

Minutes of a meeting of the CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Wednesday, 11 March 2020.

PRESENT

Cllr. K. Bool (in the Chair)

Cllr. S. Barton
Cllr. L. Fonseca
Cllr. Ratilal Govind
Mr. D. Harrison CC

Mr. J. Kaufman CC
Mr T. Parton CC
Mr J. Poland CC
Cllr. A. Thalukdar

In attendance

Lauren Haslam, Monitoring Officer
Alison Greenhill, Treasurer
Callum Faint, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer
Gavin Barker, Mazars
Anita Pipes, Mazars
Neil Jones, Head of Internal Audit and Assurance, Leicestershire County Council
Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council
Anna Poole, Democratic Services Officer

52. Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Mrs Newton CC and Mr Bentley CC.

53. 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.

54. Urgent Items.

The Chairman advised that there was one urgent item for consideration. A verbal report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning the Fire and Rescue Service's response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The verbal report was urgent due to the developing situation with Covid-19 and the continued development of the Service's response after the agenda for the Corporate Governance Committee meeting had been published.

With the agreement of the Committee, the item was taken under item 15 on the agenda (minute 66 refers).

55. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman informed the Committee of the visit to Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) by Alberto Costa MP in February, the high-rise exercises completed by operational and control crews involving over 60 staff practicing their skills in firefighting in a high-rise building; and highlighted that LFRS had received an LGBT+ inclusion award from De-Montfort University for its work in promoting equality for both LGBT staff and communities. A copy of the Chairman's Announcements, tabled at the meeting, are filed with these minutes.

There were no further announcements made.

56. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

57. External Audit Plan 2019/20.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer which presented the External Audit Plan 2019/20. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Gavin Barker of Mazars LLP, the CFA's external auditors for 2019/20, to the meeting.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. Based on the financial statements of LFRS, Mazars were able to give a 'reasonable assurance';
- ii. The significant risk related to the quality of working papers highlighted in the report arose due to the issues experienced in the audit for 2018/19. Mazars acknowledged that appropriate arrangements had since been put in place but they continued to monitor the process;
- iii. The impact of Covid-19 had not been included in the report as it was too early to speculate at this stage, although it was acknowledged that it could potentially impact on the delivery of the audit;
- iv. No significant risks had been identified regarding the Value For Money arrangements.

Members expressed concern that Mazars had highlighted that there would be an additional unspecified fee related to the extra work undertaken to address the financial pressures in the sector which would affect the Auditor's ability to deliver the audit by the end of July. The Treasurer assured members that the potential additional fees were affecting the public sector as a whole due to regulatory requirements, and were not related to Mazars' ability to complete the audit.

The Chairman thanked Mazars for their honesty in presenting the report to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the External Audit Plan 2019/20 be noted.

58. Progress against the Internal Audit Plan 2019/20.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the progress made against the Internal Audit Plan 2019-20. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 7' is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the audit work related to Contract Procedure Rules and ICT Controls detailed under 'work in progress' would be completed but evidence was currently awaited. There were no issues of concern, it was just an issue of timing.

The High Importance recommendations would remain until the audit was cleared. The Change Control recommendation could not be closed as a new Service Desk was being procured. Members were assured that this was a timing issue only.

In response to questions, members were informed that electronic payslips would be sent to members once the new payroll provider was in place, which was expected to be from June 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the update provided on the progress made with the Internal Audit Plan 2019-20 be noted.

59. Internal Audit Plan 2020/21.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the Internal Audit Plan for 2020-21. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the Plan attached to the report was a 'Statement of Intent' and it was expected that there may be changes made due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Auditors would agree with the Treasurer where their work should be focussed.

RESOLVED:

That

- a) the report and the Internal Audit Plan 2020-21 be noted; and
- b) the fact that the detail of the plan may change during the year in response to emerging issues and risks, be noted.

60. Financial Monitoring to the end of December 2019.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the key issues arising from the revenue budget and capital programme as at the end of December 2019. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the revenue budget and capital programme position as at the end of December 2019 be noted.

