

# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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## **AGENDA SUPPLEMENT (ORDINARY MEETING)**

**Date:** Wednesday 8 October 2025

**Time:** 2:00 pm

**Venue:** The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury,  
Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF

### **Agenda Item**

#### **7. Questions**

To receive questions in accordance with Standing Order SOA7.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1**

**Question from Councillor Andy Huxley - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Aylesbury East to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

I am led to believe that the coalition which is the controlling body on the Fire Authority, with you as Chairman, have decided to reduce both the number of fire stations and fire engines in Buckinghamshire. It is only a short time ago, when I was on the Fire Authority, when we were talking about putting fire engines in lay-bys in order to speed up response times. Over the next few years we are going to be building a lot of houses and industrial units. Are you prepared to put peoples lives at risk in order to do what? It is not as though that money is an issue here. I ask Chairman that you rethink your strategy in order that we can continue to offer the residents and workers a safe Buckinghamshire!

**Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Andy Huxley - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Aylesbury East**

The new housing target for Bucks is 4,300 houses per annum, so the 95,000 houses you refer to will be built out over the next 22 years. The Authority and the Senior Leadership Team will work together to plan and deliver resources to match that scale of development. This programme seeks to make more fire engines available for more of the time.

## **Question 2**

### **Question from Councillor Adekunle Osibogun - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Buckingham to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025, Lead Members of the Fire Authority from the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Impact Alliance Group, along with Cllr Robin Stuchbury also from the Impact Alliance group were asked to support moving to public consultation on the reduction of 8 fire engines in Buckinghamshire. In my ward of Buckingham those proposals involve a 50% reduction in the number of fire engines at our station. That is unacceptable.

Buckinghamshire has had housing targets of 95,000 imposed on it. Nearby Milton Keynes is seeing similar exponential housing growth with the new town announcement. The reduction in fire service cover would be of deep concern to my residents in normal circumstances, never mind when they see such massive growth in the population.

Would the Chairman of the Fire Authority please:

- explain why he supported these proposals being progressed to staff consultation?
- outline why he did not make me as a Buckingham councillor aware of the changes?
- explain to the residents of Buckingham how this reduction will make them safer?
- confirm today that in light of the public reaction to these plans, he no longer supports them, and regrets his previous decision to endorse them?

### **Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Adekunle Osibogun - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Buckingham**

No decisions have been made other than to progress and refine the options for the On-Call Improvement Programme. The new housing target for Bucks is 4,300 houses per annum, so the 95,000 houses you refer to will be built out over the next 22 years.

The Authority and the Senior Leadership Team will work together to plan and deliver resources to match that scale of development. This programme seeks to make more fire engines available for more of the time.

Our staff are the lifeblood of the service, and their views are key in all we do. At this stage it has been early engagement with staff to help shape the final consultation question for the Authority's approval.

There has been no decision made other than to continue the work that was already in hand.

When any final plans are in place the residents of Buckingham will be consulted and that consultation will include detailed information for the public regarding any proposed change.

The only public reaction I am aware of is limited comment on social media posts from members of the Conservative Party such as yourself.

### **Question 3**

#### **Question from Councillor Robert Carington - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Ridgeway West to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In a working group in February of this year, the Conservative majority on the Executive made clear to officers they would not support the reduction of 8 fire engines and closure of 2 stations, including Stokenchurch in my ward. I understand such decisions are a matter for the Fire Authority and so it was a clear steer to officers it would not get them approved at that time.

In 2024/5 the Authority had an underspend of £954k.

In July this year, officers put exactly the same proposals to you and your Lead Member colleagues from the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Impact Alliance Groups, including Cllr Stuart Wilson as Chair of Overview and Audit. I understand officers asked for your support to progress to public consultation, via staff consultation and pre-public consultation.

Given officers explicitly asked for Lead Member support in the July meeting and it is highly unlikely they would risk proceeding without believing they had the support of the majority of Lead Members and the coalition majority on the Authority, can you explain to my residents why you want to close their station considering its importance to the community and strategic location just off Junction 5 of the M40?

#### **Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Robert Carington - Buckinghamshire Councillor – Ridgeway West**

The On-Call Improvement Programme is a core strand of the authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP 2025-2030) which was approved, in full, by the BMKFA in December 2024, under Conservative control, and came into effect in April.

