

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – MINUTES

Date: 30th June 2016

Time: 10.30am – 12.10pm

Place: Fire & Rescue Service HQ, Hinchingsbrooke Cottage, Brampton Road, Huntingdon

Present: Councillors P Brown, D Divine, D Giles, M Loynes, L Nethsingha (Chairwoman), D Over (Vice-Chairman), J Schumann and M Shellens

Officers: S Ismail, C Strickland, M Warren and D Cave

55. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

It was resolved to appoint Councillor Nethsingha as Chairwoman of the Policy and Resources Committee for 2016/17.

56. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

It was resolved to appoint Councillor Over as Vice Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee for 2016/17.

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Councillor Sales.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

The Chairwoman advised that she had received a late request to speak on item 10 (Huntingdon Hub Property Rationalisation – Progress Update) from Councillor Jason Ablewhite, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In order for Councillor Ablewhite to be permitted to speak, the Committee would need to suspend Standing Orders. She advised that she was inclined to recommend that he be allowed to speak because of the unusual circumstances, but reminded Members that in the past requests to speak at short notice had been turned down.

It was resolved unanimously to suspend Standing Orders.

Councillor Ablewhite thanked Members for letting him speak. He commented that a lot was happening nationally, with changes of legislation proposed which could have a significant impact on the Fire Authority, not least potential legislation to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to become responsible for Fire and Rescue Services. Later in the meeting, Members would be asked to make a decision regarding the new Fire Service Headquarters. Councillor Ablewhite advised strongly that Members defer that decision, to allow further discussion to take place on other opportunities. He explained that he had met with the Fire Authority Chairman and Chief Fire Officer to discuss other opportunities that could save the taxpayer money. This included the potential for the Fire Service to utilise a site adjacent to

the current Police Headquarters, and also the possibility to share the training facility at Monkswood. He suggested that not all options have been fully explored, and the Fire Authority should reconsider the decision to use significant reserves to support the proposal being presented to them today. As planning permission had not yet been sought, and the land not yet acquired, there was still time to consider alternative options.

59. MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 21st APRIL 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 21st April 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairwoman.

60. FINAL REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION 2015-16 AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

A report was presented setting out the final 2015/16 revenue and capital budget outturn position, and an update on the treasury management position.

Members noted:

- the significant underspend of £162,000 at year end, and the proposal to transfer that sum into the property development reserve;
- the proposed carry forwards;
- committed capital expenditure, including Yaxley Fire Station;
- the healthy General Reserve of £2,348K;
- the Earmarked Revenue reserves position of £1,999K, including a Pension reserve, which was held to offset future costs associated with the capital outlay of a firefighter retiring early on ill health grounds;
- the Capital Reserve of £9,869,000 (property development) to help finance the cost of the new Huntingdon Hub facilities;
- the detail of Capital Programme expenditure, which was primarily spent on vehicles and Land and Buildings (predominantly Yaxley Fire Station, which was due to be completed by the end of August);
- the underspend against the Supplies and Services budget, which related to projects running behind schedule and monies set aside for budget reductions in 2016/17 not being fully spent. It was noted that Uniforms, which were not issued on a personal basis, had been updated;
- the pension liability appeared on the Balance Sheet, but the government currently underwrote this;
- the treasury management position over the last couple of years, to realise a return on investments. There was no rationale for repaying debt at the moment, and it was anticipated that the Service would not be borrowing in the short term.
- the borrowing limits, demonstrating that there was headroom for 2016/17.

Noting comments around the difficulties of recruiting On-Call staff, a Member asked for an update on the pilot for working with the ambulance service in Ramsey and March. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that the pilot had started six weeks previously, and call rates had not been as high as expected, and that the call categories were being expanded. Whilst the pilot had been well received at the two stations, demand had been less than expected.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. Note the revenue and capital budget outturn position;
2. Approve the requested budget holder carry forwards;
3. Note the year-end balance sheet position as at 31 March 2016;
4. Note the annual Treasury Management Statement.

61. MEDICAL CASH PLAN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE EMPLOYEES

The Committee received a report which sought approval for the introduction of a bespoke medical cashplan, administered through Private Medical Intermediaries Limited (PMI) Health Group, for all existing Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) employees and dependants up to the age of 24 years.

