

BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

4 SEPTEMBER 2008

PRESENT

Councillors: R Baker BEM, N Bullock, A Carter, R Davies, A Duggan (CFA Chairman), M Riaz, D Ross, J Saunders and S Timoney.

08-09/fa/030 APOLOGIES

Councillors Gwynne-Jones, Shingler and Street and Mr Logan, CFA Treasurer, had tendered their apologies.

08-09/fa/031 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Norris Bullock to his first meeting of the Combined Fire Authority.

Annual Fire and Rescue Conference

The Chairman and Chief Fire Officer reported on their attendance at the World Firefighters' Games and the Annual Fire and Rescue Conference held in Liverpool in August 2008, which had been attended also by the Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (CLG). In conjunction with Helen Shaw, who had previously addressed the Authority's Human Resources Scrutiny Group, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service had made a presentation on increasing the number of women firefighters.

CLG Consultation Documents

The Chairman referred to the following consultation documents, copies of which had been sent to Members:

- Communities in Control; Real People, Real Power – Improving Local Accountability: August 2008
- The National Procurement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service 2008/11: August 2008

CLG had invited comments on the documents by 30 October 2008 and 14 November 2008 respectively and the Chairman proposed that Members consider this matter later in the meeting.

08-09/fa/032 DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS

The Chairman and Chief Fire Officer declared a personal interest in Agenda Item No 12 (Dunstable Community Fire Station).

08-09/fa/033 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That, the minutes of the meetings of the Fire Authority held on 9 and 30 June 2008 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

08-09/fa/034 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Members noted that no questions had been received in accordance with the public participation scheme approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority held on 5 April 2000 (minute 99/fa/94 refers).

08-09/fa/035 REVIEW OF THE INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANS

DCFO Smith advised that the Authority's first Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was drawn up during 2003/04 and, after taking account of the responses to consultation, the plans had been implemented from 1 April 2004.

The original five year IRMP was drawing to a conclusion and a wide ranging review was now in progress. A small group had been established, under the chairmanship of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, with the objective of producing a draft IRMP for the next five years to drive the delivery of the Service within the community of Bedfordshire and Luton by:

- producing a draft plan by December 2008,
- developing proposals, endorsed by the IRMP Scrutiny Group, to implement the plan,
- recommending a delivery mechanism for those proposals, including a review mechanism.

The overall focus would be to set out the high level expectations of how the aims and objectives of IRMP translate into the phases of scope, risk analysis, strategy and delivery mechanism and monitoring and review.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

08-09/fa/036 PERFORMANCE ACHIEVEMENT SCRUTINY GROUP: 11 JUNE 2008

Councillor Davies, Vice Chairman of the Performance Achievement Scrutiny Group, presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2008.

RESOLVED:

That

1. the draft minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2008 be noted.
2. the Asset Management Strategy for 2008/11 be approved.
3. the Strategic Risk Register be approved.

08-09/fa/037 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY GROUP: 18 JUNE 2008

Councillor Saunders, Chairman of the Integrated Risk Management Scrutiny Group, presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2008.

RESOLVED:

That

1. the draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2008 be noted.
2. the draft Service Delivery Strategy 2008/13 be circulated for formal consultation with staff, representative bodies and the public.
3. the Community Partnership Strategy 2008-09 be agreed.
4. the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2004/09 - Year 5 Action Plan be approved.

08-09/fa/038 HUMAN RESOURCES SCRUTINY GROUP: 25 JUNE 2008

Councillor Davies, Vice Chairman of the Human Resources Scrutiny Group, presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2008.

RESOLVED:

That, the draft minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2008 be noted.

08-09/fa/039 STANDARDS COMMITTEE: 10 JULY 2008

Councillor Baker presented the draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2008.

The Secretary advised that this had been the first meeting of the reconstituted Standards Committee with three new Independent (Co-opted) Members and one new elected Member in addition to an existing Independent (Co-opted) Member and two elected Members.

