

**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
Louise Harrison

To: The Members of the Executive Committee

4 November 2024

Dear Councillor

**MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND
PUBLIC**

Please note the content of Page 2
of this Agenda Pack.

To contact our Communication
Team, please email
cteam@bucksfire.gov.uk

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY** to be held in the **PARALYMPIC ROOM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, THE GATEWAY OFFICES, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY, BUCKS. HP19 8FF** on **WEDNESDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2024 at 10.00 AM** when the business set out overleaf will be transacted.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Graham Britten'.

Graham Britten
Director of Legal and Governance

Health and Safety:

There will be limited facilities for members of the public to observe the meeting in person. A recording of the meeting will be available after the meeting, at the web address provided overleaf.

Chairman: Councillor Rouse

Councillors: Bailey, Banks, Hall, Lambert, Lancaster, McLean and Walsh



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Recording of the meeting

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 recorded. 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 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 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 'teams' meeting invitation to join the meeting at the specified agenda item.

Where the Chairman of a Committee has agreed to extend an invitation to all Members of the Authority to attend when major matters of policy are being considered, a Member who is not a member of the Committee may attend and speak at such Meetings at the invitation of the Chairman of that 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.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To make all decisions on behalf of the Authority, except in so far as reserved to the full Authority by law or by these Terms of Reference.
2. To assess performance of the Authority against agreed organisational targets.
3. To determine matters relating to pay and remuneration where required by collective agreements or legislation.
4. To select on behalf of the Authority-the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, and deputy to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, or equivalent, taking advice from suitable advisers and to make recommendations to the Authority as to the terms of appointment or dismissal.
5. To consider and make decisions on behalf of the Authority in respect of the appointment of a statutory finance officer; a statutory monitoring officer; and any post to be contracted to “Gold Book” terms and conditions in whole or in part taking advice from the Chief Fire Officer and suitable advisers.
6. To act as the Employers’ Side of a negotiating and consultation forum for all matters relating to the employment contracts of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, deputy to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, or equivalent; and where relevant, employees contracted to “Gold Book” terms and conditions in whole or in part.
7. To hear appeals if required to do so in accordance with the Authority’s Policies.
8. To determine any human resources issues arising from the Authority’s budget process and improvement programme.
9. To determine policies, codes or guidance:
 - (a) after considering recommendations from the Overview and Audit Committee in respect of:
 - (i) regulating working relationships between members and co-opted members of the Authority and the employees of the Authority; and
 - (ii) governing the conduct of employees of the Authority
 - (b) relating to grievance, disciplinary, conduct, capability, dismissals and appeals relating to employees contracted to “Gold Book” terms and conditions in whole or in part.
10. To form a Human Resources Sub-Committee as it deems appropriate.

AGENDA

Item No:

1. Apologies

2. Minutes

To approve, and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 11 September 2024 (Item 2) **(Pages 7 - 14)**

3. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

The Chairman to invite officers to provide verbal updates on any actions noted in the Minutes from the previous meeting.

4. 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.

5. Questions

To receive questions in accordance with Standing Order SOA7.

6. Budget Monitoring Report April 2024 - September 2024

To consider Item 6 **(Pages 15 - 30)**

7. Reward and Recognition Review

To consider Item 7 **(Pages 31 - 34)**

8. Exclusion of Public and Press

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

9. Exempt Minutes

To approve, and sign as a correct record the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 11 September 2024 (Item 9)

10. Standards of Behaviour and update on disciplinary and grievance processes

To consider Item 10 (**Pages 35 - 44**)

11. Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive Remuneration

To consider Item 11

12. Date of next meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Wednesday 5 February 2025 at 10 am.

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

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Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2024 at 10.00 AM.

Present: Councillors Bailey, Banks, Hall, Lambert, McLean (Vice-Chairman), Stuchbury (Substitute) and Walsh

Officers: S Tuffley (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), D Buchanan (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development) C Newman (Data Intelligence Team Manager), A Stunell (Head of Human Resources), F Mansfield (HR Advisory and Development Manager) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Rouse (Chairman) and O'Neill (Councillor Stuchbury as substitute for Councillor O'Neill)

(Councillor McLean in the Chair)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscpxL3vliv7bh1Q>

EX12 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 10 July 2024, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX13 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

EX06 - BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2023–MARCH 2024 (PROVISIONAL OUTTURN) – The Chairman asked that a report of what had been done in response to the FBU's Manifesto, be brought to the next Authority meeting – this was in progress and would be presented at the Authority meeting in December.

EX07 - THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE (TVFCS) CONTRACT – MULTI-AGENCY INCIDENT TRANSFER (MAIT) – The Chairman asked that a visit be arranged to the Thames Valley Fire Control for

any Members who would like to visit – an invitation to all Members would be sent out shortly.

A Member asked if Members could receive a briefing note as to what the Service had done as a result of the Grenfell Inquiry – The Phase 2 report of the Grenfell Inquiry had been published, and officers would be bringing a report to the Authority with the Phase 2 recommendations, and what had been done for Phase 1.

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised Members that officers had been undertaking some work around understanding the impacts of the Phase 2 report and had committed to bringing back a report to the Authority at the October meeting.

EX14 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Bailey advised that she wished to record that she was no longer working for Cranfield University and was now working for Emily Darlington MP.

EX15 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2024–JULY 2024

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT advised Members this report was a positive news story. There was a significant underspend at this time, predominantly due to the reduction in bank costs, over the border mobilisation and as a result of the Authority's push, and the Service delivering 300 wholtime head count, which was making significant savings in terms of external costs. There was also a reduction in on call costs, but the Authority would like to see retained firefighter numbers increase. It was also pleasing to note that the significant investment the Authority signed off in training for operational staff could now be delivered from the projected underspend from this year's budget. Transformation funds had already delivered huge improvements to every part of the service and would now have additional capacity for more projects moving forward.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that as the Lead Member had already stated, the underspend was predominantly around salaries. There was a reduction in bank costs compared to last year. For the first quarter of last year compared to this year, costs had reduced by about £90k. The reduction in bank costs would be formulated as part of the medium term financial plan and they would be put forward as savings for future years. There had also been a similar impact on cross-border costs, this all related to the establishment going over 300 and the Service had been significantly over 300 for a number

of months now and would likely see that impact across the board, as it was having a really positive impact on the Service's response and appliance availability.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that with regard to treasury management, the figures had not been projected yet as it was still only the first quarter, but it was likely that the Authority would overachieve on treasury again, even though the base rates were looking to reduce over the coming months.

A Member asked if any of the underspend would be used to finance some of the requirements in the Fire Brigade Union's (FBU) Manifesto.

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT advised that any proposals would come to a future Authority meeting, but the surpluses and underspend had already been benefiting firefighters in terms of new breathing apparatus cleaning equipment to reduce risks, additional training and a new People and Culture Officer.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that in terms of the FBU Manifesto, Members should be aware that as part of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the Manifesto was a big input into it and meetings had been held with the FBU prior to developing it.