Officers advised that whilst the Service currently invested in and promoted employee health and wellbeing through an in-house Occupational Health team, and an independent Employee Assistance Programme, further ways of assisting staff were being sought. Most medical insurance schemes were prohibitively expensive, but the proposed option appeared mutually beneficial to employees and the Service, at a cost of £41,500. The proposal was to trial the medical cashplan to see if it was worthwhile. One of the main benefits was that it would reduce the length of time for initial assessment or scan, by up to ten weeks. It was noted that there would be tax implications for the individual. Given cuts to the number of firefighters over recent years, the system no longer had capacity e.g. if one person was off, it potentially impacted on the service provided.

In response to Member questions:

- average costs per week per employee were noted;
- it was noted that the restriction up to the age of 24 related to employees' dependents;
- it was confirmed that staff affected by injuries were sometimes picked up e.g. through physiotherapy claims, but often went unreported.

A number of Members commented that whilst the scheme would appear to offer real benefits, it would be difficult to quantify accurately benefits from the medical cashplan on the Service. Officers acknowledged this, but pointed out that they could monitor changes in sickness rates, physiotherapy claims, benchmarking against other authorities, etc, to get an indication of benefits. It was noted that generally, the sick rate was 2-3 days per year, excluding long term sickness, and that this had reduced significantly over recent years. The company could provide data on a monthly basis about who was claiming. It was anticipated that the scheme would get people back to work more quickly and relieve some pressure on the Service. The scheme had been discussed with staff representatives, and had been well received.

The Chairwoman commented that some of the figures for annual claim limits appeared to be quite low, and it would be interesting to find out after a year how many staff had used up their allowance, and what happened after that. It was agreed it would be useful to have an update whilst the trial was in progress. It was confirmed that the scheme had not been designed specifically for firefighters.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the recommended cashplan attached to the report at Appendix 1.

62. CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF BS EN ISO 14001 – 2015 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Members received a report that sought approval to continue to develop an Environmental Management System (EMS) through external audit certification conducted by the British Standards Institute (BSI).

Members noted the background to the work undertaken to achieve various British Standards and the benefits these confer on the Service. BS 14001 was chosen as it could improve performance and resource management, and the experience to date was that it had delivered more benefits than anticipated. It was therefore proposed to extend the scope of BS 14001 to include other locations and teams.

Arising from the report, Members:

- thanked the Health and Safety Manager for the valuable work he had undertaken on this project to date;
- commented favourably on the benefits this project conferred on both the Service and the environment;
- noted the recycling arrangements for IT equipment, which was taken away free of charge. Office equipment that was damaged or destroyed in incidents (i.e. not Fire Service premises) was an issue for the Environment Agency;
- noted the progress made with installing solar panels, which were routinely installed on new premises. Investigations had previously been undertaken to retro-fit solar panels to all buildings but it was unlikely that this would be cost effective;
- noted the arrangements for disposing of hazardous waste at zero cost. In response to a Member question, it was noted that this excluded tyres, batteries, waste oil and oil filters, which were disposed of through a separate arrangement with ATS, for which there was a charge. It was also confirmed that there was no facility to carry out MOTs in-house.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note the work undertaken to date;
2. continue with certification;
3. approve the required spend of £7,000 to do so.

63. CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION RESTRUCTURE

The Committee considered a report on proposed changes to the structure of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), and to seek agreement for the Service to financially support the new arrangements.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that responsibility for Fire Services had moved from the DCLG to the Home Office earlier in the year. The Home Office was keen to establish better lines of communication with Fire Services in relation to operational matters, and welcomed the idea of CFOA reorganising its structure to help this happen. Currently, the CFOA President works part time, and the presidential term was only one year. Funding was required from Fire Services to facilitate a full-time President who was in post longer term and could develop the relationships with the Home Office, and better represent Fire Services.

The indicative cost of the proposed arrangement was noted. It was also noted that individual Fire Services' contributions reflected their relative size.

In response to Member questions, it was confirmed that there was scope for the CFOA to use its reserves, and that a decision needed to be made prior to September, as the CFOA was looking to have the arrangement set up by 01/04/17.

Members noted comments from the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer on a desire for Fire Services to have a more collegiate approach, and that there was a huge amount of work done via CFOA on national operational guidance. The similarities and differences with the Police sector were noted. Members also noted that members the Service worked extensively with other Fire Services on a variety of projects.