The meeting had considered the new procedures for the local assessment of allegations of any breach of the Members' Code of Conduct, including the establishment of an Assessment Sub Committee, Review Sub Committee and Hearings Panel, and a complaints form. Details had been published on the Service Website.

Members also noted the work programme the Standards Committee had agreed for 2008/09.

Councillor Baker advised Members that the meeting of the Standards Committee scheduled for 17 October 2008 had been moved to 10 November 2008.

The Chairman paid tribute to the work of the Standards Committee and the Independent (Co-opted) Members for their support and attendance at the recent Members' visits to fire stations.

RESOLVED:

That, the draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2008 be noted.

08-09/fa/040 EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD: 26 MARCH AND 18 JUNE 2008

RESOLVED:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2008 and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2008 be noted.

08-09/fa/041 BUSINESS CONTINUITY – PROJECT FIREGUARD

ACFO Hull advised that the Authority had, at its meeting on 11 April 2008, given an in-principle commitment that, should a contract be let at the end of the tender process for Project Fireguard, the Authority, subject to its full consideration and approvals regime, would wish to be one of the contracting authorities.

The Fireguard Project had brought together thirty three Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales in a procurement managed on behalf of CFOA by Firebuy Ltd.

The process of inviting tenders had commenced in August 2007. The companies submitting Outline Solutions were evaluated and Final Invitations to Tender were issued in April 2008; these had been evaluated by a project team in June 2008.

The evaluation process identified the solution proposed by Group 4 Security Solutions (G4S) as the most economically advantageous on the basis of the award criteria noted in the Final Invitation to Tender documents provided to all tenderers on 7 April 2008.

Firebuy Ltd had submitted G4S's solution to participant Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) (the award of any contract being subject to approval by a sufficient number of FRAs to enter into such arrangements) for consideration.

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service (BLFRS) had advised that, in the case of a local or national emergency, it would require an Emergency Fire Crew Capability (EFCC) of five, based upon the expected ability of BLFRS being able to staff a small number of Appliances by utilising available personnel dependant upon the scenario that caused the contract to be 'called off' and the experience and knowledge gained during Operation 'Fresco' in 2003.

The GS4 solution would deliver an EFCC of five for a local emergency but, in the event of a national emergency, only one EFCC would be available.

Members noted the probable cost of the Fireguard contract; in addition, if there would be further call-off charges. There was no provision in the revenue budget for this expenditure which would need to be added to the 2009/10 revenue budget. The implications of this in 2009/10, if corresponding savings could not be found, would be an additional 1.7% on the precept.

Members noted that failure to put into place adequate control measures could lead to a massive adverse affect on service delivery for the duration of an emergency and a failure on the Authority's behalf to meet its statutory duty in respect of Business Continuity. Participation in the Fireguard contract would enhance the current control measures.

Whilst Fireguard was designed to cover for local industrial action; it was noted that the Authority currently enjoyed good local industrial relations with no immediate prospect of this changing. Similarly, if there was a 'flu pandemic there was a possibility that the Service provider would also be affected.

Other Fire Authorities had found resources within their existing pool of employees and had used resilience contracts to attempt to 'guarantee' cover in the event of a future dispute. BLFRS officers had not yet fully investigated this option or other possible alternatives.

Members considered that alternative options should be further explored and that commitment to the Fireguard contract should not be confirmed until this had been done.

RESOLVED:

That, the Chief Fire Officer be instructed to explore other options to allow the Authority to meet its statutory duties regarding Business Continuity, for consideration at a Members' Workshop to be held following the Performance Achievement Scrutiny Group meeting on 15 October 2008 and further report to the Combined Fire Authority on 12 December 2008.

08-09/fa/042 DUNSTABLE COMMUNITY FIRE STATION

The Chairman and Chief Fire Officer declared a personal interest in this Item. The Vice Chair took the Chair for this Item which was introduced by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

On 9 June 2008, Members noted that discussions were taking place for St John's Ambulance to have access to the facilities at the new Dunstable Community Fire Station.

