

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: 25 March 2021
Time: 2.00pm – 2.38pm
Place: Virtual Meeting
Present: Councillors: B Ashwood, S Bywater, D Giles, W Hunt, M Jamil, K Reynolds (Chairman), M Shellens and M Smith
Officers: Jon Anderson, Tamar Oviatt-Ham, Chris Strickland, Deb Thompson, and Matthew Warren.

160. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor David Over.

161. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

162. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES – 17 DECEMBER 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman on the return to the office.

163. ACTION LOG

Verbal updates were given to on the following actions;

- Action 156 Fire Authority Programme Management - Monitoring Report:
 - Training Centre review - Shift system review completed and negotiations were taking place around the shift change.
 - Incident Command Unit - Options for an upgrade were still being developed

The Action Log was noted.

164. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES – 7 JANUARY 2021

It was resolved to note the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 January 2021.

165. RELOCATION OF HUNTINGDON FIRE STATION AND TRAINING CENTRE

The Committee received a report that provided an update on the relocation of the current fire station and training centre site based in Huntingdon to a new site at St Johns Business Park, also in Huntingdon. The report also sought to gain approval to proceed with specific options for the site that had materialised through the planning process and the development of detailed plans for the training centre.

Introducing the report, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that some revised figures for the project has been circulated and published ahead of the meeting, and that, if approved, they would form the final contract figures. He explained that he did not envisage any further changes to figures, however if there were changes, he would come back to Committee for approval.

Members noted the following points from the report:

- The drainage costs for the site had increased to £350,000 in order that storage drains were added which would give regulation of flow off the site into the main drains in Huntingdon.
- A further cost of £20,000 for noise repression for the standby generator was required.
- A commercial sprinkler system was advised for the site at a cost of £160k.
- Additional functionality in the training centre was advised with additional gas burners to create flash overs in order that scenarios could be as life like as possible.
- An archaeological survey and dig had been undertaken and artefacts of local significance had been recovered. Officers were seeking advice from Huntingdonshire District Council on the next steps but aimed to keep the costs to an absolute minimum.

Arising from the report:

- A Members questioned whether there would be an annual maintenance costs for the drainage tanks. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that in the short term there would be no maintenance costs . A Member commented that the tanks may need to be de-sludged at some point.
- Members agreed that the commercial sprinkler system was a necessity and that it was important to set the standard for such buildings going forwards.
- A Member queried whether the payback of between 5-9 years on the additional solar panels could be more specific. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that the payback was dependant on how much electricity was used at source. He agreed to refer back to the Energy Consultant for further detail. **ACTION – DCE**
- A Member sought assurances that the consultants being used for the project were value for money. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer stated that the authority aimed to keep the use of consultants to a minimum. He explained that he had regular meetings with the consultants, Artisan Developments, and that the project was also being supported internally by the authority's project governance structure. He clarified that the project was open book and all documentation was available to view.
- A Member queried if there was contingency built into the budget. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer clarified that a contingency had been built in and that he would provide the Committee with the figure and make this clear in any future reporting. **ACTION**
- A Member commented that no corners should be cut and that they fully agreed with the figures for the additional functionality and sprinkler system.
- A Member commented that they looked forward to the project coming into fruition but queried why the costs for the sprinkler system and archaeology were being brought at a late stage. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer commented that additional costs were added at a later stage due to recommendations from the surveyor in relation to requiring a commercial grade sprinkler system due to the size of the building.
- The Chairman commented that it was important to future proof the training centre. He stated that if the authority had been able to proceed

with the project four years ago then the cost for the project would have been much less. He commented that the project was well overdue.

In bringing the debate to a close the Chairman requested that an additional recommendation be added to note the late additional costs in relation to the archaeological survey and findings.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) approve the proposal to invest in additional training equipment and renewable energy, noting the assumed payback period for both;
- b) approve the additional cost for drainage on the site associated with the planning consent;
- c) approve the investment in a commercial sprinkler system;
- d) approve the revised plans as attached;
- e) approve the revised budget and funding proposal for the additional cost items.
- f) Note the update of historical artefacts on the site with the possible implications in relation to the budget.

166. POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was unanimously resolved:

To note the Work Programme

The Chairman thanked all Members of the Committee and officers for their input and diligence over the last four years. Members thanked the Chairman for his excellent chairmanship and cross party working.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Notes of informal Policy and Resources Committee meeting

Date: 15 July 2021
Time: 2.00pm – 3.30pm
Place: Fire HQ
Present: Councillors: S Bywater, B Goodliffe, M Jamil, E Murphy, D Over, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith
Officers: Jon Anderson, Dawn Cave, Shahin Ismail, Chris Strickland, Deb Thompson and Matthew Warren
Apologies: Councillor P McDonald

1. Appointment of Chair

The Monitoring Officer called for nominations for Chair. Councillor Jamil nominated Councillor Goodliffe, and this was seconded by Councillor Murphy. Councillor Bywater nominated Councillor Reynolds, and this was seconded by Councillor Smith. There were no further nominations. Following a show of hands, there was an equality of votes, four each, for each candidate.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Standing Orders did not specify what should happen in the event of equality of votes, and outlined options open to the Committee, e.g. coin toss. She added that at the November meeting of the Fire Authority, there would be a full review of Standing Orders so that there would be a remedy in such circumstances in future.

A number of options were put forward e.g. appointing a Chair for the meeting only, and the meeting adjourned for ten minutes to see if a solution could be agreed.

As no way forward was agreed, the formal meeting was suspended, and it was agreed that Members would discuss the reports informally.

2. Election of Vice Chair

Item deferred.

3. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

Councillor McDonald was not present; there were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 25th March 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021 were noted.

5. Policy and Resources Committee Action Log

Verbal updates were given to on the following actions:

It was noted that the contingency on the St Johns development was £195K for the building itself, which could be applied if there was anything unexpected expenses. This was not a big percentage of the overall project budget. There would be a full update on the St John's development at the next Fire Authority meeting.

With regard to the PV panels, this work had concluded, with the most economical option giving the biggest return. It was confirmed that the assessment of returns for the solar panels was based on a 25 year period.

The archaeological investigations were being progressed, and artefacts of local interest had been discovered. The archaeological dig was expected to conclude shortly, with work starting on site in August. It was confirmed that the Fire Authority Chair would sit on the Programme Board for St Johns so that she had a strategic overview of the project.

6. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held 7th January 2021

Item deferred.

7. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report

Members considered a report that provided an update on revenue and Capital spending as at 30 June 2021.

Members noted the £228K overspend on Full Time Firefighters. The Service had been running an over-establishment on firefighters, anticipating retirements of those towards the latter years of their careers. There had been a drawdown on Reserves to ensure this continuity. The £228K overspend also included an element of Covid expenditure: some crews had been unable to work due to cases of Covid, e.g. where the whole crew needed to self-isolate for ten days. The ways in which these absences were being addressed were noted, including bringing in staff on overtime, and using roaming appliances. It had been made clear to staff that they should not come into work if they did not feel well.

A Member asked when this Covid situation may become critical and impact on call outs. It was noted that the Service could meet its statutory obligations by providing one pump, but tried to ensure good coverage of crews and appliances across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and senior officers assured Members they would be able to deal with the current situation. In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that there were reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring Fire Services, and constant dialogue was maintained with those Services both at Chief Fire Officer and operational level. It was also noted that self-isolation was less of an issue for on-call firefighters.

With regard to the present situation on Covid testing and vaccination, all staff were encouraged to take up the vaccinations, and Cambridgeshire had been one of first Services in the country to provide testing for all staff, with staff being tested twice a week. As the rules on self-isolation were due to relax in August, this would lead to a reduction in the numbers needing to self-isolate, but could possibly lead to an increase in the numbers infected.

It was noted that the 'Variance' figure showed the actual outturn against the budget to date. It was noted that whilst some areas e.g. Property Maintenance and Insurance, were currently showing an underspend, this was due to expenditure not being evenly spread over the financial year, and they were expected to be on budget towards year end, as often expenditure or invoicing was delayed. The example of IT and Communications was noted, where many contracts were not being renewed until later in the financial year.

It was noted that in terms of Firefighter projections, there were no vacancy rates built in, as there was a very low rate of turnover. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that in summary, he was expecting to come in on budget, with the exception of Full Time Firefighters, for the reasons explained, but there were allocated Reserves for that purpose.

