire safety legislation. The Grenfell phase 1 enquiry had concluded and phase 2 was underway and the Authority continued to take an active part through the NFCC and other stakeholders and partners shaping it's response which had been submitted to the Home Office in relation to the fire safety part of the consultation.

RESOLVED –

(Recommendation 2 having been proposed and seconded to be amended to include the text 'becoming statutory consultees to the local planning authorities in the development management process' in place of 'becoming consultees in the development management process')

1. The content of the Welsh Government Consultation Document (Annex A) be noted; and
2. The Chief Fire Officer be authorised, after consultation with the Group Leaders and Vice Chairman, to submit the views of the Group Leaders about fire and rescue authorities becoming statutory consultees to the local planning authorities in the development management process to:
  - a) The Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities; and
  - b) the LGA Fire Services Management Committee.

## **FA22**

### **PUBLIC SERVICE PENSION SCHEMES CONSULTATIONS**

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT introduced the report.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that this report was for noting. It covered two formal consultations the deadline for responses were the 8 and 11 October 2020. Responses had already been submitted in agreement with the Chairman and Lead Member. Both consultations sought views on how best to remedy the firefighters pension scheme and the local government pension scheme following the McCloud/Sargeant ruling. Certain protections offered as part of the transition from old schemes to new schemes were discriminatory and had to be remedied.

The proposal for the local government pension scheme was more straight forward and simply removed the age requirement from the underpin qualification criteria during the qualifying period.

The firefighter pension scheme proposals were more complex, in that there were two proposals. Essentially, firefighters would have a choice whether they remain in their legacy scheme or transfer into the new scheme during the transition period which runs between 2015 and 2022. The proposals were that they had to either make this choice immediately or they have a deferred choice, whereby they make the choice of which scheme they want to be in when they retire.

In terms of the proposals, the Authority didn't express a preference for either option, the approach had been to highlight the implications for both choices and that there would be additional costs in terms of administration and almost certainly higher employer contributions and also made representations that these should be funded by central government and should not be a burden on local council tax payers.

As part of this, the Authority had also stressed the need for clear guidance for both employers and members of both pension schemes as they were becoming increasingly complex, and guidance was essential for everyone involved.

A Member had noted that the Local Government Association (LGA) had published a response with a preference for the deferred option and asked why the LGA felt that was the better option.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the LGA had expressed quite a clear preference for the deferred option, the overriding basis for this was that the LGA felt it mitigated the risk of any future legal challenge. One of the issues they noticed was that if there was an immediate choice exercise, not all members were massively engaged in pensions, especially the younger ones and they may not engage and make that immediate choice.

The consultation also noted that immediate choice was irrevocable although it would bring more certainty to the employer in terms of being able to value the scheme and set employers contributions. The overall impact on the Authority of

either scheme was the amount of administration and the amount of resource would increase even further over the next couple of years whatever choice was made.

The Chairman asked about the guidance and was advised that it was something the Authority was pushing government to lead on. The Authority was asking for clear guidance to come from the Home Office. It was also supported by the Local Government Association, who employ two pension advisors for which the Authority pay a levy and they advise all authorities and the Authority was further supported by its pension's administrator.

A Member asked how could we ensure that members of the pension schemes, especially the younger ones, were going to get the correct advice and was advised that the Authority would provide staff with as many updates and communications as possible to keep them apprised with what was going on and where to seek advice if they need it. The Authority also held regular retirement planning sessions for staff with an independent expert.

(Councillor Cole left the meeting)

RESOLVED –

That the responses to the consultation be noted.

**FA23**

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Fire Authority will be held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 at 11am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 12.23 PM

This page is intentionally left blank

Report considered by the Overview &amp; Audit Committee – 11 November 2020

# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



<b>MEETING</b>	Overview and Audit Committee
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	11 November 2020
<b>OFFICER</b>	Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE
<b>SUBJECT OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Local Government Ethical Standards Best Practice Recommendations</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>The purpose of this report is to highlight to Members the content of a letter published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) in July 2020 which was addressed to all local authorities in England (<b>Annex A</b>).</p> <p>The letter describes its purpose as to follow up the 15 best practice recommendations contained in the <a href="#">Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life - Local Government Ethical Standards</a> ('the CSPL Report'). The CSPL Report published January 2019 "represent a benchmark for ethical practice, and which we expect any local authority to implement."</p> <p>An audit has been undertaken by officers to compare the Authority against these best practice recommendations. The audit and its findings are attached (<b>Annex B</b>); in light of which the recommendations below are presented to Members for consideration.</p> <p>The CSPL Report states that the implementation of these best practice recommendations would be reviewed in 2020.</p>
<b>ACTION</b>	Decision.
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<p>That the Authority be recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. note the benchmarking report (Annex A) regarding the 15 Best Practice Recommendations in the CSPL's Local Government Ethical Standards Report;</li> <li>2. approve that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the Code of Conduct is reviewed on an annual basis commencing 2021/22; and where possible taking into account the views of the public, community organisations, and neighbouring and appointing authorities;</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	<p>b. in any review of the Code of Conduct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the outcomes of the LGA’s consultation on its draft Code of Conduct be taken into account;</li> <li>ii. the prohibition on ‘harassment’ be added to the prohibition of bullying;</li> <li>iii. definitions and examples of both bullying and of harassment be included; and</li> <li>iv. the requirement on Members to comply with any formal standards investigation be included.</li> </ul> <p>c. the ‘Procedure for the handling of allegations under the Code of Conduct against Members of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority’ be amended to include a non-exhaustive list of public interest factors which will be taken into account at the filtering stage of a complaint.</p>
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	The recommendation will have no adverse effect on the Authority’s business.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	The best practice recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life are suggestions and are not compulsory. The recommendations can be accommodated within existing budgets.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the authority. Each local authority must publish a code of conduct.
<b>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE</b>	No direct impact. It is the responsibility of each local authority to comply/or not with these best practice recommendations.
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	No adverse implications arising from the recommendations.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</b>	<p>The Authority’s objective is to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) both internally and externally. The EDI objectives are set out and published against the Authority’s core values: Diversity; Service to the Community; Improvement and People.</p> <p>The Authority recognises that fairness and inclusion is fundamental to everything it does, to achieve its vision of making Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the</p>

	<p>safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel.</p> <p>By complying with these recommendations, it would support the Authority in fulfilling its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and also foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.</p>
<b>USE OF RESOURCES</b>	If the recommendations are accepted, issues such as annual reviews of the Code of Conduct can be accommodated within existing resources.
<b>PROVENANCE SECTION &amp; BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<a href="#">Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life - Local Government Ethical Standards</a>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<p>Annex A – Letter from the CSPL, by email to Local Authorities in England July 2020.</p> <p>Annex B - Report on the Local Government Ethical Standards Best Practice Recommendations</p>
<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	5 minutes.
<b>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</b>	<p>Katie Nellist</p> <p><a href="mailto:knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk">knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk</a></p> <p>07799 098948</p>

This page is intentionally left blank



## Annex A

Room G.07  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

[public@public-standards.gov.uk](mailto:public@public-standards.gov.uk)

Sent by email  
to Local Authorities in England  
For the attention of the Chief Executive

**Committee on  
Standards in  
Public Life**

July 2020

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS**

I am writing from the Committee on Standards in Public Life to follow up recommendations made in our January 2019 [report](#) on local government ethical standards.

In that report, we identified some best practice recommendations which represent a benchmark for ethical practice and which we expect any local authority should implement.

We said in our report that we would review the implementation of those best practice recommendations in 2020. We completely understand the unexpected and unprecedented pressures that local authorities are facing this year with COVID-19, so we are not of course asking for an immediate response. The purpose of this email is to let you know that we will be writing again in the autumn to ask you for your progress against these recommendations. I have attached a list of the best recommendations for ease of reference, but they are of course also set out in the report.

If you have any questions, please do just let us know. Otherwise, we wish you well and look forward to being in touch again later this year.

Secretariat  
Committee on Standards in Public Life

## List of Best Practice Recommendations

Our best practice recommendations are directed to local authorities, and we expect that any local authority can and should implement them. We intend to review the implementation of our best practice in 2020.

**Best practice 1:** Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

**Best practice 2:** Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation, and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

**Best practice 3:** Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

**Best practice 4:** An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

**Best practice 5:** Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

**Best practice 6:** Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

**Best practice 7:** Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

**Best practice 8:** An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial. 19 List of best practice

**Best practice 9:** Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

**Best practice 10:** A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

**Best practice 11:** Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

**Best practice 12:** Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

**Best practice 13:** A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

**Best practice 14:** Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement, and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness, and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

**Best practice 15:** Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

This page is intentionally left blank

## Annex B

# Local Government Ethical Standards

### Executive Summary

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is an advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The chairman and members are appointed by the Prime Minister. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders and promotes the seven principles of public life.

### The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Principles of Public Life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the Civil Service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

- **Selflessness**  
Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity**  
Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity**  
Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability**  
Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness**  
Holder of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honest**  
Holder of public office should be truthful.
- **Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The Committee, in its report published January 2019 on local government ethical standards, identified 15 'best practice recommendations' which represent a benchmark for ethical practice, which local authorities should implement. In the report it said that the implementation of these best practice recommendations would be reviewed in 2020. Due to the pressures of COVID-19, the Committee did not look for an immediate response, but asked for a progress report in the autumn of 2020.

The review was not prompted by any specific allegations of misconduct, but rather to assure the Committee that the current framework, particularly since the Localism Act 2011, is conducive to promoting and maintaining the standards expected by the public.

The report also makes 26 recommendations, the vast majority are aimed at Government to implement through legislative changes; one is to the Local Government Association that it should: "create an updated model code of conduct, in consultation with representative bodies of councillors and officers of all tiers of local government." (see Endnote i)

Below are the 15 'best practice recommendations' made by the CSPL in its report which are directed to local authorities, with the CSPL's expectation "that any local authority can and should implement them". Also included below are extracts from the report setting out the some of the rationales for the recommendations.

An audit has been undertaken of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority in terms of compliance with these recommendations, and its findings are included below.

### **Best Practice Recommendations**

**Best practice 1:** Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

The CSPL Report states:

"Whilst there is no statutory definition of bullying, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) have codified a helpful definition: "offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient".

"Harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as "unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic", which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or "creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" for that individual"

The CSPL Report continues:

"These definitions make clear that bullying and harassment are instances of serious misconduct. By their nature they are likely to be persistent behaviour, rather than one off instances. A councillor should not be considered to be bullying or harassing an officer or another councillor simply by making persistent enquiries or requests for information, nor by saying something that the individual concerned simply dislikes or with which they disagree strongly. Genuine instances of bullying and harassment will fall outside the limits of legitimate free expression; but equally accusations of such behaviour should not be used as an attempt to restrict legitimate inquiries or free expression"

The CPSL Report quotes from the [ASAS non statutory guidance; Bullying and Harassment at Work, A guide for managers](#) which includes a non-exhaustive list of ten examples of bullying behaviour, including: Spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone by word or behaviour; Exclusion or victimisation Unfair treatment; Overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position Unwelcome sexual advances. The CPSL Report does not put forward suggested examples of harassment.

### **Findings:**

***The Authority's current Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members, states: 1(2) "You must not: (b) bully any person". There is no reference to prohibitions on harassment nor definitions nor examples of either bullying nor harassment.***

**Best practice 2:** Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

The CSPL Report states that:

"Complying with standards investigations, and not seeking to misuse the standards process, is an important aspect of ethical conduct. This is for three reasons. First, there is a strong public interest in an effective standards process that is not subject to disruption or abuse. Secondly, councillors should seek to maintain an ethical culture in their authority and showing appropriate respect for the process contributes to this. Thirdly, non-compliance and misuse wastes public money and the time of officers.

"Councillors should not seek to disrupt standards investigations by, for example, not responding to requests for information, clarification or comment in a timely way, or refusing to confirm their attendance at a standards hearing. Nor should councillors seek to misuse the standards process, for example, by making allegations against another councillor for the purposes of political gain."

### **Findings:**

***The Authority's Code of Conduct could be updated with the following wording:***

***"You must comply with any formal standards investigations."***

***"You must not make trivial or malicious allegations against other councillors or members of the public."***

**Best practice 3:** Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

The CSPL Report states that:

"We have seen evidence that some councils have adopted a minimal code of conduct which amounts to a restatement of the Seven Principles of Public Life. [...] The Seven Principles of Public Life are not a code of conduct: codes of conduct specify what the principles demand in a specific context in order to guide behaviour. Using principles, rather than rules, in a code of conduct can also lead to protracted arguments about what sort of behaviour falls under a particular principle in the absence of specific guidance. [...]"

"A failure to create or adopt a substantive code means that the potential benefits of devolved standards are not being realised."

#### **Findings:**

***The Authority's Code of Conduct has not been formally reviewed/amended since 2012.***

***The LGA held a consultation exercise about its draft member code of conduct which ran for 10 weeks from Monday 8 June until Monday 17 August 2020.***

***The LGA has stated that once it has reviewed the feedback it will "develop a final draft, which will be reviewed by the LGA's Executive Advisory Board before being presented to the next LGA General Assembly, which we hope will be held in the Autumn of 2020."***

***Milton Keynes Council is proposing that once the final version of the LGA Model Code is available, the Standards Committee will be able to consider it and whether to recommend that the Council adopts it, with (or without) modifications [Standards Committee – 23 July 2020](#)***

***Buckinghamshire Council is proposing to review its Code of Conduct annually, but external consultation is not currently proposed [Standards and General Purpose Committee – 2 July 2020](#)***

**Best practice 4:** An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

The CSPL Report states:



“Codes of conduct should be written in plain English and be accessible for councillors and members of the public. They cannot be written to cover every eventuality, and attempts to do so may actually make codes less effective.”

“Codes of conduct are central to upholding high standards in public life. They should not be inaccessible on a local authority’s website, or as an annex to an authority’s constitution.”

**Findings:**

*The Authority already does this.*

*All Members appointed to the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority undertake to observe the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members each year before the annual meeting in June.*

*The Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members is sent to each new Member as part of their induction pack.*

*The Code of Conduct for Councillors and co-opted Members is available to both Councillors and the public on the Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service website:*

*[Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members](#)*

**Best practice 5:** Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

The CSPL Report states that:

*“Currently, there is no legal requirement for local authorities to maintain a gifts and hospitality register, nor for individual councillors to register or declare gifts and hospitality they receive as part of their role.”*

*“The Committee has seen evidence that the accessibility and timeliness of local authorities’ registers of interest varies widely. Many are reported in a non-standard format, and some registers are not updated for long periods. Independent oversight and inspection is important to maintaining high ethical standards, and local authorities should facilitate this by ensuring that their registers are accessible to those who would wish to inspect them.”*

**Findings:**

***The Authority does not in its Code of Conduct require its Members to register or declare gifts and hospitality.***

***These are currently covered in the respective Codes of Conduct of the appointing councils***

- ***Buckinghamshire Council Code of Conduct:***

*Gifts and Hospitality*

2.32. *In addition to the registration of interests, the Council requires councillors and co-opted members to register any gifts and hospitality worth **£25** or more they have received with the Monitoring Officer.*

2.33. *Councillors and co-opted members must:*

- a. register any gifts and hospitality with the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of being elected or appointed to office;*
- b. register any gifts and hospitality within 28 days of the Council's Code of Conduct becoming applicable;*
- c. register any gifts and hospitality with the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of receiving them;*
- d. declare any gifts and hospitality at any meeting of the Council at which they are present, where a relevant matter is being considered;*
- e. register any gifts and hospitality declared at a meeting, within 28 days of disclosing it.*

• **Milton Keynes Council Code of Conduct:**

*D. Gifts and Hospitality*

*Councillors of Milton Keynes Council must:*

*1 for inclusion in the Register of Interests for a period of [three years], notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days and in writing of the receipt of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of **£100** which they have accepted as a Councillor from any person or body other than the authority.*

*2 This duty to notify the Monitoring Officer does not apply where the gift, benefit or hospitality comes within any description approved for this purpose as set out in the Council's protocol on gifts and hospitality.*

**Best practice 6:** Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

The CSPL Reports states:

"The Monitoring Officer usually filters complaints about councillor conduct and judges if the complaints are trivial or vexatious, or whether they should proceed to a full investigation. Usually this filtering is based on the judgment of the officer, often against a formal policy, though the Monitoring Officer may seek the advice of an independent person or members of a standards committee when they do so."

"The standards bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all make use of a 'public interest' test when filtering complaints. These tests set clear expectations to those making complaints and ensure consistency of approach. The tests do not necessarily need to be detailed. For example, the Northern Ireland Local

Government Commissioner for Standards provides a simple two-stage test, which asks whether they 'can' investigate the complaint, and whether they 'should'."

### **Findings:**

**The Authority's current Complaints Procedure Flowchart includes reference to a public interest test against which allegations are filtered i.e. 'Can we investigate a complaint' and 'should we investigate a complaint'.**

It states at 2.1.3:

*"In the absence of formal sanctions available to the Monitoring Officer to apply in the event of a breach of the Code the Authority expects this complaints procedure to be proportionate to the issues raised and the expected outcomes. **The Monitoring Officer will therefore take into account the wider public interest and the cost to the public purse of undertaking any investigation into alleged breaches of the Code. Complaints are, therefore, only likely to be taken forward for investigation where the allegations are reasonably considered to be serious matters.**" [emphasis added]*

*The standards bodies in Scotland (the Ethical Standards Commissioner), Wales (the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales) and Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner) all make use of a 'public interest' test when filtering complaints. The CPSL believes that these tests set clear expectations to those making complaints and ensure consistency of approach.*

*The Monitoring Officer consults with one of the Independent Persons before making an initial assessment of complaints but does not do so against published criteria.*

*The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, for example, publishes a list of non-exhaustive criteria such as whether:*

*a member has deliberately sought a personal gain at the public expense for the member or others, misused a position of trust;*

*there evidence of previous similar behaviour on the part of the member;*

*an investigation is required to maintain public confidence in elected members or whether an investigation is proportionate in the circumstances; and*

*the breach motivated by any form of discrimination against ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity.*

*These are the type of factors that would be taken into account when the Monitoring Officer consults with an Independent Person.*

*These could be published as part of the Complaints Procedure.*

**Best practice 7:** Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

The CSPL Report states:

*"[...] it is clear that a positive relationship with the local authority's Monitoring Officer is crucial to being able to perform the role effectively. This relationship involves a mutual recognition of roles: on the one hand, recognising that the Monitoring Officer has specific responsibility and accountability for the standards process in an authority, and on the other that the Independent Person can bring a valuable external and impartial perspective that can assure and enhance the fairness of the process"*

*"Some authorities will, in any given case, have one Independent Person offer a view to members or complainants, and another to offer a view to the local authority, so as not to be in a position where they may be forced to prejudge the merit of an allegation."*

**Findings:**

***Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority is required by section 28 (7) of the Localism Act 2011 to appoint at least one Independent Person whose views must be sought and taken into account before making a decision on a complaint that it has decided to investigate. The Authority has a panel of four Independent Persons.***

**Best practice 8:** An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

The CSPL Report states:

*"We heard that many Monitoring Officers appreciate the impartial view that the Independent Person can offer, both to improve the quality of decision-making itself and as a visible check on the process to reassure councillors and complainants that their decisions are made fairly."*

**Findings:**

***The Director of Legal and Governance/Monitoring Officer consults with an Independent Person as to whether a formal investigation on an allegation should be undertaken.***

**Best practice 9:** Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

The CSPL Report states:

*"Openness and transparency are important secondary safeguards, to ensure that the process can be scrutinised by other councillors and by the public. We heard evidence that many councils do not publish data and decisions on standards issues in a regular or open way. Councils should be free to make their own arrangements for whether they maintain a public list of pending investigations. However, councils should be recording allegations and complaints they receive, even if they do not result in an investigation, and should certainly publish decisions on formal investigations."*

**Findings:**

**This procedure is set down in the Authority's procedure.**

*'After the Decision Notice has been sent to the Complainant and the Member complained about, the Authority will publish the Decision Notice on its website. This will be prepared having regard to any professional advice and the information it contains will depend upon what information the Monitoring Officer decides should be provided. Normally, however, the Decision Notice will contain the complainant's name and a written summary of the complaint; the Monitoring Officer's decision; and record the main points the Monitoring Officer considered, the conclusion and the reasons.'*

**Best practice 10:** A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

The CSPL Report states:

*"We have seen examples of both good and bad practice in how open councils' standards processes are. The best examples involved a single, easily accessible page on an authority's website explaining in straightforward terms how a member of the public can make a complaint under the code of conduct, what their complaint needs to include, the process for handling complaints, and the expected timescales for investigations and decisions. That page would also include links to recent decisions on allegations that came before the standards committee."*

**Findings:**

***Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority's complaints procedure gives straightforward and accessible guidance on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes and is easily available on the Authority's website: Complaints Procedure.***

**Best practice 11:** Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

**Findings:**

***Not applicable to a Combined Fire and Rescue Authority.***

**Best practice 12:** Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

**Findings:**

***Not applicable to a Combined Fire and Rescue Authority.***

**Best practice 13:** A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

The CSPL Report states:

*"[...] serious complications can arise where the Monitoring Officer is overseeing an investigation into a senior member of the local authority, particularly a portfolio-holder. There is a potential conflict of interest, given the professional relationship between the Monitoring Officer and Cabinet members, in providing procedural and legal advice to enable them to pursue their objectives. In this case, the Monitoring Officer should be robustly supported and protected by the Chief Executive. Any investigation, even if outsourced to an independent investigator, should be overseen and managed ideally by the Monitoring Officer from a different authority, or failing that by a deputy, with the Monitoring Officer kept at arm's-length."*

**Findings**

***Arrangements are in place for the Directors for Legal and Democratic Service at Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes Council to act for the Monitoring Officer should there be any conflicts of interest, or absence of illness of the Monitoring Officer.***

**Best practice 14:** Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

**Findings:**

**Not applicable (there are no separate outside arm's length bodies on which Members sit)**

**Best practice 15:** Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

The CSPL Report states:

*"Our evidence suggests a strong link between failings in ethical standards and corporate failure by councils. The most obvious way in which this can happen is through a culture of 'slackness', where low level breaches of ethical standards go unchallenged and unaddressed. This can then seep into the culture of an authority and allows for more significant wrongdoing to take place, which would have significant implications for the performance and reputation of the council."*

*However, in most cases the process is more complicated, and several factors are jointly present in order for serious corporate governance failings to take place. As part of our review, we examined reports from high profile cases of corporate governance failure."*

*"The Chief Executive also plays an important role, especially among officers. Their leadership role includes modelling high standards of conduct, particularly those distinctive to officers in respect of political impartiality and objectivity. But the Chief Executive must also show leadership by empowering other senior officers – such as the Monitoring Officer – to carry out their role effectively. The Chief Executive is ultimately responsible for guarding the demarcation between officers and members, and needs to be clear about when members need to take a decision, and when officers should have the discretion to carry out their roles as they see fit."*

*"Leaders of political groups play a vital leadership role among councillors. Political group leaders set the tone for how new councillors will engage with each other, and set expectations for how councillors will engage with officers. Leader[s] of political groups not only need to model high standards themselves, but should be quick to address poor behaviour when they see it. They should seek to mentor and advise councillors in their party on how to maintain standards of conduct, and be willing to use party discipline when necessary."*

#### **Findings:**

**The Chief Fire Officer holds regular meetings with the political group leaders.**

---

i Endnote

### **Local Government Association Model Member Code of Conduct**

The LGA held an event on Civility in Public Life with a range of stakeholders at the end of 2019 and three consultation workshops at the beginning of 2020.

Its consultants have also examined examples of good practice, both in local government and other professions. The LGA consultation draft model member code of conduct is the result of this initial work. It is the intention to create additional guidance, working examples and explanatory text.

The LGA states that it is providing this model member code of conduct for consultation as part of its work supporting the sector to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance.

The feedback from the consultation will be reviewed by the LGA's Executive Advisory Board before being presented to the next LGA General Assembly, which would be held in Autumn 2020.

The model member code of conduct has been developed in collaboration with the sector and will be offered as a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.

The LGA states that it will undertake an annual review of the Code to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose, particularly with respect to advances in technology, social media and any relevant changes in legislation; and that, once finalised, the LGA will also offer support, training and mediation to councils and councillors on the application of the Code.



Report considered by the Executive Committee – 18 November 2020



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

<b>MEETING</b>	Executive Committee
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	18 November 2020
<b>OFFICER</b>	Mark Hemming, Director of Finance and Assets
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Councillor David Hopkins
<b>SUBJECT OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Capital Strategy</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (2017) includes a new requirement for local authorities to produce a capital strategy to demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are taken in line with the Service's objectives and take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.</p> <p>This Strategy outlines the Authority's approach to capital investment ensuring it is in line with its corporate priorities and objectives set out in the Public Safety Plan. It provides a strategic overview of how capital expenditure; capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the delivery of outcomes, as well as overview of the management of risk and future financial sustainability.</p> <p>Progress against this strategy will be reviewed annually and updated accordingly.</p>
<b>ACTION</b>	Decision.
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<p>It is recommended that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 the Capital Strategy is recommended to the Authority for approval.</li> <li>2 the Authority add, in its Terms of Reference, determining the Capital Strategy as set out at Appendix C.</li> </ol>
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	No direct impact.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this Strategy. The Strategy supports the principles of value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.