Following further discussion, it was proposed that St John Ambulance be granted a five year fixed term licence of the first floor, subject to three months notice, at a fee of £5,000 per annum plus a £1,000 per annum contribution in respect of services and insurance.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

08-09/fa/043 FIRE APPLIANCE FOR KENYA

The Service was in the process of replacing five Rescue Pumps as part of the rolling replacement programme for vehicles to enter operational service in early 2009.

As each new vehicle entered operational service, existing vehicles were cascaded down to other stations to ensure that the most modern vehicles were located in the areas with the larger operational workload.

At the end of the vehicle cascade the five eldest fire appliances could be prepared for disposal. Disposal could generate a small amount of income (between £1,500 and £3,000) depending on the vehicle's condition and whether the old vehicles were purchased on financial or operator leases.

The Service had been contacted by Mr Fredrick Akandi, and supported by Andrew Selous MP in connection with the donation of a fire appliance to Meru Town in central Kenya. In addition, the Onset Trust, an organisation based in Dunstable, had agreed to fund all expenses relating to shipping and training of the local firefighters in Meru to use any appliance donated by the Service.

DCFO Smith advised Members that Meru Town had a population of 500,000, with an area similar to that of Luton, but no fire service. In 2006, fire had destroyed over 100 family homes with multiple fatalities, many of whom were children. The town was trying to provide a fire engine and training to establish a volunteer fire service.

Members noted that an Appliance had been donated to Pakistan in 2006 and asked if an update could be reported on this matter.

RESOLVED:

That, the proposal to donate an old fire appliance to Kenya be supported by the Combined Fire Authority.

08-09/fa/044 TREASURY MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08

On 1 April 2004, the Fire Authority had adopted the Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). One of the requirements of the CIPFA Code was for an annual report on treasury management to be presented to the appropriate committee. Accordingly, the Head of Finance and Corporate Support presented the annual report for 2007/08.

Surplus cash was invested on a temporary basis through the money market and it was noted that, after allowing for interest on borrowings totalling £0.273M, net interest income of £0.212M had been generated.

The capital programme for 2007/2008 was funded in part by long-term borrowing, undertaken in advance during 2006/07, from the Public Works Loan Board, which continued to offer borrowing facilities to local authorities at rates of interest slightly lower than the prevailing market rates. The remainder of the Capital Programme was funded from Capital Receipts and Government Grant.

With regard to the Prudential Indicators, Members noted that neither the authorised limit nor the operational boundary had been exceeded during the year. Actual interest rate exposure had exceeded estimation, which reflected the higher level of net interest generated.

For the year ending 31 March 2008, the average interest rate achieved from temporary investments was 5.69%, compared to the average Local Authority 7 Day Rate over the same period of 5.3%.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

08-09/fa/045 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING – 2008/09

On 8 February 2008 the Authority approved its 2008/09 Revenue Budget of £27,792,367. It had previously endorsed the proposal that a regular monitoring report should be submitted to each of its meetings, and the Head of Finance and Corporate Support presented the second such report for 2008/09.

The Revenue Budget was funded by way of Reserves of £812,000 (2.9%), Revenue Support Grant (RSG) of £1,334,342 (4.8%), Business Rate (NNDR) Income of £9,585,232 (34.5%) and from Council Tax of £16,060,793 (57.8%). Payment dates for these various sources of funding were determined in advance of the start of the year and, as at 31 August 2008, £833,830 had been received by way of RSG, £4,313,354 from NNDR and £7,283,362 from Council Tax.

No agreement has yet been reached on the APT&C Staff pay award due on 1 April 2008 but the Firefighters' Pay Award has been approved from 1 July 2008 at 2.45% compared with the 2.5% allowed for in the Pay Contingency. This gave a small saving of £4,500, which it was proposed, should be added to the Prices part of the Contingency.