Members noted that a lot had been spent on training this year, including training to use the new boats.

It was noted that Operational fire budget related to On-Call Firefighter expenditure, which was dependent on demand. This expenditure fluctuated according to demand and would be monitored throughout the financial year. On-call firefighters were paid a retaining fee, and were then paid for every call that they attended, at an hourly rate. This could vary, year on year, due to a variety of factors, e.g. in hot summers there were more call outs.

It was noted that 75% of budget was staffing. Staff turnover was minimal, as the Service was regarded as a good place to work, and this situation had

been emphasised by the pandemic, when individuals had re-evaluated their priorities.

8. Annual Treasury Management Review 2020-21

Members considered the Annual Treasury Management Review for 2020-2021. The Treasury position as at 31 March 2021 was noted, which was effectively a summary of loans, and the CFR (Capital Financing Requirement) represented the Service's credit limit. The CFR was reviewed annually, and was based on an affordability model. Currently the Service was cash rich, but much of that cash was allocated to the project at St Johns.

In terms of investment, this had to be UK based or affiliated. All this investment was highest ratings i.e. AAA rated, and satisfactory returns were being earned on investments.

In response to a Member question, it was noted that debt was taken out against the capital programme. Capital requirements were often funded by income, including sale of assets, and sometimes revenue and underspends from prior years. Any remaining capital requirement was borrowed from the PWLB.

There were no real opportunities for increasing investment returns, as the Service had to invest in the UK. Given the current low rates, it was seen as prudent to use cash to finance capital programme rather than investing the cash and borrowing capital.

9. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register – Monitoring Report

Members considered an updated Strategic Risk report, as at July 2021, highlighting those risks that were considered to be above the risk appetite of the Authority.

The key risk remained the ESMCP Airwave (R164). Members noted that this related to a project ran by the Home Office to move the current telecoms system from 'Airwave' to a system which was run on the mobile phone network. The project was overrunning significantly. From the Fire Service perspective, the risks related to systems resilience, especially when the volume of mobile phone calls was very high, using the same network. There was no alternative option – the existing technology was outdated and most other countries had already moved on to a mobile solution. A Member observed that this had been showing as a major risk on the risk matrix for at least six years. It was noted that by 2025/26 the new system should be operational. It was also noted that Fire Services had been recently notified likely to fund element from within revenue, of around £200K per annum, which would be difficult in the current budget situation. It was confirmed that co-

location of emergency services would not be of any benefit in this regard, as each Service had its own separate mobilising control centres. It was noted that the system would use the EE Mobile network, and in the event of a major incident, emergency services' use of that network would be prioritised.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that nationally, the ESMCP project now appeared to be well managed. It was noted that there had been many assurances at the outset that there would not be a cost to Services, but it was now clear that there would be an ongoing cost, despite challenge from the National Fire Chiefs Council. The cost of extending the contract for the current system, Airwave, was also considerable, but Members were reassured that the Airwave system was still fit for purpose.

With regard to cyber-attacks (R094), there were many safeguards in place, and whilst considerable vulnerability and penetration testing was regularly being carried out, there remained vulnerabilities, which was why the risk remained high. Whilst the Service had been successful to date, the potential productivity loss was massive in this area.

Conflicting priorities (R183) remained a priority area, e.g. ridership figures versus development of staff.

With regard to Brexit/EU suppliers (R172), there was a query as to whether there were any particular issues with data sharing. Officers confirmed that data was held within the UK, and this score may be revised down.

A Member queried the changing nature of incident types, e.g. increases in flooding incidents, and whether enough consideration was being given to increasing flood risk resulting from climate change going forward. It was confirmed that there had been investment in improving water rescue capabilities over the last couple of years, and this had been identified as a risk due to changing environment and increasing frequency of extreme weather events. The budget was reviewed annually with regard to the consumables required for flood rescue. The Service also worked with Flood partners through the Local Resilience Forum. The Service was regularly reviewing the types of incidents it attended, and adjusting resources accordingly.

