

Minutes of a meeting of the CFA - Corporate Governance Committee held via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 18 November 2020.

PRESENT

Cllr. K. Bool (in the Chair)

Cllr. S. Barton

Mr. I. E. G. Bentley CC

Mr. J. G. Coxon CC

Cllr. L. Fonseca

Mr. D. Harrison CC

Mr. J. Kaufman CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC

Cllr. A. Thalukdar

In attendance

Callum Faint, Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

Lauren Haslam, Monitoring Officer

Alison Greenhill, Treasurer

Mick Grewcock, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

Paul Weston, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer

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

Amy Oliver, Chief Accountant, Leicester City Council

Matt Davis, Audit Manager, Leicestershire County Council

Anna Poole, Democratic Services Officer

87. Apologies for absence.

No apologies were received.

88. 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.

89. Urgent items.

There were no urgent items.

90. Chair's Announcements.

The Chairman announced that the Service continued to respond well to the ongoing pandemic, both in terms of a Fire and Rescue Service and in supporting the Local Resilience Forum to support the community. He added that this remained a very challenging period but one that the Service was standing up to very well.

He also highlighted the recent successful prosecution against a previous member of the Service and a landlord, which was the culmination of a lot of hard work by the Fire Protection Team, supported by the County Council's Legal Team.

91. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2020 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

92. Financial Monitoring to the end of September 2020.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the position of the revenue budget and capital programme as at the end of September 2020. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 6', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that an underspend had been forecast for the financial year; the Service was continuing to deliver despite the underspend. Agency staff were being used to fill vacancies.

The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer had considered the inspection report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to clarify resource needs in order to address the feedback received. Going forward, it was expected that the financial environment would be challenging due to the economic challenges ahead.

It was moved by Mr. D. Harrison CC and seconded by Councillor K. Bool that the revenue budget and capital programme position as at the end of September 2020 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the revenue budget and capital programme position as at the end of September 2020 be noted.

93. Performance Monitoring April - September 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 (LFRS) for the period April– September 2020. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 7', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The performance report showed an extremely positive picture, however, this had been distorted by the Covid-19 pandemic and would probably be unsustainable in the longer term;
- ii. The figures for KCI 2.1 - Fatalities in fire, had increased to a total of three following the death in November of a resident involved in an incident in early October. The Community Safety Team was working hard to raise awareness of the risks with residents;
- iii. In addition to the performance detailed in the report, the Service was also supporting the Local Resilience Forum with addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- iv. It was recognised that the report did not reflect the usual picture presented in performance reports due to the current climate.

Members expressed concern about On-Call availability at Billesdon and Uppingham stations and were informed that both had access to one full sized appliance and one Tactical Response Vehicle (TRV), although both were not present at the stations 100% of the time. As such, the data illustrated a misleading picture, and the CFO agreed to refresh and clarify the data for the next meeting of the Committee. He assured members that the TRV was used for supporting incidents and maintaining on-call availability where the crew numbered less than four, which was required for a full appliance.

It was moved by Councillor K. Bool and seconded by Mrs. Betty Newton CC that the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April to September 2020 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the performance of the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service for the period April to September 2020 be noted.

94. Progress against the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the progress made in delivering the Internal Audit Plan 2020 – 21. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that no significant issues had been found with the audit. Work would be completed on the High Importance Recommendations detailed in the report and this would be reported to the Committee by the end of the Financial Year. No new High Importance recommendations had been identified; this was a positive picture.

It was moved by Councillor K. Bool and seconded by Mr. D. Harrison CC that the progress made against the Internal Audit Plan 2020-21 be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made against the Internal Audit Plan 2020-21 be noted.

95. Update on Developments on Local (External) Audit Arrangements.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the developments in local (external) audit arrangements that are associated with the Committee's responsibilities. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. It was important that good governance arrangements were in place as, if they were ineffective in terms of challenge, this could illustrate to the auditor a weakness in the effective audit arrangements.
- ii. There would be a great deal of work undertaken by officers to explore the impact on the CFA of the developments outlined in the report.

- iii. The audit environment was extremely complex and fragile, particularly with the move to more closely align the approach in the public and private sector; something with which the Treasurer did not agree.
- iv. The report set out a clear and balanced view of the audit arena; the Treasurer would work with the Head of Internal Audit Service to define the future approach for the CFA in light of the recent developments in local audit.

