



Minutes of a meeting of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 9 March 2022.

PRESENT

Cllr. K. Bool (in the Chair)

Mr. N. D. Bannister CC
 Mr. G. A. Boulter CC
 Cllr. L. Fonseca
 Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC

Mr. R. Hills CC
 Ms. Betty Newton CC
 Cllr. M. Valand

In attendance

Callum Faint, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Lauren Haslam, Monitoring Officer
 Colin Sharpe, Deputy Director of Finance, Leicester City Council
 Paul Weston, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Karl Bowden, Interim Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
 Neil Jones, Head of Internal Audit and Assurance Service, Leicestershire County Council
 Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council
 Gemma Duckworth, Democratic Services Officer

44. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Mr. S. Bray CC and Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC.

45. 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.

46. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items.

47. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman's Announcements were tabled at the meeting, a copy of which is filed with these minutes. The announcements covered the following matters:

- Excellence Awards Event
- Covid-19 Vaccination Programme
- Business Engagement Events

48. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

49. External Auditor's Annual Report 2020/21.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the External Auditor's Annual Report for 2020/21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

It was worth noting that the Value for Money assessment had now been completed. However, the audit could not be finally signed off until the Whole of Government Accounts work was completed. This was still unable to proceed as the Government had not yet issued the necessary instructions. The Annual Report was due to be presented to the next meeting of the Combined Fire Authority on 15 June 2022.

In response to a query, it was anticipated that the certificate would be received in July/August once the Whole of Government Accounts work had been completed. There was a slight concern that, until the accounts had been finally signed off, there was the possibility that an element would need to be revisited or amended. However, this was felt to be unlikely.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr N Bannister CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The External Auditor's Annual Report for 2020/21 be noted; and
- b) Any observations be made to the Treasurer and/or the CFA.

50. Progress Against the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which provided an update of progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 7' is filed with these minutes.

In presenting the report, the Internal Auditor informed the Committee that he was happy with progress made against the Internal Audit Plan, although work was still required in relation to the High Importance Recommendations, in particular the Contract Procedure Rules and the fact that all contract documentation was held on the Blue Light Database. Whilst progress had been made, there were still areas to complete in order to lift the partial assurance rating and this would therefore form part of the 2022/23 Internal Audit coverage. It was anticipated that a further update would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

A query was raised around how the virement position was decided. In response, it was stated that the approved Internal Audit plan was a statement of intent and whilst every effort would be made to deliver it, it was recognised that it could be necessary to revise activities in response to changing circumstances or emerging risks. The Committee would be informed of any audits that would not be undertaken as part of the 85 day coverage and approval would be sought to procure additional days. The virement

position was reported to the CFA on an annual basis and approval was given for delegated responsibility in some areas.

A member raised an issue that not all Internal Audit recommendations appeared to be taken forward. It was noted that Internal Audit was beneficial, but the exercise did not always generate recommendations. This was generally due to management deciding that the level of risk outweighed the cost of implementing any changes. However, assurance was given that if there were any concerns, the Head of Internal Audit Services would be consulted or a report would be presented to the Corporate Governance Committee.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Councillor L Fonseca. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, in particular:

- a) That four audits are complete (one of which is prior year);
- b) That two other legacy partial assurance ratings remain and there is an additional partial assurance rating in the current financial year in respect of a BACS audit; and
- c) The virement position.

51. Internal Audit Plan 2022/23.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which provided an opportunity to review the Internal Audit Plan 2022/23. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Plan was made up of three elements – core auditable areas, service specific areas and key risk/high importance recommendations. The key areas of coverage for 2022/23 were detailed. Whilst the plan listed the anticipated individual audits, it was recognised that this was only a statement of intent and there would need to be flexibility to review and adjust the plan as necessary in response to changes in the CFA's business, risks, operations, programs, systems and controls. The Treasurer also recognised that there needed to be flexibility in response to changing circumstances and emerging risks.

The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer commended the value of the audit facilities to the CFA and welcomed any external scrutiny.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Councillor M Valand. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

To note:

- a) The report and Internal Audit Plan 2022/23; and

- b) That the detail of the plan may change during the year in response to emerging issues and risks.

52. Financial Monitoring to the end of December 2021.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the financial monitoring to the end of December 2021, including the key issues arising from the revenue budget and capital programme. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A query was raised around the work being undertaken to ensure that existing vacancies were filled. In response, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer stated that this was a significant challenge nationally, as there was a shortage of on-call firefighters. However, a number of initiatives were being developed and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service was considering how to implement these locally. A new cohort of firefighter recruits was due to join in March 2022 and money offset from Day Crewing Plus would be used to increase recruitment further. There was also a number of support staff vacancies within the establishment and rate of pay was felt to be a key challenge to recruitment.
- ii) Assurance was sought that there was sufficient contingency to meet the increasing costs of fuel and energy prices. The Treasurer stated that this was the case this year, but future financial years could be a concern. Pay awards of 3% had been accounted for, but there was uncertainty that this would be sufficient if energy and fuel costs continued to increase. Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service had a healthy reserve, although the majority of this had been accounted for. Should it prove necessary, a further report would be presented to the Committee and the CFA.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr R Hills CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) The revenue budget and capital programme position as at the end of December 2021 be noted;
- b) The transfer of £305,100 grant income to implement the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry to an earmarked reserve fund to fund expenditure in 2022/23 be approved; and
- c) The transfer of £37,700 grant income to resource the firefighters pension scheme remedy work to an earmarked reserve to fund future expenditure in 2022/23 be approved.

