

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

Public Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting

Date: 31 October 2023
Time: 2.00pm – 3.32pm
Place: Fire HQ, Huntingdon
Present: Councillors: S Bywater, B Goodliffe (Chair), M Jamil (Vice Chair), D Dew, E Murphy, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith
Officers: Jon Anderson, John Fagg, Tamar Oviatt-Ham, Stuart Smith, Chris Strickland and Matthew Warren

50. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies were received from Cllr David Over.

There were no declarations of interest.

51. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 26 April 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2023 were approved as a correct record.

52. Action Log

The action log was noted. All actions were completed or in hand.

53. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023-24

Members considered an update on revenue and capital spending as of 31 March 2023.

Members noted:

- The budget for full-time firefighters was currently slightly overspent this financial year, primarily due to mandatory training and associated overtime payments. Actual firefighter numbers were slightly lower than budgeted for in the establishment however the Service had robust plans in place to bring wholtime crewing levels back in line with the budgeted establishment by the end of the calendar year.

- The property maintenance budget was currently underspent but that was not expected to continue to year-end as the Service anticipated energy cost pressures through the colder months.
- The Service continued to work with District Council colleagues and external advisors to clarify the position regarding business rate income. This income continued to exceed the indicative baseline funding level. There were ongoing discussions around what the Service would be able to retain. This income would be utilised on capital projects so not to commit to on-going expenditure. The Service continued to work with District Council partners to understand the income position moving forward and hoped to be able to report this to the Fire Authority in February 2024.
- In the Capital budget there had been the carry forward related to flexi Officer car purchases that have been delayed by almost two years.

Arising from the report:

- A member highlighted an error on page 17 of the agenda pack as it showed external interest as red when it was showing a 132% increase. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained this was an error and actually showed that the Service had received more than what had been expected so should be green.
- A member queried how work was progressing on next years budget. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer stated that the draft budget would go to the Fire Authority meeting in December but that the government settlement was not likely to be received until late in December. He explained that the authority was lobbying for £5 in the Council Tax precept again. He stated that pay awards were pending and that they would take a view against the national position and this would not be negotiated until after the budget had been settled.

It was resolved unanimously to note the position on revenue and capital spending.

54. Annual Review of the Operation of the ICT Shared Service

The Committee considered the annual review of the operation of the ICT Shared Service.

Members noted:

- There had been an independent review of the ICT service which had shown the service to be value for money and to have good governance in place.

- There were a number of recommendations that would be taken forward focusing on how the service interacts with other functions. forward, how we interact with other functions.
- Paragraph 4.6 of the report set out the current projects taking place.
- There was a cross charge for the service between Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire. The service had been running successfully for 10 years now and a new delivery manager was due to come into post in December. Officers were preparing paperwork to sign the agreement for a further 5 years.

Arising from the report:

- A member queried if there was any risk in relation to the future of the shared service going forward. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit explained that he did not currently foresee a risk to the service over the medium term. The Chief Fire Officer stated that this was taken into account as part of the services business continuity planning. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit commented that if partners wished to terminate the agreement they would be required to give 18 months notice and the service would be extremely difficult to decouple. He explained that there would be clauses in the contract that covered this.
- A member questioned whether technology was moving in the direction where economy of scale was not there anymore. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit explained that technology was completely different from when the agreement was first set up 10 years ago and operating models were changing. He stated that as long as both parties were investing in the same areas the agreement would continue to work well.
- A member commented on 10.2 in the report in relation to the procurement and contracting and noted that Cambridgeshire predominantly lead on this. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit acknowledged that this was the case and that there was a recommendation to create a joint procurement function. He explained that the working relationship with both parties was good and that there was a programme board that oversaw the progress of projects. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer commented that there was still the opportunity for other services to join as it was the only joint ICT service currently in the country.

It was resolved unanimously to

- 1) consider the outcomes of the annual review of the operation of the ICT Shared Service Agreement;
- 2) note the continued achievement of the aims of improved resilience, flexibility, cover, quality and customer focus.

55. Digital Strategy 2022-2025

Members considered the Digital Strategy for 2022-2025.

Members noted:

- The themes in the strategy were the same as in previous years.
- The strategy highlighted development opportunities.
- Licencing costs had increased above inflation and officers were looking at how the service could get better value for money.
- The STEP team were looking at process automation and system integration.
- There was a focus on data reporting including real time data for operational decision making.
- The new mobilisation system was core to how the service could improve communications on the fire ground.