<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	<p>Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003 sets the framework for local authority capital finance. This capital finance framework is supplemented by the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003 and by codes of practice and guidance (as amended or reissued from time to time) to which the Authority is required to have regard when carrying out its capital finance functions. The CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) 2017 Edition has quasi-legislative force.</p> <p>The Prudential Code states (§ E8), '[Setting and revising of a capital strategy and prudential indicators] will be done by the same body that takes the decisions for the local authority's budget – ie usually it will be the full council for the authority concerned. The chief finance officer will be responsible for ensuring that all matters required to be taken into account are reported to the decision-making body for consideration, and for establishing procedures to monitor performance.'</p> <p>The Prudential Code states (§18) 'Local authorities may determine the capital strategy, capital programme and prudential indicators ahead of the revenue budget. The requirements of the Prudential Code are met provided that explicit reference to the formal decision is made within the revenue budget report.'</p>
<b>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE</b>	All opportunities to collaborate on capital projects will be considered in line with the duty to collaborate under the Policing and Crime Act 2017.
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	No direct impact.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</b>	No direct impact.
<b>USE OF RESOURCES</b>	See Financial Implications.
<b>PROVENANCE SECTION &amp; BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<a href="#">The CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) 2017 Edition</a>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<p>Appendix A – Capital Strategy</p> <p>Appendix B – Capital Bid Template</p> <p>Appendix C – Fire Authority Terms of Reference (amended in bold)</p> <p>Appendix D – List of Red Fleet Appliances</p>

<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	10 minutes
<b>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</b>	Asif Hussain <a href="mailto:ahussain@bucksfire.gov.uk">ahussain@bucksfire.gov.uk</a>

This page is intentionally left blank



## Appendix A

### 1. Changes since the last version

**Version: V1**

**Information Asset Owner: Director of Finance and Assets**

**Author: Deputy Director of Finance and Assets**

**Approval: Executive Committee**

**Please note that as Service Documents are frequently updated, if you print a document, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Always check the intranet for the latest version.**

### 2. Index

1. Changes since the last version
2. Index
3. Purpose and scope
4. Roles and responsibilities
5. Document Content

### 3. Purpose and scope

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code includes a new requirement for local authorities to produce a capital strategy to demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are taken in line with the Service objectives and take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.

This Strategy outlines the Authority's approach to capital investment ensuring it is in line with its corporate priorities and objectives set out in the Public Safety Plan (PSP). It provides a strategic overview of how capital expenditure; capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the delivery of outcomes, as well as overview of the management of risk and future financial sustainability.



#### **4. Roles and responsibilities**

- Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT - Responsible for reviewing the annual capital programme/capital strategy.
- Members – Responsible for reviewing and approving the annual capital programme/capital strategy.
- Chief Fire Officer - Responsible for leading the Service on its continued journey of improvement in the Service's governance, performance and financial management.
- Director of Finance and Assets – s112 Officer and responsible for the Finance and Assets Directorate.
- Deputy Director of Finance and Assets – Deputise for the Finance and Assets Directorate and responsible for the day to day management of the Finance and Payroll function.
- Principal Accountants - Responsible for the day to day management of the Finance function.
- Property Manager – Responsible for property related capital projects.
- Fleet Manager - Responsible for fleet and equipment related capital projects.
- IT Manager - Responsible for ICT related capital projects.

#### **5. Document Content**

1. Introduction
2. Capital Expenditure
3. Capital Expenditure Compared to Treasury Management Investments
4. Capital Requirements
5. Project Initiation Document
6. The Capital Programme 2020/21 – 2024/25
7. Funding the Capital Programme
8. Revenue Contributions to Capital
9. Prudential Borrowing
10. Reserves
11. Monitoring of Capital Expenditure
12. Risk Management
13. Credit Risk
14. Liquidity Risk
15. Fraud, Error and Corruption
16. Legal and Regulatory Risk
17. Minimum Revenue Provision
18. Affordability of the Capital Programme



### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code includes a new requirement for local authorities to produce a capital strategy to demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are taken in line with the Service objectives and take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability.
- 1.2 The Capital Strategy is a key document for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority and forms part of the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and outlines the Authority's approach to capital investment ensuring it is in line with its corporate priorities.
- 1.3 It is closely linked to the PSP and Corporate Plan. The PSP sets out our strategic approach to the management of risk in the communities we serve. The Corporate Plan sets out how we intend to equip and develop our organisation and its people to meet the challenges that we face. The MTFP details the resources available to facilitate these plans and how the plans contribute to reducing future operating costs.
- 1.4 It provides a strategic overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the delivery of outcomes. It also provides an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. It includes an overview of the governance processes for approval and monitoring of capital expenditure.
- 1.5 This Capital Strategy does not duplicate other documents, but should be read in conjunction with:
  - PSP
  - Corporate Plan
  - Property Strategy
  - Fleet Strategy
  - Treasury Management Strategy (TMS)
  - MTFP
  - Prudential Indicators
  - Financial Strategy

### 2 Capital Expenditure

- 2.1 Expenditure on the acquisition, creation or enhancement of Property, Plant and Equipment is capitalised on an accruals basis, provided that it is probable that the future economic benefits (greater than 365 days) or service potential associated with the item will flow to the Authority and the cost of the item can be measured reliably. Expenditure that maintains but does not add to an asset's



potential to deliver future economic benefits or service potential (i.e. repairs and maintenance) is charged as an expense when it is incurred. The Authority's de-minimis level for capital expenditure is £6k.

### **3 Capital Expenditure Compared to Treasury Management Investments**

3.1 This Authority defines its treasury management activities as:

The management of the Authority's investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.

3.2 Investments are carried out in line with the Treasury Management Strategy which is approved annually by the Fire Authority. Treasury Management investments arise from the organisation's cash flows and debt management activity, and ultimately represent balances which can be invested until the cash is required for use in the course of business.

3.3 The investment policy objective for this Authority is the prudent investment of its treasury balances. The Authority's investment priorities are the security of capital and liquidity of its investments so that funds are available for expenditure when needed. Both the CIPFA Code and DCLG guidance require the Authority to invest its funds prudently, and to have regard to the security and liquidity of its investments before seeking the highest rate of return, or yield. The generation of investment income to support the provision of local authority services is an important, but secondary, objective.

3.4 Performance of the Treasury Management investments is reported to the Overview and Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

### **4 Capital Requirements**

4.1 Since 2010, as part of its efforts to reduce the size of the national budget deficit, central government has made significant reductions to its funding for local government, thereby increasing reliance on local tax revenues in the form of council tax and business rates to fund services. This has had a direct impact on capital funding which is now wholly funded from revenue contributions to capital reserves and the Authority no longer receives general capital grant.

4.2 With continuing restrictions still anticipated in funding, the Authority has considered new ways of working to address risks within our communities and collaborating with neighbouring Fire Authorities to achieve value for money and assist in balancing the budget. The purchase of fire appliances and equipment is an example of how Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service have worked collaboratively with neighbouring fire authorities. This is one example of many





where collaboration has taken place and the Authority will continue to identify further opportunities in the future.

- 4.3 The Authority has approximately 400 firefighters operating from 19 fire stations, across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes which provide a mixture of Whole-time and On-Call duty cover.
- 4.4 The Property Team had a full independent survey of the property portfolio carried out, of which the last one was in November 2017. The condition survey provides the Property Manager with a report detailing the current condition of each property and assists in directing the capital programme where investment is most needed. As part of the annual programme, Property are also taking this opportunity to refurbish existing properties and ensuring that the updated facilities can accommodate all capabilities.
- 4.5 Currently, the Service has 49 Red Fleet Appliances of which many of these have passed their initially anticipated replacement date. There is currently a 5-year rolling programme where Red Fleet appliances are being replaced. The breakdown of our current appliances is shown in Appendix D.
- 4.6 Prioritisation and allocation on where the capital resources are most needed is vital to ensuring our Estate and Fleet of vehicles are fit for purpose.

## **5 Project Initiation Document**

- 5.1 The current method for allocating resources is based on the MTFP process. This is facilitated by the Business Transformation Board (BTB) in conjunction with Lead Members prior to seeking Authority approval for the Capital Programme. This approach involves evaluating the case for major capital investments by considering the information set out in the capital growth bid forms (Appendix B) supplied by the project initiator.
- 5.2 The following strategic requirements need to be considered when evaluating and prioritising each business case:
  - What are the outcomes?
  - How does it link to corporate priorities?
  - Who will benefit?
  - Why is it appropriate to progress at this time?
  - Any links to existing, previous or planned projects?
- 5.3 Once capital projects are approved, they are monitored by the Principal Accountant and the relevant budget holder and reported to the Executive Committee every quarter. For larger capital projects, a project manager is



assigned to each capital scheme to ensure they are subject to thorough oversight for the duration of the project. The project manager will oversee planning, delivery, management, skills assessment and governance of capital projects.

## 6 The Capital Programme 2020/21 – 2024/25

6.1 The capital programme for the Authority is considered annually as part of the MTFP process and is set out in the table below:

2020/21 - 2024/25 Medium Term Capital Programme					
Capital Scheme	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000
Property (Note 1)	500	500	500	500	500
Fire Appliances and Equipment	500	750	750	500	750
Equipment (Note 1)	141	155	1,055	155	155
Support (Note 1)	75	75	75	75	75
Slippage (Approved in July 2020 Exec)	1,809				
Slippage Forecast 2021/21	-260	260			
Forecast Overspend	2,284				
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>5,049</b>	<b>1,740</b>	<b>2,380</b>	<b>1,230</b>	<b>1,480</b>
Funding b/fwd	-1,442	-2,387	-1,931	-1,053	-1,763
Revenue Contribution to Capital	-1,815	-1,284	-1,502	-1,940	-2,403
Other Capital Contributions	-4,179	0	0	0	0
<b>Funding (Available)/Deficit</b>	<b>-2,387</b>	<b>-1,931</b>	<b>-1,053</b>	<b>-1,763</b>	<b>-2,686</b>

Note 1 – Figures highlighted in blue are currently only indicative for potential future growth bids.

## 7 Funding the Capital Programme

7.1 Since 2014, Central Government no longer provide general capital grant and the only capital allocation was via the Fire Transformation Fund (FTF). This was a one-off grant to facilitate Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to carry out projects to improve the efficiency of public services. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service were allocated a grant via FTF to part-fund the West Ashland Station project. No other capital grants are available and therefore the main sources of funding are through revenue contributions to capital and use of reserves. The Authority currently has no plans to undertake any further borrowing.



## **8 Revenue Contributions to Capital**

8.1 The Authority since 2014, have agreed annually an element within the Revenue budget which will go towards funding the capital programme and this has continued into each subsequent financial year. The amount allocated to assist with the capital programme is based on affordability and is specific to that year. The Capital Programme identifies the amount the Authority is projecting to fund from revenue each year.

## **9 Prudential Borrowing**

9.1 The Authority is permitted to take out regulated external borrowing. The Local Government Act 2003 refers to affordability and the requirement that the local authorities in England and Wales keep under review the amount of money they borrow for capital investment.

9.2 The Code requires that “The local authority shall ensure all of its capital and investment plans and borrowing are prudent and sustainable. In doing so, it will take into account its arrangements for the repayment of debt (including MRP) and consideration of risk and the impact on the overall fiscal sustainability”. The impact of borrowing is outlined within the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and the prudential indicators are approved by the Fire Authority annually.

9.3 As at 31 September 2020, the long-term debt currently stands at £6.797m.

## **10 Reserves**

10.1 It has been the strategy of the Authority to utilise revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure. Following approval by Authority, an amount is set aside to transfer into a reserve to fund future capital programme. In addition to this, subject to Authority approval, any in-year or end of year underspends have been set-a-side and moved into a reserve to fund the future capital programme. The amount of earmarked reserve funding identified to fund the Capital programme is shown in the capital programme table in section 6.1.

10.2 The Authority has not taken out additional borrowing since March 2011. Depending on the size of the capital programme, there could be a requirement for new borrowing in future years if the level of revenue funding reduces and results in insufficient funds to fund the Capital Programme, although it is not anticipated this will be required in the foreseeable future.



10.3 Reserves position as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

<b>Reserve Balances</b>	<b>£000</b>
General Fund Balance	-1,500
Total Earmarked Reserves - Revenue	-2,197
Total Earmarked Reserves - Capital	-1,442
<b>Total Usable Reserves</b>	<b>-5,139</b>

**11 Partner Contributions and S106**

- 11.1 The Authority is increasingly engaged in collaborative working with other public sector partners, particularly other emergency services. This includes capital projects and one example of this is the West Ashland Station which is an emergency hub providing Fire, Police and Ambulance services.
- 11.2 Specific grants for capital funding are no longer available, having been replaced with a capital and revenue grant bidding system open to all fire and rescue services, if and when monies are made available by Government. We do not anticipate any new capital grants for 2021-22. Developer contributions, usually derived from Section 106 agreements, are awarded to mitigate the impact of developments on communities. These contributions are usually earmarked for specific purposes in planning agreements and often relate to infrastructure projects or affordable housing schemes. At the present time the Authority is projecting to receive £136k S106 funding. Further developers' contributions, through the Community Infrastructure Levy, may be available moving forward, but none are held at the current time.
- 11.3 The Authority will also pursue energy efficient and heat carbonisation funds, in addition to low carbon skills funds via the appropriate agencies. These funds are available to help public sector bodies to engage specialist and expert advice, to identify and develop energy efficiency and low carbon heat upgrade projects for non-domestic buildings

**12 Monitoring of Capital Expenditure**

- 12.1 The performance of the capital programme is reported to Officers each Month and to Members each quarter and forms part of the Executive Budget Monitoring Performance and Debt Management Report. For larger capital projects, a project manager assigned to each capital scheme will meet regularly with Finance representatives to provide updates on the project to ensure any variances are picked up early and appropriate action taken.



### **13 Risk Management**

- 13.1 The Prudential Code recognises that in making its capital investment decisions, the authority must have explicit regards to option appraisal and risk:

“The Capital Strategy is intended to give a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services, along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future sustainability.”

- 13.2 Each major capital scheme project will have its own risk register and options appraisal to manage the operational risk arising from the project, however this section of the strategy focuses on strategic risks arising from capital investment activity.
- 13.3 Every item will go through a rigorous justification process so that a greater scrutiny can be achieved over what is included within the capital programme. This will become even more critical if collated bids exceed the available funding. All investment will be aligned to the PSP and the Corporate Plan to ensure that the Service is acquiring or replacing the right assets, at the right time, in the right location to address the risk and at the same time focussing also on our revenue costs to help balance the budget.
- 13.4 The capital budget requirement is determined on an annual basis. The process starts at the start of the summer with relevant departments determining their requirements. Once formalised, the requirements are discussed and scrutinised with the relevant project sponsor. Following that, they are presented to the BTB in August and December and then the appropriate Member boards in October and January. Once scrutinised by Members, the approved bids are presented to the Authority in February for approval in advance of the financial year to which it relates to.

### **14 Credit Risk**

- 14.1 There is a risk that a supplier becomes insolvent and cannot complete the agreed contract. Appropriate due diligence is carried out before a contract is awarded as part of the procurement process.

### **15 Liquidity Risk**

- 15.1 This is the risk that the timing of cash inflows from a project will be delayed. In the main, the Authority’s capital projects are self-funded and therefore don’t rely on other organisations contributing or failing to make their contributions when agreed. Under the collaboration agenda it is likely that an increasing number of capital projects will be shared across organisations. Liquidity risk and the impact on cash flows is monitored on daily basis by the Treasury Management function.



## **16 Fraud, Error and Corruption**

- 16.1 This is the risk that financial losses will occur due to error, fraudulent or corrupt activities. The Authority has procedures in place to minimise the risk of fraud especially regarding changing of bank details for suppliers. There are also policies in place to address some of the risk such as the Whistleblowing Procedure, Counter-Fraud and Corruption Policy and the Declaration of Interests.

## **17 Legal and Regulatory Risk**

- 17.1 This is the risk that changes to laws or regulation make a capital project more expensive or time consuming to complete, make it no longer cost effective or make it illegal or not advisable to complete. Before entering in to a capital project, officers will determine the powers under which any investment is made, taking appropriate advice where necessary.
- 17.2 Capital schemes must comply with legislation (Disability and Discrimination Act, as an example) and also consider Authority Regulations, Service plans and policies such as:
- The Corporate Plan;
  - PSP;
  - Contract Standing Orders; and
  - Financial Regulations.

## **18 Minimum Revenue Provision**

- 18.1 Within the Local Government Act 2003, local authorities are required to have regard to the statutory guidance on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has produced statutory guidance which local authorities must have regard to.
- 18.2 MRP represents the minimum amount that must be charged to an authority's revenue budget each year for financing capital expenditure, where it has initially been funded from borrowing. The MRP accounting practice requires the Authority to set aside an amount of money each year to ensure that it can pay off the debts it has from buying capital assets.
- 18.3 The MRP Policy is reviewed annually and is outlined within the Authority's Prudential Indicators.

## **19 Affordability of the Capital Programme**

- 19.1 A variety of factors are taken into account when determining the affordability of the Capital programme, including the impact on revenue budgets and reserves:
- MRP



- Interest payable
- Interest receivable
- Revenue contribution to capital

19.2 The most economic method to fund a capital programme is to set aside an amount from revenue each year to purchase assets, with any variations to the programme being smoothed out using an Earmarked Reserve.

19.3 Historically, the Authority received a Capital Grant of up to £1.2m per year and funded the rest via revenue contributions to capital. This grant is no longer available and it is unlikely that there will be any form of capital grants funded by Central Government and therefore the capital programme will be funded predominantly by revenue contributions in the short-term and if necessary (although not currently anticipated), borrowing in the longer-term.

This page is intentionally left blank



Service Document Standard Form:  
**Medium Term Financial Planning  
 Bid Template  
 2021/22 to 2025/26**



<b>PROJECT:</b>	<i>Insert name of Project</i>
<b>FILE LOCATION:</b>	<i>Insert file path</i>
<b>DATE:</b>	<i>Insert date document completed</i>
<b>AUTHOR:</b>	<i>Name of person completing this document – could be the proposed Project Manager</i>
<b>PROJECT SPONSOR:</b>	<i>Name of proposed person to be project sponsor</i>
<b>VERSION NUMBER:</b>	<i>Version number of document</i>
<b>APPROVALS:</b>	<i>Persons required to approve this document:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Person proposing project</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Business Transformation Board</i></li> </ul>
<b>DISTRIBUTION:</b>	<i>List names / roles to whom this document will be distributed (but who is not required to approve)</i>

**DOCUMENT  
CONTROL**

<b>Version:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
<i>ie Version 1.0</i>	<i>09-Jan-21</i>	<i>Initial version</i>

**APPROVAL  
RECORD**

<b>Version:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Approval:</b>	<b>Notes:</b>
<i>ie Version 1.0</i>	<i>09-Jan-21</i>	<i>26-Jan-21</i>	<i>Recorded in BTB minutes</i>

*All wording within this document shown in red italics is provided as guidance and should be removed prior to publication*

Please complete all cells where possible.

Only leave cells blank if:

Alternative options 1, 2 or 3 are not required or if not all cost centre boxes are required

Not all boxes for background papers or appendices are required.

Bid Category

**Bid Template 2021/22 to 2025/26**

Directorate Corporate Core Reference   
Service Service Development  
Title of Bid  
Lead Officer

**1. Executive Summary (Max. 100 words)**

[1. Executive Summary \(Max. 100 words\)](#)

**2. Options Available**

Advantages	Disadvantages
Advantages	Disadvantages
Advantages	Disadvantages

<b>3. Options Appraisal</b>					
	<b>In Year Budget Requirement</b>				
[The recommended option will be populated automatically from Section 4]	<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>23/24</b>	<b>24/25</b>	<b>25/26</b>
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Recommended Option					
Do Nothing					
Alternative Option 1					
Alternative Option 2					
Alternative Option 3					

<b>4. Detailed Financial Implications</b>					
	<b>In Year Budget Requirement</b>				
(of the recommended option)	<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>23/24</b>	<b>24/25</b>	<b>25/26</b>
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
<b>Controllable Expenditure</b>					
Employees					
Premises Related Expenditure					
Transport Related Expenditure					
Supplies & Services					
Third Party Payments/Outsourcing					
Transfer Payments					
Capital Financing Costs					
<b>Sub-total</b>					
<b>Controllable Income</b>					
Government Grants					
Other Grants & Contributions					
Customer & Client Receipts					
<b>Sub-total</b>					
<b>Net impact of proposal</b>					
<b>Cost Centre (s):</b>					
<b>Reference of related capital bid</b>	<<Finance Use Only>>				

<b>5. Impact on Establishment</b>						
	<b>Current FTE</b>	<b>Year on Year Movement in FTE</b>				
		<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>23/24</b>	<b>24/25</b>	<b>25/26</b>
<b>Change in Staffing Levels</b>						

## **6. Strategic Requirements**

**Outcomes (linked to corporate priorities)**

**Legal Implications**

**Equality and Diversity**

**Privacy**

**Environmental**

**Has an IA been completed**

**Yes/No**

## **7. Project Plan and Stakeholder Engagement**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>

## **8. Project Governance**

How will the project be managed? By Whom? How will delays be reported?

## **9. Project Risk**

Key risks, mitigating actions and post-mitigation assessment

## **10. Provenance Section and Background Papers**

## **11. Appendices**

This page is intentionally left blank

### COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY - TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To appoint the Authority's Standing Committees and Lead Members.
2. To determine the following issues after considering recommendations from the Executive Committee, or in the case of 2(a) and 2(e) below, only, after considering recommendations from the Overview and Audit Committee:
  - (a) variations to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations;
  - (b) the medium-term financial plans including:
    - (i) the Revenue Budget;
    - (ii) the Capital Programme;
    - (iii) the level of borrowing under the Local Government Act 2003 in accordance with the Prudential Code produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; and
  - (c) a Precept and all decisions legally required to set a balanced budget each financial year;
  - (d) the Prudential Indicators in accordance with the Prudential Code;
  - (e) the Treasury Strategy;
  - (f) the Scheme of Members' Allowances;
  - (g) the Integrated Risk Management Plan and Action Plan;
  - (h) the Annual Report;
  - (i) the Capital Strategy**
3. To determine the Code of Conduct for Members on recommendation from the Overview and Audit Committee.
4. To determine all other matters reserved by law or otherwise, whether delegated to a committee or not.
5. To determine the terms of appointment or dismissal of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, and deputy to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, or equivalent.
6. To approve the Authority's statutory pay policy statement.

This page is intentionally left blank



**Red Fleet Appliances**

- 30 x Pumping Appliances (B Type)
- 3 x 4x4 Pumping Appliances
- 5 x Prime Mover (2 x Water Tanker, 3 x USAR)
- 1 x Incident Command Unit (ICU) (5t Mercedes Sprinter van)
- 1 x Small 4x4 Pumping Appliance
- 2 x Aerial appliances (Turntable Ladder)
- 2 x Water Rescue Units (5t 4x4 Mercedes Sprinter Vans)
- 2 x Operational Support Units (5t Mercedes Sprinter vans)
- 1 x Environmental Unit (Iveco van)
- 2 x Driver Training Vehicles (Scania Curtain Sider)

This page is intentionally left blank

# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



<b>MEETING</b>	Executive Committee
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	18 November 2020
<b>OFFICER</b>	Mark Hemming, Director of Finance and Assets
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Councillor David Hopkins
<b>SUBJECT OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2024-25</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>A financial strategy is the link between the organisation's long-term service objectives and its financial capacity. It also helps organisations to consider the feasibility of different options in terms of affordability and financial sustainability.</p> <p>The Strategy outlines three key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where the organisation is now</li> <li>• Where it would like to be</li> <li>• How it plans to get there</li> </ul> <p>Another key element of the Strategy is that it considers potential medium and longer-term scenarios, with a consideration of areas that could be enhanced or scaled back depending on the outcome of future funding settlements.</p> <p>This Strategy also contains the Authority's reserves strategy, which is a requirement of the National Framework.</p> <p>This Strategy addresses one of the recommendations contained within our HMICFRS inspection report, and one of the areas for improvement. The recommendation within the Efficiency section is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan</li> <li>• The service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pensions liability are accounted for and that there is a contingency plan.</li> </ul> <p>The recommendation with the report that "[the Service should] consult with the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on options to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which it operates" was addressed through the implementation of the Public Safety Plan 2020-25 and is also covered with this Strategy.</p>

<b>ACTION</b>	Decision.
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	That the Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2024-25 is recommended to the Fire Authority for approval.
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	Management of our Financial resources is a key risk to the Authority. By projecting forward and monitoring our financial plans, we are in a better position to avoid and mitigate the risk of adverse financial consequences.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	As detailed in Annex 1.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	The National Framework sets priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in England in connection with the discharge of their functions. Fire and rescue authorities have a duty to have regard to the Framework.
<b>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE</b>	No direct impact.
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	No direct impact.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</b>	No direct impact.
<b>USE OF RESOURCES</b>	See Financial Implications.
<b>PROVENANCE SECTION &amp; BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2020/21-2024/25, Fire Authority, 12 February 2020: <a href="https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item7c_medium_term_financial_plan.pdf/">https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item7c_medium_term_financial_plan.pdf/</a>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	Annex 1 – Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2024-25 Appendix A to Annex 1 – CIPFA Financial Management Code Self Assessment
<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	15 minutes
<b>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</b>	Mark Hemming <a href="mailto:mhemming@bucksfire.gov.uk">mhemming@bucksfire.gov.uk</a> 01296 744687



# Financial Strategy

2020-21 to 2024-25





## The principles of financial strategy

### WHAT IS A FINANCIAL STRATEGY

A strategy is about how organisations translate their long-term goals into the actions they undertake on a day-to-day basis. A financial strategy is therefore the link between the organisation's long-term service objectives and its financial capacity. BMKFA's long-term service objectives are set out in the [Public Safety Plan](#) and [Corporate Plan](#).

