

Minutes of a meeting of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 14 July 2021.

PRESENT

Cllr. K. Bool (in the Chair)

Mr. N. D. Bannister CC
Mr. S. L. Bray CC
Mr. B. Champion CC
Cllr. L. Fonseca

Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC
Ms. Betty Newton CC
Cllr. M. Valand

Apologies

Mr. R. Hills CC and Mr. J. T. Orson JP CC

In attendance

Callum Faint, Interim Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Lauren Haslam, Monitoring Officer
Colin Sharpe, Deputy Director Finance at Leicester City Council
Mick Grewcock, Interim Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Paul Weston, Interim Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Andy Galway, Area Manager – Service Assurance
Neil Jones, Head of the Internal Audit and Assurance Service, Leicestershire County Council
Anna Poole, Democratic Services Officer

1. Appointment of Chairman.

At the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority meeting held on 16 June 2021, Councillor Bool was nominated as Chairman Elect of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee.

It was moved by Mrs. M. E. Newton CC and seconded by Mr. N. Bannister CC that Councillor K. Bool be appointed Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the Combined Fire Authority in 2022.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor K. Bool be appointed Chairman of the CFA's Corporate Governance Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the Combined Fire Authority in 2022.

Councillor K. Bool in the Chair

2. 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 Councillor Bool and seconded by Councillor L. Fonseca and Mr. S. Bray 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 Combined Fire Authority in 2022. 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 Combined Fire Authority in 2022.

3. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Mr Hills CC and Mr. J. T. Orson CC.

4. Declarations of interests.

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

No declarations were made.

5. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items.

6. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman made his announcements which covered the following matters:

- An update on the recruitment of whole-time fire fighters who had now passed out from the Fire Service College after completing their initial training course and would join their watches and stations in August; and
- The contract for the new high reach appliance had been awarded. Delivery was anticipated in approximately 15 months.

There were no further announcements made.

7. Minutes of the previous meeting.

It was moved by Councillor K. Bool and seconded by Mrs. B. Newton CC that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 be taken as read, confirmed and signed.

It was noted that new members appointed to the Committee who had not attended the meeting in March, abstained.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 be taken as read, confirmed and signed.

8. After the Incident Survey Annual Report 2020/2021.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning the outcome of the After the Incident Survey 2020/21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

In response to questions, members were informed that automatic alarms, which triggered a 999 call in an emergency, were fitted to commercial premises, residential care homes or sheltered accommodation, but not houses.

Members expressed concern about the demographics of respondents to the Survey and were informed that the FRS had worked hard to engage with all communities. The Strategic Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Board had worked with Leicester University on a study which showed that BAME people had a lack of trust with the FRS. The CFO assured members that the Service was working hard to promote the FRS across the whole community, especially BAME communities, but recognised that there was still more to do to build trust. He added that FRS literature and public documents would be changed to better reflect the communities served, and would include pictures of firefighters without helmets and breathing apparatus, in order to show the 'friendly face' of the FRS and encourage an increase in respondents to the Survey.

Mrs Newton, Equalities Champion, supported the comments made and reminded members that the Service had previously received an award for its positive action work.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mr. Bannister that the findings of the After the Incident Survey 2020/2021 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the findings of the After the Incident Survey 2020/2021 be noted.

9. Performance Monitoring April 2020 to March 2021 and April 2021 to May 2021.

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 (LFRS) for the periods April 2020 – March 2021 and April – May 2021. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The CFO informed members that the performance report showed a strong performance for the Service, but cautioned that figures had been heavily influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. He added that sickness absence was increasing, some of which was Covid-19 related and some was due to elective/non-emergency surgery which had been delayed previously due to Covid.

In response to questions, members were informed that:

- i. Deaths reported, would be reported by all three emergency services if they attended. Emergency calls received by the Police or the East Midlands Ambulance

Service which resulted in a death, would also be recorded by LFRS if they attended.