Recruiting and maintaining a viable On-Call service provision is a nationwide problem for fire and rescue services and we are no exception. On-Call staff need to meet the following criteria: -

- Over 18 years old
- Have GCSE in Maths & English Language A\* - C (9 - 4)
- A full UK driving licence holder or have alternative travel methods

- Live within 10 minutes of their Fire Station
- Be a confident swimmer
- Available to offer On-Call hours

You will appreciate, I am sure, the difficulty in recruiting to this level in low population areas such as Stokenchurch. As a result, this fire station is one of two which have not been sufficiently staffed for five years.

Notwithstanding this, the service consistently delivers overall response within its target time of 10 minutes with our twelve full-time units.

In the last eight years there have only been two days when all of our units were required due to a spate of wildfires. The Stokenchurch fire engine has been used once, crewed by firefighters from other locations. Our data suggests that Stokenchurch would respond to only one incident per week if fully staffed and this can be resourced from elsewhere.

In their report of December 2019 Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) stated '...its 18 On-Call fire engines were only available 13.6% of the time. This reflects the difficulty the service has in recruiting On-Call firefighters. This is experienced nationally.' In its subsequent report published October 2023 HMICFRS stated, 'It is unclear why the service needs so many additional fire engines when its daily demand pattern is consistently met with 12 available fire engines.

It is clear that the On-Call system is significantly unreliable, with very limited availability across the service. This has been a persistent issue of decline over the last two decades, despite numerous and varied attempts to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of On-Call firefighters within the traditional On-Call framework, which continues to face national challenges.

The senior leadership team are developing proposals which will seek to address this long-standing, systemic issue by enhancing the availability of fire assets, including standard fire engines, rural capabilities and specialist vehicles, thereby improving the overall resilience and response capability, and public safety across all of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

It is important to stress that no decisions have been made and options to address the On-Call issue continue to be developed prior to a report being presented to the full Authority later in the year with a view to securing agreement to enter into a ten-

week public consultation. Following that consultation a final proposal will be placed before the Authority in Spring 2026.

I hope that you are reassured by this response.

#### **Question 4**

##### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

Does the Chairman agree with me that we are blessed with an exceptional cadre of senior leaders, from the Chief Fire Officer downwards? During my time as Chairman I can attest they consistently showed exceptional care and skill in their handling of challenging situations in partnership with the Authority.

If he does agree with this, does the Chairman also agree that it would be inconceivable that such a skilled and capable cadre of officers would present controversial, and previously rejected, proposals in July to him, Cllrs Bailey, Stuchbury, Priestley and Wilson on cuts to fire engines and closure of fire stations, and then proceed to full staff and pre-public consultation without believing they were likely to secure the approval of the majority Lib Dem, Labour and Impact Alliance coalition on the Fire Authority?

##### **Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

I do, indeed, agree that we have an exceptional senior leadership team and I have stated elsewhere that in all my fifteen years as CEO of a commercial enterprise of similar size to BMKFRS I would have been proud to have any one of them among my own senior leadership team. I would go further and say that we also have an exceptionally dedicated workforce who are proud of the role they play in our communities. No better example of this was to be seen than at the long service awards event held last week. Proud and committed men and women. Proud families and proud members of the Authority who attended.

I do not think it inconceivable at all. It seems to me to be entirely appropriate that officers should update the new Lead Members on progress with this work which is a key part of the CRMP approved by the Authority under your Chairmanship.



## **Question 5**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025 a meeting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview Audit was held where proposals to cut 8 fire engines from our fleet and close 2 stations were proposed. These exactly mirrored proposals put to a working group of the Executive Committee of the previous Authority in February 2025 in which officers were informed any such proposals would not command the support of the then majority Conservative Group.

In the July meeting, Lead Members were asked, as a meeting objective, to support progress to public consultation. Officers have subsequently proceeded to staff and pre-public consultation. I understand that whilst you were invited to this meeting, you did not attend. Could you therefore confirm:

- whether you received the papers that were presented?
- whether you have separately expressed support either to officers or via the Chairman of the Authority to proceeding to consultation on these proposals?

### **Response from Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

Yes, I received a copy of the presentation delivered in that workshop.