A financial strategy will set out:

- **where the organisation is now** – the current financial position, including assets, liabilities, reserves and the main sources of income
- **where it would like to be** – how the finances will be developed over the period, including planned level of reserves, the balance of income from different sources and/or the development of new income streams
- **how it plans to get there** – what actions will be taken to achieve the financial objectives

### WHY A FINANCIAL STRATEGY IS IMPORTANT

A financial strategy sets out how an organisation will finance the implementation of its long-term objectives. Without a financial strategy there is a risk that the long-term objectives may remain unfulfilled. A financial strategy helps organisations to consider the feasibility of different options in terms of affordability and financial sustainability.

As well as being essential to longer-term planning, a financial strategy also provides an effective framework for medium and short-term financial plans. Each planning horizon contributes in different ways to the effective financial management of an organisation, as shown in the following table:

	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Nature	Budget	Financial plan	Financial strategy
Timeframe	Annual	2-5 years	3-10 years or more
Focus	Accountability	Performance	Transformation
Unpredictability	Risk	Risk/uncertainty	Uncertainty
Financial techniques	Estimating	Forecasting	Scenario building
Level of detail	High	Medium	Low

Due to the current uncertainty created by the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is considered that attempting to set a ten-year strategy would be overly optimistic. Therefore, for the purposes of this strategy long-term is considered to be up to five years. This will be kept under review as the situation develops, and the strategy will be updated as and when necessary.

## Developing a financial strategy

### AIMS OF THE FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The primary aim of a financial strategy is to enable the delivery of the organisation's overall strategy.

Factors that need to be considered include:

- The nature, level and balance of the organisation's sources of income
- The organisation's exposure to volatile income streams
- The organisation's cost base, especially its overhead costs
- The financial structure and staffing of the organisation
- The organisation's financial management policies, systems and processes
- The organisation's relationships with key financial stakeholders

Another important factor to consider when developing a financial strategy is the organisation's financial autonomy i.e. the extent to which it is able to influence its own activity and funding (e.g. through generating income or setting the Council Tax rate) as opposed to having to perform certain activities or having less control over the funding it receives.

As well as the benefits noted on the previous page, a financial strategy also benefits the organisation in a number of other ways.

*[Table 3.1: Aims of the financial strategy, Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition © CIPFA]*

<b>Helping to scrutinise, challenge and improve the organisation's overall strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring how the organisation's strategy can be achieved from a financial perspective</li> <li>• Identifying potential difficulties or contradictions in the organisation's strategy and its implementation</li> <li>• Acting as a practical constraint or moderating factor on the organisation's strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Improving the organisation's financial resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping to maintain and improve the organisation's financial solvency and/or liquidity</li> <li>• Increasing the value and diversity of income from public, commercial and other sources</li> <li>• Enhancing the organisation's ability to manage financial risk effectively</li> </ul>
<b>Enhancing the organisation's financial capacity and capability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping to elucidate key financial principles within the organisation, e.g. balanced budgets, limits to borrowing, use of reserves</li> <li>• Providing clarity around the cross-subsidy of different activities</li> <li>• Promoting financial awareness across the organisation</li> <li>• Acting as a basis for monitoring the financial health of the organisation</li> <li>• Demonstrating financial probity and accountability</li> </ul>
<b>Helping the organisation to make better use of its resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing the allocation of resources to departments, teams and activities</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping to generate funds for future investment</li> <li>• Promoting and demonstrating the achievement of value for money</li> </ul>
<b>Co-ordinating financial activity across the organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting as a financial reference point for the organisation</li> <li>• Helping to co-ordinate financial and other activities across the organisation</li> <li>• Enabling the flexibility required to respond to changing circumstances or to short-term opportunities</li> </ul>

## THE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING A FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The financial strategy needs to address three key elements:

- Where the organisation is now
- Where it would like to be
- How it plans to get there

## ANALYSING WHERE THE ORGANISATION IS NOW

As noted earlier in this document, it is important that a financial strategy starts with an appraisal of the organisation’s current financial position and of the financial challenges it faces. The table below shows the issues that have been considered:

[Adapted from *Figure 3.1: Examples of factors that could impact on the organisation’s ability to attain its financial goals and achieve financial sustainability, Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition © CIPFA*]:

Performance	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature, level and sources of income</li> <li>• Reliance on individual sources of income</li> <li>• Cost base</li> <li>• Level of overhead costs</li> <li>• Ability to generate a surplus</li> <li>• Financial assets and liabilities</li> <li>• Nature and level of reserves</li> <li>• Ability to service borrowing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure of the finance function</li> <li>• Nature and level of staffing</li> <li>• Staff skills and expertise</li> <li>• Succession arrangements for key staff</li> <li>• Relationships with elected representatives (where relevant), the governing body and senior managers</li> <li>• The status of the chief financial officer within the organisation</li> </ul>
Governance	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial expertise of the governing body</li> <li>• Financial and related policies</li> <li>• Financial management systems and processes</li> <li>• Political priorities and policy commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organisation’s reputation for effective financial management and performance</li> <li>• Relationships with key financial stakeholders</li> <li>• Changes to government regulations or guidance</li> <li>• Changes in service user demand or profile</li> <li>• Other changes in the external environment</li> </ul>

Each of these issues has been considered with reference to a number of sources, including internal policies and documents, audits, inspections and The CIPFA Financial Management Code [Consultation Version] (see Appendix A).

**PERFORMANCE**

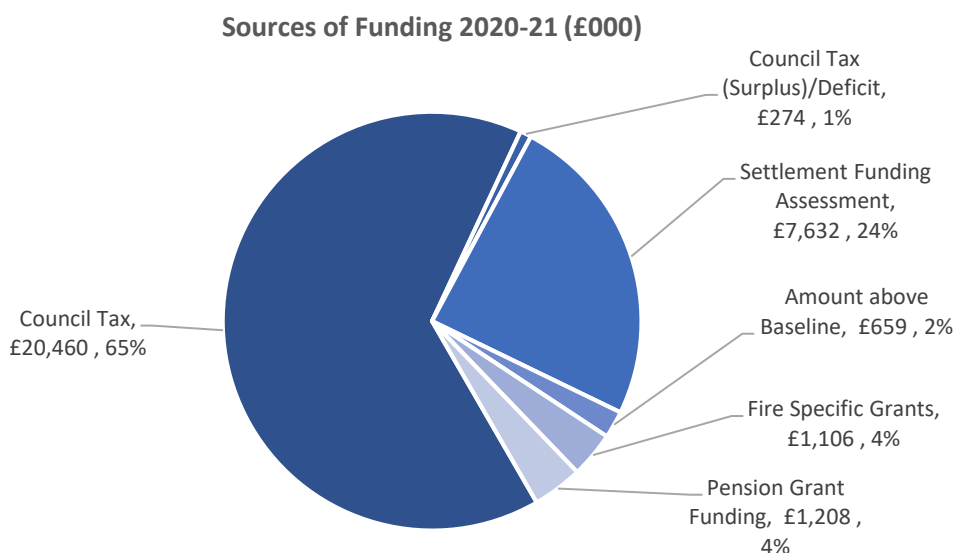
**Nature, level and sources of income**

The Authority classifies income into two broad categories:

- Funding
- Other Income

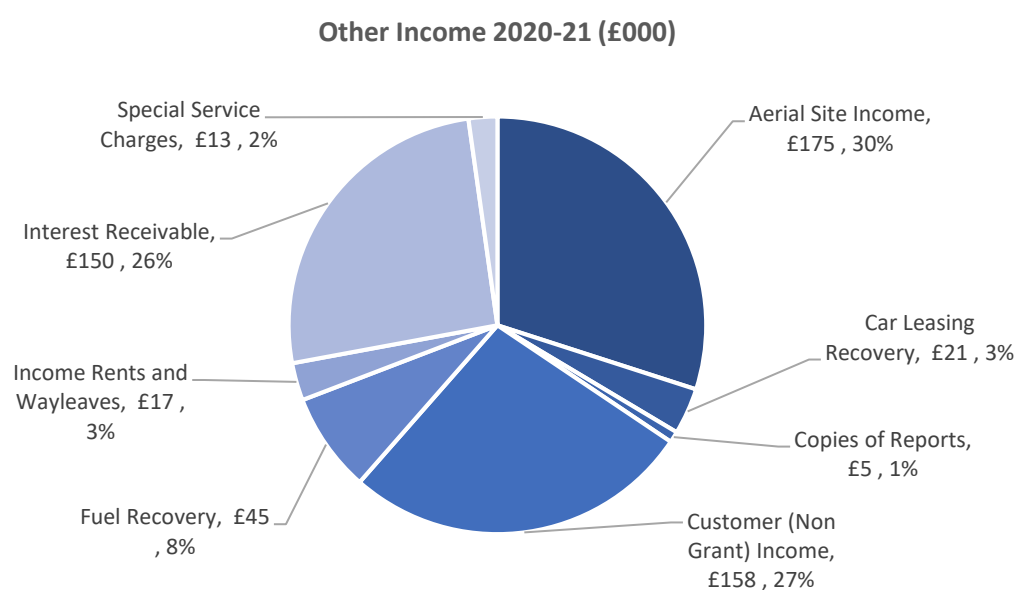
Funding for the service comes from a number of sources, comprising amounts generated through local taxes as well as some specific grants from Central Government.

- Council Tax – this is the one source of funding that the service can influence directly, albeit increases in the amount we can charge are subject to a referendum limit;
- Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) – this is our share of business rates and revenue support grant. The baseline amount of this is determined by Central Government, although a share of local growth above the baseline can be retained by the Service;
- Fire Specific Grants – currently we receive specific funding for National Resilience (Urban Search and Rescue) as well as Airwave (radio system);
- Pension Grant Funding – from 1 April 2019, the cost of employers’ pension contributions toward unfunded public sector schemes increased significantly due to changes in the discount rate. The Government funded the majority of this increase through a specific grant for 2019-20. It was originally noted that this grant was for one year only, but it has now been confirmed it will continue into 2020-21 (but no confirmation beyond then).



Other income relates to a number of specific activities undertaken, but three main sources make up over 80% of the total budget for 2020-21:

- Aerial site income – the income received from telecommunications companies for locating equipment at the top of a number of our drill towers throughout the area;
- Customer (Non Grant) Income – this consists predominantly of recharges of costs to other authorities for joint working or shared contracts e.g. co-responder
- Interest receivable – the amount earned on cash invested with banks and building societies through our in-house treasury management function



After the approval of the budget for 2020-21, a number of one-off funds have since been received:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): emergency funding for local government (£606k in 20-21, plus £90k received in 19-20) – this is a funding package for local authorities to help address the range of COVID-19 pressures they face
- Fire Protection Board Funding (£60k) – to support services' work on ensuring fire safety in high-rise residential buildings over 18 metres tall
- Protection Uplift Funding (£124k) – to bolster work targeting other higher risk buildings
- Grenfell Infrastructure Grant (£46k) – this funding contributes towards delivering outcomes against the relevant findings from the Grenfell Phase 1 inquiry and infrastructure operational improvements.

Currently, these are all one-off funding allocations, although as part of the sector's submission for the Comprehensive Spending Review, it has requested that the last three allocations are continued into 2021-22 and beyond.

### Reliance of individual sources of income

The total of 'other income' for 2020-21 is less than £600k, while total funding (excluding one-off funding announced after 1 April 2020) is forecast to be just

over £31.3million. Approximately two-thirds of our funding comes from Council Tax. Although increases are subject to referendum limits, it is generally the most stable and predictable funding source. The SFA makes up about 25% of our funding, and although it is subject to some year-on-year fluctuations, over the medium-term it is relatively consistent.

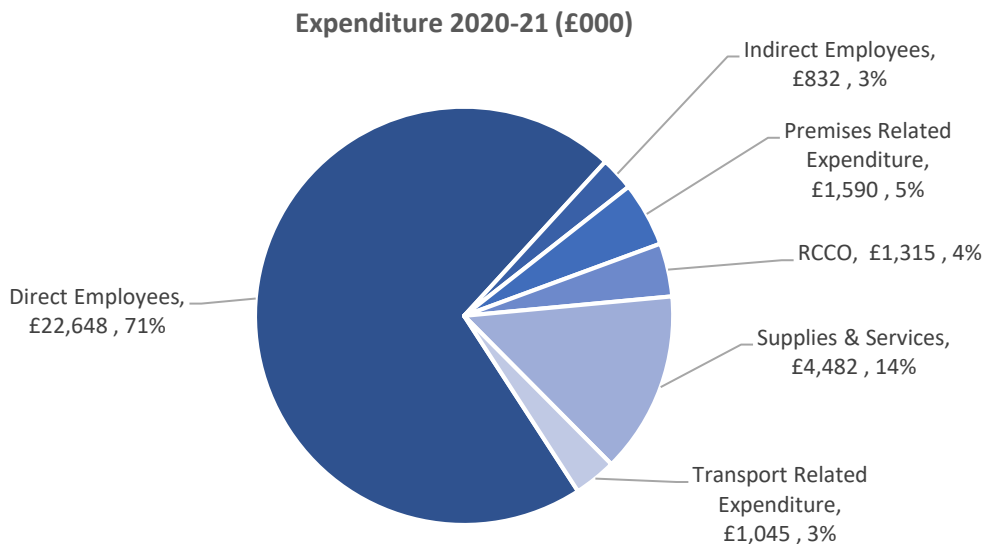
Although specific grants and pension funding together only make up about 8% of our funding, these are still significant and most susceptible to being reduced. The pension grant funding is especially uncertain, given that it was only originally confirmed for one-year.

**Cost base**

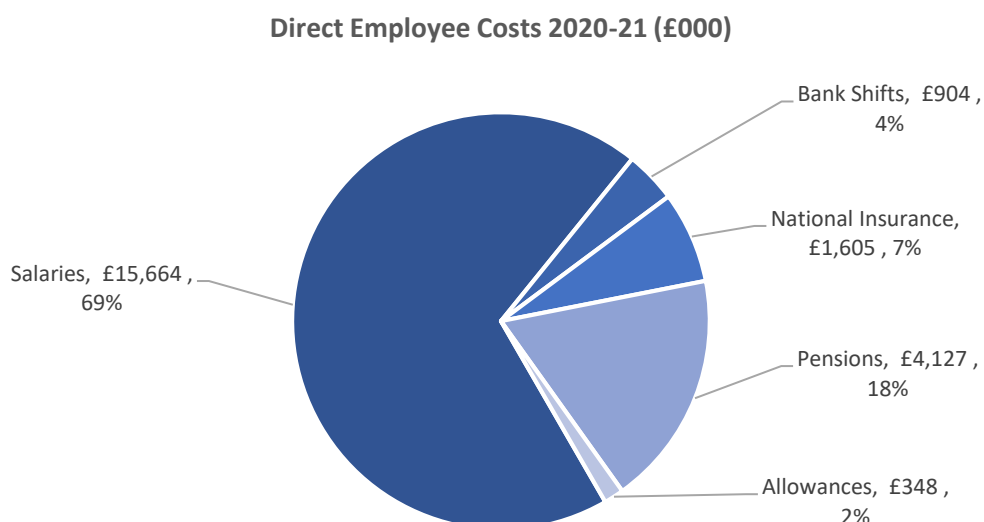
Costs for the service are categorised into six main categories:

- Direct Employees and Indirect Employees – direct costs comprise salaries and on-costs whereas indirect costs include items such as training, occupational health etc. Together these make up almost 75% of our cost base;
- Premises related expenditure – all property related costs. These are broken down further within the ‘Level of overhead costs’ section;
- Supplies and services – anything not specific to another category. These are also broken down further within the ‘Level of overhead costs’ section;
- Transport related expenditure – includes the cost of maintaining our fleet and workshops facility;
- Revenue Contribution to Capital (RCCO) – this is the amount set aside from our revenue budget to fund the capital programme.

The budget for each of these areas is shown in the chart below:



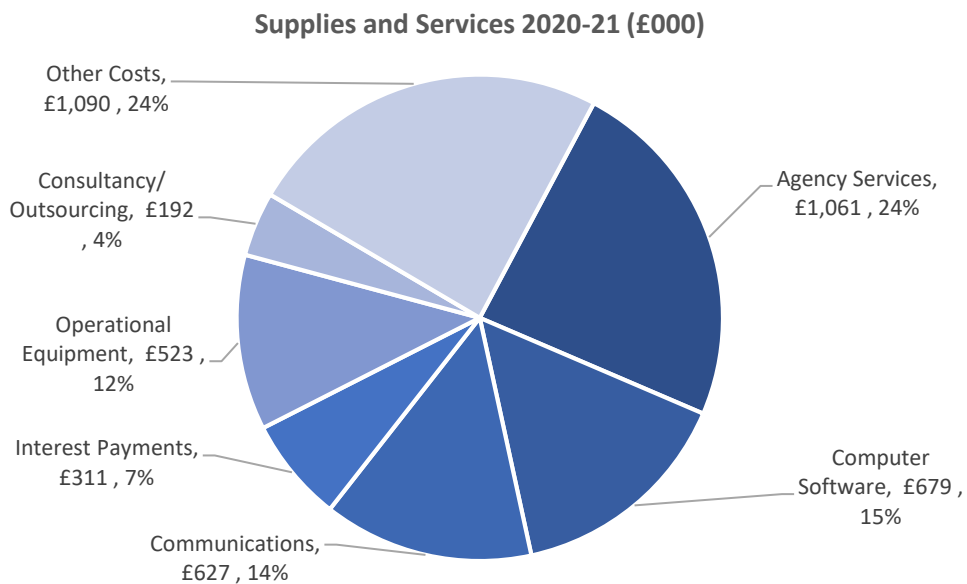
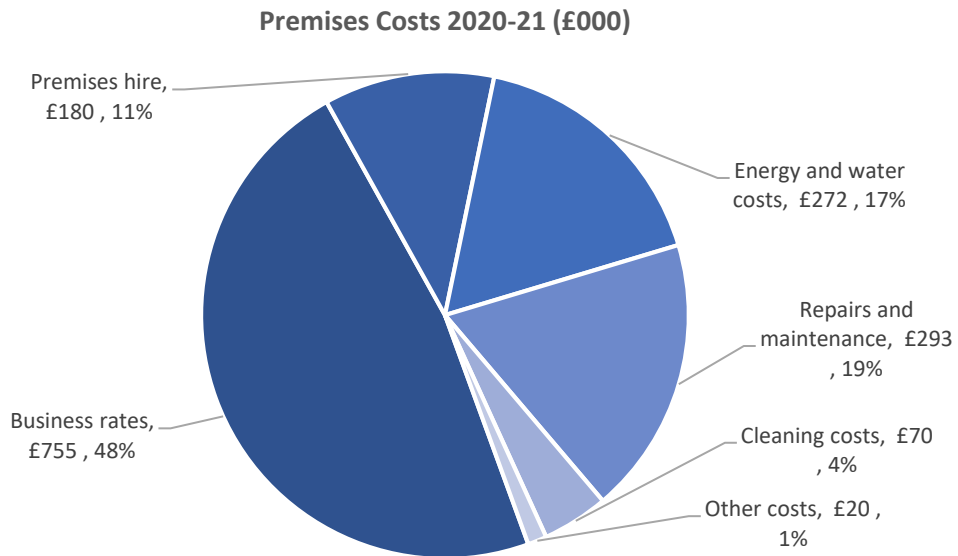
The budget for direct employee costs is shown on the following page. Of note, is the fact that pensions costs make up 18% of these costs, at a total of over £4.1million. This is a significant amount and there is a risk that this will increase further over the medium to longer term, especially given the as yet unquantified impact of the McCloud/Sargeant ruling.



### Level of overhead costs

Overheads are primarily contained within premises related expenditure and supplies and services:

- Premises related expenditure – almost half of the total cost relates to business rates. The only way to reduce this figure (other than via a successful ratings appeal) is to reduce the amount of properties that we occupy. This would also reduce the cost of repairs and maintenance (almost 20% of the total), especially if older premises were to be disposed of, as well as reducing cleaning and energy costs.
- Supplies and services – the biggest single item of expenditure is agency services, the majority of which relates to our share of the cost of the Thames Valley Fire Service Control Room. This method of provision is significantly less expensive than each service having a dedicated control room. Taken together, software and communications costs account for about 30% of expenditure. Other significant categories are shown over the page. Interest payments will reduce slowly as existing borrowing matures (there are currently no plans for additional long-term borrowing, although it does remain a fall-back option in a reasonable worst case scenario).



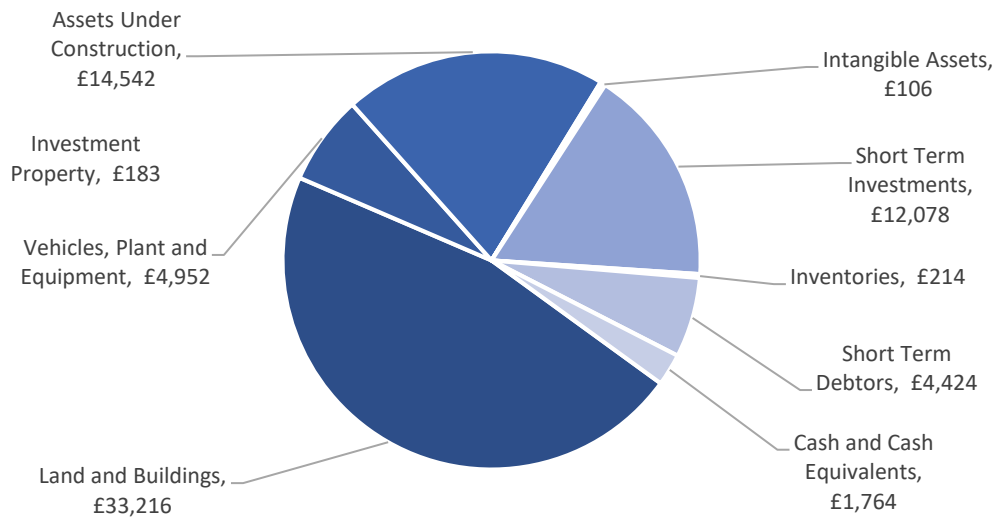
**Ability to generate a surplus**

The Service does not aim to generate a surplus. Recent underspends have generally been within a few percent of the budget for the year.

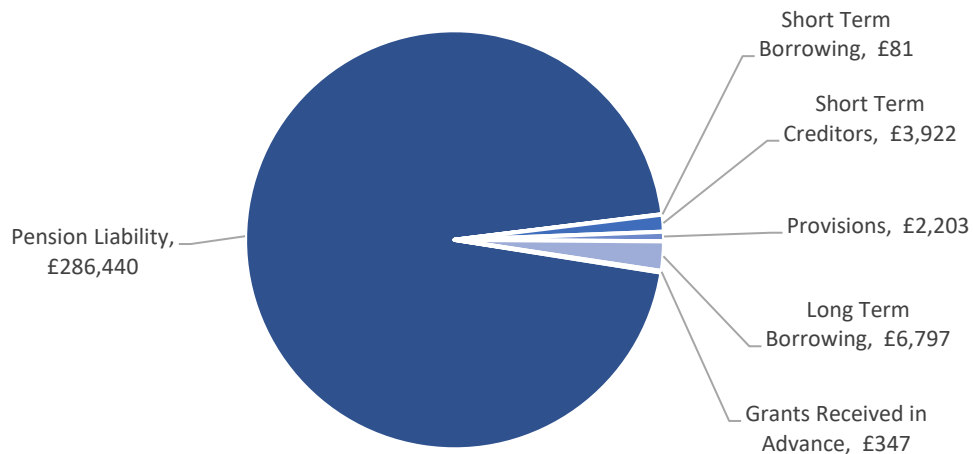
**Financial assets and liabilities**

The financial assets and liabilities as at 31 March 2020 are shown in the charts over the page:

**Financial Assets as at 31 March 2020 (£000)**



**Financial Liabilities as at 31 March 2020 (£000)**



Roughly half the value of our financial assets is in land and buildings (although it should be noted that this is an accounting valuation, not a market valuation). The short-term investments and cash and cash equivalents (c.£14m) compared to the long-term borrowing (c.£7m) show that the Service has a healthy net cash position. However, we are unable to repay this borrowing early due to the substantial early repayment charge that would apply.

Total liabilities far outweigh total assets, although this is due to the significant pension liability shown on our Balance Sheet. Effectively, the Pension Funds are in deficit by c.£286m compared with what is needed to pay the pensions of current scheme members, and the effect is to reduce the overall net worth of the Authority by that amount. However, statutory arrangements for the funding of the deficit, whereby the deficit will be made good by employer contributions over

the remaining working life of employees as assessed by the scheme's actuaries, mean that the financial position of the Authority remains viable.

### **Nature and level of reserves**

Details of reserves are shown within the Reserves Strategy on pages 29 to 36.

### **Ability to service borrowing**

The Prudential Code was established to ensure that capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable, and that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice.