A Member asked about High Wycombe Fire Station, if the building was still fit for purpose temporarily until the major refurbishment work was done and what was delaying the drill tower's refurbishment into next year as it was an essential part of firefighter training.

The Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security and IT advised that with regard to the improvements at High Wycombe Fire Station, temporary improvements had been made to the firefighter's overnight accommodation and mess area. High Wycombe Fire Station was a big part of the estate planning in the longer term, but it was potentially a multi-million-pound project. Exiting out of Unit 7 and the potential savings of £200k a year had taken priority this year.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised that not an insignificant amount of money had been spent on High Wycombe Fire Station to address those concerns. For example, air conditioning had been installed as the windows could not be opened as it was next to a busy road. The gym was also being moved down to the ground

floor. There was a longer-term plan but as stated above, it would require significant investment.

In terms of the drill towers, the issue was finding Contractors who were willing to work on drill towers. The Service had tried to find one Contractor who would come and fix them all, but it was not feasible, so officers were now looking at smaller local Contractors. The drill towers were not all unusable, some the top floor was not available, but they were still able to be used for training. The other question was whether every station needed a drill tower and could savings be made by sharing drill towers.

RESOLVED –

That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as at 31 July 2024 be noted.

EX16 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – Q1 2024/25

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised Members that since introducing these performance measures, it had really enhanced focus and given early warning when things needed further attention and had really helped to stay on track.

The investment decisions from the Authority were now coming to fruition, and the response model for wholetime appliances was the best it had been for a number of years. The headcount for whole-time firefighters had remained above 300 throughout this year. Bank costs had reduced considerably. Home fire safety visit targets were being sustained and the Service continued to reach the most vulnerable people. It was inspiring that accidental dwelling fires and serious accidental dwelling fires were now the lowest they had been for 10 years, and officers would continue to monitor this closely. Appraisal returns were the best they had been in recent years and although not reflected in this Q1 report, objective setting across the organisation was at 85%.

Furthermore, although not yet captured in this Q1 report, from July when the pilot to evaluate how the Service responded to automatic fire alarms started, a dramatic reduction in non-domestic property false alarms was being seen, and this would inevitably build capacity and productivity for the Service to spend more time doing prevention work and safety critical training.

The on-call measure had been highlighted, as although this had improved slightly, further improvement was needed in this area. Also highlighted was appraisal completion and the bank costs as they had been monitored closely this year.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised Members there had been a few changes to the pack compared to last year. A number of measures had been stripped out compared to the previous year. The reason for this was that there were many measures, and officers wanted to focus on the important ones and also provide more commentary and more substance for each of those measures. The ones that had been stripped out were still measured by officers.

Highlighted were the three measures mentioned by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. Firstly, availability of on-call, it was probably one of the worst looking measures from a performance point of view, but it was in there so that new members would have some commentary and reassurance of what the plan was. Secondly, were appraisals to show it was one of the key focuses and how much staff were valued. It was a great platform to understand training needs, ED&I etc., but it also highlighted how some of the targets had been toughened. Thirdly, were bank shift costs which was a good news story. Officers wanted to show, as alluded to in the budget monitoring paper, some of the benefits that were being reaped.

A Member asked if a list of KPIs that had been taken out could be emailed to Members.

A Member asked that, with some residents in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes losing their winter fuel payment and may be forced to no longer run their central heating and instead use old electric blankets and coal fires etc to keep warm this winter, what was the Service planning to do to ensure that people were safe while trying to warm their homes this winter.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Service was already looking at its process and systems for risk stratification for ensuring the Service's fire safety messages were targeted at the right people. The Service was targeting the most vulnerable people and giving them the advice they need to stay safe from fire. Every Station had an objective this year to reach out into the community, and to reach out to those people who were harder to reach, who perhaps did not have an internet connection.

A Member asked if the availability of on-call availability become an operational issue at any time and if there was a risk that it could. Also, looking at recruitment, what could the Authority do to make it more attractive. What were the issues regarding a 'great place to work' and how could they be addressed.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised Members that recruitment and retention of the traditional model was a national challenge,

Data Intelligence
Team Manager

and the Service did get a high turnover in those areas of staff. The Service had looked at a tiered response so people can respond from 20 minutes away, an hour away, rather than the traditional 5 minutes, trying to offer a different response model. The focus over the last eighteen months has been getting the wholetime numbers up, which had taken a lot of effort. The opportunity now was to look at on call and focus resources on it, and that was why it had been built into the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for consultation.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that on call was in the CRMP, and what the Service was going to do was a big part of it. It was not just about having every station available; it was about having the right ones available. A lot of modelling had been done to show what on call stations were the most valuable to the Service and there was a big disparity between some of them.

The Head of Human Resources advised that in August a new intake of on call firefighters had started with the Service and were currently in training. On call awareness evenings and have a go days were currently being held, with applications closing at the end of September and the Service was looking to start twelve more recruits in February 2025. It was an ongoing process.

A Member asked if a piece of work could be undertaken to see what it would take to make on call an attractive proposition for any off duty wholetime firefighters, who were living around those retained stations and communities, would it improve resilience.

The Data Intelligence Team Manager advised that it was not just about wholetime or on call, in the CRMP, it talked about resilience for those occasions (i.e. heatwaves) when it was needed.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised there were a considerable amount of wholetime firefighters who had on call contracts as well. There was also an on call pay rise scheduled from January onwards, which might be an influencing factor.

RESOLVED –

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

1. It is recommended that the Performance Management – Q1 2024/25 be noted.

EX17 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED –

It was moved and resolved that the public and press representatives be removed from the meeting by virtue of

Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report contains information relating to any individual; and Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as the report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person (including the Authority); and on these grounds it is considered the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

EX18 CASE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered the report, details of which are noted in the exempt minutes.

RESOLVED –

The content of the case management summary for 2023-2024 and Q1 2024-25, as detailed in Appendix one, be noted.

EX19 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Exempt Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 10 July 2024, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX20 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 10 am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.09 AM

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Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Executive Committee, 13 November 2024

Report title: Budget Monitoring Report April 2024 - September 2024

Lead Member: Councillor Matthew Walsh

Report sponsor: Mark Hemming

Author and contact: Asif Hussain, ahussain@bucksfire.gov.uk

Action: Noting

Recommendations:

That the provisional outturn forecast for the Authority as of 30 September 2024 be noted.

Executive summary:

The report in Appendix A outlines the Authority's revenue and capital spending as of 30 September 2024, along with the projected financial year-end position.

The budget of £39.470 million, compared to the forecast outturn of £38.635 million, indicates a projected year-end underspend of £0.835 million. This underspend is mainly due to lower direct employee costs, resulting from reduced bank (overtime) and on-call costs, as well as vacant support positions. Additionally, higher-than-expected investment returns, driven by the Bank of England's base rate falling more slowly than forecast, have contributed to this favourable variance.

