

Fire Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 06 October 2022

Time: 14:00 – 15:29

Venue: Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters

Present: Councillors Bond, Gardener, Gowing, Kindersley (Chair), McGuire, Rae, Taylor

35. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

No apologies were received. There were no declarations of interest.

36. Minutes – 22 April 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The action log was noted.

37. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

38. Integrated Risk Management Plan Performance Measures

The committee received a report which reviewed the service's progress between 1 April 2022 and 30 June 2022 with regard to incidents and workforce diversity. It highlighted potential initiatives to mitigate weaknesses. The service had exceeded targets with regard to response time but were not meeting attendance time targets. There had been decreases in fire casualties, secondary fires, road traffic collisions; and an increase in supporting other special services in incidents. Domestic fires had been predominantly caused by fuel supplies and had caused no injuries. The service had seen a reduction in diverse recruitment, but this reflected an overall downward trend in recruitment and retention.

During discussion Members:

- Queried the impact that moving to a three pump call out model would have on the service. The three pump call out would allow fewer than five vehicles to respond to an incident when fewer than five pumps were immediately available, although five vehicles would still be called upon. If the initial response resolved the incident, that pump could terminate the call out. Initial work was being undertaken on impact, but the change was a realistic response to staffing and resource pressures and would allow for faster movements, including to rural areas where fewer vehicles were immediately available. Despite concerns from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) regarding ethics and undercutting the workforce, the officer stated that this strategy was not unusual - Suffolk had successfully implemented it, which had resulted in faster response times and improved results. The on-call service had expressed

mixed views in response to the strategy, and therefore collaborative meetings had been scheduled.

- Were informed of learning from the Suffolk implementation: There had been an incident in which first responders had arrived at a road collision requiring entry into a water filled ditch to retrieve individuals from a submerged car. Protocol required greater resource to allow responders to enter water than had initially responded. However, following risk assessment on the depth of the water, firefighters had determined immediate need greater than risk and were therefore able to recover the people. Assessment after the event determined unnecessary risk had not been not taken.
- Noted the impact of the high cost of living on staffing and recruitment in many organisations.
- Inquired about the Fire Service's receptivity to implementing a four-day working week to improve staff recruitment and retention, as was scheduled to occur at South Cambridgeshire District Council. The officer confirmed that the service offered flexible working hours, but that staff often worked multiple jobs and reducing working days would likely affect the service's overall productivity.
- Suggested forming a task and finish group on staff recruitment and retention, following results from the South Cambridgeshire District Council four-day week trial.
- Requested that future reports clarify Year 1 on the rolling five years charts.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the performance report in Appendix 1 which covers the first quarter of the year, 1 April to 30 June 2022. The committee is asked to make comment as they deem appropriate.

39. Fire Authority Programme Management – Monitoring Report

The committee received a report which provided an update on business development projects for 2022/23.

The Replacement ICCS and Mobilisation Solution project was business as usual – face to face engagement had recommenced following the reduction in coronavirus. A crewing module would be formed by 25 December 2022, following which a plan for going live would be developed which factored in performance and summer conditions. The committee would receive a further update in the new year.

The review of operations aimed to make the service more efficient through improved financial contingency planning and service improvement. With regard to financial contingency planning, national pay award increases of over 2% within existing projects were unaffordable. Having a flat rate of 6% for green book staff (administrative staff) and 5% for grey book staff (operational and control staff) would create a £1.1m deficit within the £31m budget. Therefore, a financial business continuity plan had been

developed which evaluated the impact of cost saving measures on staff losses, redundancies and station closure. An email and video had been sent by the service to staff and members addressing this. Measures taken would be dependent on preset flexibility in 2023 and a spending review period, but reserves could be used to reduce impact.

The Fire Service were developing a new finance software system as the current system was near end of life. As part of the next stage, the Project Board would be evaluating the review.

Huntingdon relocation would occur before mid-November, but had been granted a slight extension due to UK power network outages which were now resolved. The new training centre had been agreed by the local Fire Brigade Union and received positive feedback from staff.

The Review the Ways of Working Project was complete, but use of Hinchingsbrook Cottage as Fire Headquarters was being reviewed due to changes in the ways of working. One potential consideration was locating the headquarters within joint premises. This work would be tied into the pilot scheme for remote working.

In response, Members:

Replacement ICCS & Mobilising Solution:

- Understood that the replacement of Airwave (the current communications infrastructure for all emergency services) had been occurring for ten years and that the current system cost the government £1m per day. The project faced additional delays of multiple years due to factors including: insufficient technological advancements; government underestimation of the scale of the project; and a possible conflict of interest in Airwave leading the transition to DCS. As a result, re-procurement for the technology would occur in 2023. Airwave cost the government £1m per day, however, there was no concern regarding Airwave's functionality during the interim period and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority were scaling back the project locally to reduce costs.
- Expressed surprise that traditional annual leave arrangements in July and August in France had caused delays and that the supplier had not factored this into timescales. The officer responded that management issues in France had been resolved following discussions between the company and the Fire Service, but that the pandemic had also been a factor in delays.
- Noted that, despite delays from the home office, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were scheduled to be the first area to move to DCS.
- Noted that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority were communicating concerns with regard to the project through the Fire Customer Group, which comprised of Airwave, FCC, the Home Office Committee and NSC.