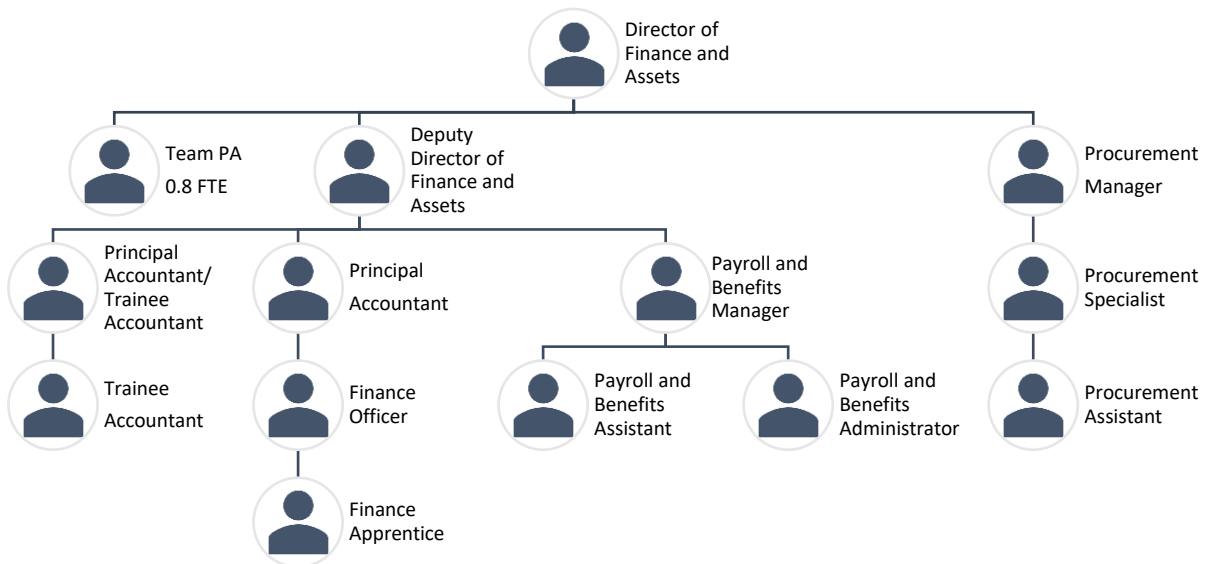
Details of the Prudential Indicators demonstrating compliance with the Code are approved annually by the Fire Authority and can be found here - [https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220\\_item7b\\_prudential\\_indicators\\_minimum\\_revenue\\_position.pdf](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item7b_prudential_indicators_minimum_revenue_position.pdf)



**PEOPLE**

**Structure of the Finance Function**

The structure of the Finance function (including the Procurement and Payroll functions) is shown in the chart below (all roles 1 FTE unless stated):



**Nature and level of staffing**

The team is currently fully established, except for the Procurement Specialist post. This post has proved difficult to recruit to.

Both the Director and Deputy Director roles also have responsibility for areas outside of the Finance function (including Property, Fleet, Programme Management Office, ICT, Data and Communications).

The team won the award for “Finance Team of the Year - Local Services” at the Public Finance Innovation Awards 2018. The judges commented that “Finance teams across the local government sector are continuing to operate effectively – and with passion – in challenging circumstances. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority achieved a lot with a small team through collaboration and flexibility.”

**Staff skills and expertise**

Staff within the finance function are well trained, and all finance staff either have obtained or are working towards obtaining a professional qualification (e.g. CIPFA/ACCA/AAT etc.)

Training is provided to staff outside of finance as part of the Station Manager development programme, which aims to equip staff with the skills to manage their budgets effectively.

### **Succession arrangements for key staff**

A comprehensive succession plan is presented to the Executive Committee on an annual basis. Due to the personal nature of the information contained within it, detailed arrangements are not repeated within this document.

The succession plan has been demonstrated to have worked extremely well over the past five years. Within that time, staff have been promoted internally to the positions of Director of Finance and Assets, Deputy Director of Finance and Assets, two Principal Accountant positions and one Trainee Accountant position.

### **Relationships with elected representatives, the governing body and senior managers**

The Authority has appointed a Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT. The Lead Member is briefed regularly by the Director of Finance and Assets, as is the Chairman of the Authority and the Chairman of the Overview and Audit Committee. The Director of Finance and Assets is a member of the Senior Management Team.

### **The status of the Chief Financial Officer within the organisation**

As noted above, the Chief Financial Officer is a member of the Senior Management Team and is able to exercise the duties set out in on page 28.

## **GOVERNANCE**

### **Financial expertise of the governing body**

Our self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code has identified the need to undertake a review of the skillsets of elected members and offer further training if required.

### **Financial and related policies**

The Authority has approved Financial Regulations, which are the regulatory framework within which the financial affairs of the Authority operate. The approved Financial Instructions provide additional detail to achieve compliance with the Financial Regulations and the system of internal control.

### **Financial management systems and processes**

The finance system used is Integra, which was brought in to replace SAP in April 2017. This newer system is more suited to our needs and has made processes more efficient.

Payroll is processed using the iTrent system. After Payroll was moved from HR to Finance, a series of process optimisation meetings were undertaken. However, these appear to have lost momentum and there still remains an opportunity to improve the end-to-end process for paying staff.

The Core Financial Controls audit reviews our financial systems and processes on an annual basis. The most recent audit found that substantial assurance can be placed on the operation of these controls.

## Political priorities and policy commitments

The Financial Strategy must be consistent with the Public Safety Plan, which is the Authority's commitment to the public.

### EXTERNAL

#### The organisation's reputation for effective financial management and performance

Externally, the two key organisations that review our financial management and performance are Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Ernst & Young LLP (EY).

Within their [inspection report](#) HMICFRS noted that they "have serious concerns as to whether Buckinghamshire FRS has the resources it needs to meet its foreseeable risk. As a result of the financial position the service finds itself in, it doesn't have enough operational firefighters to resource its prevention and protection functions and crew the minimum number of fire engines it says it needs."

However, they also noted that "in one sense, it is highly efficient: it has an innovative deployment model which, if better funded, would be a cost-effective way of keeping people safe." According to HMICFRS, the firefighter cost per person per year for Bucks Fire is £17.38 versus the national average of £22.08. This correlates with previous [benchmarking reports](#) [p.21] that show the Service is one of the most efficient services in England and Wales when measured on net expenditure per 1,000 population.

The summary of their findings concluded with the statement that "Overall, we would like to see improvements in the year ahead, but without increased funding, it is difficult to see where progress can be made."

In their Audit Results Report for 2018/19 EY concluded that "In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people"

#### Relationships with key financial stakeholders

Other than local residents and businesses, the key financial stakeholder for the Service is Central Government. The Director of Finance and Assets is a member of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Finance Sub-Committee, which is also attended by a representative of the Home Office.

#### Changes to government regulations or guidance

The most significant change that will impact on the Authority during this period is the impact of the Sargeant pensions ruling. This will not only increase the cost of employer pension contributions but will also be an administrative burden. A dedicated resource will be required to manage any remediation process.

Sir Tony Redmond has published an [Independent Review into the Oversight of Local Audit and the Transparency of Local Authority Financial Reporting](#). This contains a number of recommendations, most notably in relation to external audit. It is likely that the level of work undertaken by external audit will continue to increase, as will the audit fees and the amount of internal staff time required to support the year-end audit process and reporting requirements.

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry was created to examine the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the fire at Grenfell Tower on the night of 14 June 2017. The Phase 1 report was published in October 2019. One-off grant funding has been provided during 2020-21 (see page 5) to contribute towards the implementation of recommendations contained in the report. The Phase 2 hearings are currently in progress.

### **Changes in service user demand or profile**

The Public Safety Plan deals extensively with the level of demand on our Service, as well as the changing demographic factors that influence the profile of demand.

### **Other changes in the external environment**

Infrastructure projects within our area will require us to review a range of potential risks and identify any additional training, equipment and vehicle requirements.

COVID-19 has already had an impact on the way we work and will continue to do so into the future. The possible financial impact on the service is considered with the scenario planning section on pages 21 to 24.

**SWOT**

[Figure 2.1: SWOT matrix, Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition © CIPFA]

Attributes internal to the organisation	<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
Factor determined by the external environment	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
	Help the organisation’s ability to achieve its objectives	Hinder the organisation’s ability to achieve its objectives

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant percentage of funding comes from Council Tax</li> <li>• Excellent budgetary and other internal controls</li> <li>• Low capital financing requirement – could borrow more if required (either internally or externally)</li> <li>• Reserves sufficient in line with current risk assessment</li> <li>• Experienced and well qualified Finance team with succession planning well embedded</li> <li>• Dedicated Lead Member provides support and challenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Council Tax Band D equivalent – referendum limit as a percentage relatively more restrictive.</li> <li>• Large reliance on temporary/one-off grant funding</li> <li>• According to HMICFRS we do not currently have the resources to fully meet all the risks within the Public Safety Plan</li> <li>• Limited scope for further savings without impacting on the delivery of services and public safety</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased working from home provides opportunity to review the size of the estate</li> <li>• Further opportunities for collaboration following completion of the Blue Light Hub</li> <li>• Improve efficiency of end-to-end payroll processes and links with HR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall in council tax and business rates income due to COVID-19</li> <li>• Comprehensive Spending Review deferred for a further year creating additional uncertainty. Overall level of funding may decrease.</li> <li>• Treasury Management income reduced significantly due to decrease in the base rate</li> <li>• Increased cost of pensions and administrative burden</li> <li>• Pay increases above budgeted amount – although has been relatively stable in recent years</li> </ul>

## SUMMARY

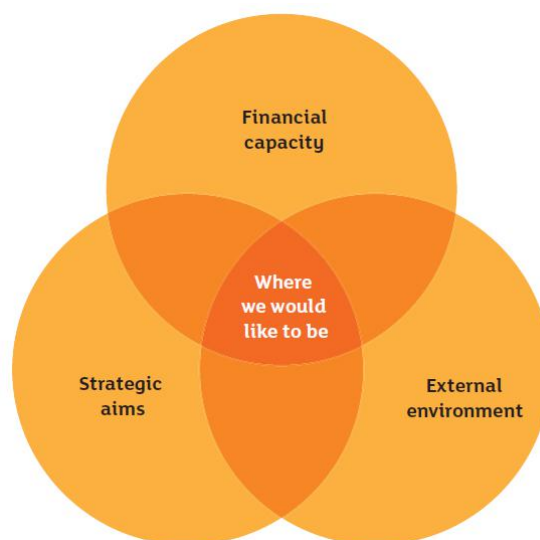
The table below uses the analysis to summarise our current position:

Performance	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Tax is a significant proportion of funding, however still heavily reliant on non-local sources of funding with low certainty over future levels</li> <li>• Efficient in terms of cost per firefighter and net expenditure per head of population</li> <li>• Excellent budgetary and other internal controls</li> <li>• Over-borrowed but unable to repay loans early. Borrowing costs are not overly burdensome. Capacity to borrow more if required.</li> <li>• Sufficient reserves but uncertain future levels due to uncertainty over future funding streams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient number of finance staff</li> <li>• Qualified and experienced Finance team.</li> <li>• Succession planning demonstrated to be working well.</li> <li>• Dedicated Lead Member provides support and challenge</li> <li>• The Chief Finance Officer is a member of the Senior Management Team.</li> </ul>
Governance	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial expertise of non-Finance staff and elected Members needs to be formally reviewed</li> <li>• Up-to-date and proven financial policies</li> <li>• Efficient finance system and processes, although scope to improve the end-to-end process for payments to staff</li> <li>• MTFP consistent with Public Safety Plan and Corporate Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputation for delivering an efficient service, but concerns about effectiveness due to insufficiency of resources to fully support the activity in the Public Safety Plan</li> <li>• Strong representation on stakeholder groups</li> <li>• Unknow impact of key legislation regarding pensions</li> <li>• Potential changes in user demand and/or profile as detailed in the Public Safety Plan</li> <li>• Further uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic</li> </ul>

## WHERE THE ORGANISATION WOULD LIKE TO BE

Having analysed where the organisation is now, the financial strategy needs to determine where the organisation would like to be. In doing so, it needs to consider the following three key factors:

- The organisation's current **financial capacity, capability and performance** (as summarised on the previous page)
- The organisation's overall **strategic aims**, as well as any specific strategies to achieve these aims
- The **external environment** and any anticipated changes



As well as addressing the organisation's strategic aims, the finance function will also need to address developments that are not covered within the strategic plan (for example streamlining of processes and implementation of new technology). It will always need to ensure that its core processes such as accounts payable, accounts receivable and payroll continue to function effectively.

The external environment in which public services operate can be highly challenging and dynamic. Aspects of the environment that may influence where the organisation wants to be from a financial perspective include:

- Funding cuts and government austerity drives
- Restrictions on fees that can be charged to service users
- Requirements to improve efficiency or to demonstrate value for money
- Policy changes (e.g. business rates retention)
- Changes in the cost of borrowing
- Pay caps, pay increases and change in employment taxes
- Demographic changes among service users

Would like to be:

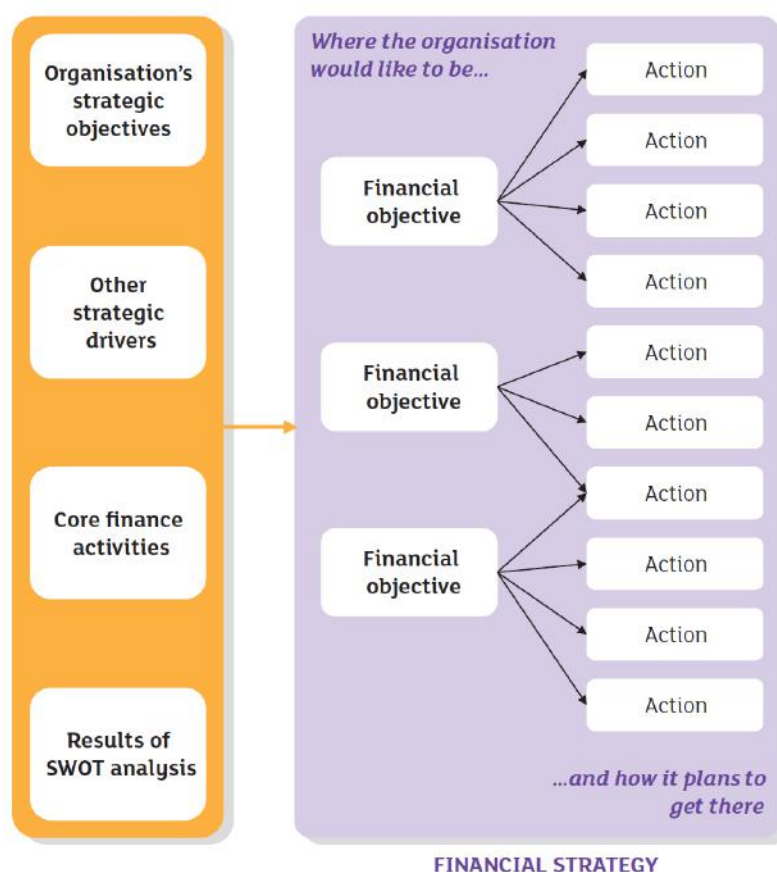
Performance	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to increase Council Tax above the current limit of 2%</li> <li>• Other grant funding to be brought within our core Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA)</li> <li>• Increased expenditure on front-line staff as a percentage of total expenditure</li> <li>• Further reduced overhead costs by reducing the size of the estate</li> <li>• No additional borrowing and have repaid deals that have matured</li> <li>• Reserves maintained at current levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minor change to staff structure to incorporate dedicated pensions expertise</li> <li>• No overall increase in the number of Finance, Procurement or Payroll staff</li> <li>• Retain existing staff expertise, knowledge and skills as far as possible</li> <li>• Continue to work closely with Lead Member</li> <li>• The Chief Finance Officer remains a member of the Senior Management Team.</li> </ul>
Governance	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Finance staff and elected Members assessed as having a high level of financial expertise</li> <li>• Policies updated to reflect changes in legislation and best practice</li> <li>• Systems and processes further optimised, especially with regards to the end-to-end processes for payments to staff</li> <li>• Programme Management Office supports Finance and the wider organisation to deliver transformational change through an efficient internal governance system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HMICFRS note improvements to efficiency in their report. Ratings for efficiency and effectiveness both improved to "good"</li> <li>• Influence within the NFCC and with Home Office secures a good funding settlement for the Service</li> <li>• Pensions remedy fully implemented</li> <li>• Finances able to respond to changes in user demand/profile</li> <li>• Ensure external partners maintain the same high standards of conduct with regard to financial administration and corporate governance that apply throughout the Authority and that they contribute to the achievement of the Authority's objectives</li> </ul>



### AGREEING HOW THE ORGANISATION PLANS TO GET THERE

Having determined where the organisation would like to be, it then needs to determine a number of financial objectives to achieve this aim. These objectives will then be divided into a number of actions. An overview of this process is shown in the figure below:

[Figure 3.5: Translating the organisation’s overall aims and strategies into a financial strategy, *Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition © CIPFA*]



## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The following table sets out the activities that will move the organisation towards where it would like to be. References in (brackets) refer to the self-assessment against the statements of standard practice (see Appendix A).

Year	Activity	Target/outcome
2020-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to lobby for an increase in the Council Tax Referendum Limit and for other grants to become part of the Settlement Funding Assessment</li> <li>Value for Money (VFM) initial review by external provider</li> <li>Review estate footprint</li> <li>Review of Partnership arrangements (F3)</li> <li>Establishment of Programme Management Office (E3)</li> <li>Recruit Pensions Officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain or enhance firefighter numbers and substantiate temporary protection staff</li> <li>Identify areas for improvement in relation to other fire services</li> <li>Reduction in overhead costs</li> <li>Ensure partners have high standards and contribute to our objectives</li> <li>Better oversight of key corporate projects to support transformation</li> <li>Dedicated expertise to support implementation of legislative changes</li> </ul>
2021-22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of system requirements and processes and upgrade/replace system</li> <li>Review of budget monitoring and performance reporting arrangements (E2, K3, R2, R3, R5, S1)</li> <li>Review skillset of non-Finance staff and elected Members (B3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved efficiency (also compliance with procurement regulations as current contract ends 31 March 2022)</li> <li>Improved reporting and compliance with CIPFA FM Code</li> <li>Improved compliance with CIPFA FM Code</li> </ul>
2022-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeat and review VFM exercise</li> <li>Review of Charging Policy and support review of unwanted fire signals as per the Corporate Plan</li> <li>Review of ethical financial management (B6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify areas for further improvement</li> <li>Explore opportunities for further efficiencies</li> <li>Improved compliance with CIPFA FM Code</li> </ul>
2023-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete any outstanding items from above</li> </ul>	
2024-25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zero-based budget in preparation for Public Safety Plan 2025-30</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reset any budgets that may have 'drifted' over time.</li> </ul>

## Scenarios for long-term financial planning

### THE AIMS OF SCENARIO PLANNING

At a time of political and economic uncertainty, it is essential that longer-term financial strategies are based on scenarios, rather than on forecasts based on the continuation of the current environment. Scenarios are not predictions of the future, but plausible visions of the future.

Scenarios allow decision makers to test the viability of financial strategies to deal with possible future states. They consider a wider range of possibilities than simple forecasts and can also cope with potential abrupt changes such as changes in Government policy.

### USING SCENARIOS TO INFORM LONG-TERM PLANNING

The financial strategy should ensure that the service is able to achieve its strategic aims in each of the plausible scenarios it has identified. Where a scenario necessitates a particular course of action, this should be integrated into the financial strategy, including monitoring mechanisms to ensure that appropriate action is initiated as and when required.

In order to be resilient, a financial strategy must be suitable, feasible and acceptable for each of the scenarios identified. There are a number of questions that the management team can ask itself to establish this is the case.

#### Suitability of the strategy

[Table 4.2: Suitability of the strategy, *Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition* © CIPFA]

<b>Rationale</b>	Is there a clear case for action?
<b>Proportionality</b>	Is the (cost of the) strategy proportionate to the (benefit of the) objectives to be achieved?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	To what extent will the strategy support the achievement of the organisation's strategic aims?
<b>Impact</b>	Are there any unintended consequences? Are costs and benefits equitably distributed?

#### Feasibility of the strategy

[Table 4.3: Feasibility of the strategy, *Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition* © CIPFA]

<b>Capability</b>	Will it be possible to implement and manage the strategy?
<b>Accountability</b>	Can clear accountabilities be established and aligned with incentives?
<b>Affordability</b>	Is the strategy affordable, and does it provide value for money against alternatives?
<b>Risk</b>	Can risks be identified and either mitigated or allocated and managed?

<b>Control</b>	Are there clear success measures and mechanisms for prompt feedback and learning?
----------------	---

## Acceptability of the strategy

[Table 4.4: Acceptability of the strategy, *Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition* © CIPFA]

<b>Legitimacy</b>	Is the strategy supported by those with the authority and influence to legitimise action?
<b>Participation</b>	Has there been sufficient stakeholder participation and engagement in the development of the strategy?
<b>Buy-in</b>	Is there sufficient support from both internal and external stakeholders?
<b>Equality</b>	Has an explicit equalities assessment been carried out?
<b>Probity</b>	Are the actions set out in the strategy legal and within the organisation's powers?

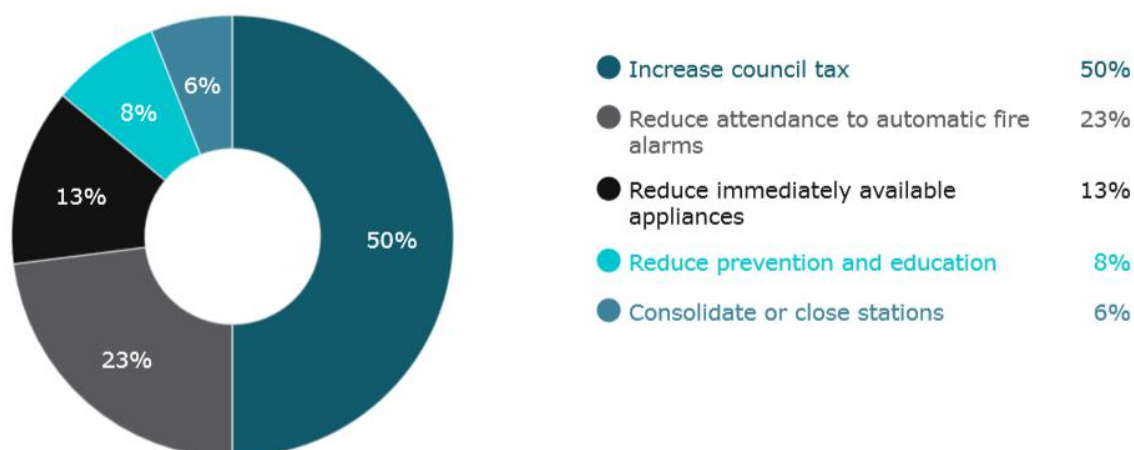
The two recommendations arising from HMICFRS's cause for concern within their inspection report (see also page 13) are that:

"At the earliest opportunity, the service should:

- ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan; and
- consult with the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on options to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which it operates."

The first bullet point was addressed (as far as possible given budgetary constraints) by implementing a zero-based budget approach when setting the budget for 2020-21 (see also page 26). This allowed the Authority to add an additional twenty firefighter posts to the wholetime establishment. The development of this Financial Strategy further addresses this recommendation over the medium to longer-term.

The consultation exercise was carried out while developing the Public Safety Plan 2020-25. Some possible strategies to meet future challenges were outlined to participants. These were based on the assumption that we will have done everything possible to make savings from 'back office' functions and that our service would receive no additional Government money with which to provide services. Participants were asked to allocate 100 points between the options, and their responses are summarised on the following page.



There was a clear preference amongst those consulted that the Authority should seek to increase council tax, where a one-off increase of £5 to the base amount was favoured. While the second preference was to reduce attendance to automatic fire alarms, it is unlikely this would produce significant savings. The least preferred option was to consolidate or close stations, although the reduction of immediately available fire appliances was preferred to any reduction in prevention and education activity.

Participants were also asked to rank some other possible strategies in the event of us receiving more Government money or raising additional funds ourselves through increased council tax levels. The overall ranking across all five focus groups was as follows:

- 1. Make on-call firefighting more attractive**
- 2. Keep existing stations and assets**
- 3. Recruit more firefighters**
- 4. Enhance protection (to be fit for the post-Grenfell environment)**
- 5. Upgrade crewing levels at stations**
- 6. Deliver additional services such as co-responding**
- 7. Ensure fairer urban versus rural service provision**

## Scenarios

The scenarios considered are:

- Optimistic – if the Council Tax Referendum Limit was increased to allow the Authority to increase Council Tax by £5, rather than the current 2% limit.
- No Change – as per the MTFP approved by the Authority in February 2020
- Pessimistic – reduction in Council Tax and settlement funding assessment
- Reasonable Worst Case – as per the Pessimistic Scenario, plus the loss of specific grant funding for pensions and USAR.


For each scenario, the Strategy outlines a range of additional funding available to invest (+ve) or further savings to be found (-ve).

### Possible Responses to Scenarios

In addition to the recommendations within the HMICFRS report, a further area for improvement was noted in that “The Service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pensions liability are accounted for and that there is a contingency plan”.

The following potential responses to the financial scenarios address this area for improvement, as well as supporting the recommendation to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which we operate.

All the amounts shown below are highly dependent upon how quickly Council Tax and business rates receipts recover, as well as the amount of support that Central Government may provide to offset local losses. Therefore, the Authority will seek to avoid changes that are substantially irreversible in the short-term (e.g. closure of a station) as far as possible. However, reserves are finite and can only be used to fund any shortfalls for a limited period of time.




**Optimistic Scenario (+£500k)**

- Substantiate temporary fire protection staff
- Increase firefighter numbers to increase availability and resilience
- Continue to explore ways of increasing on-call recruitment
- Also undertake some of 'No Change' solutions to allow further investment in the above




**'No Change' Scenario**

- Reduce office footprint and adopt flexible working for office based staff
- Re-profile property maintenance and vehicle replacement programmes
- Potential outsourcing/sharing of some support functions
- Short-term use of reserves to balance budget



**Pessimistic Scenario (-£1.7 million)**

- As per Current Forecast scenario plus
- Reduce bank shift availability in line with degradation plan. This will reduce appliance availability at some locations on certain days/times.
- Removal of second pump from one or more wholtime stations



**Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (-£4 million)**

- As per Pessimistic scenario plus
- Closure of one or more fire stations
- Cessation of national Urban Search and Rescue capability

## Medium and short-term financial planning

### TURNING THE STRATEGY INTO ACTION

The previous section looked at longer-term financial plan and how to deal with future uncertainty. As well as having a long-term view, the financial strategy should also be used as the basis to prepare plans for the medium and short-term.