Appendix B provides details of all planned property works across our estate for 2024-25.

Financial implications: As set out in the main body of the report.

Risk management: Management of our financial resources is a key risk to the Authority and the performance reports to Committee inform Members of the main financial risks facing the Authority in year.

Legal implications: None.

Privacy and security implications: None.

Duty to collaborate: None.

Health and safety implications: None.

Environmental implications: None.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications: None.

Consultation and communication: None.

Background papers: Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2028/29, Fire Authority Meeting 13 February 2024. <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/fire-authority-14-february-2024-item-8a-medium-term-financial-plan-1.pdf> and <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/executive-committee-meeting-8-february-2024-item-7-revised-appendices-1-and-2-1.pdf>

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
A	Appendix A – Budget Monitoring Report April 2024 – September 2024 Q2	None
B	Appendix B – Property Works 2024-25	None

1. Revenue Forecasts by Service Area – Table 1

Table 1 shows the budget and forecast outturn for each Directorate as at the end of 2024/25 financial year. The budget of £39.470m compared to the forecast outturn of £38.635m gives a forecast yearend underspend of £0.835m.

Directorate	Total Budget £	Actual Year to Date £	Forecast Outturn £	Projected Year End Variance £
Corporate Core	861,700	544,655	869,046	7,346
Finance & Assets	7,233,110	4,270,012	7,120,684	-112,426
Human Resources	627,070	325,977	628,714	1,644
Delivery, Corp. Dev. Planning	28,407,280	12,732,613	27,651,397	-755,883
Statutory Acc. & Contingency	2,341,170	124,582	2,365,170	24,000
Total Expenditure	39,470,330	17,997,840	38,635,011	-835,319
Total Funding	-39,470,330	-20,430,652	-39,470,330	0
Net Position	0	-2,432,812	-835,319	-835,319

Protection Grant - Table 2

Table 2 includes breakdown of the Protection grant. It is being reported separately as this is ring-fenced grant for specific purposes which is only approved and allocated in year. Therefore, it makes it difficult to include in the base budget as this grant information is not available until closer to when the funding allocations will be distributed. As at 30 September, we have received the first instalment of the grant for 2024/25. The grant is predominantly for the Fire Service to increase their protection capability and delivery, aligning with locally agreed integrated risk management plans and risk-based inspection programmes.

Protection Grant	Funding £	Actual Year to Date £	Commitments Full Year £	Forecast Outturn £	Residual Grant Remaining £
Protection Uplift	-297,796	121,211	10,500	297,796	0
Officer Accreditation	-16,467	0	0	16,467	0
Total	-314,263	121,211	10,500	314,263	0

Variance by Directorate

The key variations in directorate budgets compared to the year-end outturn shown in Table 1 are as follows:

Corporate Core: £0.007m over – This overspend is due to temporary restructuring aimed at enhancing operational resilience. Additionally, the forecast includes positions filled on a fixed-term contract basis. However, this overspend is largely offset by higher-than-expected investment income, driven by the current Bank of England base rate. If the Bank of England base rate remains at its current level, anticipated returns will be reflected in future reports.

Finance & Assets £0.112m under– The underspend mainly relates to salary costs whereby employees are not yet at the top of their pay scales and vacant positions due to be filled in the coming months.

Delivery, Corporate Development & Planning: £0.756m under – The underspending in this directorate is primarily due to lower-than-budgeted on-call and bank (overtime) costs. Since September 2023, we have exceeded the budgeted establishment of 300, maintaining over 300 operational staff. As of the end of September, the operational number was 313 and includes the latest apprentice cohort starting in September. This number is expected to fluctuate throughout the year due to anticipated leavers, retirees and transferees. The increase in operational numbers has positively impacted our pump availability, resulting in significant reductions in bank and cross-border forecasts for 2024/25. We will monitor this closely over the coming months, and if the forecasts hold, we will incorporate this saving into the medium-term financial plan as part of the zero-based budgeting process.

2. Direct Employee Variances – Table 3

Table 3 shows the breakdown of all the favourable (-) and adverse (+) variances for each sub-heading within the direct employees subjective as at the 30 September 2024:

Subjective	Salary (Including Training costs)	Allowances	NI	Pension	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
Wholetime	-368,115	49,947	-8,202	-213,210	-539,580
On-Call	139,922	-315,806	26,099	-84,558	-234,343
Support	-216,504	0	-35,172	-79,787	-331,463
Technicians	-8,408	0	-1,570	-2,427	-12,405
Sessional	-2,300	2,896	928	0	1,524
Agency	38,241	0	0	0	38,241
Grand Total	-417,164	-262,963	-17,917	-379,982	-1,078,026

Wholetime – This is based on forecasted establishment numbers and bank projected underspends are included in these figures.

On Call – Underspends predominantly seen within allowances which is based on activity and retaining fees paid.

Support Staff – This relates to vacant in year support roles which will be recruited to throughout the year.

Agency Staff – Agency staff have been used to partly cover interim vacancies within support staff roles and this partially offsets the underspend on support staff.