- ii. The CFO could not speculate whether the number of deaths from suicide had increased during the pandemic as not all deaths were attended by LFRS.
- iii. The category of 'false alarms' was quite wide, with the largest volume of false alarms caused by a fault with the alarm system. Only a small number of malicious calls were received. Members questioned the cost to the CFA of false alarms and were informed that it was difficult to quantify as it depended on many variables, for example, the number of appliances despatched, the location of the premises, etc. The CFO assured them that all incidents were attended, even if they did result in a false alarm. A risk-based approach was taken to the handling of calls – for example, an alarm in a hospital posed a significant risk to life so would be attended immediately. However, for less risky alarms, for example in office buildings during the day, the control room would call once the appliance had been despatched, to confirm whether it was a false alarm. If so, the crew would stand down on route. The CFO added that LFRS did not attend a *false* alarm, but only returned from one – all calls were treated as *real* incidents.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mrs Newton that the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the periods April 2020 to March 2021 and April 2021 to May 2021 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the periods April 2020 to March 2021 and April 2021 to May 2021 be noted.

10. External Audit Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the External Audit Progress Report compiled by the CFA's External Auditors, Mazars. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that audit work by Mazars was expected to be completed by the end of November 2021, which was later than the September deadline required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The delay was due to issues with recruitment, the impact of the pandemic leading to more remote auditing and delays in audit processes, and additional work as a result of changes to the national audit standards.

The draft 2020/21 Statement of Accounts would be signed by the Treasurer and published by 31 July 2021 in accordance with the Regulations, and then presented to the Committee at its meeting in September. Subject to completion of the audit, the final Statement, with the audit certificate, would be considered by the CFA at its meeting on 15 December 2021.

In response to questions, Members were informed that the delays were a national issue with other fire and local authorities seeing such delays across a range of external audit firms. Assurance could not be given at this stage that such delays would not reoccur next year. There were significant issues with the structure of the external audit market, with baseline fees set at scale levels from the previous national procurement, but with auditors being given more work as the national standards were enhanced, and as a result of them

being subject to more scrutiny and regulation. The Deputy Director of Finance added that the risks caused as a result of the delay should have been detailed in the report under paragraph 17 - Risk.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Councillor Fonseca that the External Audit Progress Report and the implications for the Combined Fire Authority, as set out in paragraphs 11 – 14 of the report, be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the External Audit Progress Report and the implications for the Combined Fire Authority, as set out in paragraphs 11 – 14 of the report, be noted.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning progress made since March 2021 in delivering 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.

The CFO informed members that a consultation had been launched by the Government following the Grenfell Tower, which proposed legislative changes including the need for housing providers to have a Personal Escape and Evacuation Plan for individuals living in high-rise buildings who were vulnerable due to age, mobility, disability or mental impairment. He assured members that the Service was prepared for the changes, and resources in the Fire Protection Team had been increased.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mr Champion that the progress made since March 2021 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in Our Plan 2020-24, be noted.

RESOLVED:

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

12. Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2020-21.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2020/21. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mr Bray that the Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2020-21 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the Head of Internal Audit Service Annual Report 2020-21 be noted.

13. Developments in local (external) audit arrangements.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer and Monitoring Officer concerning the developments in local (external) audit arrangements. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

The Head of Internal Audit and Assurance Service informed members that, since writing the report, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had launched a scathing report which detailed that the Government's oversight of local government audit had become 'increasingly complacent' and was seen 'as an afterthought'. PAC had questioned how the new organisation identified in the Redmond Review report to oversee future audit standards would be established and asked the Government to explain the governance arrangements that would be in place for the new organisation.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Councillor Valand that the developments in local (external) audit arrangements be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the developments in local (external) audit arrangements be noted.

14. Procurement Annual Report 2020/21.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning the procurement related activity and compliance for the financial year 2020/21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mr Ghattoraya that the summary of procurement activity in 2020/21, as required by Rule 19.2 of the Contracts Procedure Rules 2018, be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of procurement activity in 2020/21, as required by Rule 19.2 of the Contracts Procedure Rules 2018, be noted.

15. Governance Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Monitoring Officer which provided assurance to the Corporate Governance Committee on governance and ethical issues. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 15', is filed with these minutes.

It was moved by Councillor Bool and seconded by Mr Bannister that the update provided on governance and ethical issues be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on governance and ethical issues be noted.

16. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 15 September 2021 at 2pm.

2.00 - 3.43 pm
14 July 2021

CHAIRMAN

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