### THE MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP)

The MTFP is the translation of the organisation's financial strategy into the near future. It also links the organisation's plans for service delivery to the financial strategy. Therefore, the MTFP cannot be just a financial document, but needs to be integrated with service planning, risk management and asset management plans.

The development of the MTFP may highlight a gap between the funding available to an organisation and the level of risk and demand that it faces. This gap needs to be narrowed through either increasing income, reducing activity or improving efficiency (or indeed a combination of these three).

### THE BUDGET AS AN INSTRUMENT OF FINANCIAL CONTROL

The annual budget has three main purposes:

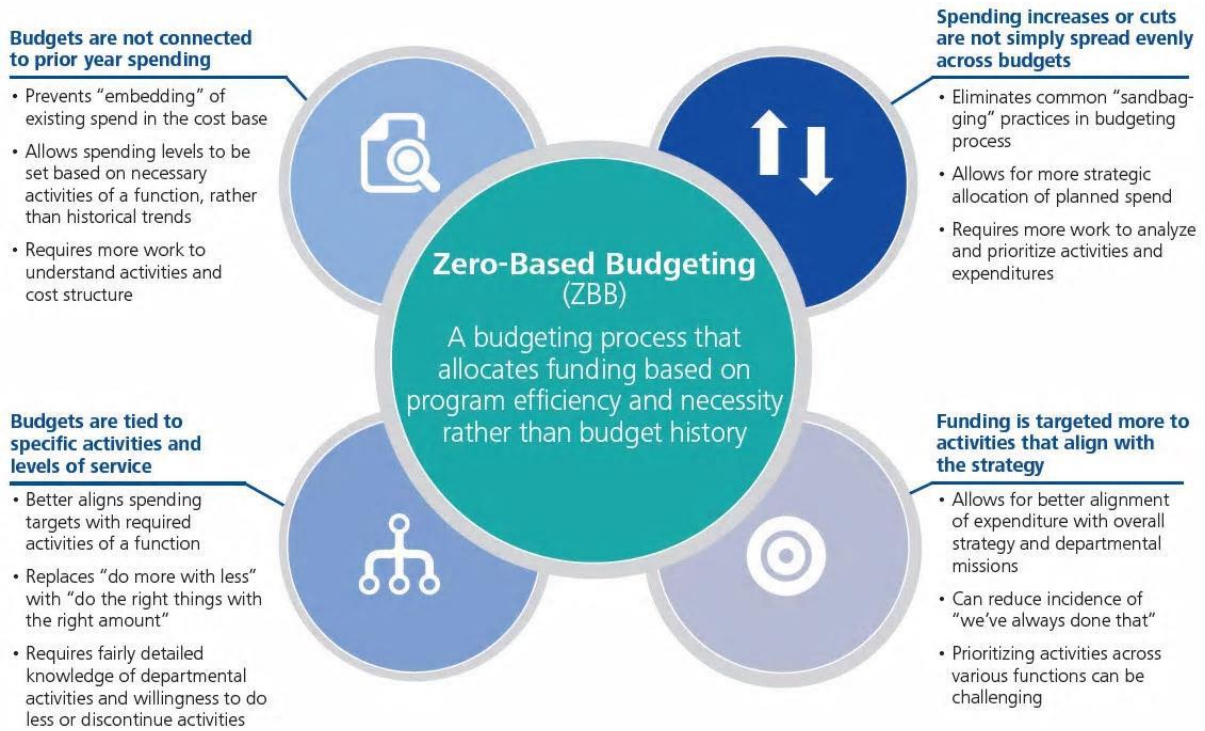
- To allocate financial resources across the organisation
- To co-ordinate the use of these resources in the delivery of services
- To monitor the use of these resources over the year

The budget is derived by dividing the high-level financial objectives from the financial strategy and MTFP into smaller components that are then assigned to individual business units to act on.

## Zero-based budgeting (ZBB)

In contrast to the traditional incremental approach to budgeting where budgets are included in the plan for the next year simply because they were in the previous year’s budget, ZBB requires everything in the budget to be considered and justified. The figure below summarizes the advantages (and disadvantages) of the ZBB approach:

*Explaining Zero-Based Budgeting* Copyright © 2015 Deloitte Development LLC



ZBB isn’t something that should be enacted every year, but in the same ways strategies and plans benefit from a periodic refresh, ZBB provides an opportunity to check on a periodic basis that budgets are well aligned to strategic objectives.

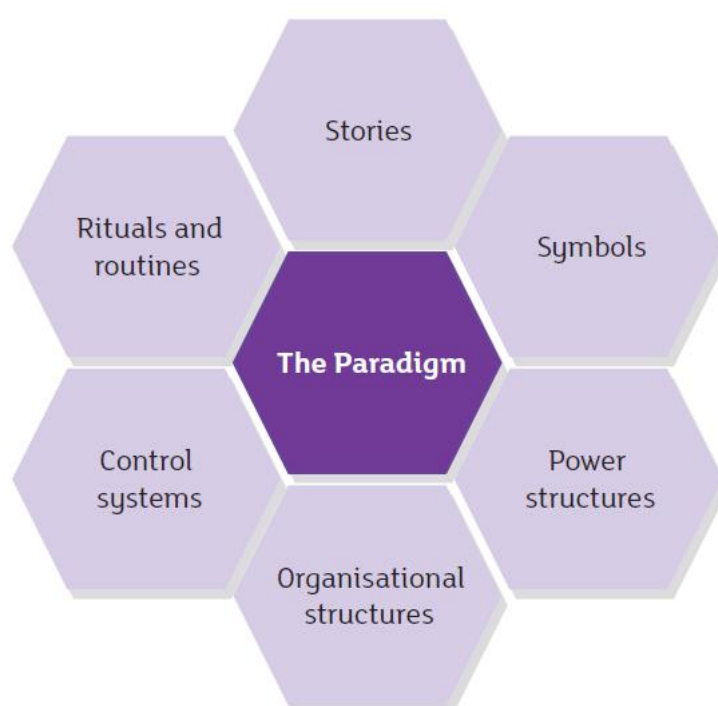


## Financial Leadership

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG FINANCIAL LEADERSHIP

In all organisations, the organisational culture plays a key role in determining what is important to the organisation and, consequently, what gets done and what does not. In the Fundamentals of Strategy (Johnson G et al) the model of the cultural web is proposed, which shows six elements that contribute to the organisation's overall cultural paradigm.

[Figure 6.1: The cultural web, *Thinking Ahead: Developing a Financial Strategy 2018 Edition* © CIPFA]



A culture of effective financial planning is an essential prerequisite for the delivery of the financial strategy. This means, for example, that:

- Organisational structures need to be aligned with financial management structures and reporting lines
- Control systems need to monitor performance and prevent and/or highlight any issues
- Long-term financial planning needs to be embedded within the organisation and engaged with across departments
- The achievement of financial aims and budgets is something that should be expected
- Those responsible for developing and delivering the financial strategy, medium-term financial plan and annual budget need to have the power to do so.

The commitment to financial planning needs to come from and be promoted by those in leadership roles throughout the organisation.

## THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION'S GOVERNING BODY

The *International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector* (CIPFA/IFAC, 2014) states clearly that:

*The governing body should ensure that its decisions further the entity's purpose, contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, and remain within the limits of authority and resources.*

Compliance with this duty can be demonstrated by the approval of a robust financial strategy, which aligns resources available to the organisation's strategic objectives. The governing body should also be involved in the strategic planning process.

## THE ROLE OF THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Senior Management Team have a key role in establishing a culture where effective long-term financial planning is valued. It has a crucial role in aligning the services delivered with the resources available, as this is something that can not be achieved by the finance function working in isolation. The Senior Management Team should also seek to lead, promote and be actively involved with the strategy development and implementation process.

## THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

The Chief Financial Officer has a critical role to play in developing and implementing the financial strategy, as well as creating a culture that values effective financial planning. CIPFA's *Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Public Service Organisations* (CIPFA, 2011) sets out clearly that:

*The Chief Financial Officer in a public service organisation:*

- *Is a key member of the Leadership Team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the organisation's strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest*
- *Must be actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and alignment with the organisation's financial strategy; and*
- *Must lead the promotion and delivery by the whole organisation of good financial management so that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively.*

This financial strategy document will support the Chief Financial Officer in discharging these requirements effectively.

## Reserves Strategy

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Section 42A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires that, when setting the budget for the forthcoming year, precepting authorities should have regard to the level of reserves needed to provide sufficient resources to finance estimated future expenditure, plus any appropriate allowances that should be made for contingencies.

Best practice on the use and management of reserves and balances is provided by CIPFA and the Local Authority Accounting Panel (LAAP) guidance, specifically LAAP Bulletin 99 - 'Local Authority Reserves and Balances'. This was issued in July 2014, but since then many references have been made to the scale of public sector reserves by various parties.

In May 2018 the Government published the New Fire and Rescue Services Framework which introduces a requirement for Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish a Reserve Strategy on their website and outlined the detail which should be included. The Reserves Strategy can form part of the Medium Term Financial Plan or be a stand-alone document.

### STRATEGIC CONTEXT

There are a number of reasons why a Local Government Authority might hold reserves, these include to:

- Mitigate potential future risks such as increased demand and costs
- Help absorb the costs of future liabilities
- Temporarily plug a funding gap should resources be reduced suddenly
- Enable the Authority to resource one-off policy developments and initiatives without causing an unduly disruptive impact on Council Tax
- Spread the cost of large scale projects which span a number of years.

Reserves only provide one-off funding so the Authority aims to avoid using reserves to meet regular and ongoing financial commitments, other than as part of a sustainable medium-term budget plan.

Long-Term Sustainability - Reserves are an essential tool to ensure long term budget stability particularly at a time when the Authority is facing significant year on year reductions in grant funding over the medium term. Due to the fact that funding for future Capital Projects is held as an Earmarked Reserve, the overall level of reserves held by the Authority is currently still high, but will reduce significantly as the Capital programme progresses.

Reserve balances have been identified as a key indicator of financial health and the Authority continues to have an appropriate level of reserves to deal with identified risks. As a minimum, there are sufficient balances to support the budget requirements and provide an adequate contingency for budget risks.

There are two different types of reserve, and these are:

- Earmarked Reserves – these reserves are held to fund a specific purpose and can only be used to fund spending associated with that specific purpose. Should it transpire that not all of the agreed funds are required then the agreement of the Authority would be sought to decide how any remaining balance is to be utilised.
- General Reserve – usage from this Reserve is non-specific and is held to fund any unforeseen spending that had not been included in the base budget e.g. excessive operational activity resulting in significant retained pay costs.

## Provisions

In addition to reserves the Authority may also hold provisions which can be defined as: a Provision is held to provide funding for a liability or loss that is known with some certainty will occur in the future, but the timing and amount is less certain.

## RISK ASSESSMENT TO DETERMINE THE ADEQUACY OF THE GENERAL RESERVE

A well-managed multipurpose authority will strive to maintain as low a level of General Reserve as possible, whilst still covering its financial risks. As a single-purpose authority, the Authority has no opportunity to use cross-service subsidies to meet unanticipated expenditure and so, proportionally, its General Reserve may be slightly higher than for a multi-purpose authority.

The Authority has a robust approach to managing risk and there are effective arrangements for financial control in place. That said, given the high level of influence that third parties, such as the Local Government Employers and Government departments have on its income and expenditure, there is always a risk that the Authority will unexpectedly become liable for expenditure that it has not budgeted for.

The Authority has set its Prudential Indicator for the General Reserve at 5% of annual budget which is a commonly used benchmark across the Fire Sector. At the start of 2020-21, the General Reserve represented 4.8% of the Authority's net revenue budget. Due to varying revenue budgets, maintaining a consistent level of General Reserve will result in the percentage varying over time. Transfers in or out of the General Reserve to conform to the 5% indicator would only be considered if there was significant variance or if resources were earmarked to another project.

The prudential indicator is a useful control measure but is a rudimentary way of assessing the adequacy of the general reserve and a more meaningful approach is to develop a risk assessment. The Authority will consider both measures as part of its annual reserve strategy.

A risk assessment of the adequacy of the Authority's General Reserve will be carried out annually to determine the extent to which the Authority is exposed to uninsured and unbudgeted losses. The risk assessment for the current financial

year, 2020-21, has been prepared as part of the budget setting process and is shown on pages 32 to 33.

## **ANNUAL REVIEW OF EARMARKED RESERVES**

The Authority has a number of earmarked reserves which have been established for specific purposes where there have been timing differences at budget setting or year end, or emerging risks or cost pressures. The relevance of, and balance in, each of these is reviewed annually and the Authority is informed of the latest plans for the balances held in such reserves over the medium term via the Reserves Strategy.

As part of the annual review of reserves 2019-20, Earmarked Reserves are presented in broad categories and analysed as outlined below.

### **Apprentice Reserve**

This reserve is held to fund the additional cost of recruiting new apprentices (although to date this has been funded by year-end underspends). This reserve would fund periods of over establishment and be topped-up in years where we are under established.

### **Continuing Projects Reserves**

This reserve has been created to cover any future costs on a number of large scale projects currently being undertaken by the Authority.

### **COVID-19 Reserve**

This reserve is held to fund future expenditure requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

### **Future Funding Reserve**

This reserve is held to meet known funding requirements within the medium term financial plan and to fund projects from underspends in the previous year.

### **Revenue Contribution to Capital Reserve**

This reserve represents funding set aside to contribute towards future capital expenditure in order to mitigate the need to fund the expenditure through additional borrowing.

### **Usable Capital Receipts Reserve**

This reserve receives monies from the sale of capital assets and uses these monies towards the purchase of new assets.

### **Control Room Reserve**

This reserve contains the renewals fund used to replenish the Joint control room assets. This is not shown in the chart on page 34 as the funds are held by Oxfordshire County Council on behalf of the three Thames Valley Services, but accounting regulations dictate it is shown in our Statement of Accounts (our share of the balance as at 31 March 2020 was £534k).

## RISK ASSESSMENT OF THE ADEQUACY OF GENERAL RESERVES

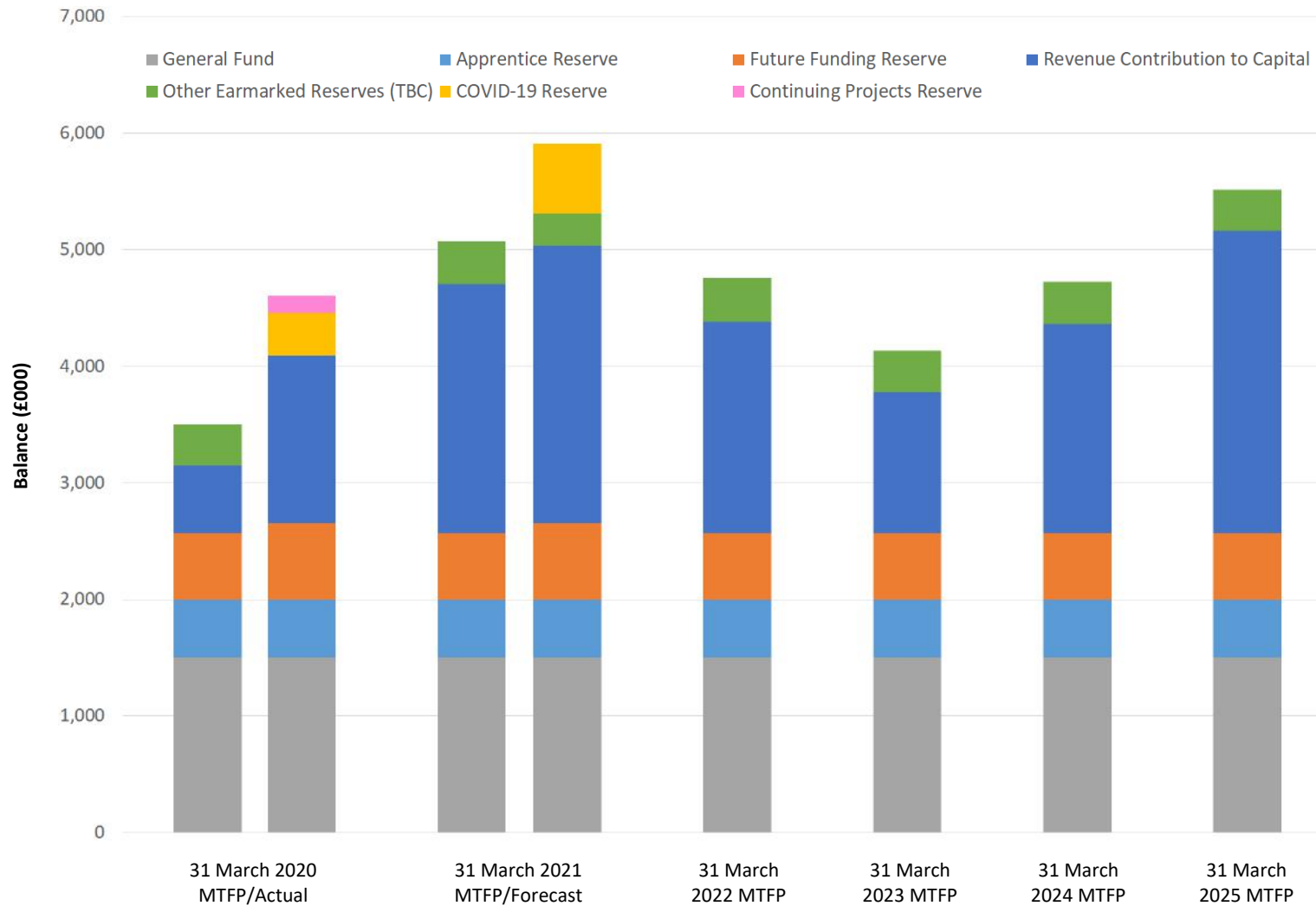
The table below shows the calculation of the amount required to be held in the General Fund.

Budget Assumptions	Financial standing and management assessment/impact	Comments	Amount Required £000
The treatment of inflation and interest rates	The overall financial standing of the authority (level of borrowing, debt outstanding, council tax collection rates etc.). Rises in the prices of some commodities, eg fuel, highlight the relevance of using a number of inflation rates in the budget and financial strategy, and considering whether general reserves are adequate to deal with unexpected increases. Volatility in the financial markets also points to the need to consider investment and borrowing risks and their impact on income.	Pay inflation is a significant risk if increases above 2% are not funded centrally. The amount required is based on an additional 1% award.	300
Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts	The authority's track record in budget and financial management including the robustness of the medium term plans. Authorities will also need to take into account changes in the property market, and adjust estimates and assumptions for reserves accordingly.	This amount is based on 5% of the total estimated capital receipts within the capital programme	100
The treatment of demand led pressures	The authority's capacity to manage in-year budget pressures, and its strategy for managing both demand and service delivery in the longer term.	An amount has been set aside to help fund any recommendations that may come from the Grenfell Tower inquiry or the McCloud/Sargeant judgement	200
The treatment of planned efficiency savings/productivity gains	The strength of the financial information and reporting arrangements. The authority should also be in a position to activate contingency plans should the reporting arrangements identify that planned savings or gains will either not be achieved or be delayed.	A key future efficiency within the Medium Term Financial Plan is the property saving associated with consolidating our current property portfolio. This is the amount required if planned savings are delayed by one year.	100

Budget Assumptions	Financial standing and management assessment/impact	Comments	Amount Required £000
The financial risks inherent in any significant new funding partnerships, major outsourcing arrangements or major capital developments	The authority's virement and end of year procedures in relation to budget under/overspends at authority and department/directorate level. Risk management measures in relation to partnerships, including consideration of risk allocation. Contract provisions designed to safeguard the authority's position in the event of problems arising from outsourcing arrangements.	This amount is based on 15% of the total estimated expenditure on the capital programme for 2020/21. There is a specific risk in relation to vehicles and potential increases in import tariffs.	200
The availability of reserves, government grants and other funds to deal with major contingencies and the adequacy of provisions	The adequacy of the authority's insurance arrangements to cover major unforeseen risks. When considering insurance cover, the structure of the cover as well as the overall level of risk should be taken into account. Risk assessments should be used when balancing the levels of insurance premiums and reserves.	The insurance excess is set at £5,000 for the majority of claims. There is a risk that there may be a large number of high value claims. This value assumes ten claims over £5,000 in any one year.	50
The general financial climate to which the authority is subject	External factors, such as future funding levels expected to be included in Spending Reviews and expected referenda principles and limits, will influence an authority's ability to replenish reserves once they have been used. Any plans for using reserves will need to consider the need and ability of the authority to replenish the reserves, and the risks to which the authority will be exposed whilst replenishing the reserves.	There are risks to the continuation of the fire specific revenue grants that the Authority currently receives, covering Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), Firelink (control room communication links) and pension grant funding. This amount is based on 10% of the specific grants receivable for 2020/21. An additional £250k has been included due to additional risks posed by Covid-19	550
<b>Total Required</b>			<b>1,500</b>

**PROJECTED RESERVE BALANCES OVER MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN PERIOD**

The chart below shows balances forecast in the MTFP approved in February 2020 vs. actual/latest forecast balances.





Of the amounts on the previous page, the following reserves and forecast year-end balances could be used to meet a potential funding deficit in 2021-22:

- Apprenticeship Reserve (£500k)
- COVID-19 Reserve (£595k)
- Future Funding Reserve (£651k)

This gives a total potential one-off use of reserves to allow the Authority time to implement necessary actions of circa £1.75m. (It is anticipated that a significant portion of the reserves currently forecast as 'other earmarked TBC' will be required to be placed into a Protection reserve as they relate to specific funding so would not be available for other purposes). Should an amount higher than £1.75m be required the Authority could also look to utilise some of the Revenue Contribution to Capital Reserve and reprofile the capital programme.

### **EXTRACT FROM NATIONAL FRAMEWORK REFERENCE RESERVES**

#### **Reserves**

- 5.7 Fire and rescue authorities should establish a policy on reserves and provisions in consultation with their chief finance officer. General reserves should be held by the fire and rescue authority and managed to balance funding and spending priorities and to manage risks. This should be established as part of the medium-term financial planning process.
- 5.8 Each fire and rescue authority should publish their reserves strategy on their website, either as part of their medium term financial plan or in a separate reserves strategy document. The reserves strategy should include details of current and future planned reserve levels, setting out a total amount of reserves and the amount of each specific reserve that is held for each year. The reserves strategy should cover resource and capital reserves and provide information for the period of the medium term financial plan (and at least two years ahead).
- 5.9 Sufficient information should be provided to enable understanding of the purpose(s) for which each reserve is held and how holding each reserve supports the fire and rescue authority's medium term financial plan. The strategy should be set out in a way that is clear and understandable for members of the public, and should include:
- how the level of the general reserve has been set;
  - justification for holding a general reserve larger than five percent of budget; and
  - details of the activities or items to be funded from each earmarked reserve, and how these support the FRA's strategy to deliver a good quality service to the public. Where an earmarked reserve is intended to fund a number of projects or programmes (for example, a change or transformation reserve), details of each programme or project to be funded should be set out.
- 5.10 The information on each reserve should make clear how much of the funding falls into the following three categories:

**Annex 1**

- a) Funding for planned expenditure on projects and programmes over the period of the current medium term financial plan.
- b) Funding for specific projects and programmes beyond the current planning period.
- c) As a general contingency or resource to meet other expenditure needs held in accordance with sound principles of good financial management (e.g. insurance)

## The CIPFA Financial Management Code: Assessment of Compliance against Consultation Version

### OBJECTIVES

The CIPFA Financial Management Code (CIPFA FM Code) is designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The CIPFA FM Code therefore sets the standards of financial management for local authorities.

The Code is based on a series of principles supported by specific standards and statements of practice which are considered necessary to provide the strong foundation to:

- Financially manage the short, medium- and long-term finances of a local authority;
- manage financial resilience to meet foreseen demands on services; and
- financially manage unexpected shocks in their financial circumstances.

Each local authority must demonstrate that the requirements of the Code are being satisfied. Demonstrating this compliance with the CIPFA FM Code is a collective responsibility of elected members, the Chief Finance Officer and their professional colleagues in the leadership team.

### PRINCIPLES OF GOOD FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The CIPFA FM Code applies a principle-based approach. It does not prescribe the financial management processes that local authorities should adopt. Instead, the Code requires that a local authority demonstrate that its processes satisfy the principles of good financial management for an authority of its size, responsibilities and circumstances. Good financial management is proportionate to the risks to the authority's financial sustainability posed by the twin pressures of scarce resources and the rising demands on services.

The principles have been designed to focus on an approach which will assist in determining whether, in applying standards of financial management a local authority is financially sustainable:

- Organisational **leadership** - demonstrating a clear strategic direction based on a vision in which financial management is embedded into organisational culture
- **Accountability** - based on medium term financial planning which drives the annual budget process supported by effective risk management, quality supporting data and whole life costs
- Financial management is undertaken with **transparency** at its core using consistent, meaningful and understandable data, reported frequently with evidence of periodic officer action and elected member decision making
- Adherence to professional **standards** is promoted by the leadership team and is evidenced.
- Sources of **assurance** are recognised as an effective tool mainstreamed into financial management and includes political scrutiny and the results of both external audit, internal audit and inspection.

- The long-term **sustainability** of local services is at the heart of all financial management process and is evidenced by prudent use of public resources.