53. Performance Monitoring April 2021 - January 2022.

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 2021 – January 2022. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that incident numbers and performance had remained reasonably consistent during the period. Fire incidents were significantly lower than the three year average, whereas fire false alarms and non-fire incidents were slightly higher. Of note was the two fatalities which had occurred during the reporting period.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) There had been an increase in the number of special service incidents that were being attended, in particular bariatric rescues and moving people who were in a non-life threatening environment. Work was currently taking place around this and a report would be presented to the CFA when a full assessment had been completed.
- ii) Although the total average response times of life threatening incidents was positive over the last three years, this was still above ten minutes. It was stated that some aspects were beyond the control of the service. However, work was being undertaken to improve this response time.
- iii) In relation to the average number of days lost to sickness by operational staff, comparison was being made with the figures nationally and within the home group, although Leicestershire appeared to be better. A report with the findings would be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee.
- iv) Reference was made to the availability of on-call fire appliances and the fact that there had been a decrease compared to the three year average. It was stated that there was no specific benchmark for this indicator, but assurance was given that crews aimed to attend an incident as soon as possible.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr K Ghattoraya CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2021 to January 2022 be noted.

54. Service Development Programme and 'Our Plan 2020-24' Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which detailed the progress made since November 2021 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks included in Appendix A of 'Our Plan 2020-24'. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The project to redevelop Western Station was now underway. The intention was to improve the accommodation so that it better met the individual needs of a more diverse workforce.

- ii) Of particular note was the work undertaken around the identification of 'in scope' premises within the Fire and Rescue Service. Within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, 115 premises had initially been identified. However, from knowledge within the Fire Protection Team, it had been possible to report back to the National Fire Chief's Council Protection, Policy and Reform Unit that LLR actually had 155 'in scope' premises.
- iii) As part of implementing the HMICFRS Improvement Plan, it was noted that 69 of the 88 areas for improvement had now been completed and the remaining actions were in progress. The next HMICFRS inspection was due to commence on 9 May and the data request ahead of the inspection had been submitted on time.
- iv) The community work undertaken by the Service was commended. In response to a query relating to the demographic, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer reported that this varied across the area. An Engagement Officer was being recruited to liaise with more diverse communities and it was also hoped that more women would join the service. Members agreed that it would encourage the less represented groups to join the service if they could see their peers at recruitment events.
- v) It was agreed that it would be useful for parts of this report to be highlighted at a future meeting of the CFA, for example the carbon monoxide safety video and work with students. This would be arranged.
- vi) A member commented on the merits of using social media to promote specific issues and to engage with members of the public. LFRS currently had a very small corporate communications team and was therefore limited with its resources. However, with the increased budget it was the intention to improve the corporate communications to better promote the Service.

The recommendations contained within the report were moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr G A Boulter CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That progress made since November 2021 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in Our Plan 2020-24 be noted.

55. 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 12' is filed with these minutes.

It was pleasing to note that the overall level of risk had reduced. There had been some incremental change to the individual risk assessments, mainly as a result of planned risk mitigation work. The changes of note were highlighted. It was the intention to revise the process and have a more direct link to the aims and objectives contained within 'Our Plan'.

With regard to the risk around the inability to maintain firefighter competence for basement firefighting, it was reported that arrangements had been made for this to be addressed. A venue had been secured to train firefighters by having live fire scenarios in basements.

A member queried whether there was an increased threat of cyber attacks as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The National Fire Chief's Council had confirmed that cyber systems were as protected as possible and the Service was as prepared as it could be to deal with any attacks.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mrs M E Newton CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the report and Organisational Risk Register be noted.

56. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Improvement Plan.

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 report by HMICFRS, following the report to the Committee at its meeting in November 2021. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Current progress identified that 70 of the 88 actions were now complete and work continued to complete those that were outstanding. The next inspection was due to commence on 9 May and it was anticipated that this would result in a more positive report, albeit with areas of improvement, particularly in relation to staff.

In response to a query around the 24 areas for improvement, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer reported that these were all being progressed. It was noted that some areas of work would not be completed before the next inspection, but it would be possible to evidence positive work in all areas of the Service. There was a clear narrative in all areas of the inspection on how the Service was working to improve things and assurance was given that the inspectors would be able to see the progress that had been made.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr R Hills CC. The Motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the progress of the Improvement Plan be noted.

57. Members' Code of Conduct.

The Committee considered a report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer which presented the revised Members' Code of Conduct, adopted by Leicestershire County Council. The Committee was asked to consider whether it wished for the revised Code to be submitted to the CFA for approval. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Members agreed that the model Code of Conduct, adopted by Leicestershire County Council, should be submitted to the next meeting of the CFA for approval. The CFA's Constitution would be amended thereafter.

The recommendation contained within the report was moved by Councillor K Bool and seconded by Mr N Bannister CC. The motion was put and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends that the Combined Fire Authority approves the adoption of the revised Code of Conduct for Members with effect from 1 July 2022.

58. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee will be held on Wednesday 13 July 2022 at 2pm.

2.00 – 3.43pm
09 March 2022

CHAIRMAN