

Fire Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Date: 22 April 2024
Time: 2.00 p.m. – 3.33 p.m.
Venue: Fire and Rescue Services Headquarters
Present: Councillors Gowing, Hathorn, Kindersley (Chair), Rae, Taylor, Warren

76. Verbal Update from Ernst & Young

An auditor from Ernst & Young (EY) presented a verbal update to the Committee. Members were informed that EY's focus was on concluding historic audits to then have the ability to focus on the 2023/24 audit. There had been a 'back stop' date released that all auditors had to publish an audit opinion on all audits up to and including 2022/23, by 30th September 2024. This would allow for a reset for 2023/24 audits to be completed by 31st May 2025. EY aimed to have 2023/24 audits completed by 30th November 2024. This subsequently meant that auditors would have to provide a 'disclaimed audit opinion'. Over the next three-to-four-year period, auditors would have to build up assurances over opening audits. 2023/24, 2024/25 and possibly 2025/26 would have a modified audit until full assurance could be given. This applied to approximately 90% of Local Government audits.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the update:

- queried the political consequences. The auditor and Officers informed Members that to have a completed audit they required a draft set of accounts prepared and the ability to audit them. There had been a combination of issues such as a shortage of auditors, financial reporting issues and specific council issues that have made this difficult. It was important that all authorities have robust close down arrangements, draft accounts and to be ready to be audited. Additionally, audit fees had increased.
- sought clarity that full audit procedures would be completed, but full audit assurance could not be given.

The Committee noted the verbal update.

77. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor Bond and Councillor Fitzgerald. There were no declarations of interest.

78. Minutes – 4th October 2023 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Action Log was noted.

79. Integrated Risk Management Plan Performance Measures

The Committee considered a report on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) performance measures between 1st October and 31st December 2023.

Attention was drawn to Appendix 1 which detailed attendance times for urban and rural areas and first pumps at all incidents, total fires, primary and secondary fires, fire deaths and casualties, road traffic collisions, people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions, special service incidents attended, applicant and workforce diversity, the number of non-domestic fires, and the number of business engagements identified through the risk based audit programme.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer also informed Members of two collaborations. The first was with Huntingdonshire District Council around the use of HVO fuel. The second collaboration was to provide Community Welfare Officers to support East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST) with both fall and community safety work. The two Officer posts were funded by EEAST but operated by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS). This was a one-year trial collaboration.

As per a request from the previous meeting, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer updated Members on crews of three. The crews of three offered an average of 1160 hours per month and they attended around 20 incidents per month this quarter; 50% of these incidents saw the crew of three appliance being first in attendance. A report would be brought to the July meeting.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- noted that the most recent deaths were not linked to lithium batteries.
- sought clarification regarding the 'special service incidents attended' section.
- welcomed the HVO collaboration but asked if *Huntingdon* District Council could be changed to *Huntingdonshire* District Council.
- queried the collaboration work with EEAST. Officers informed Members that CWO's would attend those who had fallen in their home to assist the ambulance service. They would also provide community safety advice whilst in the home where appropriate. Members were informed that the collaboration had been ongoing since the start of the year and an update report would be brought back to Committee - **action required**.
- questioned if the data regarding religion reflected a larger trend within society.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the contents of the performance report in Appendix 1 which covers Quarter 3 of the year 2023/24, 1 October to 31 December 2023. The Committee is also asked to make comment as they deem appropriate.

80. Fire Authority Programme Management Monitoring Report

Members received the Fire Authority Programme Management Monitoring Report. The report provided a timely update on the performance against current Service projects as set out in Appendix 1.

The Integrated Communication and Control System (ICCS) and Mobilising System was scheduled to go live on 11th June, however that would be reviewed by 10th May to ensure it would only go live once ready. Systel supported the aim to go live in June. There were remaining (data) issues with Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). Training was underway and the first four stages were completed. Stage 5 was due to begin next week and stage 6 two weeks thereafter. Members learnt that the control room would be moved to St Ives and would use the current system, while installation of the new system and equipment was carried out at the Huntingdon site. The Officer emphasised that they would not change the system if it was not deemed ready and safe.