It was moved by Councillor S. Barton and seconded by Mrs. Betty Newton CC that the outcome of the Redmond Review and developments in local (external) audit arrangements that are associated with the Corporate Governance Committee's responsibilities be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the Redmond Review and developments in local (external) audit arrangements that are associated with the Corporate Governance Committee's responsibilities be noted.

96. Industrial Action Business Continuity Planning.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the progress made on the Industrial Action Business Continuity planning arrangements, specifically the employment of a third-party contingency provider, to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place to continue service delivery in the event of industrial action and to satisfy the minimum response requirements of the Home Office. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

It was moved by Mr. D. Harrison CC and seconded by Councillor K. Bool that the arrangements in place to employ a third-party contingency provider in order to put in place appropriate business continuity arrangements, should the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service be exposed to periods of industrial action, be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the arrangements in place to employ a third-party contingency provider in order to put in place appropriate business continuity arrangements, should the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service be exposed to periods of industrial action, be noted.

97. 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 September 2020 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.

Members commended officers for the positive results detailed in the Staff Engagement Survey.

It was moved by Councillor K. Bool and seconded by Mrs. Betty Newton CC that the progress made since September 2020 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 September 2020 in the delivery of projects within the Service Development Programme and the tasks that are included in Our Plan 2020-24 be noted.

98. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Improvement Plan and Covid-19 Inspection.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning the progress made with the implementation of the Improvement Plan which was developed in response to the inspection report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), following the report to the Committee in September 2020. This report also detailed the recent HMICFRS COVID-19 inspection of the Service. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Members were informed that the Covid-19 inspection had been carried out virtually by HMICFRS across the country. Formal written feedback was awaited, but informal verbal feedback had been received. This was positive and recognised that there had been unique circumstances in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, which had not really emerged from the first wave of the pandemic, placing the Fire and Rescue Service in constant response mode.

The Chief Fire and Rescue Officer said that the FRS had been broadly unaffected by Covid in the first wave of the pandemic in terms of sickness levels and the number of staff self-isolating. However, this had changed with the second wave; with 19 cases of Covid since the outset, the majority of these were in the previous three weeks. The peak for self-isolation was the previous weekend, with 94 people affected. Members were assured that this had now reduced, and fire cover had not been adversely affected, with service delivery remaining significantly high. The majority of absences were due to the need to self-isolate, mainly due to family contact or life outside the Service. It was expected that a continued level of absence would be evident for some time to come.

Members asked that their best wishes and thanks be passed on to staff for their continued working during such a difficult period.

Following questions, the CFO added that the business continuity arrangements set out under item 10 on the agenda could be used should the Service be adversely affected by Covid. The CFO reassured members that the Service was quite some way off needing to call on these arrangements.

In response to questions, Members were informed that the Service had considered actions required for Brexit to ensure continued service delivery for some months. Earlier reports to the Committee had explained the plans in place and action to be taken by the Service, which was also involved in the Local Resilience Forum. The mobilising system was provided Systel, a French Company, and the necessary arrangements had been put in place to continue the project.

It was moved by Mrs. Betty Newton CC and seconded by Mr. Kaufman CC that the progress made with the Improvement Plan since the last update in September 2020, and also the verbal feedback given on the outcome of the recent HMICFRS Covid-19 inspection, be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made with the Improvement Plan since the last update in September 2020, and also the verbal feedback given on the outcome of the recent HMICFRS Covid-19 inspection, be noted.

99. Annual Procurement Report 2019-20.

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer concerning procurement related activity and compliance for the financial year 2019/20. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

It was highlighted to members that there had been no breaches of the rules and no legal action taken against the CFA.

It was moved by Councillor. K. Bool and seconded by Mrs. Betty Newton CC that the summary of procurement activity in 2019/20, as required by Rule 19.2 of the Contract Procedure Rules, be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of procurement activity in 2019/20, as required by Rule 19.2 of the Contract Procedure Rules, be noted.

100. Date of Next Meeting.

The next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee will be held on Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 2pm via Microsoft Teams.

2.00 - 3.24 pm  
18 November 2020

CHAIRMAN