To date, £13,600 had been allocated from the Prices Contingency of £165,000. However, with the substantial recent increases in energy and fuel costs it was anticipated that this would be called upon further later in the year.

Members had previously noted the problems encountered with fire services' mutual insurance company, FRAML. Interim arrangements had been made to extend cover until 31 October 2008 after which time cover until 31 March 2009 should be secured following the currently on-going tender process. Negotiations were continuing between FRAML and the Financial Services Authority (FSA) for the release of the original premiums paid on 1 April 2008.

Since the last meeting, short term investments had generated net additional interest of £105,053.

Dunstable Community Fire Station had been handed over, subject to outstanding snagging works, on 12 August 2008 and the Station had 'gone live' on 20 August 2008. The other major project to provide rest and study accommodation at Stopsley Fire Station was underway and on target, both budget and time wise.

The Service's Capital Strategy Team, at its quarterly meeting on 17 July 2008, had reviewed progress on the remaining capital projects. As a result of increased costs of £108,000 for three small fire appliances that slipped from 2007/08; savings of £35,000 on three replacement rescue pumps; the slippage of the aerial provision appliance (CARP) to 2009/10 and the decision to purchase early from leasing (at favourable terms) the Bedford Aerial Platform, there was an overall reduction of £95,000 in the current year's Capital Programme. This was offset by an increase in 2009/10 of £225,000, resulting in a net increase over the two years of £130,000. The Capital Programme for vehicles had been amended accordingly and Members were requested to endorse this.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the reported change in the Capital Programme for vehicles be approved.

08-09/fa/046 REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Head of Finance and Corporate Support reported that TRIBAL's internal audit report on governance had recommended that the Authority's Financial Regulations be amended to include reference to the Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy.

The current Financial Regulations dated back to June 2005, with the exception of a small amendment in September 2006, and the opportunity had been taken to review all of the Financial Regulations.

Only minor amendments were found to be required and a proposed revision to the Authority's Financial Regulations was submitted for Members' approval.

RESOLVED:

That the submitted revision to the Authority's Financial Regulations be approved.

08-09/fa/047 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Secretary reported on the current position. The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 Regulations, had come into effect on 29 August 2008 but did not affect the Combined Fire Authority specifically.

Further sets of Regulations were to be laid over the coming months dealing with other transitional matters, finance issues (including the preparations needed for the setting of council tax for the new unitary councils) and ceremonial matters.

A working party of officers had been established to ensure continuity of services currently provided to the Service via the County Council and maintain dialogue with the successor authorities regarding future provision and working arrangements, and the Chief Fire Officer was in discussion with CLG on the variation of The Bedfordshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1996 as revised by the Local Government Act 2003.

Although the Combined Fire Authority would continue after 1 April 2009, County Councillors would cease to be Members of the Combined Fire Authority with the abolition of the County Council (though those who were Members of the Shadow Authority for Central Bedfordshire would hold office, as such, up to the local government elections in 2009). Subject to an appropriate new Combination Scheme Order being in place from 1 April 2009, Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire should be able to appoint Members to the Combined Fire Authority for an interim period up to the elections/annual general meetings.

It was also reported that the Government had proposed that Bedford Borough Council should be the new Administering Authority for the Bedfordshire Pension Fund from 1 April 2009.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

08-09/fa/048 COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL; REAL PEOPLE, REAL POWER – IMPROVING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY: AUGUST 2008; AND THE NATIONAL PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE 2008/11: AUGUST 2008

The Chairman referred to the above CLG consultation documents, which had been previously sent to Members, noting that CLG had invited comments on the documents by 30 October 2008 and 14 November 2008 respectively.

RESOLVED:

That,

1. Members advise the Administration Manager of their comments by 3 October 2008 for report to the Performance Achievement Scrutiny Group on 15 October 2008;
2. the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Performance Achievement Scrutiny Group be authorised to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Combined Fire Authority.

08-09/fa/049 INFORMATION BULLETIN

Members received a bulletin containing information on various matters relating to the Fire and Rescue Service.