

Fire Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Date: Wednesday 21 July 2021

Time: 14:00pm.

Venue: Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters

Present: Councillors Cox Condron, Gardener, Gowing, Kindersley (Chair), McGuire, Taylor (Vice-Chair)

1. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair

It was resolved to note the appointment of Councillors Sebastian Kindersley and Simone Taylor as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2021/22.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Andrew Bond.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

4. Minutes – 7 January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record will signed by the Chair.

5. Action Log

The reporting officer gave oral updates on the action log. They noted the additional work occurring in the pension fund, and a change in the risk profile of coronavirus to reflect the lifting of restrictions.

The action log was noted.

6. Annual Internal Audit Report 2020-21

The Committee received for scrutiny a report which provided an annual internal audit opinion based upon, and limited to, the work performed on the overall adequacy and

effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes.

The officer reported that the annual internal audit was, in general, positive and the organisation was categorised as having an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control, but with some areas to improve upon. The need for improvement was caused, in part, by the limited scope of the audit and because of a number of incomplete management actions. Of the nineteen management actions due for completion at the time of audit, eight were completed and seven were ongoing.

In response to Member's questions, the officer confirmed that the audit had been completed independently and in compliance with the standards.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report.

7. Internal Audit Progress Report July 2021

The Committee received for scrutiny a standard report which summarised progress made against each plan and the results of the Internal Audit to date. This report had been delayed due to the meeting timing, but the officer established that reports for 'Follow Up' and 'Estates and Property Maintenance' had been completed since the previous meeting.

The officer noted the Quality Assurance Team's split findings with regard to the progression of managerial actions in the Follow Up report. Five of the eight 'HR Training, Recording and Competency System' management actions had been completed, with the remainder ongoing. This was considered reasonable progress. Meanwhile, little progress was reported in the implementation of management actions in the 'Collection and Update of Risk Information' and 'Follow Up Audits'. An explanation for this could be found in the report.

In response to Members comments, officers:

- Recognised that changes in personnel and operation systems had resulted in actions being missed. In response to this the officers stated the missed actions were now 'ongoing' and would be completed prior to the next audit. It was agreed Members would be updated on this in the next Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Overview and Scrutiny meeting. Action. Matthew Warren.
- Established that a new member of staff had been hired to follow up actions related to 'Estate and Property'. Members' requested a 'meet, greet and update' with the new member of the Estate and Property team. Action. Deb Thompson.

In response to the report, Members:

- Requested circulation of a glossary for technical terms. Action. Deb Thompson.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report and take remedial action as necessary.

8. Internal Audit Strategy 2021-22

The Committee received for scrutiny, an audit programme which had been developed with consideration to continuing developments and pandemic impacts by the internal audit team and management. It prioritised service objectives, risk profiles and the ongoing use of technology to meet service needs.

Tendering of the internal audit 2021/22 had been successful following delays caused by the pandemic. Key objectives of the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 included the review of key financial controls and follow ups of previously agreed actions. The officer noted that the topics proposed here were unlikely to change but were dependent upon certain factors.

In particular, the officer:

- Provided an update on the Training Centre project for which capital had been resourced. In response to a Member's question, the officer reported that no changes had been made by external training centres to reduce infection risk.
- Clarified that the Forward Plan for next year provided an internal audit assurance map.

In response to Members comments, officers:

- Expressed a desire to bring Property Asset to the Fire Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny.
- Notified Members that the greatest strategic risk came from 'ICCS and MOBs Implementation', but that the review had not yet found any unsupportable technology in the key system.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report.

9. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority - Audit Planning Report - 2020-21

The Committee received a report which laid out the audit strategy plan for the year ending 31 March 2021 including the audit of financial statements and use of resources; comprising materiality, key audit risks and the planned approach to these; the timetable and the BDO team. Overall, there were no significant changes, but planning materiality was proposed to be set at 2.5%.

It was explained that the deadline for the NHS audit, set for June 2020, had been extended, causing auditing delays in local government services which used the same auditing bodies. As a result, the 2019/20 audit for Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Fire Authority occurred between January and March, with 45% of the audit signed off by the original November deadline. Therefore, the 2020/21 audit was also delayed and

unlikely to meet the 30 September 2021 deadline, despite having sufficient resource to carry it out. The officer noted that this was a challenge being faced by all local government bodies.