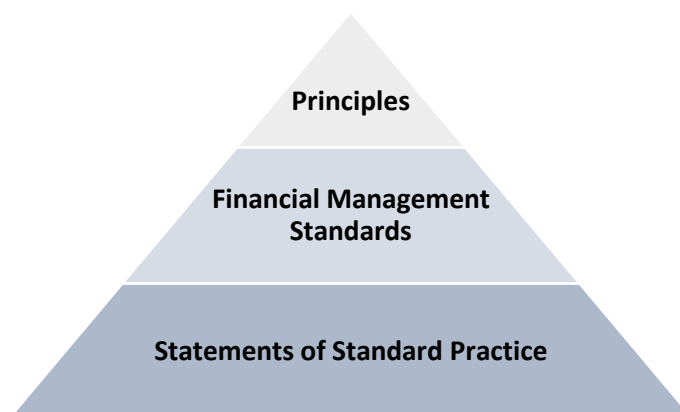
## THE STRUCTURE OF THE CODE

To enable authorities to test their conformity with the CIPFA Principles of Good Financial Management, the CIPFA FM Code translates these principles into:

- Financial Management Standards; and
- Statements of Standard Practice.

The principles set out are supported by defined financial management standards, the adherence to which will be by application of statements of standard practice.

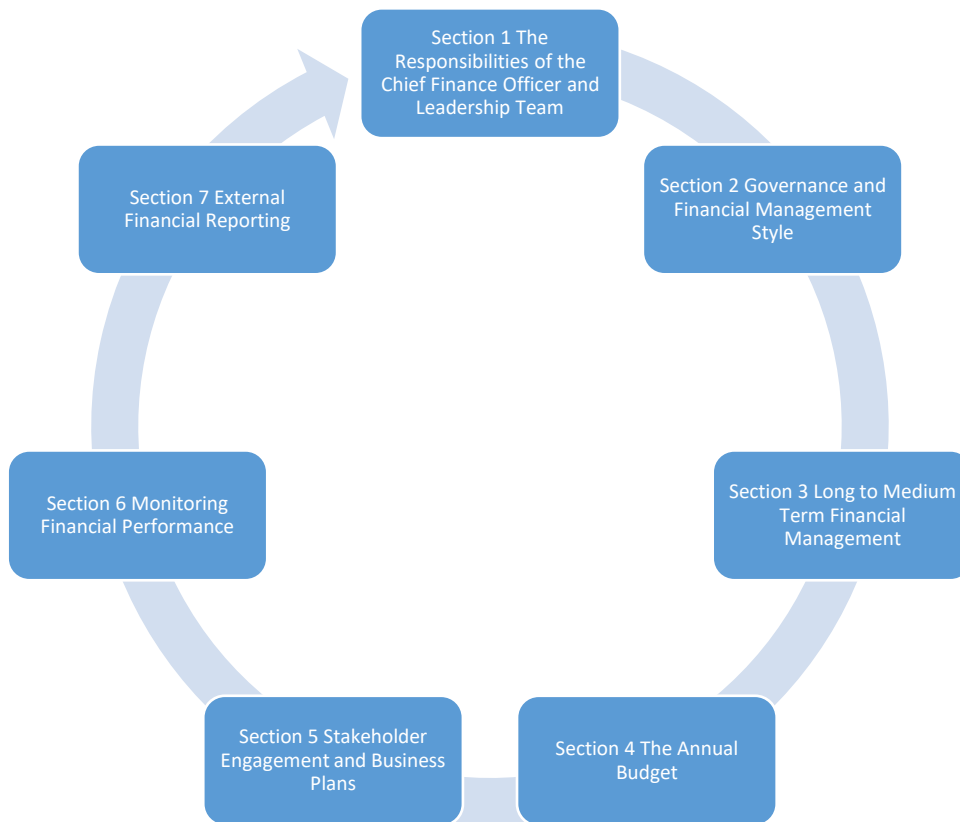
*[The Structure of the Code [p7], The CIPFA Financial Management Code [Consultation Version] © CIPFA]*



**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT STANDARDS AND STATEMENTS OF STANDARD PRACTICE**

CIPFA expects that compliance with the FM Code will typically be achieved by documenting compliance with the Statements of Standard Practice that underpin each of the Financial Management Standards. The Authority’s current level of compliance and any actions required to achieve full compliance are detailed on pages 4 to 16. This list is divided into sections, each of which forms part of what is referred to in the Code as the ‘Virtuous Management Cycle’:

*[The Virtuous Financial Management Cycle [p11], The CIPFA Financial Management Code [Consultation Version] © CIPFA]*



A chart showing how each of the Financial Management Standards support the Principles of Good Financial Management is shown on page 17.

## Assessment of Compliance with Statements of Standard Practice

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
	<b>Section 1 The Responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer</b>			
<b>A</b>	<b>The leadership team demonstrates that the services provided by the authority provide value for money.</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Compliance is demonstrated by the application of other Standards and Statements in the FM Code</b>	
<b>B</b>	<b>The authority complies with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government</b>	<b>H</b>		
B1	The Chief Finance Officer in a public service organisation is a key member of the leadership team, helping it to develop and implement strategy and to resource and deliver the organisation’s strategic objectives sustainably and in the public interest.	H	The Director of Finance and Assets is a key member of the Senior Management Team involved in developing and implementing strategy.	
B2	The Chief Finance Officer must be actively involved in, and able to bring influence to bear on, all material business decisions to ensure immediate and longer term implications, opportunities and risks are fully considered, and alignment with the organisation’s financial strategy.	H	All material decisions that require the approval of senior officers or Members must have first been considered by the Director of Finance and Assets.	
B3	The Chief Finance Officer must lead the promotion and delivery by the whole organisation of good financial management so	M	Good financial management is promoted throughout	Undertake a review of the skillsets of officers and elected members

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
	that public money is safeguarded at all times and used appropriately, economically, efficiently and effectively. The Chief Finance Officer should regularly review the skillsets of elected members and all officers with budget/financial management responsibility and ensure appropriate support is provided.		the Authority through regular communication. All managers with budgetary responsibility receive training and regular one-to-one meetings with a member of the Finance team.	and offer further training where required.
B4	The Chief Finance Officer must lead and direct a finance function that is resourced to be fit for purpose The Chief Finance Officer should regularly review the skillsets of all finance staff with senior budget/financial management responsibility and ensure ongoing appropriate support is provided. The ratio of qualified staff as a proportion of total finance staff ensures that the finance function has the necessary financial competence.	H	The Finance function is adequately resourced and fit for purpose. A training needs analysis is undertaken annually for all Finance staff. The majority of the team are either qualified or actively studying for a qualification.	
B5	The Chief Finance Officer must be professionally qualified and suitably experienced. The Chief Finance Officer must be able to demonstrate adherence to professional CPD requirements on an annual basis.	H	The Director of Finance and Assets is a Fellow of CIPFA with over fifteen years of experience in local government finance. CPD is demonstrated as part of their membership obligations.	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
B6	<p>The Chief Finance Officer should promote the highest standards of ethical behaviour in the conduct of financial management.</p> <p>Professionally qualified staff should evidence an ongoing commitment to the principles of objectivity, integrity professional behaviour, professional competence, dues care and confidentiality.</p>	M	Professionally qualified staff are required to adhere to the ethical standards of their professional bodies.	Review how to promote ethical financial management throughout the organisation.
B7	<p>To enable financially informed decision making:                      The Chief Finance Officer should be able to provide the leadership team with sound advice on the key principles of local government finance; and                      The Chief Finance Officer should be able to demonstrate a sound system which ensures the authority has access to high standards of technical financial advice.</p>	H	<p>The Director of Finance and Assets is an integral part of the leadership team and provides sound advice as part of this role.</p> <p>The authority also has access to technical advice through external contracts for funding, taxation, audit and pensions, as well as a forum within the Fire Finance Network to discuss national issues.</p>	
B8	<p>The chief finance officer should report explicitly on the affordability and risk associated with the capital strategy and where appropriate have access to specialised advice to enable them to reach their conclusions.</p>	H	The affordability of the capital strategy is an integral part of the medium-term financial plan.	
B9	<p>The chief finance officer must establish the reporting and monitoring processes, and integrate the treasury management indicators into the overall financial planning process.</p>	H	There is an established process for reporting and monitoring.	



	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
			Treasury Indicators are approved alongside the budget each year.	
B10	The Chief Finance Officer of Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) administering authorities satisfies the requirements of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Public Sector Pensions Finance Knowledge and Skills (2013 edition).	N/A	The LGPS is administered by Buckinghamshire Council.	
<b>Section 2 Governance and Management Style</b>				
<b>C</b>	<b>The leadership team demonstrates in its actions and behaviours responsibility for governance and internal control.</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>Internal controls are tested annually as part of the work of Internal Audit, with the most recent audit providing substantial assurance (the highest rating).</b>	
<b>D</b>	<b>The authority applies the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016)</b>	<b>H</b>		
D1	The authority maintains an effective audit committee	H	The Authority has an Overview and Audit Committee that meets at least three times per year.	
D2	The audit committee receives and monitors the implementation of internal and external audit recommendations. When threats to the financial sustainability of the authority are identified by auditors the audit committee should ensure that the recommendations are communicated to	H	An update on the progress of recommendations arising from audit reports is a standing agenda item for the	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
	the leadership team and that the committee are informed of the effectiveness of the leadership team’s response.		Overview and Audit Committee. All audit reports and recommendations are considered by the Senior Management Team.	
D3	The authority has a PSIAS conformant internal audit function	H	The internal audit function is provided by Buckinghamshire Council and is compliant with PSIAS.	
<b>E</b>	<b>The Financial Management Style of the authority supports financial sustainability</b>	<b>M</b>		
E1	The organisation has an effective framework of financial accountability that is clearly understood and applied throughout, from the political leaders, elected members to directors, finance officers and front line service managers.	H	Financial Regulations and Instructions provide a clear and understandable framework for accountability.	
E2	Finance teams and the organisation they support are actively committed to continuous improvement focused on efficient and effective delivery and organisational performance.	M	Finance act as effective business partners, working closely with cost centre managers.	Integrate performance and financial information with a focus on monitoring and achieving continuous improvement.
E3	Enabling transformation: the finance team have input into strategic and operational plans taking into account proactive risk management, clear strategic directions and focus-based outcomes	L	While Finance have input into strategic and operational plans, this is not necessarily	Implement a Programme Management Office and review internal

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
			always at an early enough stage to support and enable transformation.	governance arrangements that underpin this.
E4	Managers understand they are responsible for delivering services cost effectively and are held accountable for doing so. Financial literacy is diffused throughout the organisation so that decision takers understand and manage the financial implications of their decisions.	H	Budgets and financial approval limits are clearly delegated to cost centre managers. Meetings are held monthly with cost centre managers to ensure implications of decisions are understood and that managers are responsible for those decisions.	
E5	The financial management of the authority has been critically evaluated	H	Internal Audit reviews core financial controls on an annual basis and has also undertaken an audit of financial planning and budget monitoring and forecasting, both of which received substantial assurance.	
<b>Section 3: Long to Medium Term Financial Management</b>				
<b>F</b>	<b>The authority has carried out a credible and transparent Financial Resilience Assessment.</b>	<b>H</b>		

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
F1	Financial resilience is tested against best and worst case scenarios which cover a wide range of financial demographic and social challenges.	H	Financial resilience is tested against various scenarios within the Financial Strategy	
F2	The authority uses independent objective quantitative measures to assess the risks to its financial sustainability.	H	Key objective measures are used to assess financial stability and risks.	
F3	Decision making by the authority demonstrates a sound understanding of the risks associated with its strategic business partners.	M	Key partners are evaluated before entry into formal arrangements.	Key partners should be reviewed to ensure they maintain the same high standards of conduct with regard to financial administration and corporate governance that apply throughout the Authority and they contribute to the achievement of the Authority's objectives.
<b>G</b>	<b>The authority has a Long Term Financial Strategy for financial sustainability.</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>This is covered within the Financial Strategy</b>	
<b>H</b>	<b>The authority has a capital strategy aligned to its long term financial strategy</b>	<b>H</b>		
H1	The authority has an asset management plan that reviews the condition, sufficiency and suitability of assets in the light of business needs, and ambitions of the Medium - Long Term Financial Strategy	H	A condition survey is carried out on a regular basis by external consultants, which provides a total cost	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
	The plan should evidence rigorous assessment of asset portfolio in relation to service delivery.		and prioritisation to inform the Property Strategy and MTFP. Regular reviews of station/fleet numbers and locations are undertaken to assess the asset portfolio against service requirements.	
H2	The authority maintains processes to ensure that information about key assets and liabilities in its balance sheet is a sound and current platform for management action.	H	Information regarding whole-life cost of assets is maintained within the Redkite system	
<b>I</b>	<b>The authority complies with the CIPFA Prudential Code</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>Compliance is reported annually to the Fire Authority</b>	
<b>J</b>	<b>The authority has a rolling multi-year Medium Term Financial Plan</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>The MTFP is approved by the Fire Authority annually</b>	
<b>K</b>	<b>The authority has sustainable service plans that are consistent with its long term financial strategy and the medium term financial plan.</b>	<b>M</b>		
K1	The Medium Term Financial Plan should make reference to other organisational plans (e.g. workforce planning) and performance measures to demonstrate an alignment between service and financial planning.	M	Whilst other plans (e.g. workforce planning) are central to the MTFP, this link isn't explicit in published documents.	Included references to other plans within future MTFP papers.

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
K2	The authority has benchmarked the performance of its services against appropriate comparators.	H	The Authority uses CIPFA benchmarking services to consider performance against other fire and rescue services.	
K3	To inform the Leadership Team’s decisions the authority has a single document tracking progress in the delivery of planned savings over the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan.	M	The service has reported progress against its Efficiency Plan, but this was retrospective rather than on-going. Delivery of savings is included with the budget monitoring report, but these only consider the current financial year.	Include a more detailed savings tracker that covers the medium-term with the budget monitoring reports.
K4	The authority publishes it plans for the use of reserves over the over the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan The level of reserves at 31st March in any one year should not be fall below the level previously agreed. The authority should demonstrate adherence to the most recent guidance on reserves from CIPFA’s Local Authority Accounting Panel	H	The Authority has an approved Reserves Strategy that details plans for reserves over the period of the MTFP. This plan is compliant with CIPFA guidance.	
<b>Section 4: The Annual Budget</b>				
L	<b>The authority complies with its statutory obligations in respect of the budget setting process</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>All statutory obligations are fulfilled with the annual MTFP paper.</b>	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
<b>M</b>	<b>The budget report includes an assessment of its consistency with the current medium term financial plan and long term financial strategy.</b>	<b>M</b>		
M1	The annual report proposing the budget includes an analysis of the success/failures in achieving the spending plans of the previous year and of departures from the planned use of reserves and balances.	M	Whilst these are considered in other reports they are not part of the budget setting report.	Include these aspects in the annual budget setting report.
<b>N</b>	<b>The budget report includes a statement by the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the estimates and a statement of the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>This is included within the annual budget setting report.</b>	
	<b>Section 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Businesses Cases</b>			
<b>O</b>	<b>The authority has engaged with key stakeholders in developing its long term financial strategy, medium term financial plan and annual budget.</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>The long-term strategy is informed by the Public Safety Plan, which is consulted upon widely. It has also been through the internal governance process.</b>	
<b>P</b>	<b>The authority uses a documented option appraisal methodology to demonstrate the VFM of its decisions</b>	<b>H</b>		
P1	Option appraisal complies with IFAC/PAIB Project and Investment Appraisal for Sustainable Value Creation: Principles in Project and Investment Appraisal (Annex C to CIPFA FM Code)	M	Option appraisal complies with the principles, but this is not formally documented.	Ensure process makes explicit reference to these principles.

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
P2	The accounting treatment of material decisions is considered and demonstrated as part of the formal option appraisal process.	H	The accounting treatment and impact is determined at the time of the decision.	
Q	<b>The authority applies the principles contained in the CIPFA Service Reporting Code of Practice and utilises appropriate costing techniques in the development of business cases</b>	H	<b>SeRCoP principles are utilised consistently.</b>	
<b>Section 6: Performance Monitoring</b>				
R	<b>The authority takes action using reports enabling it to identify and correct emerging risks to its budget strategy and financial sustainability.</b>	M		
R1	Timely time financial and performance information is available to managers via the appropriate systems. The systems are engineered to provide relevant data at a sufficiently accurate level. The organisation ensures that information is appropriately tailored and streamlined to avoid the risk of 'data overload'.	H	Managers are able to access information on demand. Reports have been developed with budget holders to provide them with the correct level of information.	
R2	All Financial monitoring reports include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The name of the budget holder responsible for the information presented</li> <li>• Accruals based financial information</li> <li>• Include the approved budget against which monitoring is taking place.</li> <li>• A forecast for the remainder of the budget period,</li> <li>• Service performance information and</li> </ul>	M	Monitoring reports don't include other performance information.	Agree what other performance information may be required and include in monthly monitoring reports.



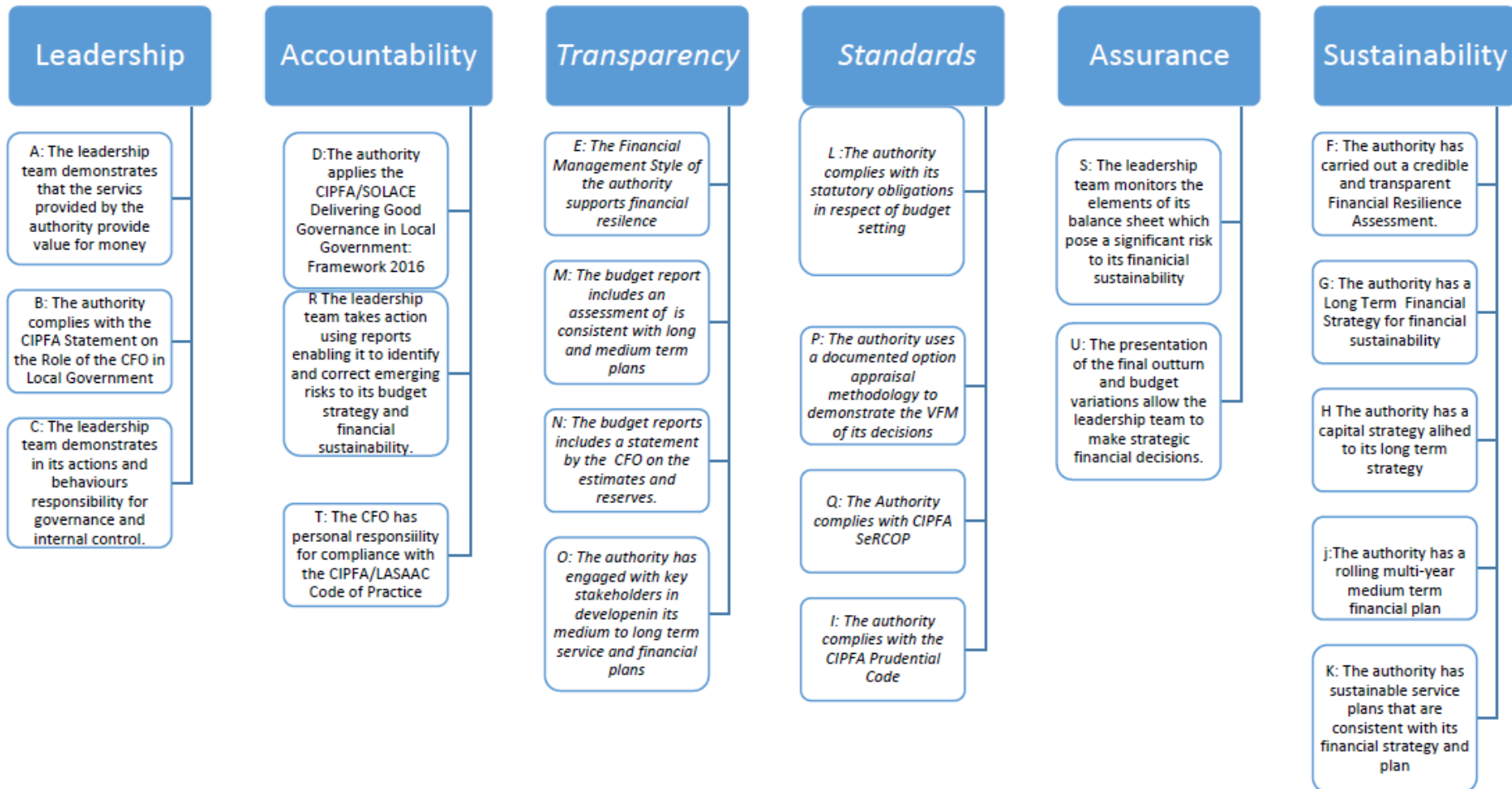
	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
	- is shown, for instance by reconciliations, to be consistent with the aggregate position for the authority.			
R3	<p>Financial monitoring reports for high risk budgets are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scrutinised by the leadership team of the organisation on (as a minimum) monthly basis.</li> </ul> <p>Financial monitoring reports for steady state/low risk budgets are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Received by budget holders on a monthly basis</li> <li>Received (in aggregate) by the leadership team on a regular basis (in aggregate) by the leadership team.</li> </ul>	M	The leadership team only consider budgets on a quarterly basis.	Distribute monthly monitoring reports, including a focus on high-risk budgets, to the Formal Senior Management Board on a monthly basis.
R4	The authority has arrangements which allow annual service budgets to be recalibrated in response to unforeseen developments.	H	In-year budget realignments can be approved by either the Director of Finance and Assets, Senior Management Team or Executive Committee (depending on value)	
R5	At the financial monitoring period end the leadership team receives a set of financial statements with forecast outturn for the year ahead	M	These are currently only received by the leadership team on a quarterly basis	Monthly reports are already produced. These are to be consolidated and circulated to the monthly Formal Senior Management Board meetings (see also R3).
R6	There are appropriate arrangements in place for reporting and managing the financial performance of each of the organisation’s delivery partnerships and collaborative arrangements.	H	Thames Valley collaborative arrangements are overseen by Officer	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
			and Member steering groups and/or committees. Partnerships are reported to the Overview and Audit Committee annually.	
R7	There are appropriate arrangements in place for the project management and cost control of capital projects.	H	Capital projects are monitored on a monthly basis.	
<b>S</b>	<b>The authority monitors the elements of its balance sheet which pose a significant risk to its financial stability</b>	<b>H</b>		
S1	Unplanned and planned use of reserves are reported [quarterly] to the management team of the organisation and to Council.	M	Movements in reserves are reported quarterly, although the report does not explicitly distinguish between planned and unplanned movements in reserves.	The budget monitoring report should make explicit the distinction between planned and unplanned movements in reserves.
S2	Management accounts include either a full balance sheet or an appropriate level of balance sheet information to meet business needs and evidence of monitoring of material items	H	Management accounts include reserves, and where relevant, stock balances.	
<b>Section 7 External Financial Reporting</b>				
<b>T</b>	<b>The Chief Finance Officer has personal responsibility for ensuring that the statutory accounts provided to the local authority comply with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>The annual accounts are reviewed and signed by the Director of Finance and Assets</b>	

	Section/Financial Management Standard/Statement of Standard Practice	Level of Compliance (H/M/L)	Current Treatment	Further Action (if required)
U	The presentation of the final outturn figures and variations from budget allow the leadership team to make strategic financial decisions.	H	An annual report is presented that informs strategic decision making.	