I discussed this with the Chair who updated me on the workshop and that those attending supported further work being carried out to inform the preparation of a proposal to the Authority later in the year.

## **Question 6**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Robin Stuchbury, Lead Member for Health and Safety and Corporate Risk, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025 a meeting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview Audit was held where proposals to cut 8 fire engines from our fleet and close 2 stations were proposed. Included in those proposals was the removal of a fire engine from Buckingham in your own ward.

These exactly mirrored proposals put to a working group of the Executive Committee of the previous Authority in February 2025 in which officers were informed any such proposals would not command the support of the then majority Conservative Group.

In the July meeting, Lead Members were asked, as a meeting objective, to support progress to public consultation. Officers have subsequently proceeded to staff and pre-public consultation on those specific proposals. Given the high calibre of our officer team, it is inconceivable they would have proceeded without confidence such proposals would be supported by the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Impact Alliance majority on the Fire Authority.

Please can you explain why you gave support to officers proceeding with proposals, and specifically why you supported consideration of the removal of a fire engine from Buckingham?

### **Response from Councillor Robin Stuchbury, Lead Member for Health and Safety and Corporate Risk, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

My recollection was to agree the report to be taken to a future meeting for the authority to vote on whether it was in agreement to go out to consultation, There was no decision.

There has been no decision taken other than to go out to gather more information. There has been no decision taken of where the outcomes of such a consultation would lead and which units might be removed.

## **Question 7**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Tracey Bailey, Vice-Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025 a meeting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview Audit was held where proposals to cut 8 fire engines from our fleet and close 2 stations were proposed. Included in those proposals was the removal of fire engines from Broughton and West Ashland in your own authority area of Milton Keynes.

These exactly mirrored proposals put to a working group of the Executive Committee of the previous Authority in February 2025 in which officers were informed any such proposals would not command the support of the then majority Conservative Group. You were invited to that meeting and received the papers.

In the July meeting, Lead Members were asked, as a meeting objective, to support progress to public consultation. Officers have subsequently proceeded to staff and pre-public consultation on those specific proposals. Given the high calibre of our officer team, it is inconceivable they would have proceeded without confidence such proposals would be supported by the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Impact Alliance majority coalition on the Fire Authority.

Please can you confirm whether you reminded officers of the strong view of Members of the Executive Committee in February that these proposals were not appropriate to progress?

Please can you explain why you gave support to officers proceeding with proposals, and specifically why you supported consideration of the removal of fire engines from Broughton and West Ashland in Milton Keynes?

### **Response from Councillor Tracey Bailey, Vice-Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

I did not attend the workshop for Executive Committee in February as it clashed with a training session for work.

I do not recall seeing papers for the above workshop, but I have asked officers to check to see if I was sent anything as I have nothing in my records.

My recollection of the July meeting was not that I supported the proposals, but that I supported officers taking the proposals to staff and other stakeholders for further

discussion. The reason why I supported this decision is because the data we considered at the meeting strongly suggested that consolidation of resources which could not be manned warranted further investigation, and I trust that Senior Officers would only make proposals that do not present a risk to the public we serve.

## **Question 8**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Moriah Priestley, Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025 a meeting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview Audit was held where proposals to cut 8 fire engines from our fleet and close 2 stations were proposed. Included in those proposals was the removal of fire engines from Broughton and West Ashland in your own authority area of Milton Keynes.

These exactly mirrored proposals put to a working group of the Executive Committee of the previous Authority in February 2025 in which officers were informed any such proposals would not command the support of the then majority Conservative Group.

In the July meeting, Lead Members were asked, as a meeting objective, to support progress to public consultation. Officers have subsequently proceeded to staff and pre-public consultation on those specific proposals. Given the high calibre of our officer team, it is inconceivable they would have proceeded without confidence such proposals would be supported by the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Impact Alliance majority coalition on the Fire Authority.

Please can you explain why you gave support to officers proceeding with proposals, and specifically why you supported consideration of the removal of fire engines from Broughton and West Ashland in Milton Keynes?

### **Response from Councillor Moriah Priestley Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

No decision has been taken, the decision point for any proposals will happen at a later date.