61. Performance Monitoring April 2019 - January 2020.

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 2019 – January 2020. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the new performance monitoring format would be used from the new financial year.

In response to questions, the following points were raised:

- i. The increase in On-Call availability was welcomed by members; the use of TRVs had contributed to the improvement;
- ii. When an incident was received, if 2 fire fighters were available and they met the requirements for using a TRV, then that would be used rather than a full engine;
- iii. The level of sickness at 6.83 days/shifts by support staff was better than the national average and that for most fire authorities. Extensive support arrangements were in place to support staff;
- iv. Risk assessments were carried out regarding accessibility particularly in built-up areas such as along the Golden Mile. Issues identified would be addressed by Fire Protection Officers. A risk-based inspection programme was in place for business properties.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April 2019 – January 2020 be noted.

62. Service Development Programme and 'Our Plan' Update.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning progress made since January 2020 in delivering projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks included in Appendix A of Our Plan 2019-22. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made since January 2020 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in Our Plan 2019-22 be noted.

63. Organisational Risk Register.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning 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.

RESOLVED:

That the Organisational Risk Register (appended to the report) be noted.

64. Industrial Action Business Continuity Planning.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning the actions taken regarding Business Continuity Planning following the Home Office Review in January 2019. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item13', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the tenders received for the Third-Party supplier were currently being evaluated and arrangements should be in place by April 2020. The contract would detail the training required, the appropriate level and the frequency of refresher training. Potentially some of the additional staff brought in as part of the contract could be ex-fire fighters.

Training a member of the public to become a fire fighter, to a safe and competent standard, usually lasted for 8 weeks. The tender process would include analysis of the tenders to ensure that all staff provided were adequately and appropriately trained. The contract awarded would include performance measures which would be monitored and reviewed.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made against the recommendations in the Home Office review in to Industrial Action Business Continuity Planning of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, be noted.

65. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services - Improvement Action Plan.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer concerning the implementation of the Improvement Plan developed following the inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in December 2018. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that officers were keen to increase capacity in the Fire Protection Team following the inspection findings and were assessing how this could be done. The inspection had not taken into account the availability of financial resource to address such recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made with the Improvement Plan (appended to the report) and the arrangements that are in place to monitor and ensure delivery of the Plan, be noted.

66. Urgent Items - Coronavirus (Covid-19).

The Committee considered an urgent verbal report of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer which advised of the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic within the County and LFRS' response. The verbal report was urgent as the situation and the Service's response was developing after the agenda for the Corporate Governance Committee meeting had been published.

Members were informed that:

- i. The Service was working locally and nationally in line with Public Health advice. Messages were being given to staff regarding increased hygiene, handwashing and cleaning regimes;
- ii. The Service was working across multi-agencies through the Strategic Coordination Group, with a 'business as usual' approach. Scenario planning, regarding future changes to the pandemic situation and impact on service delivery, was being undertaken;
- iii. The impact on fire staff of potential school closures was not known, although it was recognised that this would affect some staff. It was expected that this would have the largest impact on staffing levels and service delivery, as generally the workforce was fit and well.

In response to questions, the following points were raised:

- i. Professional support staff could all work from home if they needed to self-isolate. However, operational staff would be unable to do so;
- ii. The full HR implications and impact on service delivery of the need to self-isolate were unclear at present. There were key pieces of work in progress, including the procurement of a new payroll provider, and it was unclear what the impact of Covid-19 on this would be;
- iii. The need to self-isolate would be led by guidance for Public Health England. If a fire fighter was diagnosed with Covid-19, whether the remainder of the station would then self-isolate would be determined by whether the individual had been symptomatic in the workplace. Such instances would be treated on a case-by-case basis and relevant sites would be deep cleaned.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic within the County and LFRS' response, be noted.

67. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee will be held on 15 July 2020 at 2pm at Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Birstall.