



BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY TO LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL AT ITS MEETING ON 9TH NOVEMBER 2004

1. MEETING

A meeting of the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority was held at County Hall, Bedford on 16 September 2004. The issues discussed at the meeting are summarised below:

2. FIRE SERVICE PAY AND CONDITIONS AGREEMENT: LOCAL VERIFICATION REPORT PHASE 2

The Combined Fire Authority has considered a report on the results from phase two of the modernisation audit carried out by the Audit Commission. The Authority has been assessed with an "amber plus" rating, meaning that reasonable progress has been made towards the overall modernisation agenda. The overall key message was the Authority has put in place the essential building blocks to deliver the modernisation programme. Positive comments have been made on the Brigade's Integrated Risk Management Project and the devolvement of risk assessment and response decisions to a local level, which is considered best practice. However, the full support of staff and local funding were identified as vital prerequisites to achieving success, with funding the programme in the medium to long-term being the challenge for the Authority.

3. OPERATION FRESCO

The Authority has received a verbal report by the Chief Fire Officer on Operation Fresco.

Members have been informed that a letter had been received from the ODPM suggesting that the CFA release front line equipment into a pool as a contingency measure in the event of further strike action. The Chief Fire Officer advised the CFA not to do so until an order was received because of uncertainties over the impact of fire cover. Such an order was subsequently made under the Fire Services Act 2003 that required the Service to release fire appliances in the event of an industrial dispute.

4. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The Combined Fire Authority has received a report from Councillor Mrs L Ledster on the outcome of a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) training day held on 25 May 2004.

Concerning the Authority's forthcoming CPA scheduled for 20 – 26 January 2005, Members have noted their role in preparing for the process. Workshops will be held via the various CFA Working Groups to ensure a clear understanding of the CPA process. The need to build upon the 'amber plus' rating awarded by the Audit Commission has been emphasised.

The Authority has also received a presentation from Assistant Chief Fire Officer Smith on 'Preparing for the CPA' covering the following areas:

- The two judgements that will be made
 - How good is the Service?
 - Prospects for Service Improvements
- Questions to be asked on each judgement
 - What has the Service aimed to achieve
 - Is the Service meeting the needs of the Community and Users?
 - Is the Service delivering Value for Money?

5. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT

The Combined Fire Authority has endorsed the Internal Audit report on the Ethical Governance Audit of the Authority and the recommendations contained in the Management Action Plan, as revised and supported by the CFA Standards Committee on 12 July 2004. Members have noted that the request for the audit was in response to the growing interest in ethical governance arrangements to ensure the Authority was acting positively to promote and monitor ethical governance. The overall audit opinion was "satisfactory" placing the Authority, generally, in a strong position with the recommended improvements making the ethical framework more transparent.

6. 2003/2004 ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT - UPDATE

Further to the meeting of the Authority held on 14 June 2004 where the main findings of the 2003/04 Annual Internal Audit were reported, Members have been advised on those sections which had not been finalised as part of the report. Outstanding responses in relation to the Payroll and IT/IS audits have been received and were satisfactory in terms of agreeing the recommendations and the report on Ethical Governance has been approved by the Standards Committee. With regard to previous significant problems with the payroll systems, payroll would be revisited earlier as part of the 2004/05 managed audit arrangements. In response to on-going concern about problems with IT Net, the Chief Fire Officer has advised Members that because of the impending end of the contract, the Service was currently looking at in-house provision against future outsourcing of Payroll and that a report would be brought to the Authority in due course.

7. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2004/2005

The Authority has considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer on progress regarding the management of the 2004/05 Revenue Budget in relation to identified budget pressures.

Members have been reminded that by utilising savings generated from delays in retirement of some Firefighting staff and the reduction in insurance premiums, the £200,000 budget saving required had been reduced to £127,500. This was, however, increased to £187,500 by the £60,000 additional pressure in relation to the replacement of personal protective equipment reported to the meeting of the Authority on 14 June 2004.

The Treasurer has reported that approximately £147,000 of potential savings has been identified from delayed implementation or removal of budget items to meet this pressure. The 'net' saving still to be found was £40,000 and the Service was confident that this would be found during the current financial year.

With regard to reducing the budget, Members have been advised that there could be some effect on service delivery, such as a reduction of smoke alarm provision, fireground catering or other planned community safety initiatives, as the Authority's budget was finite.

COUNCILLOR A DUGGAN
Chairman of the Combined Fire Authority