Arising from the report:

- A member question whether there was a risk in relation to the telephone network change which had recently been communicated, that would take place in 2025. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit stated that this was a risk to the whole country and would have a big impact for emergency services. He explained that this was being worked on at the moment with all stations needing to change to IP and the call centres. He stated that they were in the final testing stages and hoped to go live before Christmas.
- A member queried what would happen if there was a power cut and in relation to 999 calls getting through. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit explained that internally the Service was covered but that externally the telephone companies would need to provide back up for vulnerable customers.
- A member asked if Artificial Intelligence (AI) would be used within the Service. The Head of ICT and Occupational Health Unit stated that AI was already being used and was part of a new project to look at how it could be used in decision making in the future. He explained that there were risks in using it but that these risks would be monitored.

It was resolved unanimously to:

approve the revised Digital Strategy for 2022 to 2025, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

56. Property Portfolio Update

Members considered an update on the Property Portfolio.

Members noted:

- It was the final day for bids on the old Huntingdon site on Wednesday 1 November 2023. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that there had been a lot of interest in the site but that it was not clear how this would translate into offers. He stated that as soon as he had an understanding of what offers had been made, he would update the Fire Authority.
- Officers had been working closely with the NHS on the St Ives site. Officers were also working with Cheffins to establish the value of the entire site. The Chief Fire Officer stated that clear timescales would be established with partners to ensure that plans would go ahead.

Arising from the report:

- A member questioned if there were any issues with RACC in any of the Services buildings. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer stated that there was no building that had been identified as having RACC but that there were a number that had asbestos, that were currently being dealt with.
- A member queried how the money would be used from any sales. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that the proceeds would go into the property investment reserve. He explained that a more detailed report on the St Neots site would be going to the next Fire Authority meeting. The Chief Fire Officer stated that it had been difficult to find a new premises in St Neots and that the Service was looking at what would happen if the Constabulary pulled out of the agreement in relation to the site and any associated costs.
- A member commented that there had been a lot of growth around St Neots and queried if there had been any section 106 money available. The Chief Executive Officer stated that there was potential funding through the Community Infrastructure Levy from Huntingdonshire District Council and the service would apply for this.

It was resolved unanimously to note the current position at the properties detailed in the report.

57. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register - Monitoring Report

The Committee considered the updated strategic risk report, as of September 2023 which highlighted those risks that are considered above the risk appetite of the Authority.

Arising from the report:

- A member sought clarity on risk a new risk R224 'a risk that if Hertfordshire withdraw cross border support this may negatively impact on operational response times in the south of the county'. The Chief Fire Officer stated that there were ongoing discussions with Hertfordshire and that currently they called on Hertfordshire services under section 13 but paid them the national agreed rate for services which did not have a cross border agreement. He explained they had pulled out of the previous agreement over a year ago.
- A member highlighted that the EV Chargers risk R205 had become very high in public perception due to recent incidents and that this needed to be discussed in more detail at the next Fire Authority meeting regarding the Services approach and what was being done both locally and nationally. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that a report had gone to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this subject but that a report could be taken to the Fire Authority for further discussion, including the actions taken following the recent coroners report . **Action Required**. He also explained that the Service was lobbying MPs for a change in legislation.
- A member stated that they felt the scoring of the extreme weather conditions risk R215 was not high enough, particularly in relation to the extreme heat experienced over recent years. The Chief Fire Officer explained that officers could provide further detail on how they had reached the score including a degradation plan which looked at how best to respond with less and less appliances. He explained that this was reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- A member sought further clarity on the on-call availability risk R112 and the introduction of to three crew pumps and whether this caused additional risks. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the majority of staff still did stand by and that the longer the policy had been in place the more evidence was in place to show its effectiveness. He stated that he had some communications on three crew pumps which he could share with members. **Action Required** Members sought an update to Fire Authority in 6 months time to update on progress. **Action Required**. A member commented that a different name could be used for three crew pumps to differentiate them such as first response team.

It was resolved unanimously to note the strategic risk report.

58. Work Programme

Members noted the forward Work Programme.

59. Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings held 20 April and 4 October 2023

Members noted the Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes of the meetings held 20 April and 4 October 2023.

Chair