



Minutes of a meeting of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 23 July 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. R. Allen CC	Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC	Mr. D. Harrison CC
Mr. D. Grimley CC	Cllr. S. Harvey

In attendance

Callum Faint, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Paul Weston, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Judi Beresford, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Amy Oliver, Treasurer
 Lauren Haslam, Monitoring Officer
 Neil Jones, Head of Internal Audit Service, Leicestershire County Council
 Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council
 Karl Bowden, Head of People and Organisational Development
 Collette Sutton, Head of Corporate Financial Services
 Gemma Duckworth, Senior Democratic Services Officer
 Alec Maxfield, Independent Member

81. Appointment of Chairman.

It was moved by Mr D Harrison CC and seconded by Mr D Grimley CC that Mr R Allen CC be appointed Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the CFA in 2025.

RESOLVED:

That Mr R Allen CC be appointed Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the CFA in 2025.

Mr R Allen CC in the Chair

82. Election of Vice Chairman.

The Chairman sought nominations for the position of Vice Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee.

It was moved by Mr Harrison CC and seconded by Mr Grimley CC that Mrs. M. E. Newton CC be appointed Vice Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the CFA in 2025. There being no other nominations, the Chairman declared Mrs. M. E. Newton CC be appointed Vice Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs. M. E. Newton CC be appointed Vice Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the CFA in 2025.

83. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Barton, Councillor A Osman and Mr B Bhakri.

84. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare an interest in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations were made.

85. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items.

86. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman made his announcements which covered the following matters:

- New Recruits
- Charity Events
- Breathing Apparatus Exercise

87. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

88. External Audit Strategy Memorandum 2023/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ended 31 March 2024 from the CFA's External Auditor, Grant Thornton. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Audit Strategy Memorandum plan for the 2023/24 external audit included detail of matters such as Grant Thornton's audit scope and approach, significant audit risks and key judgement areas, value for money work and the scale of audit fees. It was anticipated that the audit would be completed by the end of November 2024. Assurance was given that arrangements were in place to address any significant risks.

In terms of informing the audit risk assessment, no issues had been identified by senior management and the document mirrored where officers expected things to be.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Harrison CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the External Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ended 31 March 2024 be noted.

89. Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer noting the delay in publishing the Draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

The Draft Statement of Accounts were required to be published by the statutory deadline of 31 May 2024. However, due to resourcing issues and delays in completing the 2022/23 external audit, this had not been possible. It was the intention to publish the Draft Statement of Accounts by the end of July 2024 and the Committee would be notified once this was the case.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Grimley CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

90. After the Incident Survey Annual Report 2023/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented the outcomes of the After the Incident Survey 2023/24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the response percentage to the survey was quite low. In response, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer commented that, although crews handed out cards after an incident, consideration was being given to other ways of improving the response rate, for example having a tablet at the scene for people to complete the questionnaire immediately. However, it was important to ensure that those involved in an incident were asked for a response at the appropriate time.

The Committee noted the overall positive response rate and wished to place on record its thanks to officers for providing such an excellent service.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Councillor Harvey. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the summary findings be noted.

91. Performance Monitoring April 2023 to March 2024 and April 2024 to May 2024.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented an update on the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2023 to March 2024 and also April 2024 to May 2024. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) Between April 2023 – March 2024, 9,345 incidents were attended, with an increase in the number of non-fire incidents, in particular RTCs, effecting entry and flooding. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer commented that the Fire and Rescue Service was not a statutory agency for dealing with flooding but it was acknowledged as an issue and there was little that could be done to mitigate issues when they occurred. The situation would continue to be monitored.
- ii) Officers continued to work with Road Safety Partnerships around reducing the number of RTCs. Attendance times were often slower due to the rural locations of many accidents and work continued to improve this.
- iii) The number of suicide and suicide attempts being attended had increased significantly. Assurance was given that the impact on crews attending these incidents was being closely monitored, and a range of support was available. Following Leicestershire Police implementing the 'Most Appropriate Agency' response to incidents, LFRS had been attending more non-fire related incidents. Although the impact to the Service was minimal currently, the time spent at incidents could be significant.
- iv) KCI2 – Fatalities and casualties – was largely in line with national trends, as was KCI3 – level of emergency response service provision. The new mobilising system was due to go live on 7 October, and there was an expectation that there would be an improvement in call-handling time.
- v) The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer reported that LFRS was in the top ten FRAs for the number of home fire safety checks and for fire protection and enforcement.
- vi) A query was raised around whether there had been an increase in the number of collisions with electric vehicles/electric scooters. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer responded that there had not currently been an increase in collisions with electric cars. However, he stated that the impact of electric vehicle fires was different due to the intensity of the fire. In relation to e-scooters, there had been a national and local impact, particularly with those which had been imported, and there had been a number of domestic dwelling fires as a result of the batteries in the scooters. The National Fire Chiefs Council was leading a campaign around lithium ion batteries.
- vii) A comment was made that using rolling statistics on a three year basis could make it difficult to notice slowly deteriorating performance. However, this is what had been requested by the Committee previously. Consideration could be given to using a benchmarking period instead.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Harrison CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2023 to March 2024 and April 2024 to May 2024 be noted.