- Voiced concerns regarding the cost of Airwaves for taxpayers nationally and requested a Members' briefing on the subject. **Action.**

Review of Operations

- Clarified that staff payments would be backdated to July for grey book staff and April for green book staff.
- Noted that the Chief Officer Advisory Group had met on 6 October 2022 and determined that vacancies would only be readvertised in staffing areas not at risk from cuts. As a result the current two-year contract period advertised for the new project manager post would be revised.
- Noted that a briefing session on the Financial Business Continuity Plan was scheduled for 21 October 2022.

Review the Ways of Working Project – Hinchingsbrooke House Headquarters

- Noted that the Huntingdon Relocation Project Manager was scheduled to review use of Hinchingsbrooke House.
- The Chair showed support for this project, emphasising the positive impact it could have on reducing the organisation's carbon footprint.

It was resolved unanimously to:

The Committee is asked to note the Programme Status Report, as of September 2022, attached at Appendix 1.

40. Internal Audit Report 2021/22

The Internal Audit Report for 2021/22 had been developed through analysis of priorities, risk profile and assurance framework. As in previous years, the audit had been positive with some areas for improvement.

During discussion Members:

- Noted that sickness recording had been impacted, in part, by high rates of coronavirus, but that action had still been taken to mitigate concerns raised by the audit. Improvements to the Sickness Recording Policy included a sickness follow-up meeting to ensure proper documentation; and a sickness management meeting which examined the approach taken to illness both with regard to the individual and the organisation.
- Clarified that, on page 7, the evaluation of risk appetite as 'slippery' referred to projects often becoming bigger than anticipated. Establishing the size of a project prior to its initiation could help manage this.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Internal Audit Report.

41. Internal Audit Progress Report

The committee received the Internal Audit progress report which measured good progress against the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 with some areas for improvement and included a review of capital projects in relation to the training centre. Overall, 17/27 recommendations had been implemented, with three superseded and seven granted delayed completion by management. The officer highlighted that enforced completion of the debrief form following complex incidents would be actioned by management; and that the union had voiced concerns regarding proposed training centre shift patterns.

During discussion, Members:

- Sought more information on the two outstanding actions and on asset and fleet management policies and procedures. The officer was under the impression that these actions had been completed and would seek an update to circulate to Members after the meeting. **Action.**
- Raised the GDPR action scheduled for 23 September 2022.
- Agreed that the disparity between all individuals finding the management system easy to use and half of individuals finding training for the management system good was likely due to the system itself being easy to navigate.
- Noted that the service was considering developing routes for the RM14 (Informal Post Incident Debrief) and RM17 (Escalation from RM14) forms.
- Complimented the service on the audit outcome.

It was resolved to:

Note the Internal Audit Progress Report.

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

The committee were provided with an update on and assurance of compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code. The report author noted that section 6 could now be considered historic - the website was updated with the organisational chart and senior salaries on 05 October 2022 - and that consultation would be enhanced by a public consultation forum. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda Plan would be updated to include a paper on the forum.

In response to Members' questions, officers explained they were following government guidance with regard to fire authority website information, but that this information was ambiguous, and interpretation was unique to each fire authority.

It was resolved to:

Note the current position in terms of compliance and in particular the assurances given at Paragraph 7.4.

43. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

The committee reviewed the Draft Annual Governance Statement as informed by the CIPFA/ SOLACE Framework. Considerations included asset and fleet management system, sickness management and property portfolio. In future, the statement may need to become more robust to mitigate the potential impact of pay awards.

In response to Members' questions:

- Suggested incorporating within internal audit reports the Draft Annual Governance Statement's statement that 'the system of internal controls is a significant part of that framework [the Governance Framework] and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable and foreseeable level'. This was not currently done as audit viewed internal risk management as a whole, rather than through specific controls.
- Proposed that, when published on the website, the report include hyperlinks to policies mentioned to aid the reader. The possibility of this would be reviewed by the Assurance and Scrutiny Manager. Action.

It was resolved to:

In accordance with the current Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Terms of Reference, the Committee is asked to:

- (a) Scrutinise the AGS, attached at Appendix 1 and make comment as appropriate,
- (b) Recommend to the Authority that the AGS is approved for external publication.

44. Review of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Consultation with Representative Bodies

The committee received a Member-led report on the inability of Joint Consultative Committee meetings to take place on the basis of Fire Brigade Union policy. This was a longstanding problem which the previous Joint Consultative Committee chairman had

tried to remedy through the introduction of additional meeting dates. The review recommended dissolution of the Joint Consultative Committee.

During the discussion, Members:

- Showed confusion at the FBU's statement that meetings with the Fire Authority would be useful because ongoing offers from the Fire Authority for individual contact had not been utilised. The officer explained that this may be because the FBU wished to have more influence over the agenda of Fire Authority meetings than the offer allowed; or that they may wish for interactions with Members rather than fire colleagues.
- Clarified that, at the time, FBU refusal to sit with the RFU had been a regional decision rather than a local one, and was not nationwide.
- Agreed that it would be beneficial to hold Member training with representative bodies. Officers proposed fire colleagues joined conversations between the FBU and Members.
- Both the Chair and lead Members thanked the Assurance and Scrutiny Manager for her considerable effort towards the report.

It was resolved to:

The Committee is asked to;

- (a) Consider and note the contents of this report,
- (b) Approve the recommendation at Paragraph 12.1,
- (c) Discuss and agree suggestions to take forward to the next Authority meeting (Paragraph 12.2),
- (d) Approve the recommendation at Paragraph 12.3.

45. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The committee resolved unanimously to note its work programme pending the inclusion of formation of a potential Staffing Task and Finish Group and a public consultation forum report.

Chair