## **Question 9**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In a letter to Members of Parliament on 26th September 2025, the Chief Fire Officer advised that it was intended that the question of "full" Operational Independence of the CFO to determine distribution of the Service's fleet would be put to public consultation in November, subject to Fire Authority approval.

This intent to consult on widened operational independence was shared with Members of Parliament before being discussed with either the full Fire Authority, or its Executive Committee. I have been advised that this approach was agreed with you as Chairman. I consider this highly discourteous to the rights of members of the Fire Authority to be made aware of significant matters affecting their scrutiny responsibility before the wider public.

This issue of widened CFO operational independence for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes has never been discussed by the Fire Authority during my time as Chairman between 2022-25, nor since. It is a material issue that gets to the heart of the relationship between the Authority in its role representing the communities of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, and the Chief Fire Officer. Changing that relationship, or being seen to seek to change that relationship, needs to be handled with extreme care and diligence.

In its submissions to general government consultations on Fire Service Reform, the Authority has always maintained a position that the actual operating status quo of our CFO was appropriate. Indeed, in July 2022 the Authority, agreed by all political groups, specifically responded to Fire Service Reform consultation that the CFO should not have full operational independence in respect of station closures for example, a likely consequence of having operational independence around fleet deployment.

Please can you explain:

- why parties external to the Fire Authority were advised of this intention to consult the public on this matter before Fire Authority Members?
- whether you consider this discourteous to the Fire Authority and its members?

- why the normal governance procedures of a Fire Authority or Executive Committee discussion were not followed before advising external parties of this?
- how this approach is conducive to effective scrutiny?
- why you considered your role gave you the appropriate mandate to agree this approach with the Chief Fire Officer before reference to the Fire Authority or its committees?
- whether you personally support full operational independence of the CFO including in relation to closing stations?
- that any such proposals on operational independence will be subject to its own separate and discrete paper, considered first by Executive Committee?
- why you did not sign this letter to Members of Parliament, rather than the Chief Fire Officer or jointly with the CFO?

**Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

The option proposed to be included within the consultation seeks to ensure that the CFO is able to make operational decisions to drive effectiveness/safety and improve, appropriate responses when called upon to do so, without the bureaucracy of being required to go through the cycle of business governance and FA Approval. The approval sought for consideration is for the CFO to make the decision to move its assets when required, i.e. for operational expediency. This option does not seek to circumvent the robust scrutiny or relationship and governance in place with the Authority. Explicitly, the option does not seek to permit the CFO to reduce assets- this should remain within the remit and purview of the Authority.

I have studied all of the background papers related to this issue and it seems to me that there is a clear case for clarifying the operational independence of the CFO. This is particularly so around issues which affect the basic structure of the service and delivery of effective response to current and future issues. This seems to be in line with the aims of 2022 White Paper of the previous government and the 2023 report of HMICFRS. I would be happy for public opinion on this to be explored as part of a wider consultation but that would only be done, of course, with the support of the Authority.

- a) The letter made it clear that any full public consultation would be subject to approval by the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, It further, and separately, made it clear that the inclusion of a question on the extent of operational independence of the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) would only be included subject to approval of the Authority.
- b) No, I Don't
- c) As Chair of the Authority, I have my own way of working with the SLT, and the CFO in particular. This is based on many years of commercial experience where I operated as CEO of a similar sized organisation. In that time, I had the great benefit of working with a Chairman who preferred a light touch form of oversight. In that regard I made it clear immediately following my election as Chairman that I see the Authority as a 'critical friend' and the 'guardian of the public purse'.
- d) The Authority and its committees meet regularly, and members are free to contact myself or the CFO on any issues at any time. This form of oversight is, I believe, likely to be more productive than conducting our business on social media platforms.
- e) As indicated above my approach is developed from considerable previous commercial experience.
- f) I have every confidence in the CFO, an exceptional leader, who has been invited to join a select group of CFO's, Chief Constables and Senior Civil Servants for further career development.
- g) The Authority will be kept fully informed and involved.
- h) I approved the letter in question. I see no reason for me to have to counter-sign it.



### **Question 10**

**Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

Please can you advise whether any work of any nature has commenced on the disposal or potential disposal of Stokenchurch or Great Missenden fire stations?

**Response from Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

No work of any nature has commenced on the potential disposal of either Stokenchurch or Great Missenden fire stations.