The reporting officer highlighted significant audit risks, including:

- Management override of controls: Inclusion of this as a presumed risk was a statutory requirement of Auditing Standards. To manage this, the audit would identify outlying risks, estimation determination, and for activity outside normal business.
- Expenditure Recognition: This risk regarded the manipulation of expenditure by public sector bodies. Risk management included using the year-end financial position to ensure all expenditure is accounted for.
- Valuation of Non-Current Assets: This risk regarded ensuring land and building asset valuation was accurate and current. Risk management included testing valuations against market data.
- Valuation of Pension Liability: This risk regarded uncertainty around pension fund estimation. Risk management included cross-referencing actuarial assumptions with market data and assurance from the pension fund auditor.
- Use of Resources: A new code of practice had been introduced for audit work with new assessment criteria which moved away from value for money. It required a commentary on criteria met/unmet and resulting actions, rather than a conclusion. Another requirement was publication within three months of audit submission.

In response to Members comments, officers noted that:

- Missing the auditing deadline would result in publication of clearly marked unaudited draft financial statements on 30 September 2021. There would be no consequences.
- They would be readvertising for a position in the key financial team.
- Interdependencies with audits from external bodies may result in further delay of the Fire Authority Audit.
- A report on financial resilience, financial management, value for money, and management of resource would go to the Fire Authority for scrutiny November 2021.

Individual Members raised the need for a financial amendment on page 85 of the report. Action. Rachel Brittain

It was resolved unanimously to note the report and take remedial action as necessary.

10. Fire Authority Programme Management

The Committee received the programme management monitoring report, which included action plans to mitigate risks to, and achieve the vision of, the service.

The officer highlighted certain projects in the programme status report:

- Property collaboration: The joint housing of the St Neots police and fire service awaited planning permission for the redevelopment of the St Neots Fire Station.
- Sharepoint and Microsoft 365 Migration Project: The implementation of new technology into the service had been delayed. Officers noted firefighters may require technological support following implementation.
- Replacement ICCS and Mobilising Solution: Project progress had been delayed by remote working, with only half of control system tests being performed. Therefore, SAT tests would occur in August 2021.
- Asset Management Software: This risk would be closed as all associated actions had been delivered. QR coded equipment now allowed for quick assessment, and a separate system for property asset recording would be developed to resolve remaining concerns.
- ESMCP (Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme): This was a 10 year old Home Office business case which sought to replace emergency service airways radio communication with mobile communication by 2025/26 through gradual national roll out. England would be the first emergency services to be run this way.

Advantages of the change included modernisation of technology.

Disadvantages included an uncertain but increasing cost to the service that would need to be budgeted for; and concerns regarding the resilience of mobile networks. The latter concern would be reduced as the Connecting Cambridgeshire Project increased mobile network coverage.

In response to members' questions, the officer reported that Motorola had purchased airwaves radio, but was also involved in the ESMCP.

In response to Members comments on risks, officers:

- Noted that P088, On-Call Board Stage 2, had returned to business as usual.
- Established that sliding timescales were generally the result of optimistic planning, real setbacks and personnel changes.
- Offered to meet separately with new members regarding the attempted PCC take-over.
- Explained that the new ways of working had been developed following movement to a new training centre.

Individual Members requested:

- More details and an online seminar covering ESMCP. Action. Jon Andrews.
- A link to the Equality Impact Assessment report. Action. Deb Thompson.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report and take remedial action as necessary.

11. Member-Led Review Update

The Committee received an oral update of the two ongoing Member-led reviews.

Engagement with represented bodies:

The lead Member provided a background on progress to date and the desire to continue the work started. Councillors Cox Condron and Taylor were to consider joining this Member-led Review.

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Approach to recruitment:

The review sought to workforce diversity and career progression for women. The officer suggested, and the lead member agreed, to halt the review following delays caused by the pandemic and a change in Authority membership.

Future reviews:

Terms of reference for a Member-led review would be drafted and circulated to Members for nominations. Action. Deb Thompson.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report and take remedial action as necessary.

12. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

Members asked for the Internal Annual Report and Internal Strategy Report 2022/23 to be brought to the Fire Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, scheduled April 2022. Action.

The Committee resolved unanimously to note its work plan, including the actions noted throughout the minutes.

Chair