A Member queried risks R178 (on-call staff leaving) and R161 (staff diversity), and asked whether there were any potential linkages between the two, i.e. the potential to access new, more diverse, labour markets. Officers advised that many actions had been taken to appeal to those sections of the community that were currently underrepresented, and increase the attraction of the Service to groups who maybe not considered it as a career option. There were two members of staff focused on reaching out to hard to reach groups, and there had been a gradual increase in applications from both female applicants and applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds. A key point was to increase the awareness of the professional nature of the work actually undertaken by Fire and Rescue Services, so that candidates were fully aware what the job entailed.

There was a discussion around the entry criteria, both academic and physical requirements. It was noted that there were always large number of applicants for Firefighter positions, the issue was often getting a field of applicants who represented the diversity of the communities the Service served, and a sufficient number of applicants who were interested in progressing their career to a senior level.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Notes of informal Policy and Resources Committee meeting

Date: 15 December 2021

Time: 2.00pm – 3.10pm

Place: Virtual meeting

Present: Councillors: S Bywater, B Goodliffe, M Jamil, P McDonald, E Murphy,
D Over, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith

Officers: Ursula Bird, Dawn Cave, Shahin Ismail, Chris Strickland, Deb
Thompson and Matthew Warren

Apologies: None

1. Appointment of Chair

Item deferred.

2. Election of Vice Chair

Item deferred.

3. Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 25th March 2021, and notes of the informal meeting held 15th July 2021

Noted.

5. Policy and Resources Committee Action Log

Noted.

6. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held 21st July and 7th October 2021

Noted.

7. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2021-22

Members considered a report that provided an update on revenue and capital spending as at 30 November 2021.

Officers advised that there had been no significant changes since the position had been presented to the Fire Authority in November. The organisation would be below establishment at the end of the financial year, which was good from a financial management perspective, but posed numerous operational challenges. Whilst a lean shift system was being run, a number of factors in that shift system meant that at times the Service was struggling with optimal crewing. Officers confirmed that there was sufficient flexibility given that there would be a short timescale to make any budget cuts, especially given the pay award would be unknown until the summer.

Generally, the financial position was relatively strong. The supplies and services budget was showing an underspend, owing to the expenditure against specific ICT contracts that tend to be incurred later in the financial year. This budget was expected to be on target by the end of the financial year.

Members noted areas where underspends were expected, including lower energy consumption, as not all buildings were occupied, and uniform. An Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Plan would be brought to the Fire Authority in 2022, and any underspends would be invested in this area, as it was expected that there would be a legislative impetus for the Service to become carbon neutral.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that “senior management (Hay)”, referenced in Appendix 1 to the report, related to senior management in support services, including the Chief Officer Group.

It was confirmed that both protective uniforms and workwear for firefighters was leased. Attempts had been made to have a collaborative framework with other fire and rescue services, but none had come to fruition to date.

8. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register – Monitoring Report

Members considered an updated Strategic Risk report, as at July 2021, highlighting those risks that were considered to be above the risk appetite of the Authority.

The following risks were discussed:

- the ongoing issues with the Emergency Services Mobile Communications, as the replacement communications package which was not forecast to go live before 2024;

- Other significant risks including the pandemic, cyber attacks, and balancing competing priorities.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the Service was reasonably resilient, partly due to significant business continuity planning. The Service was viewed very favourably as an organisation, especially in the recent HMICFRS Inspection. Resilience had been demonstrated in recent years when there had been industrial action, and again during the worst of the pandemic. It was also confirmed that the Service was keen to support NHS colleagues as far as possible, and had offered support for the difficulties anticipated due to the Omicron variant, as long as this did not detract from the provision of core services. The Minister had indicated that such assistance would be financially supported by the Home Office. It was confirmed that this would be voluntary for staff and could be either incorporated into the normal working day or in addition to regular hours.

Noting paragraph 5.7 of the report, a Member suggested that it should be made clearer which staff group was reducing when resources were being lost.

9. Pensions Immediate Detriment Update

Members received a verbal update on the Pensions Immediate Detriment. At the Fire Authority meeting in November, Members had been advised that there was an agreement between the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) that if the Service proceeds to make these payments through the pension administrator, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, and it transpired that they were incorrect, there would be no challenge to CFRS. Members agreed at that meeting to the proposed approach to immediate detriment, which was to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding with the LGA and FBU.

This proposed approach had been reliant on advice and guidance given by HM Treasury and the Home Office, which had subsequently been revoked. Urgent legal advice was being sought by fire services collectively, and that advice was expected very shortly. It was confirmed that there were ten relevant cases within CFRS.