## Mapping of CIPFA summarised Financial Management Standards onto CIPFA Principles of Good Financial Management

[p10, The CIPFA Financial Management Code [Consultation Version] © CIPFA]



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority



<b>MEETING</b>	Fire Authority
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	9 December 2020
<b>OFFICER</b>	Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE
<b>SUBJECT OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Independent Persons</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	This report recommends the appointment of Independent Persons (IPs) by the Authority following a recruitment process undertaken by Milton Keynes Council (MKC). Those appointed by MKC were approached and four of them wish to be considered to be appointed by the Authority. The appointment of the Independent Persons will be for a period of four years, ending no later than 30 September 2024, to align with the IPs' maximum terms with Milton Keynes
<b>ACTION</b>	Decision
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	It is recommended that the following persons be appointed to serve as Independent Persons for the Authority until 30 September 2024: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr Vasco Fernandes</li> <li>2. Chris Fogden</li> <li>3. John Jones</li> <li>4. Deborah Maggs</li> </ol>
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	<p>The recommendations achieve compliance with the Localism Act 2011 which requires the Authority to have in place arrangements for the determination of complaints against its Members which must include the appointment by the Authority of at least one IP.</p> <p>An IP's views are to be sought and taken into account by the Authority before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate; and an IP's views may be sought by the Authority in relation to the allegation but also by a Member who is the subject of an allegation.</p> <p>Due to the dual role of an IP of adviser to both the Authority and a Member, the Authority would need to appoint at least two IPs to avoid a conflict of interests. The pool of IPs provides resilience in the event of unavailability (including resignations)</p>

	<p>during the next four years to mitigate the need to undertake a further recruitment and appointment process.</p> <p>In its <a href="#">Local Government Ethical Standards Report, published 30 January 2019</a> the Committee on Standards in Public Life stated (p.54), "it is clear that a positive relationship with the local authority's Monitoring Officer is crucial to being able to perform the role effectively. This relationship involves a mutual recognition of roles: on the one hand, recognising that the Monitoring Officer has specific responsibility and accountability for the standards process in an authority, and on the other that the Independent Person can bring a valuable external and impartial perspective that can assure and enhance the fairness of the process."</p>
<p><b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b></p>	<p>The costs incurred in the recruitment process (advertising, short listing, and interviewing) were borne by MKC.</p> <p>The arrangement in place since 2012 was for the IPs to be on a retainer of £300 per annum, with a sum of £50 (together with reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses) in the event that they are called upon to assist one of the authorities.</p> <p>The current pool of applicants have accepted the roles with an increase from £50 to £75 in the event that a case is referred to one of them (together with reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses). Whilst the total retainer is yet to be fixed, subject to any subsequent agreement with Luton Borough Council, the proportion of the annual retainer payable to them from the Authority has been fixed at £150 per annum.</p>
<p><b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b></p>	<p>Since the introduction of section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, the Authority has been required to have in place at least one IP (a) whose views are to be sought, and taken into account, by the Authority before it makes its decision on an allegation of a breach of its Code of Conduct that it has decided to investigate, and (b) whose views may be sought (i) by the Authority and (ii) by a Member of the Authority if that person's behaviour is the subject of an allegation.</p> <p>A person may not be appointed as an IP unless (i) the vacancy has been advertised, (ii) the person has submitted an application to fill the vacancy to the authority, and (iii) the person's appointment has been approved by the meeting of the full Authority.</p> <p>No person can be appointed as an IP if he or she has been a Member or co-opted Member of the Authority within the five years preceding the date of the</p>

	<p>appointment.</p> <p>The IP has no formal powers, and whilst their views must be 'taken into account', they do not have a decisive say on the outcome of an investigation.</p>
<b>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE</b>	<p>The obligations for these arrangements under the Localism Act 2011 do not apply to the other blue light services (i.e. Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service).</p>
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	<p>No issues arising.</p>
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</b>	<p>Recruitment was undertaken by MKC and in compliance with its policies and its obligations as a public body under equalities legislation and with the criteria for independent persons which are set out in the Localism Act 2011.</p> <p>The role was advertised on MKC's website for a period of around three weeks, supported by a social media campaign. Seven completed application forms were received before the deadline.</p> <p>A shortlisting process was undertaken by the MKC Monitoring Officer and Chairman of MKC's Standards Committee, before references were taken up, prior to interview and selection.</p>
<b>USE OF RESOURCES</b>	<p>A job specification, application form and recruitment pack were prepared by MKC and the positions were advertised on MKC's website between 10–28 August 2020.</p> <p>Shortlisting and interviews were undertaken in the period 1–11 September 2020. The interview panel comprised the Chair and Vice-Chairs of MKC's Standards Committee.</p>
<b>PROVENANCE SECTION &amp; BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<p>Three of the proposed IPs were in the previous pool of five IPs appointed in 2016.</p> <p>Overview and Audit Committee Meeting – 14 September 2016 (Item 10):  <a href="https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overviewandauditcommittee140916agendapack.pdf/">https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overviewandauditcommittee140916agendapack.pdf/</a></p> <p>Minutes of the Authority Meeting – 14 December 2016  <a href="https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/fire_a_uthority_agenda_141216.pdf/">https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/fire_a_uthority_agenda_141216.pdf/</a></p> <p>The Authority has previously participated in the joint recruitment of IPs since their introduction by the Localism Act 2011, with exercises in 2012 and 2016 including with the, then, Bedfordshire &amp; Luton Combined Fire Authority. Some participating authorities have subsequently taken different approaches.</p>

Independent Persons

	<a href="#">Local Government Ethical Standards Report, published 30 January 2019</a>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	Appendix A – Pen profiles of the proposed Independent Persons
<b>TIME REQUIRED</b>	5 minutes
<b>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</b>	Katie Nellist <a href="mailto:knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk">knellist@bucksfire.gov.uk</a> 07799 098948



### **1. Dr Vasco Fernandes**

An Independent Person for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority until 31 October 2020.

Currently an Independent Person for Milton Keynes, Luton, and Central Bedfordshire Councils, Dr Fernandes is a retired Consultant Physician with extensive experience at a senior clinical and management level in Public Health and Substance Misuse and was Associate Medical Director of the MK NHS Community Health Services from 2001-2007.

Dr Fernandes is currently a Vice President of the MK Community Foundation and served as the Honorary President of the MK Equality Council From 1993 to 2010.

### **2. Chris Fogden**

An Independent Person for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority until 31 October 2020.

Currently an Independent Person for Luton and Central Bedfordshire Councils, Chris was also the Independent Chair of MK Council's Standards Committee for 12 years and served on the Authority's Standards Committee until 2012.

A former Magistrate with 24 years' experience and over 10 years' service as an Independent Town Councillor (including three years as Mayor of Buckingham), Chris currently volunteers at Woodhill Prison and Milton Keynes Citizens Advice Bureau.

### **3. John Jones**

An Independent Person for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority until 31 October 2020.

Currently an Independent Person for Milton Keynes, Luton, and Central Bedfordshire Councils, John was involved in setting up a forum of Independent Persons, to share experience and expertise during the transition to the current standards regime. John also serves as an Independent Panel Member for 6 police forces in the eastern region, dealing with gross misconduct allegations against police officers.

A retired company director, John served as a magistrate for over 20 years and is now Lead Governor of a large mental health Foundation Trust, serving Essex, Suffolk and Bedfordshire. John is also an Independent Chair of Stage 3 Reviews for complaints in Children's Services and a Member of the NHS Providers Governor Advisory Committee representing mental health.

### **4. Deborah Maggs**

Currently an Independent Person for Bedford Borough Council and previously at Central Bedfordshire Council, Deborah is currently working as a language teacher at Henlow Academy. With 30 years' service at the Home Office, Deborah has experience of developing governance processes and had responsibility for leading on Parliamentary relations on EU matters.

A Magistrate with 25 years' experience and trained mediator, Deborah is also currently the Chair of the Trustees of Bedfordshire YMCA.



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

<b>MEETING</b>	Fire Authority
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	9 December 2020
<b>OFFICER</b>	Calum Bell, Head of Protection and Assurance
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Councillor Keith McLean
<b>SUBJECT OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>Annual Health, Safety and Well-being Report 2019/20</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Health, Safety and Well-being performance report – 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BFRS Health and Safety achievements</li> <li>• Statistical overview</li> <li>• COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>• Blue Light Hub</li> <li>• Employee well-being</li> </ul>
<b>ACTION</b>	Noting.
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	It is recommended that the Service's performance, detailed in the Annual Health, Safety and Well-being Report 2019/20, be noted.
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>	Risk management involves understanding, analysing and addressing risk to ensure the Service can achieve its objectives. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges in terms of managing the associated risks, in what has been and remains uncharted territory. Robust measures are in place across all Authority sites to mitigate the risks to staff, visitors and contractors and to protect our staff when they are in the community, so far as is 'reasonably practicable'.
<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	<p>If risks are not managed and controlled effectively, they can potentially lead to serious injuries and breaches of legislation which can have significant financial implications by way of claims or fines for the Authority. In terms of the pandemic, should the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) receive a complaint from an employee, they will carry out an investigation and will issue fines to organisations who do not have the required social distancing, personal hygiene and cleaning regimes in place. There is also the potential for reputational damage.</p> <p>The number and severity of Health &amp; Safety incidents</p>

	also has a direct impact on insurance premium expenditure. At present the Authority has a good record in this regard with premiums being held at a level proportionate to the risk profile.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	The safety management system is well embedded throughout the Service and its performance is subject to regular monitoring and review in order to ensure the health, safety and well-being of the Authority's employees, contractors, visitors and the communities it serves, as well as ensuring compliance with legislation. If this scrutiny does not take place, there is the potential for a breach of health and safety legislation. The pandemic has initiated the implementation of additional legislation by the Government which the Service is working towards compliance with. It has also highlighted the importance of adherence to Section 2 (Employer responsibilities) and Section 7 (Employee responsibilities) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
<b>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE</b>	Collaboration work continues with other FRSs in the South East region and the Fire and Rescue Risk Group amongst others. This report highlights the on-going collaboration work.
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	Since February 2020 the primary focus has been to mitigate the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. New procedures and guidance for staff have been implemented based on the Government's Working Safely with COVID-19 documents. Risk assessments have been written and existing ones reviewed and additional measures have been put in place to support staff in terms of mental health and well-being. All authority stations and sites are 'COVID Secure'. Normal work activities and existing projects have continued wherever possible.
<b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</b>	The data collected as part of personal injury safety events is name, date of birth and gender. Where the number of personal injury safety events is so low that there is the potential for affected individuals to be identified, they are reported generically rather than specifically.
<b>USE OF RESOURCES</b>	The Authority remains committed to having a dedicated Health, Safety and Well-being team and to their on-going development. This has proved crucial during the pandemic which has brought ever increasing workloads. Having a third person in the department has been invaluable as it has meant that most workstreams have been able to continue.
<b>PROVENANCE SECTION</b>	This is the annual health, safety and well-being report detailing performance and progress against objectives

<p><b>&amp; BACKGROUND PAPERS</b></p>	<p>set for the year 2019-20. A link to the previous year's report is provided below. Some of the statistical information contained in the report is detailed in the six-monthly reports presented to the Performance Management Board.</p> <p><a href="#">Health, Safety and Well-being report 2018-19</a></p>
<p><b>APPENDICES</b></p>	<p>Appendix A: Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report 2019-20</p>
<p><b>TIME REQUIRED</b></p>	<p>15 minutes</p>
<p><b>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</b></p>	<p>Alison Chart  <a href="mailto:achart@bucksfire.gov.uk">achart@bucksfire.gov.uk</a>                      01296 744490</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

Health, Safety and Well-being



# Annual Report

2019-20



## **Contents:**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
Forewords	3
Executive summary	4
COVID-19 pandemic	5
Our performance at a glance	7
Performance overview	8
Station Improvement planning	10
Employee Well-being	11
Blue Light Hub	16
Management of risk	17
Working with others	20
Health and Safety training	21
Performance indicators	22
 Appendix:	
1. BFRS Health and Safety statistics	24



# Forewords

*"I am very pleased to be writing this foreword to the annual Health, Safety and Well-being report for 2019-20. Since my first appointment to the Fire Authority in 2016 I have always been interested and concerned about the welfare of the most important asset the Service has, its people. Since taking on the role of Lead Member in July 2020 I have spent time shadowing members of the Health and Safety department, as well as discussing with them and other members of staff how best we can protect and support our staff at all times, whilst still providing what the public expect from a front-line emergency service.*

Councillor Keith McLean  
Lead Member for Health, Safety and Well-being  
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

*"The Covid-19 global pandemic has presented many different challenges for us in terms of implementing appropriate measures to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and well-being of our staff, visitors, contractors and the communities we serve. Although these are unprecedented times, they have also presented us with the opportunity to work in different ways, something that has been embraced by all staff and looks set to continue post pandemic. I am pleased to confirm that all of our sites have been certified as 'COVID Secure'.*

Jason Thelwell  
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive  
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

# Executive summary

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** The Service has implemented a range of measures to comply with Government guidance for *Working Safely with COVID-19* in terms of social distancing, maximum occupancy, personal hygiene and cleaning regimes which are audited and monitored. Staff are kept informed of all changes via a robust communications programme in this ever-evolving situation.

**Our performance:** The safety event statistics for the year 2019/20 identify that there has been a decrease in the number of events in four of the seven areas. A reduction in three of the areas is seen as a positive trend. However, the fourth area is a decrease in the number of 'near misses' reported which is a negative outcome as this highlights a downturn in the proactive reporting – where no injury or loss/damage has been sustained. Two areas remain at the same number as 2018/19 and there has been an increase in one area – vehicle damage.

**Station Improvement Planning:** An 'audit' style process has been piloted over the past six months across fire stations to ensure that there is an improvement in the way station personnel perform. The aim of the process is to identify key areas which are either a risk or have been seen to be areas of weakness and test the station personnel against what the Service expects from them in these areas.

**Employee Well-being:** The current focus of the Attendance Management Monitoring Group (AMMG) is on the structure of the group and how the Service captures and reports absence and whether there are ways this could be enhanced.

Overall, sickness absence reduced in 2019/20 for both On-Call and Wholetime staff groups when compared to 2018/19. Support staff, however, saw a significant increase from 4.9 days per person in 2018/19 to 7.3 days per person in 2019/20.

**Blue Light Hub:** Landlord responsibilities for two partner agencies simultaneously, South Central Ambulance (SCAS) and Thames Valley Police (TVP), is a new role for the Service. Work has been ongoing to ensure that risk assessments, including control of hazardous substances, general and fire risk assessments are in place and have been shared.

**Working with others:** Work continues with our National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Health and Safety and South East Region colleagues, Thames Valley Health and Safety counterparts and with the members of the Fire and Rescue Risk Group.

# COVID-19 pandemic

When the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in the UK at the end of January 2020, a Pandemic Planning Group consisting of key stakeholders was convened which included the Health and Safety Manager.

With rapidly evolving guidance from the Government, work commenced on communications with all staff and implementing the COVID-19 measures (personal hygiene, cleaning regimes, limitations on maximum occupancy and social distancing) across all stations and sites.

Occupancy assessments were carried out which resulted in a 50% reduction in numbers of persons able to occupy rooms, desks etc. Seating plans and guidance was issued to staff to ensure they were aware of what was required of them. This guidance has been reiterated regularly.

The Health and Safety department conducted a review of existing risk assessments to ensure the risks of COVID-19 were captured and new risk assessments were written for 'Working Safely with COVID-19' and were based on the Government guidance and localised to Service requirements.

The Tripartite Agreement/s (agreement between the Fire & Rescue Services National Employers, the Fire Brigades Union and the National Fire Chiefs Council) supported new and additional activities for the Service. Examples of these activities are driving ambulances, training care home staff in the donning and doffing of PPE safely, assisting in the storage and dispatch of PPE, amongst others. This meant that risk assessments had to be written to capture the risks and control measures required to protect personnel.

During lockdown, staff working from home and those who were shielding were contacted regularly by their line manager to check on their welfare and reminded of the support networks available to them should they feel isolated or felt that their mental health and well-being may be at risk.

At the end of lockdown and shielding a 'Supporting staff back into the workplace' aide memoire was developed which provided the latest position on the measures implemented, adjustments necessary etc. in a bid to allay concerns and reassure staff. This was completed by both the individual and line manager.

The Government introduced 5 steps that organisations needed to have in place to be deemed 'COVID Secure'. They also introduced certificates to display once these measures were in place and embedded.

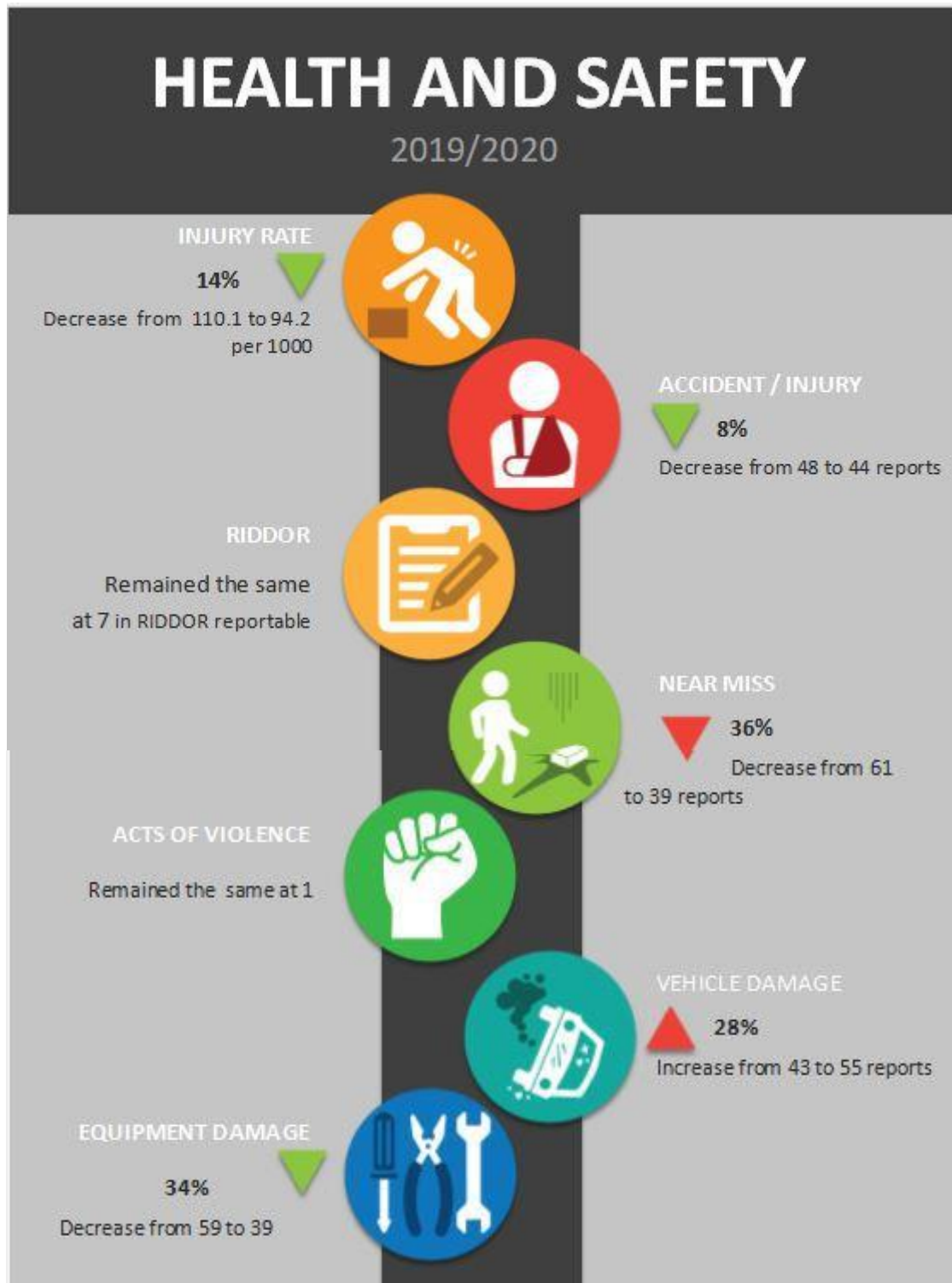
The Health and Safety department created a COVID-19 audit form and conducted a programme of spot audits across all stations and sites to identify if the measures were being implemented and adhered to. Any breaches and

findings were highlighted to the Station Commander/site manager for rectification.

It is pleasing to note that all stations and sites are now COVID Secure. To ensure ongoing compliance with the requirements, monthly inspections will be carried out by the Station Commander/site manager with the Health and Safety department conducting spot audits.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have stated that, should they receive a complaint from an employee concerned about the lack of measures in place in their organisation, they will carry out an investigation. One of the processes they will be looking for is the monitoring of the ongoing compliance with the measures. To ensure this is in place in this Service, the Health and Safety department have created a monthly inspection form, an extension of the COVID-19 audit form, which is to be completed by the Station Commander/site manager and returned to the Health and Safety department. This provides evidence and an audit trail should the HSE wish to come into the Service. It also provides assurance to the Authority that the Service is doing all it can to ensure compliance.

# Our performance at a glance



# Performance overview

In 2019/20 the number of incidents attended was 9,073 and the number of mobilisations was 9,827. These figures do not include co-responding incidents or officer mobilisations. Overall there have been reductions in personal injury and equipment safety events, an increase in the number of vehicle safety events and the number of events that come under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) and Acts of violence have remained the same – please see *'Our performance at a glance'* on page five. The number of 'near-miss' reports has decreased this year from 61 to 39. An overview of the figures is provided below.

**Personal injury:** The *injury rate* is determined by calculating the number of events reported; divided by the number of employees and multiplied by 100,000 as set out by the HSE. For the year 2019/20 the *injury rate* is 94.2 per 1000 employees compared to 110.1 in 2018/19 which is a significant reduction. In terms of the actual numbers of personal injury safety events, there has been a decrease from 48 in 2018/19 to 44 in 2019/20.

The severity of a safety event is determined by multiplying the 'likelihood' of the safety event occurring again by the 'severity' of the injury sustained. The resulting figure is known as the risk factor score:

- 1 to 5 is deemed a minor event
- 6 to 12 is moderate and
- 15 to 25 is a major event

Of the 44 personal injury safety events, 33 have been recorded as minor in nature and 11 as moderate.

Six of the 11 were musculoskeletal injuries primarily sustained by the latest cohort of apprentices who were using muscle groups in different ways and were perhaps not as fit as they should have been. Two were cuts of a moderate nature and the remaining three were other separate injuries which cannot be specified due to GDPR legislation.

Serious workplace injuries, occupational diseases and specified dangerous occurrences are reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR.

The number of RIDDOR reportable events for 2019/20 is seven, the same as in 2018/19. Analysis of these events resulted in:

- One dangerous occurrence
- Six 'over 7 day' sickness absences.

Equipment damage safety events has seen a significant decrease of 34 per cent, with 39 safety events compared to 59 in 2018/19. 34 of these were of a minor nature and 5 were moderate. Analysis carried out by the Health and Safety department identified that the moderate events were isolated incidents with no trends highlighted from them. One of these, however, resulted in a 'dangerous occurrence' which was reported under the RIDDOR requirements (as stated above).

2019/20 has seen a significant increase in the number of vehicle safety events with 55 safety events compared to 43 in 2018/19. 42 were of a minor nature and 13 were moderate. Four of these were slow speed manoeuvres and three were attributable to identifying vehicle damage sometime after the damage had occurred. The Health and Safety department have issued a communication reminding all staff of the importance of carrying out pre and post use checks of vehicles and equipment and the requirement to report damage as soon as practically possible after it has occurred. The remaining six were separate safety events which, again, cannot be specified due to GDPR legislation.

In the category "Acts of violence against firefighters"; there was only one incident of note in 2019/20 which was the same for the year 2018/19. It is important to bear in mind that, whilst these are very low figures, all acts of violence against staff are taken seriously and reported to the police.

"Near-misses" (where there has been no injury or financial loss) are a vital part of risk management. Proactive reporting is key to reducing the number of safety events (reactive reporting) as an investigation can be carried out and recommendations actioned to ensure safety events of a similar type do not occur in the future.

For the year 2019/20 there has been a significant decrease in the number of "near-miss" reports of 39 compared to 61 in 2018/19. This result highlights the need to constantly remind staff to report events that may seem trivial, as there has been no injury or financial loss, in order to improve performance.

The performance statistical data received from the Home Office for 2019/20 is displayed as league tables of fire and rescue services with similar numbers of employees in order to provide a more accurate comparison of performance between BFRS and its peers. This performance relates solely to operational personnel.

There has been an increase in the **total number of persons injured** from 36 in 2018/19 to 38 in 2019/20. Of these 20 occurred at training events, 11 during routine activities and 7 at operational incidents. Wholetime firefighters have been most affected with 16 injuries. The remaining injuries affected 9 Apprentice Firefighters, 5 On-Call Firefighters, 2 Flexible Firefighters and 6 during bank shift activities.

The total number of **injuries at fires** has decreased from six in 2018/19 to five in 2019/20 resulting in BFRS remaining in the top three of the National Peer Group Performance Comparison table detailed in Appendix 1.

The total number of **injuries at special service calls** has increased from one to two, resulting in BFRS remaining top of the peer table.

In terms of **injuries during routine activities** there has been an increase of one from 10 in 2018/19 to 11 in 2019/20. This has resulted in BFRS moving from fifth position to seventh. The small number of events and increase of one in this year compared to last, has a negative impact on the position that BFRS hold in the peer table.

**Injuries over 7-day absence** figures have remained the same as last year at six. BFRS have retained fourth position in the peer table.

There has been an increase in the total number of **injuries during training events** from 19 in 2018/19 to 20 in 2019/20, resulting in BFRS retaining fifth position for the third year running.

Health and safety performance is reported quarterly at the Health, Safety and Well-being Committee chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Key stakeholders, the representative bodies and the Representative of Employees are invited to attend these meetings. Governance is via the Performance and Strategic Management Boards on a six-monthly basis. The reports include statistical data on the number and type of safety events occurring at operational incidents, training and routine activities and the number and types of safety events involving Support staff.

## Station Improvement Planning

As a result of the development of an 'audit style' process to ensure there is an improvement in the way station personnel perform and simultaneously provide evidence for how they are improving, a pilot has been carried out across fire stations over the past six months. This process has been through several iterations and continues to evolve but early indications are that crews have engaged in the process and the outcomes of each 'audit' carried out so far have been positive.

The aim of the process is to identify key areas which are either a risk or have been seen to be areas of weakness and test the station personnel against what the Service expects from them in these areas.

The overall objective is to see improvement through social incentives, immediate reward and progress monitoring which will be achieved through ensuring the



process is one of transparency, positivity and allowing the stations to maintain an element of control.

There is a range of subjects that will be covered in this improvement programme including health and safety. In association with the Health and Safety department, a range of health and safety matters were determined which would be discussed with station personnel to identify their level of understanding and expected behaviours. These subjects include:

- Employee health and safety responsibilities
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on the incident ground
- Slow speed manoeuvring
- Non-operational risk assessments
- Hazard reporting
- COVID-19
- Dynamic Risk Assessments (DRAs) and Analytical Risk Assessments (ARAs) – Supervisory Managers only
- Safety events and 'near-miss' reporting

The Health and Safety department will be attending stations to observe how the process works with a view to conducting these 'audits' moving forwards to provide an overall consistent approach to the improvement plan.

Over a period of time all stations and watches will be visited providing an overview of how they are all performing and where there are areas of weakness.

As the final part of the process, from early 2021 there will be a greater emphasis on the robustness in challenging the behaviours and levels of understanding amongst station personnel to highlight that the Service takes this process very seriously. This will invariably mean that there will be additional work for the Health and Safety department in terms of following up on identified failures and then to challenge response on the actions taken to deal with these.