## **Question 11**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In February 2025, when I was Fire Authority Chairman I asked officers to invite all members of the Executive Committee to a working group to discuss on-call service provision. This covered all political groups on the Authority.

In July 2025, a meeting was held with officers, you as the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview and Audit - it discussed the exact some proposals to cut 8 fire engines and close 2 stations, but with revised consultation dates. Please can you advise:

- why you did not invite Conservative members of the Executive Committee to this meeting unlike in February 2025?
- why you did not as a minimum invite the Conservative Group Leader?
- how exclusion of the largest group on the Authority from such discussions is conducive to effective governance and scrutiny?
- why the Chair of Overview and Audit was present at this meeting given he is not a Lead Member nor a member of the Executive Committee to whom these matters relate, not Overview and Audit?
- why the papers from that meeting have not been shared with the Executive Committee?
- whether officers advised you that the proposals put before you were an exact replica of the February 2025 ones the majority of the working group of the Executive had stated it could not support or that they originally sought to commence consultation in the summer, but on the basis of this feedback did not proceed to that plan?
- why there have been no meetings of Group Leaders on the Authority held or scheduled since one meeting held on August 2025, (following a request from me but set at a date I could not attend due to annual leave)?
- why, at the time of writing, you have failed in 6 days to respond or even acknowledge by email on a request by the Conservative Group for an extraordinary meeting of the Fire Authority to debate proposed cuts to the Fire Service, or my request for confirmation of the usual standing orders on

petitions and questions being included on the agenda of the planned 12th November Extraordinary meeting.

- whether you intend to continue to lead the Authority on the basis of excluding the largest political group from key engagement sessions with officers and not conducting Group Leader meetings?

**Response from Councillor Llew Monger, Chairman, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

Whilst the proposals presented in the July workshop were very similar to those presented to you in February, they were not exactly the same. In the February workshop, Broughton was included in the option for a mix of stand-alone and wholetime based on-call appliances, this changed to Buckingham, with Broughton removed by the time of the July workshop.

- a) This was a workshop arranged for the benefit of the newly appointed Chair, Vice Chair and Lead Members.
- b) See above
- c) See above
- d) At the time of this workshop, the chair of the O&A committee was still Cllr Carroll. Cllr Wilson was not elected as Chair of the O&A until 16 July. From previous discussions with Cllr Wilson, I considered that as a new member to the Authority, he would add valuable experience and understanding to the discussion in the workshop.
- e) There was no 'paper' as such. This was a workshop at which a series of slides were used as an 'aide memoir' for the presenter in order to generate discussion.
- f) Whilst these proposals were similar they were not exactly the same. More data had been presented by the project team at this stage.
- g) Meetings of Group leaders are scheduled through to April 2027 on the second Monday of every month. The last meeting was held on 8th September 2025 at 09:30hrs on MS Teams which you declined.

- h) Your request was sent to the Monitoring Officer who is dealing with this as is required by Standing Orders.
- i) Group Leaders meetings are in the calendar on the second Monday of every month through to April 2027

## **Question 12**

### **Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Stuart Wilson, Chairman – Overview and Audit Committee, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

In July 2025 a meeting of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Lead Members and the Chair of Overview Audit was held where proposals to cut 8 fire engines from our fleet and close 2 stations were proposed. Included in those proposals was the removal of fire engines from Beaconsfield and High Wycombe, impacting your own ward of the Wooburns, Flackwell Heath and Bourne End.

These exactly mirrored proposals put to a working group of the Executive Committee of the previous Authority in February 2025 in which officers were informed any such proposals would not command the support of the then majority Conservative Group.

In the July meeting, you were asked, as a meeting objective, to support progress to public consultation. Officers have subsequently proceeded to staff and pre-public consultation on those specific proposals. Given the high calibre of our officer team, it is inconceivable they would have proceeded without confidence such proposals would be supported by the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Impact Alliance majority coalition on the Fire Authority.

Please can you explain why you gave support to officers proceeding with proposals, and specifically why you supported consideration of the removal of fire engines from Beaconsfield and High Wycombe?

