



Minutes of a meeting of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 11 September 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. R. Allen CC (in the Chair)

Cllr. S. Barton

Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC

Mr. D. Grimley CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC

Mr. D. Harrison CC

In attendance

Judi Beresford, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

Ben Bee, Area Manager

Lauren Haslam, Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Collette Sutton, Head of Corporate Financial Services

Neil Jones, Head of Internal Audit Service, Leicestershire County Council

Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council

Bipon Bhakri, Independent Member

Alec Maxfield, Independent Member

Gemma Duckworth, Senior Democratic Services Officer

101. Apologies for absence.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Harvey.

102. 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.

103. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items.

104. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman made his announcements which covered the recruitment process for the new Head of Corporate Financial Services/Treasurer.

105. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2024 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

106. Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Financial Services which presented the draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

The draft Statement of Accounts had been signed by the Treasurer on 12 August 2024 and submitted to the external auditor and published on the website for public inspection on the same date. The draft accounts were subject to ongoing review by Grant Thornton prior to them concluding their audit opinion and Value for Money assessment. It was the intention that the final version of the accounts would be presented to the CFA for approval at its meeting on 10 December 2024, subject to completion of the external audit.

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 draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24 be considered and the submission of the documents to the Combined Fire Authority for approval be approved, noting that they may be subject to amendment following the external audit.

107. Performance Monitoring April to July 2024.

The Committee considered a report presenting an update on the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April to July 2024. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) 3,116 incidents had been attended between April and July 2024. Of these, 1,101 had been fire false alarms, which was an increase on the three year average. There was a risk that the increase in false alarms was using resources and as such, fire protection measures were being improved to ensure a reduction in the use of apparatus.
- ii) It was pleasing to note that the target for attendance times to life risk incidents was being met – for primary domestic dwelling fires, the response time had been 8 minutes 16 seconds, and for all other life risk incidents, it had been 10 minutes 34 seconds.
- iii) The number of home safety checks undertaken between April and July 2024 was 4,965, which was just slightly below the average year to date figure. Fire Protection had increased the number of fire safety audits undertaken in the period to 486, which was considerably higher than the three year average.
- iv) Public satisfaction remained very high – 100% of the 68 people who responded to the After the Incident survey had been satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service they had received at an incident. Also so far this year, 260 home safety check feedback surveys and 110 fire protection surveys had been completed with 100% satisfaction.
- v) In response to a query around the support package for firefighters, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer reported that a bespoke package had recently been

developed in conjunction with the Police. This was to help firefighters dealing with cases of suicide until the Police arrived at the scene. This would be rolled out to all personnel, but the uptake of the package was increasing.

- vi) Road Traffic Collisions remained above the three year average. Consideration was currently being given to locality areas where there had been a number of incidents to target specific activity.
- vii) In terms of home safety checks, assurance was given that officers tried to follow up with individuals to ensure that they were adhering to the guidance they had been given. Work was undertaken to build relationships in local communities. It was noted that Housing Officers, as landlords, were trained on fire safety and the Business Engagement Officer engaged with private landlords.
- viii) A query was raised around the public perception of the Fire Service. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer stated that the satisfaction demonstrated by the public suggested that they had a very positive view of the Service. The number of primary dwelling fires was reducing and it was felt that this was a result of community engagement. A video had been produced – ‘Be The Difference’ – which demonstrated the work undertaken by LFRS in local communities.

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 2024 to July 2024 be noted.

108. Service Development Programme and 'CRMP 2024-2028' Actions.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer informing of progress made since July 2024 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the actions included in the Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028. A copy of the report, marked ‘Agenda Item 8’, 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 progress made since July 2024 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in the CRMP 2024-2028 be noted.

109. 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 and an introduction to forthcoming changes to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. A copy of the report, marked ‘Agenda Item 9’, is filed with these minutes.

Two legacy partial assurance reports containing high importance recommendations remained as these had not yet been addressed. However, the interim BACS arrangements regarding bank account changes had been adequately tested. A permanent solution was due to go live at the end of September which would be tested before closing the recommendation.

There were eleven potential auditable areas within the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan and of these, one had been completed to draft report stage, nine current year audits were at various stages of work in progress, and one audit had not yet started.

An action plan had been produced and work was being undertaken to address the required changes within the Contract Procedure Rules. There remained concerns in terms of readiness in respect of 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 work was being undertaken on contracts and procedures to ensure greater consistency. The Service would adopt the County Council's strategy and would utilise training that it was developing for its own employees.

Details were provided of the forthcoming changes to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which would be effective from January 2025. CIPFA was proposing to introduce a Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government. Consultation was due to be issued by the end of September.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Mr Allen CC and seconded by Mr Harrison CC. 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 respectively) 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 it remains at the stage anticipated for this time of year;
- c) From testing undertaken there remains 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;
- d) Work will be required by the Head of Internal Audit Service to implement revised public sector internal audit standards.

110. Organisational Risk Register.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which detailed the progress made in the identification, documentation and management of organisational risk through the Organisational Risk Register. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

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 report and the Organisational Risk Register be noted.

111. Appointment of Independent Persons.

The Committee considered a report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer concerning the appointment of Independent Persons to support the Member Conduct Complaints Process as required under Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 and to support the procedures for dealing with the dismissal of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Treasurer, as required by the Local Authorities (Standing Order) England Regulations 2001 (as amended). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

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

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The decision taken by the Appointment Committee and the Monitoring Officer to extend the contract of the four current Independent Persons that applied for the position, rather than invite them for interview, be noted;
- b) The Combined Fire Authority, at its meeting in October, be recommended to appoint Richard Gough, Gordon Grimes, Surinder Sharma, Pamela Roberts, John Pilgrim and Kimberley Kingsley to serve as Independent Persons for a term of four years ending on 30 September 2028; and
- c) Thanks be given to Ms T Herring and Ms H Kotecha for their valuable work in supporting the Monitoring Officer in the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct complaints process over the last four years.

112. Governance Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on governance and ethical issues. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

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 update provided on governance issues be noted.

113. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the CFA Corporate Governance Committee will be held on 20 November 2024 at 2.00pm.

10.00 - 11.15 am
11 September 2024

CHAIRMAN