A Member queried what would happen to SFRS. The Officer informed Members that the data needed to be available this week and if they did not receive it, they would not be able to mobilise pumps safely. SFRS were due to leave the collaboration on 31st December 2024. CFRS had contacted the Home Office regarding the change of finances for when SFRS has left and were awaiting a meeting.

The Review of Operations was still ongoing with a pilot due to run this weekend to provide resilience. The estimated go live date was the 1st June 2024. ICU were now out of the contract and there was an interim solution. Members sought clarification on the public consultation regarding the closure of three stations. Officers responded that they had corresponded with Parish Councils in the affected areas and there was a lack of understanding regarding the On-Call service. To help increase awareness they were hosting open days at the station(s). The Officers highlighted the struggle to recruit especially in areas such as Manea and St Ives.

The Financial System Software Replacement Project had implemented all the modules and phases.

Trauma Welfare Support (TRiM Replacement) was working well and Officers emphasised that they were passionate about offering support to those that need it.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the Programme Status Report, as of February 2024, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

81. Strikes Minimum Service Levels Act 2023

The Committee received a report regarding the Service's approach to implement the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 during times of industrial action, whilst safeguarding the positive culture. Minimal service levels (MSLs) aimed to limit the impact of strike action on the Service. The presenting Officer emphasised the importance of maintaining good relationships with the unions. The Act set the expectation that all emergency calls must be answered and assessed and that a minimum of 73% of vehicles and appliances normally available would remain available. Where possible, the Service would like to operate how they had done in previous strikes. Work notices would be the last resort. Members were informed that if people ignore work notices, they lose their protection in strike law. Members learnt that the Act applied to all emergency services.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the contents of this report.

82. Internal Audit Strategy 2024/25

The Committee received a report regarding the Internal Audit Strategy 2024/25. Attention was drawn to section 2 of the report which included succession planning and talent management, asset and fleet management, control system, IT assets, medium term financial planning, key financial controls, follow up and management. The presenting Officer highlighted that culture would be carried forward from 2023/24 to avoid duplication as a survey was currently being conducted.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- clarified that IT assets were misplaced due to staff leaving and an asset register would help complete an accurate list of purchased IT assets.
- learnt that the data from the culture survey would help aid the internal audit report.
- sought clarity on how areas of audit were chosen.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the report.

83. Internal Audit Progress Report April 2023/24

The Committee received a report which provided a summary update on the progress of the internal audit. Attention was drawn to the three drafts issued and two which have been finalised. Procurement was still in progress but was due to have a completed draft by the end of the week. The report would return to Committee once all work had been finalised.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the report.

84. CPFA Scrutiny Function and Areas for Future Scrutiny Consideration

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the current scrutiny function within the Authority and suggested areas for future scrutiny.

Members reviewed the potential scrutiny areas and rated them high and low priority. Members set a relaxed time frame however hoped to hear an update within the next four months.

Those classed as high priority were assigned Members:

Employee Recruitment and Retention was deemed high priority, especially the On-Call service and Councillor Hathorn and Councillor Gowing were appointed.

Impacts and consideration due to population growth was classed as high priority and Councillor Kindersley and Councillor Taylor were appointed.

TRaCS and the implementation of the new post traumatic incident support process was high priority and Councillor Rae was assigned.

Service improvement project (operational response review) was deemed high priority however due to elections in Peterborough, the Committee decided to wait to appoint to this piece of work.

Other areas of scrutiny were:

Code of Conduct was discussed in the Fire Authority meeting in February 2022 and in subsequent Member seminars. It was working well so was deemed a low priority area.

Pay Policy/Employee Pay was deemed low priority.

Service Culture was deemed important but would benefit from the results of the survey (Minute 82 above refers) so would be brought back to Committee.

Fire Authority structure to include membership size and Constitution was deemed low priority but an area for reflection and potential as a future piece of work.

New mobilising system in Combined Fire Control seemed low priority as it would be premature to scrutinise now.

Performance and talent management would be brought back to Committee at the end of the financial year.

Productivity and efficiency were classed as low priority.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- i. agree the areas to be subjected to scrutiny,
- ii. prioritise the agreed areas to be scrutinised,
- iii. allocate every Member of the Committee to at least one agreed area to lead and drive the review,
- iv. determine a timeframe for each agreed area to start.

85. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee resolved unanimously to note its work programme.

Chair