## Employee Well-being

### **Attendance Management**

The current focus of the Attendance Management Monitoring Group (AMMG) is on the structure of the group and how the Service captures and reports absence and whether there are ways this could be enhanced.

Overall, sickness absence reduced in 2019/20 for both On-Call and Wholetime staff groups when compared to 2018/19. Support staff, however, saw an increase for the year period, from 4.9 days per person in 2018/19 to 7.3 days per person in 2019/20. This was mainly due to an increase in both long and short-term sickness over the period.

The Human Resources department continue to work closely with managers to support employees back to work, this includes adherence to the Attendance Management procedure, referrals to Occupational Health, Welfare Officer and Employee Relations support, Employee Assistance Programme and a range of other initiatives relevant to each individual case.

Wholetime staff sickness levels decreased for the same period, from 10.4 days per person in 2018/19 to 8.7 per person in 2019/20.

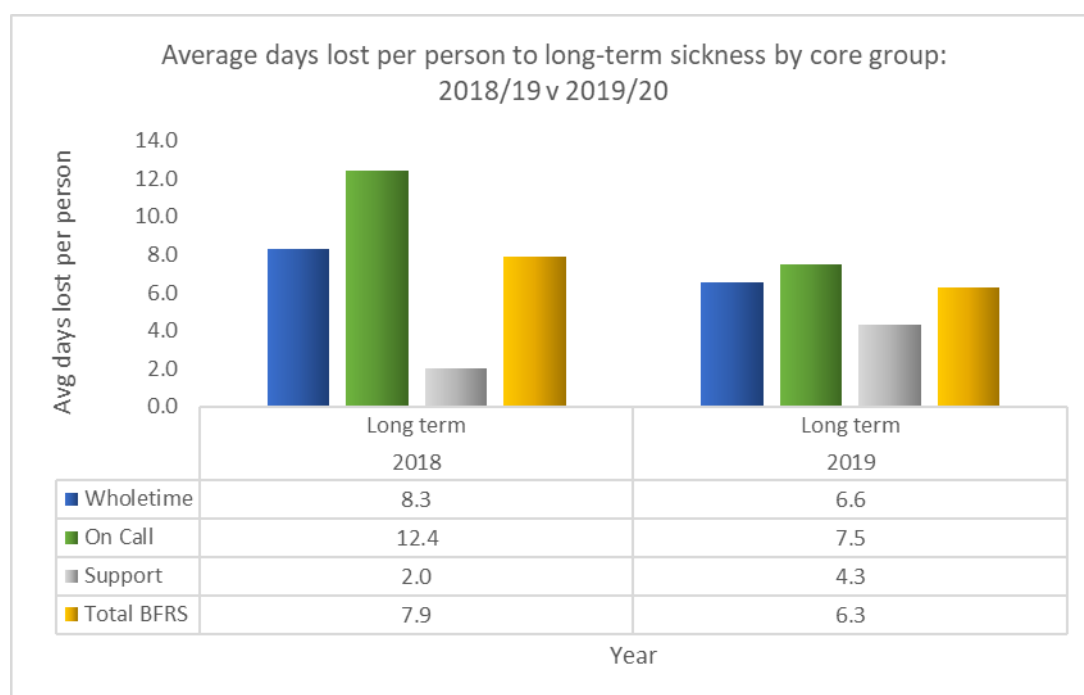
On Call staff absence levels dropped to 10.1 days lost per person, which was a decrease compared to 2018/19 where the average was 14.9 days per person.

However, considering sickness absence overall for all three staff groups, levels overall at BFRS fell by 1.6 days per person in 2019/20 to 8.7 days, compared to 10.3 days per person in 2018/19.

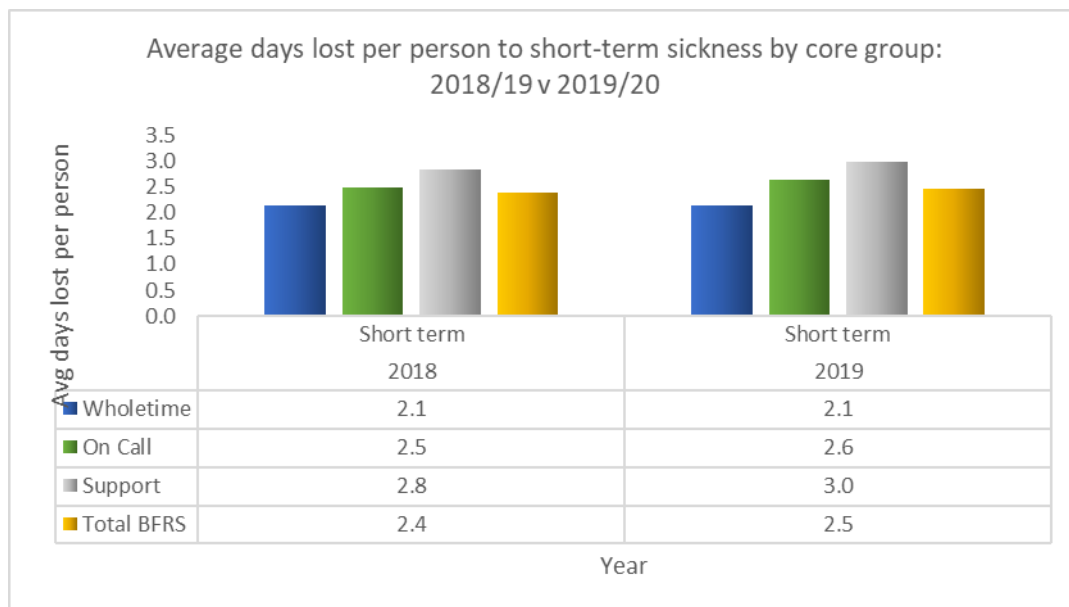
### Long-term v short-term sickness absence

Long-term sickness is classed as any single period of 28 or more calendar days. All staff groups saw a decline in the number of days per person lost to long-term sickness in 2019/20 in comparison to 2018/19, with the exception of Support staff.

Please see graphs below.



Days lost to short-term sickness remained the same as in 2018/19 for Wholetime staff, or saw a minor increase for the other staff groups, and BFRS as a total.



The following table outlines the fact that musculoskeletal was the top sickness reason for all groups in 2019/20, with stress, second across the board.

Top 3 sickness reasons	Wholetime	Support	On Call	BFRS total
1	Musculo Skeletal (72.8%)	Musculo Skeletal (37.4%)	Musculo Skeletal (53.2%)	Musculo Skeletal (60%)
2	Stress (9.6%)	Stress (28.5%)	Stress (9.9%)	Stress (13.5%)
3	Minor illness (4.8%)	Minor illness (10.7%)	Hospital/ Post-Operative (8.4%)	Minor illness (5.1%)

The percentage in each group’s column for each of the top three reasons is a percentage of the total sickness absence for each group. E.g. Musculoskeletal accounts for 72.8% of all Wholetime, 37.4% of all Support staff and 53.2% of all On-call sickness absence.

The BFRS total column identifies that Musculoskeletal accounts for 60% of all sickness absence across the organisation, stress 13.5% and minor illnesses (colds, flu, viral infections) 5.1%.

Whilst stress is relatively low in comparison it needs to be monitored closely, particularly as it is the second top sickness reason across all groups and for the organisation as a whole.

The Well-being group is actively considering why this may be happening and looking at how the Service can work proactively to reduce the likelihood of stress occurring in the workplace rather than simply react to cases. This is a wider piece of work involving many stakeholders. Progress will be reported on regularly through the appropriate governance board.

According to our Occupational Health providers, musculoskeletal accounted for 55% of referrals in 2019/20. Mental health was second with 10% and injury/fracture third with 8%.

The current Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which forms part of the Occupational Health contract, commenced on 1st April 2019. In 2019/20 the annualised utilisation for BFRS was 10.9% calculated as counselling and advice calls against the employee headcount.

Counselling calls make up 98.3% of all calls received. Depression was the most common reason, accounting for 22% of the overall counselling engagement.

The online portal received a total of 112 hits within this reporting period. However, there were no online counselling consultations during the reporting period.

There were 13 referrals resulting in face-to-face consultations which equated to 62 sessions. Four referrals were on a telephone counselling basis with 13 sessions delivered.

All employees within the Service have a role to play in minimising and managing stress.

Employees are encouraged to seek assistance from their line manager or others as appropriate if they are or potentially could be suffering from stress. If an individual has any concerns about a colleague who they feel may be suffering or are likely to be suffering from stress they raise these with their line manager, or appropriate alternative such as the Welfare Officer.

When a manager identifies that an employee is suffering from stress, they meet with the individual and complete an individual stress audit, as per the Service's Stress in the Workplace procedure. Where it is not possible or appropriate for

the manager to undertake the stress audit, Human Resources, the Welfare Officer or Occupational Health will undertake the audit.

Where an employee has been away from work for any period of time as a result of any stress related factors, a return to work stress audit will be completed to ensure that the necessary adjustments have been made to reduce the individual's stress. Providing employees with a clear understanding of what the return to work will entail will go a long way towards alleviating any potential anxiety before returning back to work following a period of absence. A telephone call/meeting with a member of Human Resources /Welfare Officer or the line manager to discuss important details about the return and potential impacts on work performance or team can be extremely helpful.

To aid with the employee's reintegration into the workplace to ensure a smooth transition, a Wellness Action Plan should be completed. This details any support mechanisms required to maintain their health at work. The Wellness Action Plan is designed to mitigate, reduce or remove the individual's stress.

If an individual has any concerns about someone they can bring this to the attention of Human Resources, the Welfare Officer, or Mental Health Champions or Mental Health First Aiders in order to promote assistance and intervention as necessary.

Human Resources provides support to employees via Occupational Health, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the Welfare Support Officer, providing guidance and assistance for both managers and individuals when dealing with stress and psychological health issues.

Occupational Health provide specialist advice to employees and will refer to specialist counsellors or agencies as required.

The Employee Assistance Programme – via Health Assured, a free, confidential service available online or by phone, which offers expert advice, information and support to employees 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition, Health Assured publish monthly newsletters, a health and well-being mobile app which offers a range of well-being tools and features, designed to improve the users' mental and physical health by using personal metrics to set goals and achievements.

The Trauma Support team will support employees exposed to traumatic stress through specific incidents, this is to provide some normalisation and an opportunity to talk about the traumatic event they have recently experienced.

# Blue Light Hub

The Health and Safety Manager has been actively involved in the Blue Light Hub project, offering advice on the health and safety legislative requirements for fitting out the building to ensure compliance.

Landlord responsibilities for two partner agencies sharing the Blue Light Hub, South Central Ambulance (SCAS) and Thames Valley Police (TVP), is a new role for the Service. Work has been ongoing to ensure that risk assessments, including Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2004 (COSHH), general and fire risk assessments are in place and have been shared. SCAS have taken up residency and TVP are due to move in imminently.

Fire Wardens for all three Services have been trained including how to operate the simple evacuation system which is used in the event of an evacuation, whether in an emergency or as part of a drill.

The system (known as TagEvac) is based on identifying zones within the building. In each zone a 'tag' is located in a sealed perspex box. On activation of the alarm the relevant fire warden will 'sweep' their allocated zone and ensure everyone has left the area before utilising the tensile 'do not enter' barriers and breaking the seal and removing the 'tag'. The fire warden will then take the 'tag' to the Fire Incident Controller at the muster point, who will insert it into the zone board. This provides a clear visual indicator of all areas cleared and any that may not have been which will assist the attending fire crew.



# Management of risk

**Air monitoring** – In 2012 the World Health Organisation designated diesel as a group 1 carcinogen. Whilst the frontline appliances are *Euro 6* category for diesel emissions some of the older On-call appliances are not. It was highlighted during the annual Health and Safety audit in 2019 that soot residue was present on the kit room walls at Beaconsfield fire station. As a result, the Service commissioned Bureau Veritas to conduct air monitoring for diesel fumes. This monitoring took place over a three-month period - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in order to provide robust data which would inform the outcomes and subsequent report.

The conclusion reached by Bureau Veritas was *“whilst there are spikes in the PM10 concentrations measured at the fire station, these typically only last 5 or 10 minutes, and so the concentrations never exceed those of concerns for either the Air Quality Limit or the Workplace Exposure Limit. As such, there is no proven risk to health.*

*That said, we make the following recommendations in order to limit the PM10 concentrations that personnel are exposed to:*

- *Replace or repair the plastic door between the Appliance Bay and the Muster Bay in order to prevent particulates from the Appliance Bay entering the Muster Bay;*
- *When vehicle engines are on, the Appliance Bay door should be open and the plastic door to the Muster Bay should be shut;*
- *The old Volvo without the catalytic convertor should only be started if all other vehicles are unavailable. If this vehicle is parked in the bay furthest from the Muster Bay, then this will limit the potential for particulates to enter the muster bay;*
- *To investigate whether the old Volvo without the catalytic convertor can have a catalytic convertor installed”.*

**Protecting Firefighters against contaminants** – Whilst there is no case law or confirmed evidence that the products of combustion from a fire lead to an increased risk of cancer in firefighters in the UK, it is recognised that this is a risk which needs to be mitigated so far as is reasonably practicable.

The NFCC set up a project to monitor the effects of contamination through medical surveillance and to determine what measures nationally could be adopted to reduce the potential risk posed. Due to COVID-19 this work has had to be temporarily suspended.

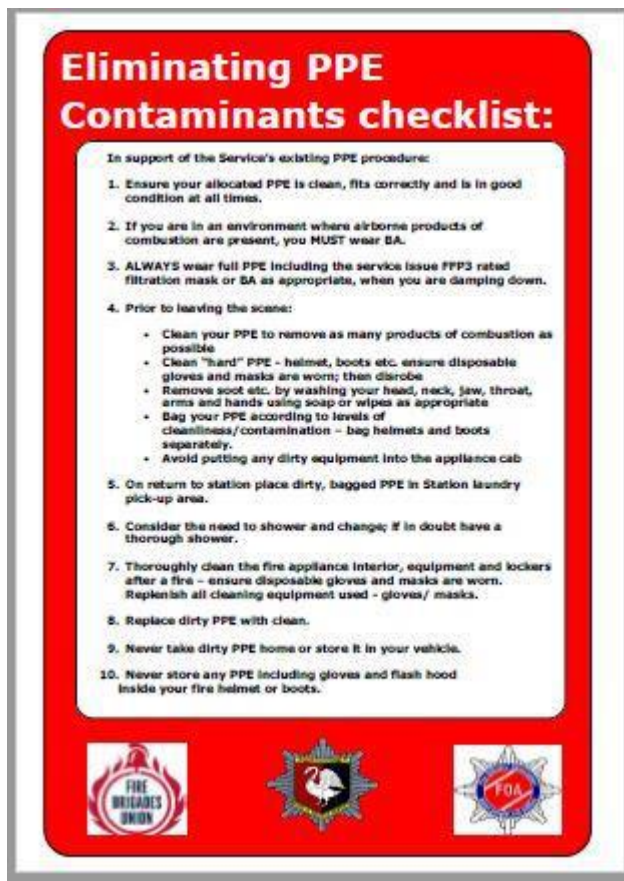
The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) also commenced a contaminants project, in conjunction with Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire, which involves the analysis of blood, urine and hair to determine if and at what level contaminants are present. Unfortunately, this project, too, has been temporarily suspended.

Locally, the Service has introduced a range of measures to protect firefighters against the risk of contamination which include:

- PPE and 'Clean cab/vehicle' procedure;
- 'Clean' and 'dirty' areas on stations to limit where PPE can be worn
- Blue Light Hub – designed to 'flow' from 'dirty' to 'clean' areas and a lecture room capability in the appliance bay which removes the requirement to remove PPE before attending a lecture;
- A robust process for dealing with contaminated PPE including boots, helmets and gloves;
- Issuing of 'wipes' which will remove contaminants from exposed skin on all appliances and stations;
- Provision of washing machines on all stations for washing working rig and bedding etc. so there is no risk of cross contamination;
- 'Eliminate contaminants' checklist prominently displayed in main areas of fire stations as a reminder to crews of the actions they need to take – please see example below.

This checklist was developed and agreed by the Service, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and The Fire Officers Association (FOA).





## Michelin Wheely Safe

A recommendation from the independent investigation into the major 'near miss', involving a wheel coming off an appliance whilst returning to station, was to procure and fit a safety device to prevent the wheel nuts from working loose undetected. After research, it was decided to procure the Michelin 'Wheely Safe' and conduct a trial - see image below.



The trial was successful and these devices have been fitted to all Scania appliances. Discussions have been held with the appliance builder regarding the possibility of integrating the 'Wheely Safe' system into the new build Volvos and retrofitting existing appliances. COVID-19 has meant that this work has been halted due to the temporary closure of the appliance build factory.

### **Analytical Risk Assessment (ARA) Training Package**

A key component in managing risk on the incident ground is the analytical risk assessment. Its purpose is to identify the significant hazards, who may be affected and what control measures need to be implemented to eliminate or control those hazards.

The Incident Commander uses these findings to determine the tactical plan for managing the incident and the tactical mode to be used e.g. *Offensive* (where crews are committed to a burning building to fight the fire) or *Defensive* (where crews are not committed and firefighting takes place outside of the building).

Through 'operational learning' from incidents and the audit of ARAs by the Health and Safety department it is recognised that there is confusion amongst some operational crews as to the purpose and importance of these risk assessments.

To remove that confusion and to clarify the process, the Health and Safety department have written an ARA training package which is to be rolled out, by both the Operational Assurance and Health and Safety departments, to all operational personnel.

Discussions are underway between the Health and Safety department and the People Systems and Learning Design Manager to build an interactive virtual training package which will provide crews with an evolving incident scenario for which they must identify the significant hazards, who will be affected and what control measures are required to eliminate or control those hazards and subsequently be able to create a robust and effective ARA.

## **Working with others**

### **Internally**

During 2019/20, the Health and Safety department assisted the Procurement and Property departments with the procurement and issue of new office chairs across the Service. The assistance provided was advice and guidance on the ergonomic considerations and compliance with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 (DSE).

Several different types of chairs were trialled by headquarters staff with the most popular purchased. Guidance was issued to staff on how to adjust them to suit their preferred seating position.

## **Externally**

**South East region Fire and Rescue Services** – The Health and Safety Manager chairs the South East region Health and Safety Committee which meets quarterly to discuss a range of standing agenda items such as COVID-19, national, regional and local learning, significant safety events and new and updated legislation as well as relevant matters that may arise during the year. The Health and Safety Manager also sits on the NFCC national Health and Safety Committee which provides the Service with a holistic picture of health and safety nationally.

## **Fire and Rescue Risk Group (FARRG)**

As the Service is a member of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC) the Health and Safety department, along with the insurance officer, sit on this group and are instrumental in developing 'good practice' in terms of risk management. Examples of the work carried out by the group is the development of processes to reduce the risk of claims in terms of stress in the workplace and driving for work, amongst others.

## **Thames Valley Health and Safety collaboration opportunity**

After initial discussions, it has been decided that this project will be placed on the 'back burner' for the time being. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on various workstreams across the fire service nationally.

# Health and Safety training

Once again, the Training Strategy Group approved funding of £25,000 for Health and Safety training requirements for this financial year. Of those requirements, the following training courses took place:

## **External providers**

It was necessary again this year to run two **Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Managing Safely** courses. These courses took place in January and February 2020. The delegates consisted of both Operational and Support staff who had recently been successful at the Supervisory Manager assessment centre or had recently been promoted to Crew Commander or Support staff equivalent.

This year saw a reduction in the number of **National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) General Certificate** courses to one, as the Service now has only a handful of new Station Commanders and Support staff equivalents. The course provides the necessary skills to enable these staff groups to conduct health and safety audits/inspections and to manage stations/sites and people from a health and safety perspective. The course was run in-house in October 2019 where five places were sold to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

**Fire Risk Assessor** training took place in February 2020 for Station Commanders and site managers in charge of stations/sites and, who are deemed to be the 'responsible person' under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

A gap had been identified during local Fire Safety audits on authority sites which highlighted that the 'responsible persons' had not received training in creating fire risk assessments and as a result a four-day training course, delivered by the British Standards Institute, was undertaken.

The fire risk assessment template was evaluated, updated and implemented as a trial for the 2020 assessments.

This year it was necessary to run a **First Aid at Work** course for Support staff in preparation for occupancy of the Blue Light Hub and to renew qualifications that had expired.

A **Fire Warden** course was provided for personnel who would be working at the Blue Light Hub prior to the Service taking up occupancy. Personnel from TVP and SCAS have been identified and have now completed their Fire Warden training prior to them taking up residency.

## Performance indicators

### **Budgets**

The health and safety budget for the year 2019/20 resulted in an underspend of just under £9K as a result of savings/underspends in printing and stationery, courses and conferences fees and subscriptions to national bodies. These underspends have been taken into account in the zero-based budgeting for the financial year 2020/21.

### **Health and Safety key performance indicators – 2020/21**

Please see below the health and safety objectives set in line with the Authority's Public Safety Plan 2020-2025 for this year:

1. Implement and embed the next stages of the Health and Safety strategy – apply for a RoSPA Occupational Health and Safety Award and conduct a further Behavioural Safety Culture Survey;
2. Ensure working hours in Fire Service Rota\* are monitored and breaches of the Working Time Regulations are highlighted and actioned;
3. Devise and implement an action plan in preparation for the next HMI inspection;
4. Work with Human Resources and the occupational health provider to set up a programme of medicals and surveillance for Workshops personnel;

\*Fire Service Rota (FSR) is the electronic resource management system used to track, manage and allocate staff resources.

# Appendix

## National peer group performance comparison tables 2018/19 and 2019/20

The Health and Safety department is required to report on BFRS end of year accident statistical returns to the Home Office on 31 May 2020 for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

### **Summary:**

The Health and Safety department provided returns for:

**HS1** - injuries during operational incidents, encompassing both Wholetime and On-Call employees and sub-divided into injuries at fires, at road traffic collisions and at other Special Service calls.

**HS2** - injuries during training and routine activities also encompassing Wholetime and On-Call employees and sub-divided into injuries during operational training, fitness training and routine activities.

### **Findings:**

**HS1** – The year 2019/20 has seen a small increase in the number of personnel injured at operational incidents from 36 to 38. The peer group has seen both increases and decreases in the number of injuries which differs from the previous year where there were significant increases across the board.

**Outcome:** In the national peer group league tables for *total number of injuries*, BFRS has moved from third position in 2018/19 to fifth in 2019/20. For injuries sustained at fires BFRS has moved from the top of the table to third position and for injuries sustained at special service calls BFRS retains the top position.

**HS2-** Injuries at training events have seen an increase of one from 19 in 2018/19 to 20 in 2019/20. Injuries sustained during routine activities has seen an increase of one from 10 in 2018/19 to 11 in 2019/20.

**Outcome:** BFRS's position in the peer group table for injuries at training events has moved from fifth place to sixth and for injuries during routine activities, BFRS has remained at seventh position.

Overall, of the seven categories, the number of injuries sustained to firefighters has increased by one in four categories; remained the same in two and decreased by one in the remaining category.

Below are the national league tables which provide a visual view of the overall safety performance of BFRS in the operational arena compared to their peer group. A detailed explanation of performance can be found in the Performance Overview section of the report on page six.

<b>Total number of persons injured</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
Suffolk	28	27
West Sussex	38	28
Northamptonshire	50	29
Warwickshire	29	29
Bedfordshire	53	37
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>
Oxfordshire	39	47
Berkshire	56	60
Hereford and Worcester	71	62
East Sussex	66	65
Cambridgeshire	122	82
Norfolk	60	86

<b>Total number of injuries at fires</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
Bedfordshire	9	2
Warwickshire	7	4
Berkshire	24	4
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
West Sussex	15	5
Suffolk	7	6
Northamptonshire	13	7
Oxfordshire	7	11
Hereford and Worcester	10	12
East Sussex	16	19
Norfolk	17	19
Cambridgeshire	73	34

<b>Total number of injuries during routine activities</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
Bedfordshire	10	4
Suffolk	3	5
West Sussex	2	5
East Sussex	12	7
Northamptonshire	13	7
Warwickshire	4	8
Oxfordshire	3	9
Berkshire	12	10
Hereford and Worcester	8	10
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
Cambridgeshire	15	14
Norfolk	4	24

<b>Total number of over 7-day injuries</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
West Sussex	7	1
Berkshire	6	2
Warwickshire	2	2
Northamptonshire	5	3
Suffolk	3	3
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Oxfordshire	3	6
Bedfordshire	5	7
Cambridgeshire	5	8
Hereford and Worcester	9	8
East Sussex	5	10
Norfolk	10	12



<b>Total number of major injuries</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Berkshire	1	0
Norfolk	0	0
Suffolk	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0
East Sussex	1	0
West Sussex	1	0
Cambridgeshire	2	0
Oxfordshire	2	0
Bedfordshire	1	1
Hereford and Worcester	1	2
Northamptonshire	1	3

<b>Total number of injuries during training</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
Northamptonshire	20	12
West Sussex	15	12
Cambridgeshire	19	13
Suffolk	13	14
Warwickshire	10	14
East Sussex	19	19
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>
Bedfordshire	27	20
Oxfordshire	22	20
Norfolk	26	31
Hereford and Worcester	51	31
Berkshire	18	38

<b>Total number of injuries at Special Services</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>Buckinghamshire</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Suffolk	5	2
Northamptonshire	4	3
Warwickshire	4	3
West Sussex	6	6
Oxfordshire	7	7
Berkshire	2	8
Hereford and Worcester	2	9
Bedfordshire	7	11
Norfolk	13	12
East Sussex	19	20
Cambridgeshire	15	21



This page is intentionally left blank