One of the potential risks was that because it fell outside the time limit, the Service would be burdened with the tax charge, which was around £100,000, unless a guarantee was offered by government. The intention was therefore to pause on this process, whilst the legal advice was awaited. The legislation was unlikely to come into effect until 2022 or 2023. It was noted that a number of fire services had already made payments.

It was confirmed that this part of the McCloud judgement was specific to the Firefighter Pension Scheme, and did not apply to the Cambridgeshire Pension Fund which covered both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils, as that was a LGPS (funded) pension scheme.

10. Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2025

Members considered the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy and associated draft financial plan for 2022 to 2025.

Presenting the report, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the budget had been fundamentally reviewed by the new Finance Manager, and much was dependent on the Comprehensive Spending Review, which was expected on 16 December, and possible scenarios were outlined. It was noted that a 2% increase in Council Tax would just cover inflationary increases, but if inflation or the pay award exceeded 2%, the position would be problematic. The flexibility to raise Council Tax going forward, which was the most significant part of the budget, was being stressed to government. Members were reminded that the Authority's £30M budget was essentially unchanged since 2010, and that there had been significant cuts since that time and the organisation was already as lean as possible.

The Conservative group indicated that they felt they were unable to support the report recommendations for a consultation based on a 2% increase in Council Tax as there was insufficient detail in the report. Examples were given of areas where there was insufficient detail, such as "*...a process to identify savings in professional support service*", suggesting that as nearly 50% of the total budget was spent on staff, a more accurate assessment was required. Officers commented that the report may be misleading in terms of the amount spent on support staff, and that by far the largest spend on pay is for uniformed staff, as set out in the budget monitoring report:

	£'000	%
Full-time Firefighters	12,881	60
Control	1,652	8
Professional Support	6,981	32
	21,514	100

Officers also advised that all functions had undertaken assessments to determine savings which would have a minimal impact on front line services. Over recent years, staffing had been reduced by 30%, and the shift system had been reorganised to facilitate this. There was little scope to further reduce staffing levels without a detrimental impact on services. Given that there were many unknowns e.g. in the financial settlement, the Service awaited further information but was not currently recruiting to give some flexibility in the budget.

It was stressed that the recommendation was to *consult* on the basis of a 2% increase, not to implement the Council Tax increase, which would be a decision for the Fire Authority in February, when further information was

available. Other Members commented that the same situation had been faced in previous years and that the December Policy and Resources Committee meetings had always agreed to consult on the information available. It was noted that the total wages for firefighters was around £12.5M and for support staff was £6M. Officers agreed that the text would be made clearer on this point and could be supported diagrammatically. More information would be available shortly as part of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review, and a range of scenarios for the government settlement were possible.

It was noted that for support staff roles, these included professional roles such as accountancy and ICT, which in the current climate could be done from home. It was noted that despite offering less competitive salaries than some organisations, the Service remained a popular employer.

Members discussed how the Service was seeking to become carbon neutral by 2030. It was noted that there were various approaches to sustainability that were being progressed, including fuel and hybrid vehicles,

In terms of the process for the budget consultation, it was noted that there needed to be enough time for a consultation before the Fire Authority meeting on 10 February 2022. Council Tax could be frozen but this would require cutting services. Any increase above 2% would require a referendum, at considerable cost. It was stressed that consulting on a 2% increase would not commit the Fire Authority to a 2% increase.

It was noted that around 100 responses were usually received to the consultation.

A number of Members reiterated that they did not wish to commit to a Council Tax increase of 2%, prior to the settlement notice from government being received of the Peterborough City full Council meeting. Other Members pointed out that approval was sought to *consult* on a 2% Council Tax rise, the final decision would be made at the Fire Authority meeting in February, and the proposed Council Tax rise at that meeting would be informed by both the consultation and settlement.

The majority of Members indicated that they were happy for the Fire Authority Chair to use her delegated powers to approve a consultation based on a 2% Council Tax increase.

11. Policy and Resources Committee Work Programme

It was agreed that there would be a seminar prior to the Fire Authority meeting in February.

Members passed on their congratulations to Officers for the tremendous HMICFRS report, which was an excellent achievement.