92. Service Development Programme and 'CRMP 2024-28' Actions.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented the progress made since November 2023 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the actions included in the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-28. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the VRVs had now moved to Central and Uppingham Fire Stations. In particular at Central, this would provide an opportunity to test the vehicles in a city environment. At the end of the twelve month trial, the results would be presented to the CFA. So far, the impacts had been very positive.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Grimley CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made since November 2023 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in the CRMP 2024-28 be noted.

93. Head of Internal Audit Services Annual Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2023-24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the Head of Internal Audit Service was able to conclude a reasonably positive opinion and gave reasonable assurance that overall, the control environment remained adequate and effective. Whilst there were isolated high risk rated weaknesses identified in some areas, controls to mitigate key risks were generally operating effectively.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Harrison CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2023-24 be noted.

94. Progress Against the Internal Audit Plan 2024-25.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which provided an update of progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Two legacy partial assurance reports containing high importance recommendations (in respect of Contract Procedure Rules and BACS audits) remained outstanding. There were concerns in respect of readiness for addressing the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023 in time for the go live date of 28 October 2024. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer gave assurance that a plan would be in place to meet the necessary changes. A procurement training package was being developed and would be rolled out to staff when ready. In terms of contract management, it was acknowledged that there were staffing/capacity issues and work was taking place to recruit.

In respect of BACS audits, the responses to the supplementary questions had now been received. These appeared to be satisfactory but needed to be tested. It was hoped that this audit could be closed at the next meeting.

It was noted that four audits carried over into 2024-25 had been finalised with substantial assurance. There had been ten potential auditable areas within the approved 2024-25 Internal Audit plan and of these, nine current year audits were at various stages of work in progress and one audit had not yet started.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Councillor Harvey. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that

- a) Two legacy partial assurance reports (relating to contract procedure rules and BACS) containing high importance recommendations remain outstanding. These continue to be retested as part of the 2024-25 coverage;
- b) Work is progressing well with the 2024-25 audit plan and is at the stage anticipated for this time of year;
- c) From conversations held, there are concerns in respect of readiness for addressing the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023 in time for the go live date of 28 October 2024.

95. Procurement and Waivers Annual Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which provided details of procurement related activity and compliance for the financial year 2023-24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 15' is filed with these minutes.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Grimley CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of procurement activity in 2023-24, as required by Rule 19.2 of the Contracts Procedure Rules 2018, be noted.

96. Sickness Analysis April 2023 - March 2024.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented an update on sickness analysis for the period April 2023 to March 2024. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 16' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that the overall sickness had increased for wholetime and support staff when compared to the previous year. However, Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service collated and analysed sickness data on behalf of all Services within England. The annual summary had recently been released; this showed that despite the increase in sickness within LFRS, it still compared very favourably against the national picture.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) Following a query around whether there were any trends in the type of sickness being reported, it was noted that the majority were non-work related, with a large proportion being muscular skeletal injuries or mental health. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer gave assurance that a wide range of support was available and processes were in place to assist staff in getting back to work as quickly as possible.
- ii) It was acknowledged that mental health issues had increased nationally, particularly post-Covid. LFRS had invested in internal support for staff suffering with mental health issues, but this was now at the capacity of what could be offered. However, it was worth noting that LFRS was in a much better position than a number of other FRSS.
- iii) The Committee noted that LFRS was doing well in terms of what it was providing to staff. A request was made that a breakdown be provided to a future meeting of the number of long term sickness absences.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mrs Newton CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the sickness analysis for the period April 2023 to March 2024 be noted.

97. HMICFRS Improvement Plan and Culture Report Recommendations.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which detailed how the Service was progressing with the implementation of the Improvement Plan which had been developed in response to the inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) during May and June 2022. An updated plan, detailing the progress made so far, was presented. The report also informed the Committee how the Service was progressing with the HMICFRS Cultural Report recommendations following its publication in March 2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 17' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee noted the significant improvements made within the Service and thanked the Senior Leadership Team for ensuring the work had been undertaken.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Harrison CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the progress of the Improvement Plan and Cultural Report recommendations be noted.

98. Annual Equalities Report 2023-24.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented the LFRS Annual Equalities Report for 2023-24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 18' is filed with these minutes.

The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer acknowledged that, despite statistics showing progress in relation to recruitment across all protected characteristics, there was still work to be done. The Service was committed to maintaining its focus in ensuring a working environment where staff felt confident to self-identify in all areas of monitoring and it was pleasing to note that there had been a significant increase in the number of staff willing to share their data.

In response to a query around equalities champions, it was reported that there had been a shift away from the champions role and there was now one main equalities group within the Service. The Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Manager had undertaken lots of work with staff and training had now been embedded across the Service.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Councillor Harvey. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer be authorised to make any necessary amendments prior to publication.

99. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2024-27.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented the LFRS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2024-2027. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 19' is filed with these minutes.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Councillor Harvey. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The content of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2024-2027 be noted; and
- b) The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer be authorised to make any necessary amendments prior to publication.

100. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the CFA Corporate Governance Committee will be held on 11 September 2024 at 10.00am.

23 July 2024

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