### **Response from Councillor Stuart Wilson, Chairman – Overview and Audit Committee, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

As a new Member of both the Fire Authority and the Overview & Audit Committee (but not yet elected as Chairman), I had reviewed the reports for the Overview & Audit Committee and raised several questions to Officers regarding the Internal Audit and the Corporate Risk Management Plan reports. This was particularly, but not exclusively, around Workforce Planning and Training for On-Call Fire Crew which was identified in the reports as being highly problematic.

From the Internal Audit, it was clear that this represents a significant risk to the effective operation of the existing model of staffing and therefore safety for residents in Buckinghamshire.

Following a response from Officers it was suggested that I might attend a workshop already scheduled on this topic with the permission of the Chairman. I attended neither as a Lead Member nor as Chairman of the Overview & Audit Committee which had yet to sit. I made that clear during the workshop.

My understanding is that the workshop was to bring the new Lead Members up to speed on the latest position regarding the On-Call position. I had been asked to attend because I had raised specific questions and concerns from the Overviews & Audit Committee papers. It is my clear recollection that any decisions to consult on any options would need to be taken at a later date by the Fire Authority.

Having led on significant corporate affairs matters in the private sector previously, I suggested that a communication work-stream would be important and should start as soon as possible. Future meetings and events would provide an opportunity to put the operational facts to Members of the Fire Authority, in the public domain, and with relevant stakeholders.

Indeed, the first meeting of the Overview & Audit Committee discussed the Internal Audit finding and concerns on Workforce Planning. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer commented extensively on the matter: on the deteriorating position of the On-Call Service; the situation with the 12 Whole-time appliances; the lack of need for 30 appliances; and that options would be brought forward. All Members from all political groups had the opportunity and did ask questions. I asked a question about the number of staff to be recruited. Other Members from the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat groups asked questions about managing resources and funding risk, adapting to weather pattern changes, public education, and the reassurance of the Fire Service response. At no point did any Member from any political group challenge the proposals to bring forward options for future approval given the significant concerns highlighted by the Internal Audit and Corporate Risk Management Reports.

It goes without saying that any proposals or options would require significant scrutiny and would not receive my support if they put the safety of any Buckinghamshire residents at risk.

### **Question 13**

**Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

Milton Keynes Council has a publicly stated intent to form a new strategic authority under local government reform, with authorities in Luton and Bedfordshire.

There are implications of any such strategic authority formation in relation to the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and its resources - namely that it is likely that Milton Keynes would exit the Combined Authority arrangement and seek a resource split with Buckinghamshire.

On this basis, please could you advise:

- whether officers have undertaken any work on the potential financial implications of any such split, namely the likely split, principles for split on assets and resources of the Service?
- whether the implications of a significant reduction of up to 7 Buckinghamshire fire engines in the current proposals for on-call reduction on resources and asset split have been considered either in this work, or the on-call reduction work?

**Response from Councillor Niknam Hussain, Lead Member for Finance and Assets, Information Security, IT, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

No formal work has been undertaken at this stage.

#### **Question 14**

**Question from Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member to Councillor Moriah Priestley, Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

The Service currently does not have sufficient on-call firefighters in a number of locations, yet it recently ran a recruitment campaign focusing on only 6 six stations.

It was noticeable that no recruitment was done for Stokenchurch, Haddenham, Great Missenden, Amersham, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Broughton or West Ashland.

If the Service has not yet made any decision, nor had authority, to remove the on-call appliances from these locations, why has it given up recruiting to see if they can be viable?

Please confirm that a recruitment campaign will be run for these stations without delay.

**Response from Councillor Moriah Priestley Lead Member for People, Equality and Diversity and Assurance, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority to Councillor Simon Rouse – Fire Authority Member**

Locations for piloting a targeted recruitment campaign were identified which would have the most impact in terms of response times.

This campaign has attracted 44 applicants. 27 of which are at the targeted sites, and 17 are for other stations. All applications are being put forward to the next recruitment stage.

It is worth noting that in addition to the targeted campaigns being trialled in September 2025, seven on-call firefighters have already been recruited earlier in 2025.

Broughton x 1,

Amersham x 2,

Beaconsfield x 1,

Marlow x 2

Princes Risborough x 1.



Learning from the targeted approach will be taken forward to continually improve future recruitment campaigns which may or may not be targeted at specific locations.