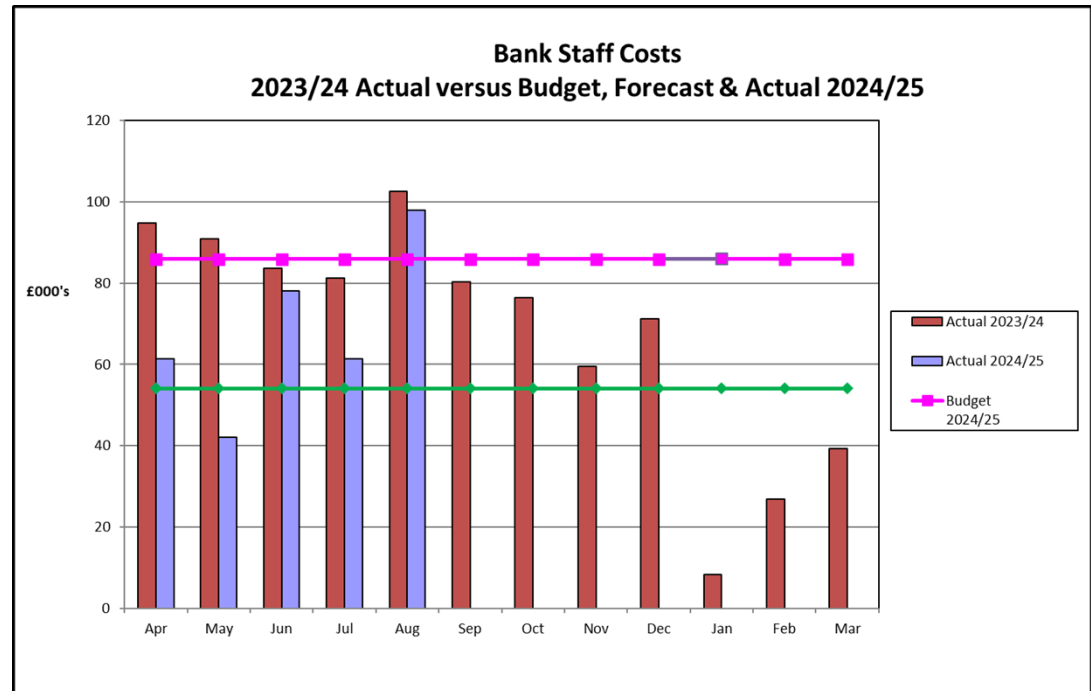
3. On-Call Variance Breakdown

On-Call	Budget	Actual	Forecast	Year End Variance
Retaining Fees	460,280	114,580	235,448	-224,832
Holiday Pay	41,890	11,240	30,959	-10,931
Turnout Overtime	5,890	3,647	6,360	470
CPD	19,940	7,455	17,991	-1,949
Training	126,230	113,378	294,474	168,244
Attendance & Turnout	164,190	31,508	57,254	-106,886
NI	4,400	12,250	30,499	26,099
Pension	296,610	101,024	212,052	-84,558
Total	1,119,430	395,083	885,037	-234,343

4. Bank Costs

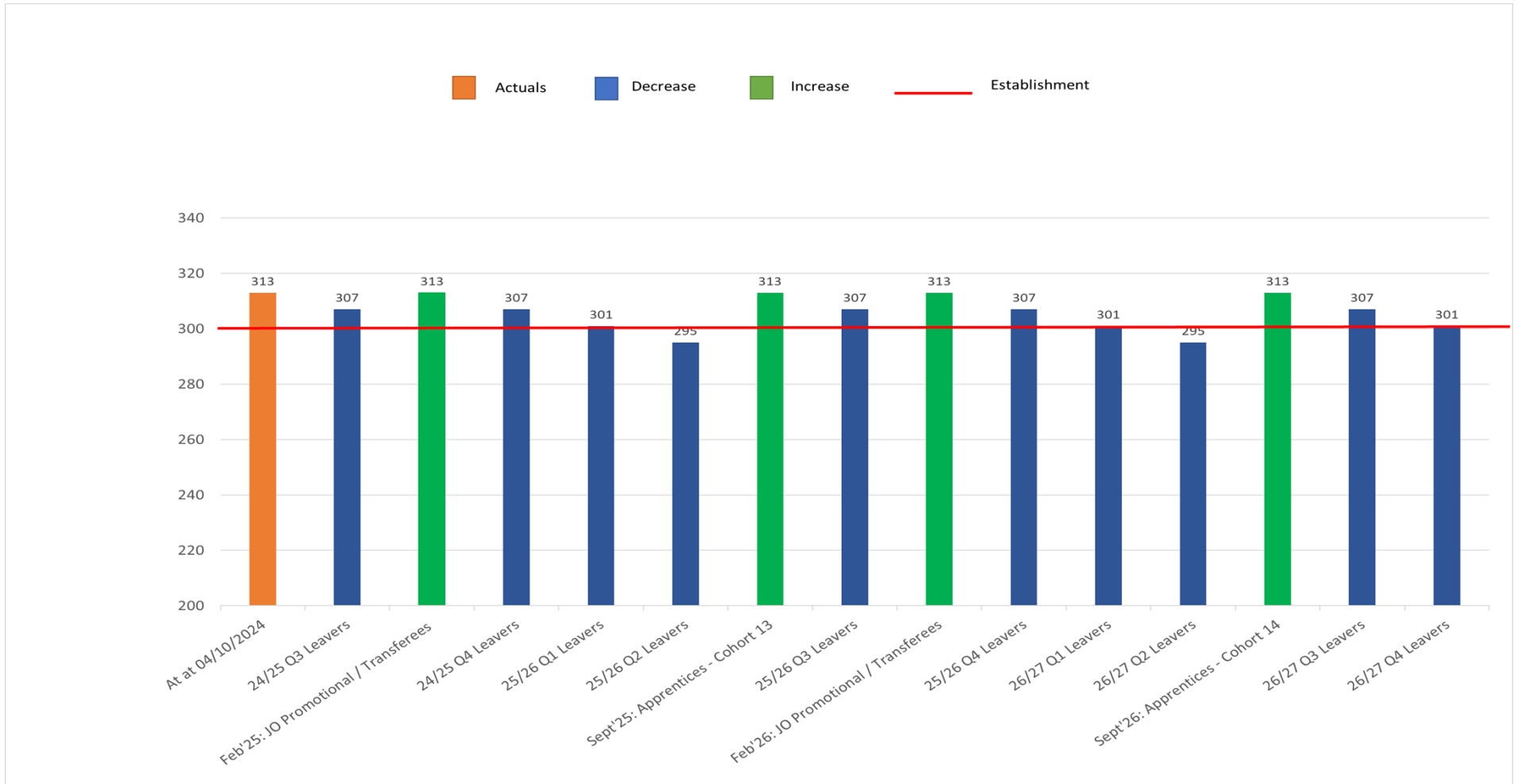
The following table/graph provides a breakdown and comparison of bank costs in 2023/24 and 2024/25. As you will see in the table, bank costs have reduced significantly from April to August in 2024/25 (£0.341m) compared to the same period last year (£0.453m). We started to notice a substantial drop in the last quarter of 2023/24 when we had surpassed our operational budgeted establishment of 300 and the trend has continued. We will continue to monitor this closely throughout the year and will build in a saving as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan if the trend continues. Please note these figures do not include NI contributions.

Bank	Actual 2023/24 £	Actual 2024/25 £
Apr	94,769	61,333
May	90,856	42,104
Jun	83,662	78,134
Jul	81,139	61,403
Aug	102,597	97,938
Sep	80,305	
Oct	76,430	
Nov	59,552	
Dec	71,171	
Jan	8,253	
Feb	26,849	
Mar	39,323	
Grand Total	814,906	340,912



5. Wholetime Establishment Roadmap

The following graph illustrates the wholetime operational establishment as of 4 October 2024 through to 30 March 2027 taking into consideration projected retirees, leavers, transfers and recruitment of apprentices.



6. Funding

Table 4 details the budget and forecast outturn for each category of funding.

Funding	Total Budget £	Actual Year to Date £	Provisional Year End Forecast £
Government Funding	-5,141,610	-2,568,199	-5,141,610
Specific Grants	-1,567,000	-783,291	-1,567,000
NNDR	-5,631,090	-3,148,992	-5,631,090
Top-up / Pooling Receipts	-1,603,630	-833,889	-1,603,630
Precept	-26,192,000	-13,096,281	-26,192,000
Transfer to Reserve	665,000	0	665,000
Grand Total	-39,470,330	-20,430,652	-39,470,330

Currently forecasting to budget but we anticipate there being changes in the NNDR funding once we have received the NNDR3 returns. There are also end of year reconciliations carried out by central government which may result in additional funding. These forecasts will be updated accordingly throughout the year, once this information is available.