In discussion, it was suggested that the required funding could be sourced from cost reductions e.g. reduced CFOA membership owing to reduced senior leadership team numbers. A number of Members expressed strong reservations, and most Members felt that if CFOA wanted a full-time, permanent President, it was up to that organisation to finance it, at least initially, rather than Fire Services collectively providing the up front funding.

Members agreed that whilst they welcomed the CFOA's proposal for a full-time permanent President, it was too early to commit to making a financial contribution. It was agreed that the Chief Fire Officer should continue discussions on this issue and take forward the CFOA restructure funding, subject to there being general support from other Fire Authorities also supporting the proposal. The Chief Fire Officer agreed to bring back an information report on this matter.

The Chairwoman proposed an amended recommendation:

"the authority supports the principle of stronger collaboration arrangements at national level for CFOA, and this Authority reserves its position on how it might contribute to the costs of the proposal, whether through membership cost or directly funding a presidential office."

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

It was resolved, by a majority, to:

1. support the principle of stronger collaboration arrangements at national level for CFOA;
2. reserve its position on how it might contribute to the costs of the proposal, whether through membership cost or directly funding a presidential office.

64. HUNTINGDON HUB PROPERTY RATIONALISATION – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report on progress with the Huntingdon Hub property rationalisation project and seeking approval to sign the development agreement for the construction of the new Combined Fire Station, Training Centre, Combined Fire Control and Headquarters building.

Noting the comments of the Police and Crime Commissioner earlier in the meeting, a Member spoke in support of the recommendation as set out on the report. He reminded the Committee that the process of identifying an alternative site for Service Headquarters and Huntingdon Fire Station had been going on for years, and it had been a very open process.

The Member had challenged the proposal for the St John's site when it had originally come forward, and asked officers to make every effort to identify potential partners, which they had done. Whilst noting that there was uncertainty in terms of legislation and the future relationship between the Fire Authority and Police and Crime Commissioner, he did not feel that this justified abandoning or putting on hold the extensive work that had been undertaken to identify a suitable site and develop plans to this stage. Other Members agreed, observing that whilst an alternative site had been suggested by the Police and Crime Commissioner at this late stage, no such option had emerged during other discussions with the Chief Constable and the previous Police and Crime Commissioner.

A Member suggested that, if timescales permitted, a very short pause in proceedings could be taken to examine the suitability of the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposed site. It was agreed that an additional meeting should be held on 21st July to review the new proposal, and to take a decision whether to explore that proposal further, or the existing option on St John's Business Park. It was pointed out that staff and the public need to know as soon as possible what was happening, and it would not be appropriate to delay the process any further, and to miss the opportunity of progressing with the St John's site if the Police site was unsuitable. It was also noted that if Members decided that the Police site was suitable, this would lead to further slippage in timescales.

Officers confirmed that they had had recent discussions with Police colleagues about the St John's site, including options for sharing training space and office space. One option that had been explored was adding an additional storey to the current Fire Service plans to accommodate other offices, at a cost of approximately £3.5M.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. Note the progress to date with this project;
2. Allow a short period to explore other options prior to an additional meeting on 21 July, before making a decision whether to sign the development agreement for the development of the new site.

65. PRIMARY AUTHORITY SCHEME – BUSINESS HUB UPDATE

A report was presented seeking Members' views on the opportunities presented by further development of the 'Business Hub' concept.

The introduction of the Primary Authority Scheme (PAS) in 2009 enabled a scheme whereby one regulator would work closely with a regulated business and provide advice and support to that business on a consistent, national basis. CFRS is the primary authority for six businesses.

The scope of the legislation had recently been expanded on to a more commercial footing. Outlining the proposals, officers explained how there would clearly need to be separation between enforcement and regulatory roles of Authority and the trading arm (the Business Hub). Before exploring these options further, Members' views were sought on whether this was a viable proposition. Members expressed support for the proposed direction, and urged officers to work with all partners in the county e.g. all districts and city councils.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- 1) Note the contents of the report;
- 2) Agree to further development of the "Business Hub".

53. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Work Programme and Seminar Programme as updated at the meeting was noted.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETINGS

To be confirmed.

Chairman
21 July 2016