



Minutes of a meeting of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 22 November 2023.

PRESENT

Mr. R. G. Allen CC (in the Chair)

Cllr. Hemant Rae Bhatia
Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC
Mr. D. J. Grimley CC
Cllr. A. Joel

Cllr. S. Harvey
Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mrs. P. Posnett MBE CC

In attendance

Callum Faint, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Paul Weston, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Stuart McAvoy, Head of Finance, Leicester City Council
Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council
Karl Bowden, Area Manager
Gemma Duckworth, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Gavin Barker, Mazars

58. Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. N. Bannister CC and Councillor S. Barton.

59. 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.

60. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items.

61. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman made his announcements which covered the following matters:

- Variable Response Vehicles
- Mobilising System
- Introduction of New Technology

62. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

63. Financial Monitoring to the end of September 2023.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the financial monitoring to the end of September 2023, including key issues arising from the revenue budget and capital programme. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- i) In response to a query around underspends in staffing in support services, the Treasurer reported that this was made up of two areas – vacancies which it was the intention to fill and the fact that the budget assumed all staff were at the top of their salary band. It was acknowledged that there were recruitment issues, but it was not the intention to lose any posts.
- ii) Inflation had been built into the 2023/24 budget, but inflationary pressures had exceeded the budget. The budget for the next financial year was currently being set, although the finalised pay award had not yet been agreed so it was likely that there would be a variance. In terms of reserves, the position would be set out in the 2024/25 budget.
- iii) In relation to capital and financing slippage, this had largely been linked to vehicle availability. However, this was a national and global issue.

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:

To note:

- a) The revenue budget and capital programme position as at the end of September 2023; and
- b) The capital overspend of £422,000 to be funded from the Capital Fund Reserve and Estates Strategy Reserve, reducing resources available for future years' budgets.

64. Completion of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the Audit Completion Certificate for the year ended 31 March 2021, as signed by the CFA's External Auditors, Mazars. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 7' is filed with these minutes.

It was reported that it was the intention to issue the Audit Completion Certificate for the 2021/22 audit by the end of March 2024. For the 2022/23 audit, it was anticipated that Mazars would issue an unqualified opinion, but this would be confirmed. The CFA would then have a new external auditor from the 2023/24 financial year – Grant Thornton.

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 completion of the Audit for the year ended 31 March 2021 and the issuing of the Audit Completion Certificate be noted.

65. Performance Monitoring April - October 2023.

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 October 2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion the following points were raised:

- i) It was reported that Leicestershire Police had launched an initiative – Most Appropriate Agency – whereby it was now only attending incidents that it felt were relevant to attend. There was concern that this could have a significant impact on LFRS having to attend more incidents when its resources were already stretched. The situation would continue to be monitored.
- ii) The number of special service incidents attended had continued to increase, particularly road traffic collisions (RTCs). The number of RTCs was increasing, along with the number of cars on the road and the number of journeys being taken. Although FRAs had no statutory responsibility to prevent RTCs, this was an area where lots of work was taking place locally and it was the intention to divert some resources to continue with this work. Consideration was being given as to the best way to deliver this. It was noted that there had also been an increase in flooding incidents in LLR, although there was again no statutory responsibility for the FRS to respond to this.
- iii) In response to a query around suicide prevention, the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer confirmed that LFRS was well connected with local Community Safety Partnerships and was part of a wider strategic meeting to discuss suicide prevention. It was also part of a national helpline for staff who had responded to a suicide incident. However, it was acknowledged that the number of incidents was increasing and would continue to do so.
- iv) The level of emergency response service provision was an area which continued to be looked into, in particular ensuring that incidents were responded to. It was hoped that the introduction of the new mobilising system would improve the time taken to get to incidents.
- v) In relation to KCI6 (Capacity, staff and availability), it appeared that staff sickness had been higher in this period. However, assurance was given that nationally, LFRS was in the top five FRAs for the lowest sickness levels and the Service worked hard to reduce the number of shifts lost. Where possible, staff returned to work on modified duties.

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 performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April to October 2023 be noted.

66. Service Development Programme and 'Our Plan 2020-24' - Appendix A Tasks.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which presented the progress made since September 2023 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 9' is filed with these minutes.

A query was raised around the dangers of E-Bikes and whether this was an increasing issue. The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer reported that lithium-ion batteries were generally considered to be safe, but the number of devices using batteries was increasing. There had been an increase in fire incidents involving E-Bikes and scooters which had been imported and a national safety campaign would be undertaken to highlight the correct way of charging the batteries.

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 progress made since September 2023 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in Our Plan 2020-24 be noted.

67. Progress against the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which provided an update of progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' 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 the report be noted, in particular that:

- a) three legacy partial assurance report ratings containing high importance recommendations remain outstanding and the ACFO (Service Support) continues to work to bring resolutions to these outstanding actions but there are continued delays; and
- b) work is progressing well with the 2023/24 audit plan and is at the stage anticipated for this time of year.

68. People Programme of Work.

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Cultural Survey actions and other people related plans, including the HMICFRS 'Spotlight' report and the external cultural review of the Service. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

It was pleasing to note the significant progress that had been made within the Service and the work undertaken around equality, diversity and inclusion was commended.

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:

To note:

- a) the People Plan and programme of work being implemented across the Service;
and
- b) the information related to closed Discipline and Grievance cases between April 2022 – October 2023.

69. Review and Revision of the Constitution.

The Committee considered a report of the Monitoring Officer which sought approval for the submission of the revised CFA Constitution (Part 2 – Constitutional Framework) to the Combined Fire Authority for approval at its meeting on 29 November 2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

It was noted that further amendments would be presented to the Committee in the Spring relating to the Contract Procedure Rules and Finance Procedure Rules, which were currently being reviewed.

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 changes to the Constitution, Part 2 – Constitutional Framework detailed in the Appendix to the report be approved and be submitted to the CFA for approval at its meeting on 29 November 2023.

70. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the CFA Corporate Governance Committee will be held on 13 March 2024 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 3.00 pm
22 November 2023

CHAIRMAN

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