7. Capital Monitoring

Capital Forecast

The capital programme for 2024/25 is £3.783m, including £1.300m from 2023/24 carry forward capital projects.

Project Name	Original Budget 2024/25 £	Carry Forwards 2023/24 £	In Year Funding £	Revised Budget 2024/25 £	Actuals Year to Date £	Slippage £	Provisional Outturn £	Projected Year End Variance £
Property	701,000	957,623	0	1,658,623	155,945	521,036	1,420,405	282,818
Total Property Portfolio	701,000	957,623	0	1,658,623	155,945	521,036	1,420,405	282,818
Hydraulic Equipment	70,000	19,000	0	89,000	53,746	0	89,000	0
Operational Equipment	95,000	26,259	0	121,259	71,908	0	121,259	0
Operational Red Fleet Vehides	1,327,000	0	40,000	1,367,000	446,198	310,000	1,057,000	0
Operational White Fleet Vehides	0	92,030	0	92,030	3,836	0	92,030	0
BA and Associated Equipment	90,000	59,817	0	149,817	59,824	0	149,817	0
Fireground Radios	0	115,000	0	115,000	114,999	0	115,000	0
Total Fire Appliances & Equipment	1,582,000	312,106	40,000	1,934,106	750,512	310,000	1,624,106	0
ICT	160,000	30,300	0	190,300	69,846	0	190,300	0
Total Support	160,000	30,300	0	190,300	69,846	0	190,300	0
Grand Total	2,443,000	1,300,028	40,000	3,783,028	976,303	831,036	3,234,811	282,818

Capital Funding

The capital programme will be funded as follows:

Funding	Balance at 1 April 2024 £000	Estimated Transfers (in) £000	Estimates Transfers Out £000	Estimate Balance at 31 March 2025 £000
Revenue Contribution to Capital	-5,715	-2,528	2,156	-6,087
Other Capital Contributions	-1,035	-44	1,079	0
Total Capital Funding	-6,750	-2,572	3,235	-6,087

Property Portfolio

The Property team has a capital budget of £1.659m for 2024/25, which includes carry forward budget from 2023/24 of £0.958m. The capital expenditure is being utilised to carry out planned capital projects as agreed at Business Transformation Board. This includes capital works across several sites following a conditions survey carried out during 2022/23.

The capital plan for 2024/25 includes works at Aylesbury, Broughton, Beaconsfield, Buckingham, and Olney, as well as planned works to remove and install new fire doors and fire shutters across the estate following fire and health and safety audits. Most urgent works on drill towers have been completed, with works at Princess Risborough in progress. A longer-term review of drill tower provision is required.

Several unplanned emergency works at Brill, Gerrards Cross, Haddenham, Newport Pagnell, Stokenchurch, and Winslow, along with the reconfiguration of offices at HQ, have been added to the capital plan for 2024/25. These additional works will result in a projected overspend of £0.283 million. The capital works on High Wycombe fire station have been postponed until 2025/26 at the earliest, resulting in a slippage of £0.521 million.

All operations and staff from Unit 7 have been relocated, and the building was handed back to the landlord on 30th September 2024.

Fire Appliances & Equipment

Fire Appliances & Equipment has a capital budget of £1.934 million for 2024/25, which includes a carry forward budget from 2023/24 of £0.312 million and in-year funding of £0.040 million from the disposal of the water carrier in 2023/24. The capital funds will be utilised to purchase three fire appliances, two wildfire units, two boats and trailers, and a water carrier, along with operational equipment for these vehicles in line with the fleet strategy. Additionally, three white fleet vehicles, three BA washer sets, BA equipment, and fireground radios are planned for purchase.

Year-to-date spending on Fire Appliances & Equipment includes the purchase and delivery of hydraulic sets, fireground radios, BA equipment, other operational equipment, and first and second stage payments for the three fire appliances. The three fire appliances and workshops van are due to be built and delivered in the third quarter of 2024/25, and confirmation of the delivery of the other two white fleet vehicles is pending. Orders for boats and trailers will be placed soon following the completion of the procurement process.

There is a slippage identified for £0.310 million related to the purchase of a water carrier. Technical and Procurement are in the specification stage, and due to lead times, it is unlikely that the water carrier will be delivered during 2024/25.

Support

ICT has a capital budget of £0.190m for 2024/25, which includes carry forward budget from 2023/24 of £0.030m. This budget will be utilised for the purchase of ICT hardware equipment, as per the ICT replacement strategy along with replacement of On-Call MDTs, system security and Data migration and storage. Year to date spend on ICT capital equipment includes the purchase of ICT hardware.

8. Reserves

The table below shows the provisional movement in reserves during 2024/25.

Reserves	Balance at Start of year £000	Projected Movement £000	Balance at End of Year £000
General Fund	-1,625	0	-1,625
Earmarked Reserves (Revenue)*	-4,765	-753	-5,518
Earmarked Reserves (Capital)	-6,750	663	-6,087
Total Reserves	-13,140	-90	-13,230

* This figure includes £0.673m, which represents this Authority's share of the joint control room renewals fund (which is held by Oxfordshire).

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Appendix B – Property Capital Programme Progress September 2024

Complete
 On Track
 Risk to Progress
 Not due to be started

Location	Description of Works	Start Date	End Date	Commentary (if Risk to Progress)	Status
Works Carried Forward from 2023/24					
Aylesbury	Refurbish old drill tower with option to be installed at another station.	-	-	New location yet to be determined. Carry forward to 2025-26.	Risk to Progress
Broughton	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: install new road surface adequate for HGVs in car park, repair brick boundary wall, replace dehumidifier/heater in line with replacement schedule.	Oct-24	Dec-24	Out for quotations	On Track
Aylesbury	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: partial refurbishment to 1st floor toilets in BHQ and the refurbishment of the watch room and office on Aylesbury fire station.	May-24	Sep-24		Complete
Beaconsfield	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: internal works which include compartment kitchen / mess area, replacement guttering and soffit boards and external boundary works.	Oct-24	Dec-24	Out for quotations	On Track
Buckingham	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: replace Ideal concord gas fired boiler in line with replacement schedule.	Sep-24	Dec-24	Out for quotation	On Track
Various sites	Purchase and installation of six flagpoles at selected wholetime stations.	-	-	Delayed due to other priorities – especially unplanned emergency works.	Risk to Progress
Olney	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: refurbishment to 1st floor mess /kitchen area and ceiling (H&S audit). Additional works on yard and front apron.	-	-	Currently re-evaluating scheduling as lower urgency than initial survey indicated.	Risk to Progress
Amersham	Kitchen replacement - additional worktop required.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
Marlow	Supply of additional solar panel batteries.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete

BHQ / Workshops	Replacement of motorised gate.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
Newport Pagnell	Install motorised fire door.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
Various sites	Drill tower works.	Apr-24	Mar-25	Urgent work completed. Longer-term review of drill tower provision required. Princess Risborough emergency works continue following parapet brick failings	Risk to Progress
Unit 7 Exit					
Unit 7	Exit from Unit 7 and associated works.	Apr-24	Sep-24	Building returned to landlord 30th September.	Complete
Implementation of MTFP Capital Works					
High Wycombe	Various works from 2022-23 Condition Survey including: internal upgrades to walls, flooring, doors, lighting and heating system. External upgrades to yard & roads, windows, doors (including bay doors) and pipework.	Apr-24	Mar-25	Significant refurbishment required – to be carried forward to 2025-26.	Risk to Progress
Additional Workstreams					
Waddesdon	Compartmentalise new muster bay area from appliance bay.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
All sites	Fire door assessments and replacement programme.	Jan-25	Mar-25		Not due to be started
High Wycombe	Fire shutter – kitchen.	Aug-24	Sep-24		Complete
Aylesbury	Fire shutter – kitchen.	Aug-24	Sep-24		Complete
BHQ	SMT Offices.	Aug-24	Sep-24	Will complete 9th October	On Track
Emergency Unplanned Capital Works					
Haddenham	Drainage renewal.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete

Brill	Internal damp and wall replacements.	Jul-24	Oct-24		Complete
Newport Pagnell	Replacement of two pedestrian doors.	Sep-24	Sep-24		Complete
Gerrards Cross	Drainage renewal.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
Winslow	Drainage renewal.	Apr-24	Jul-24		Complete
<i>Pulled Forward Capital Works</i>					
Newport Pagnell	New Roof, Guttering & Downpipes.	-	-	Due to a number of emergency works, this will slip into 2025/26	Risk to Progress
Stokenchurch	New Roof, Guttering & Downpipes.	-	-	Due to a number of emergency works, this will slip into 2025/26	Risk to Progress
<i>EDI</i>					
Gerrards Cross	EDI/Wellbeing - introduce 3 individual Rest Area for standby crew model and re-establish Station Managers Office	Nov-24	Feb-25		Not due to be started
Buckingham	EDI/Wellbeing - introduce 3 individual Rest Area for standby crew model.	Jan-25	Mar-25		Not due to be started

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Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Executive Committee, 13 November 2024

Report title: Reward and Recognition Review

Lead Member: Councillor Gary Hall, Lead Member - People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance

Report sponsor: Louise Harrison, Chief Fire Officer

Author and contact: Ronnie Davidson, Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Action: Decision

Recommendations:

1. Bonus payments are not paid to the Senior Management Team in the current financial year.
2. A Review of Reward and Recognition processes for BFRS staff.

Executive summary:

In accordance with good practice and Scheme of Conditions of Service of the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services (the Gold Book), a review of Senior Management bonus pay has been undertaken.

It is recommended that bonus payments are not to be paid to the Senior Management Team in the current financial year.

Subject to the Executive Committee approval, a review and benchmarking exercise of Reward and Recognition will commence (see Appendix 1).

Financial implications: The cost of the initial work undertaken by South East Employers (SEE) is potentially £18k. Further financial implications will be considered as part of the reward and recognition review.

Risk management: Without a fair and transparent reward and recognition processes, this will negatively impact recruitment, retention and employee engagement. The financial position could impact on the award of any payments. Non-financial rewards will need equal focus. These include performance management, opportunities for personal and career development, flexible working and recognition.

Legal implications: UK law governs that there should be equal pay for men and women performing equal work, as unequal pay is considered an aspect act of sex discrimination. Equal pay is the right for men and women to be paid the same for the same, or equivalent, work.

Privacy and security implications: BFRS is the Data Controller of any data provided to SEE. SEE will act as the data processor of any personal data provided to them.

SEE use the Microsoft suite of software for storage and processing purposes. Their data is stored in Microsoft SharePoint, which Microsoft warrants that UK users data is stored in the UK.

Duty to collaborate: Benchmark on pay scales for support staff in comparison to Fire Authorities and public sector bodies within the UK. Consider the full employee reward and recognition proposition, rewards and benefits outside of pay, and where appropriate, provide benchmarks with other sectors.

Health and safety implications: There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Environmental implications: There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

A transparent reward and recognition system will enable staff to understand how the reward system operates. This will help minimise uncertainty or perceptions of unfairness.

Consultation and communication:

Staff are aware of the work that has been undertaken by SEE, and have previously provided their feedback, therefore, ongoing communications with staff is key for positive engagement purposes. Perceptions of fairness and transparency are essential as part of the Reward and Recognition review and outcomes. This will enable employees to better understand reward and recognition and what it means for them.

Background papers:

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Reward and Recognition Review	

Appendix 1 – Reward and Recognition Review

The Executive Committee are invited to consider the proposed objectives for a review of Reward and Recognition:

- Provide a benchmark on pay scales for support staff in comparison to Fire Authorities within the UK (operational staff are on Grey Book and SMB on Gold Book)
- Review and map all current employee allowances across the service
- Review salary structures for support staff and mechanisms for pay progression
- Review current BFRS recognition schemes
- Review current job descriptions for operational and support staff
- Identify clear metrics for measuring outstanding performance in consideration of potential future bonus payments
- Review current processes for learning and development, career progression, wellbeing initiatives and talent management
- Consider the full employee reward and recognition proposition, rewards and benefits outside of pay, and where appropriate, provide benchmarks with other sectors
- Make recommendations for change and the development of a recognition and reward strategy

Factors and Considerations

- Difficulty of having had one-year settlements
- Financial position could impact on the award of any payments
- Assess and consider not awarding bonuses or Performance Related Pay (PRP) in addition to base salary
- Consider introducing new measurable performance objectives for support staff to determine salary movement within a pay grade, until the normal grade maximum is reached
- Consider accelerated/additional increments for support staff where performance has been rated consistently excellent
- Consider the amount of any honoraria/one off payment and how this is determined. For example, a payment for exceptional performance over the preceding year may equate to the equivalent of one increment (around 3%).
- Pulse surveys, focus groups or forums to gauge staff views on whether the processes and decisions on incentives and recognition are fair, and use these insights to inform change

- Market considerations
- Substantial local factors e.g. London weighting; complex local, regional or national responsibilities
- Fairness and transparency will be central considerations

Timeframes

2024	Activity
Nov	Executive Committee approval
Dec	Mapping exercise of current allowances paid to staff
2025	
Jan	Benchmark allowances for staff in comparison to Fire Authorities within the UK
Jan/Feb	Benchmark pay scales for support staff
Mar	Draft pay scale recommendations for support staff
Apr	Draft recommendations for new pay allowance structure
May	Draft recommendations for the full employee reward and recognition proposition
June	Final recommendation paper completed and presented to the Fire Authority



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Executive Committee, 13 November 2024

Report title: Standards of Behaviour and update on disciplinary and grievance processes

Lead Member: Councillor Gary Hall, Lead Member - People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance

Report sponsor: Louise Harrison, Chief Fire Officer

Author and contact: Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance

Action: Noting.

