

Agenda Item 6

TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

FROM: Scrutiny and Assurance Manager – Deb Thompson

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Annual Review - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an (annual) update on and assurance of compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to;
- note the current position in terms of compliance and in particular the assurances given at Paragraph 7.2.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 **Economic** – the Government believes that transparency is the foundation of local accountability and the key that gives people the tools and information they need to enable them to play a bigger role in society. It is also considered that the availability of data can also open new markets for local business, the voluntary and community sectors and social enterprises to run services or manage public assets.
- 3.2 **Political** – the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 was issued to meet the Government's desire to place more power into citizens' hands to increase democratic accountability and make it easier for local people to contribute to the local decision-making process and help shape public services.
- 3.3 **Social** – the Government believes that in principle all data held and managed by local authorities should be made available to local people unless there are specific sensitivities for example, protecting vulnerable people or commercial and operational considerations. It encourages local authorities to see data as a valuable resource not only to themselves but their partners and local people.

3.4 **Equality Impact Assessment** – completed at source.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a revised Transparency Code in February 2015 as a tool to embed transparency in local authorities and set out the minimum data that such authorities should be publishing, the frequency it should be published and how it should be published. The Code can be found at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Under this Code local authority means a fire and rescue authority (constituted by a scheme under section 2 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 or a scheme to which section 4 of that Act applies).
- 4.3 In July 2015 a Member-led review was undertaken, the objective of which was to provide assurance that the Authority was complying with the requirements of the Code whilst also considering its wider approach to transparency. A number of recommendations to improve compliance were made by the review group which were accepted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then the Authority in October 2015.
- 4.4 The redesigned Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) website was launched on 15 February 2016. Prior to the launch a considerable amount of effort was expended to ensure the findings of the Member-led review were incorporated into the design and the website now features a separate section for **Transparency** providing a central repository for all information demanded by the Code. Under this section there are sub sections for Constitution of Fire Authority, Organisation Structure, Procurement, Expenditure, Senior Officer Pay, Assets, Grants and Trade Union Time. There is also a link to wider service documents that may be of interest to the public for example, the Annual Report and Statement of Assurance.

5. **Requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015**

- 5.1 Under the Code the following information is to be published **quarterly**, not later than one month after the quarter to which the data and information is applicable;
- Expenditure exceeding £500
 - Government procurement card transactions and
 - Procurement information.
- 5.2 The following (applicable) information is to be published **annually**, not later than one month after the year to which the data and information is applicable;
- Local authority land
 - Grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations
 - Organisation chart
 - Trade union facility
 - Senior salaries
 - Constitution
 - Pay multiple

- Fraud

5.3 The following information is to be published once only;

- Waste contracts.

6. Compliance with the Requirements of the Trade Union (Facility Time Publication Requirements) Regulations 2017

6.1 In August 2018, the Service became aware, through the submission of a Freedom of Information request relating to Trade Union Facility Time, of a Statutory Instrument (SI) that detailed additional publication requirements. Full details of the SI can be found via the following link
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/328/made>

6.2 The then Information Governance Manager subsequently reviewed the publication requirements of the SI which are summarised below;

- Number of relevant trade union officials,
- Percentage of time spent on facility time (banded),
- Percentage of pay bill spent on facility time,
- Paid trade union facility time activities.

6.3 The SI was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2018 where it was agreed that data from financial year 2018/19 onwards would be published. This review has found that the Service has not yet published the required data from financial year 2022/23.

7. Compliance with the Code – October 2023

7.1 The last report of compliance was presented to this Committee on 6 October 2022.

7.2 At the time of writing, this annual review has found that the Service is currently fully compliant with the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 apart from the area identified at Paragraph 6.3 above for which assurances have been given that the necessary work will be completed by the end of October 2023.

7.3 In addition to the requirements of the Code (and the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018), the Service continues to have very active social media channels and routinely publishes a range of documents and resources which it believes are likely to be of public interest.

7.4 That said, the Service has always been proactive in looking for ways in which to improve engagement and in November 2022 it launched a new public initiative, the Community Engagement Forum or CEF. Using a combination of technologies, the Media and Communication Team put together an online form to allow people to sign up to receive periodic questions about the Services activities known as 'Hot Topics.' The responses received from the CEF, along with other inputs, will allow the Service to better understand public

opinion whilst ensuring proposals for change and development of the organisation are open and transparent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact Officer
Local Government Transparency Code 2015 Review of CPFA Compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes	Hinchingsbrooke Cottage Brampton Road Huntingdon PE29 2NA	Hayley Douglas Head of Media, Communication and Transparency hayley.douglas@cambsfire.gov.uk