Recommendations: That the content of the report be noted.

Executive summary:

The purpose of the report is to:

- a) apprise members of the creation a new role of a Professional Standards Investigator (PSI) (0.6 FTE) (employed on local terms and conditions) to complete disciplinary, grievance, bullying and harassment investigations ensuring they are completed in accordance with ACAS codes of practice and relevant policies;
 - b) set out how the PSI role aligns with successive recommendations from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (Appendix 1); and
 - c) provide an update on Employee Relations case management from that received by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 11 September 2024 (Appendix 2)
-

The post, which will report to the Director of Legal and Governance, has been advertised with a submission deadline of midnight 13 November 2024. The successful candidate should have:

- Level 2 Professionalising Investigations Programme, Level 2 (or equivalent)
- In-depth experience of conducting formal disciplinary investigations including best practice interview techniques and producing investigation reports.

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- Experience of presenting at formal disciplinary hearings and meetings

Financial implications: The in-year cost of the role can be funded from the forecast in-year underspend. Future years' costs will be included within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Risk management: The appointment addresses the feedback from staff reported in the HMICFRS BFRS inspection report 19 October 2023 in terms of confidence in timeliness and impartiality of investigations; and the recommendations from the HMICFRS 'Values and Culture' and 'Standards of Behaviour' reports. The appointment gives rise to the potential to create an inter-service professional standards unit for creating shared specialisms/best practice/resources

Legal implications:

The appointed PSI will act within the scope of the service's disciplinary and grievance procedures which, in accordance with ACAS guidance, advocate informal resolution being explored before instigating formal investigations. However, the role supports the discharge by the Authority of the implied duty of trust and confidence where a failure to take formal action would constitute a breach of this duty.

Privacy and security implications:

The PSI role requires the post holder to be competent in processing sensitive personal data.

Duty to collaborate:

Posts of this type have been established at other fire and rescue services, for example, Bedfordshire (1.0 FTE), Norfolk (evolving from 0.6 to 0.8, predicted to rise to 1.0), and Derbyshire. There may be potential to increase to 1.0 FTE and/or collaborate with other services to, i.a., cover peaks/troughs of workload, share best practice, benchmark, and progressively standardise procedures (and there have been preliminary discussions in these respects with the above services).

Moreover, to obtain additional assurance the Head of People and Organisational Development has arranged for the inhouse PSI from Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service to undertake a further external review of the service's misconduct processes¹.

Health and safety implications:

The role should ensure that investigations are undertaken impartially and in a timely manner. As such investigations can be stressful for all employees involved in them, the Authority, as an employer, has a duty of care to protect the wellbeing of its

¹ Recommendation 8 of the HMICFRS 'Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services report, 1 August 2024: 'By 1 November 2024, chief fire officers should make sure all allegations of misconduct are handled in a consistent way and staff have confidence in misconduct processes. Chief fire officers should carry out a full review of the processes, from initial identification of a misconduct issue through to the resolution or outcome. This should include a review of how services: monitor and manage investigations; maintain accurate records; and adhere to required timescales.'
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employees whether they be a subject of the investigation, a witness, or a complainant. All parties' interests are served by the outcomes being concluded as fairly and swiftly as possible.

Environmental implications:

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications

The role will be a positive contribution the service's policy of zero tolerance of discrimination and harassment; and will support the discharge of the new obligations introduced by the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, for the Authority to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of its employees. If the employer fails to investigate, or carries out an inadequate investigation, this could have consequences, especially if the allegation involves discrimination or harassment (including sexual harassment).

Consultation and communication

The proposal has been through internal governance boards; and the main representative body (FBU) is locally supportive of the principle. The NJC Grey Book (under which operational employees are contracted) sets out 'lowest level of line management' for investigations. The extant service discipline procedures states 'Lowest level of Investigating Officer' for investigations, 1: Watch Commander or equivalent; 2: Station Commander or equivalent; 3: Group Commander or equivalent. It does not preclude an investigator being appointed outside of a line management chain.

Background papers:

13 March 2024 – Overview and Audit Committee: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Update

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2024/02/overview-and-audit-committee-13-march-2024-item-9-hmicfrs-bfrs-2023-2025-update.pdf/>

12 June 2024 - Fire Authority: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023-2025 Update

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 12/06/2024 11:00 \(bucksfire.gov.uk\)](#)

11 September 2024 – Extraordinary Fire Authority: HMICFRS Update

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 11/09/2024 11:00 \(bucksfire.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Summary of HMICFRS recommendations pertaining to the establishment of a Professional Standards Investigation function	None
2	Case Management Summary for quarters one and two of 2024-25	Exempt from Publication

Summary of HMICFRS recommendations pertaining to the establishment of a Professional Standards Investigation function

Page 44 of the [HMICFRS Report Effectiveness, efficiency and people Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service, 19 October 2023](#) stated as follows:

‘Although the service has clear policies and procedures in place, **staff have limited confidence in how well the organisation can deal effectively with cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination as well as grievances and discipline. This is due to high workloads and capacity issues at senior management level at which most cases are investigated.** Staff told us that some investigations have taken much longer than the 28-day period that the service’s policy states. **They also told us that some concerns haven’t always been escalated to the next level for investigation when staff believe they should. This has left staff feeling worried and frustrated.**’
(emphasis added)

In the HMICFRS [Values and culture in the fire and rescue services report \(30 March 2023\)](#) changes and improvements were identified. These included:

‘Recommendation 4

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should assure themselves that updates on how concerns are being handled are shared with those who have raised them. The updates should be given in an accessible way that encourages trust and confidence in the service response. **Consideration should be given to creating a professional standards function to handle conduct concerns in service (or from an external service) to have oversight of cases, to make sure they are conducted in a fair and transparent way and to act as a point of contact for all staff involved.**’

‘Recommendation 5

By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should make sure they provide accessible information for all staff and members of the public on how they can raise concerns and access confidential support (including through external agencies). Chief fire officers should also make sure accessible information is provided on how concerns and allegations will be investigated in a way that ensures confidentiality and is independent of the alleged perpetrator.’

‘Recommendation 13

By 1 December 2023, the Fire Standards Board, in liaison with the National Fire Chiefs Council, should review the existing relevant standard(s) and supporting

guidance to clearly state how services should handle misconduct and safeguarding-related allegations and outcomes. These should include requirements to:

- conduct and complete investigations, whether or not the staff member under investigation leaves;
- consider whether the incident requires immediate dismissal;
- provide training for staff who are carrying out investigations; and
- ensure the diversity/neutrality of the investigation panel/person.'

'Recommendation 18

By 1 August 2023, chief fire officers should provide assurances to HMICFRS that all parties are supported in relation to ongoing investigations.'

'In several services, we found a worrying trend of staff not raising concerns if they felt they weren't part of an 'old boys' club'. We also heard from staff who felt others could get away with inappropriate behaviours, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination, "if they know the right people". Some groups of staff we met in some services reported that they didn't have the confidence to challenge poor behaviours, and we were told that managers dealt with reports either inconsistently or not at all. In another service, after a firefighter's reports regarding a senior officer making a racist comment were dismissed, he was threatened. He was told "**friends investigate friends**" in services and that it was "career suicide" to challenge the status quo.'

'Staff need a secure way to raise concerns

Services need honest staff feedback so they can identify areas for improvement and take appropriate action where misconduct allegations are concerned. If they ignore these problems, serious issues may go unnoticed and potentially get worse.

All staff – and particularly those in emergency service roles where the lives of both staff and members of the public are at risk – need reporting processes they trust as safe, without fear of any reprisals. They also need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated properly, and that outcomes or sanctions will be appropriate.'

In July 2023, following its values and culture spotlight report, HMICFRS was commissioned by the then Home Secretary to carry out a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct allegations in fire and rescue services.

Its inspection concluded in January 2024. In HMICFRS 'State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023', (9 May 2024)

<https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publication-html/state-of-fire-and-rescue-annual-assessment-2023/> it states:

‘We focused on:

- how services identify potential misconduct; in particular, how confident staff are to raise grievances, and how proactive managers are in their use of discipline procedures;
- to what extent services’ policies on discipline, complaints, grievances and whistle-blowers are adequate, and how well those policies are implemented in practice;
- to what extent investigations, hearings and appeals for misconduct are effective; and
- whether any groups of staff are disproportionately affected by misconduct.’

The thematic inspection report was published on 1 August 2024 and contained 15 recommendations. [Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services](#)

‘Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services [extract]

Staff are aware of how to raise concerns, but services could do more to improve confidence

Staff generally have a good awareness of how they can raise concerns

In our survey, 62 percent (553 out of 887) of the staff who responded thought the process for raising a concern was very clear or slightly clear. Twenty percent (174 out of 887) felt it was not so clear or not at all clear. The remaining 18 percent (160 out of 887) thought the process was neither clear nor unclear. This is positive. But only 58 percent (403 out of 689) of respondents who had experienced misconduct in the last 12 months thought that reporting processes were clear compared to 76 percent (150 out of 198) of respondents who had not. This could suggest that the experience of using the reporting process had reduced their confidence in it and that it hadn’t been as clear as they had expected.

When we spoke with staff about how to raise concerns, they generally agreed they could access discipline, grievance and whistle-blowing policies and showed they knew where to look for them. In one service, posters with a QR code that could be used to raise a concern were prominently displayed in most fire stations to raise awareness. Another service had introduced a “freedom to speak up guardian”, who offered advice, guidance and support to staff members about raising concerns.

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Staff still feel they can't raise concerns about poor behaviour

Despite the fairly good awareness shown by staff about the ways in which they can raise concerns, in most services, some feel unwilling to do so. There is compelling evidence of a widespread fear of using formal reporting processes, such as raising a formal grievance, in FRSs across England. The most common reasons given are:

- a fear of repercussions from senior managers;
- a fear of repercussions from peers;
- a fear that nothing will be done as a result of raising concerns; and
- a fear that confidentiality will not be maintained.

This matches our findings in our [values and culture spotlight report](#). But the evidence we have gathered for this [thematic inspection](#) on standards of behaviour has increased our concerns.

Although the majority (68 percent; 2,986 out of 4,392) of our survey respondents agreed their services took reports of [misconduct](#) seriously, some respondents said they felt that reporting bad behaviour and [misconduct](#) would lead to punishment and reprisals for the person raising the concern. Some said they had been singled out and overlooked for promotion, which they felt was a direct result of reporting an issue. Some also said they had witnessed others get “punished” for reporting issues. This fear and mistrust was so widespread that many staff members doubted whether our survey was truly confidential and expressed concerns that they would be vulnerable if they disclosed information to us. This was also reflected in the discussions we had with staff during fieldwork.

In our survey, 77 percent (3,405 out of 4,396) of respondents agreed their team would support them if they raised concerns about another team member's behaviour and attitudes. But some staff told us they were afraid that raising concerns could lead to negative reactions from their peers in the form of exclusion and marginalisation. For example, one former FRS employee told us: “People are, to a point almost, like persecuted, vilified, because they have, like, blown the whistle on individuals.” Another said: “Some people are just taking the abuse, the [harassment](#), because they don't want to put a target on their back.”

Many staff were also reluctant to raise issues formally because of fears about the [misconduct](#) system itself. We found staff widely believed that if they raised concerns, they wouldn't be treated confidentially. For example, survey respondents reported frequent breaches of one-to-one and confidential conversations, and rumours circulating within their services that someone had raised a concern that turned out to be true.

In addition, many staff believed the misconduct system was biased and not impartial, which was closely related to the fear of reprisals. They told us investigations were sometimes conducted by someone close to the person alleged to have perpetrated the misconduct, such as their line manager. They considered such cases to be cover-ups.

Women most often expressed a fear of reporting. For example, one firefighter told us she did speak to her line manager about something and it wasn't dealt with. The manager breached her confidentiality and she felt humiliated by her peers. She was adamant she would never raise a concern again. Another firefighter said when she raised a concern to her manager, she was told it would be held against her when she went for promotion.

Because of this fear of reporting, it is likely that the actual level of misconduct within FRSs is higher than the evidence suggests. Many staff members decide to just put up with unacceptable behaviour rather than use the systems they distrust so thoroughly. Staff in many of the services we visited told us that people don't want to "put their heads above the parapet".

Many services are aware of the negative perceptions staff have about misconduct processes and how this affects their willingness to raise concerns. In our values and culture spotlight report, we recommended that chief fire officers consider creating a professional standards function to oversee cases, make sure they are investigated in a fair and transparent way, and act as a point of contact for all staff involved. A small number of services have created some form of professional standards unit. But in all but the largest services, these aren't a full-time dedicated resource and their staff retain other roles and operational functions. Some smaller services have formed agreements with their local police forces or have employed private companies to provide this function.

The evidence about the effectiveness of these units and other approaches is mixed. Many services are positive about the benefits they are bringing. However, some staff working in HR and professional standards also said that the professional standards functions in some services don't have staff with relevant training and enough staff to meet demand. And some external sources don't have the FRS-specific knowledge needed to be fully effective. But these issues appear to be because the professional standards functions are relatively new. They were still being implemented when we inspected. We still consider that a professional standards function can be an effective tool to improve misconduct processes and increase staff confidence in those processes. So we are strengthening our values and culture spotlight report recommendation even further.

Recommendation 4

By 1 February 2025, chief fire officers should make sure their services create or have access to a dedicated professional standards function to oversee the investigation of concerns raised within a service or from an external source. This should oversee cases to make sure they are investigated in a fair and transparent way, manage complex cases directly and act as a point of contact for all staff involved.

Recommendation 10

By 1 May 2025, chief fire officers should make sure their services have enough capacity to carry out their misconduct investigations. They should consider using external investigators or a similar independent resource to support the process if required.