

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee Meeting

Date: 22 January 2024
Time: 2.00pm - 3.00pm
Place: Fire HQ, Huntingdon
Present: Councillors: S Bywater, M Jamil (Chair), E Murphy, K Reynolds, P Slatter and M Smith
Officers: Tamsin Mirfin, Jon Anderson, Matthew Warren, Chris Strickland, Dawn Cave and Sophie Rankine

60. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor Goodliffe and Councillor Over.

There were no declarations of interest.

61. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 31st October 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st October 2023 were approved as a correct record.

62. Action Log

The Action Log was noted. All actions were completed or in hand.

63. Draft Fire Authority Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Strategy 2024-28

Members received a report for the Fire Authority budget and precept for 2024/25 and medium-term financial strategy for 2024/28. This detailed the strategy that was presented to the Committee in December. Officers remarked that there would be a 2.99% increase in the Council Tax which would result in a balanced budget, but this was predicated on a 3% increase in employee costs, and the pay award could be higher. It would be hard to plan for the next financial year with the withdrawal of Suffolk Fire and Rescue from the Combined Fire Control function.

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

- Sought clarity on two figures in relation to the loss of Suffolk and income from the Combined Control Centre. Officers clarified that there would be a potential deficit of £1 million in income but that could be brought down to £700k.
- Queried the use of savings and reserves. Officers answered that the reserve levels were healthy and at a sufficient level (£2.5 million). Reserves could be accessed throughout the year if issues were to arise. If for example, the sale of the Huntingdon site went through, that would help bolster reserves. There were no current plans to use reserves for the next financial year.
- Questioned if the Service would be liable to be marked down in future inspections from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for not acting on their recommendations. It was confirmed that HMICFRS could make observations, but those recommendations were not prescriptive. Officers reassured Committee that they would have to provide rationale for their decisions which meant they would not be marked down.
- It was clarified that capital receipts must go back into Reserves, and could not be used for revenue costs, unless there were exceptional circumstances. There was still uncertainty regarding the date of Suffolk's departure: the proposal was for them to withdraw in December 2024, but the process had not yet started.
- Observed that significant capital projects were underway, and questioned if it was wise to commit to the expenditure when the medium term is unclear, with regard to St Neots. Officers stated that they had applied to Huntingdonshire District Council for £750K Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and a view would be taken when the outcome of that bid was known. There would be careful consideration before any action was taken.
- Queried the budget regarding the Silver Fleet as a significant amount of money was being invested and asked if there would be scrutiny of that investment Officers stated that there was an ongoing review process regarding the Silver Fleet. There had been a change of supplier as Volkswagen removed themselves from the 'Blue Light List' and been replaced by Hyundai. The new supplier had provided a discount which included a service plan. Whilst this expenditure seemed to be large, there had been a three-year backlog. There was a review on non-Officer cars in the fleet. **Action required - Wayne Swales to bring a report to next meeting.**
- Questioned the technical rules regarding reserves, and whether these could be used as a cash flow buffer? If so, was there the potential for unsustainability? Officers reassured that the budget was sustainable and

general reserves were adequate for the next 12 months. The risk around inflation was an unknown but there were adequate reserves to cover the uncertainty. There could be a review in next year's budget if there was a need to use reserves.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Endorse the budget book attached at Appendix 1 including the recommendations detailed on Page 18,
- b) Endorse the revised medium term financial strategy attached at Appendix 2.

64. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24

Members received a report which provided the Policy and Resources Committee with an update on revenue and capital spending as of 31 December 2023. Officers stated that Appendix 1 was presented in a revised format due to the new financial system. It was evidenced that the Service were in a good financial position with overall underspending, although there were some areas that would catch up before the end of the financial year.

Members were informed that there would a stricter carry forward plan with money that was unspent being reallocated to other projects. However, Members were reassured that money would only be reallocated if it were deemed necessary and there would be sufficient deterrents for budget holders not spending the money for the sake of not losing it in the next budget.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the position on revenue and capital spending.

65. Fire Authority Programme Management- Monitoring Report

Members received a report which provided the Policy and Resources Committee with an update against the projects for 2023/24.

The Integrated Communication and Control System (ICCS) and Mobilising System had been progressing well and had received good feedback from staff, despite a few IT issues. It was hoped that the transition would take place in February, but care had been taken to ensure that there would be a continuation of service for a smooth transition; it would not be forced, and the existing system would not be decommissioned until staff were confident. A Member queried how staff had found training. Officers replied that there were User Acceptance (UA) training and different training modules. Two of the six modules had been completed, with the remaining four to be undertaken in February. There were workshops for control management and day teams to learn to input data and deal with different scenarios. Another Member sought clarification on how much of Cambridgeshire would be covered in the initial

launch, and it was confirmed that all of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would be live. The existing system was very stable and would be able to perform as a backstop for a period before it was decommissioned.

The Review of Operations update regarding financial system project had gone live and had been moved to phase two and had additional modules.

Microsoft 365 implementation: Officers stated that they wanted to enhance and get the best use out of the software.

TRIM replacement: this related to post traumatic stress support. Members noted why this was being replaced.

PPE and uniform replacement had commenced and was due for completion in 2027/28.

Occupational Health System Replacement: the team had agreed on a system. There would be a quick implementation and it was hoped to go live before summer.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Programme Status Report, as of December 2023, attached at Appendix 1.

66. Property Portfolio Update

Members received an update on the sale of the former Huntingdon Fire Station site and progress on the sale of the St Ives site.

Officers informed Members on the sale of Huntingdon Fire Station site. The site was split into two lots: the fire station, and the four houses that are adjacent to the station. They had received two offers, one for both sites and one for just the fire station. They were proceeding with the (£1.5 million) offer for the fire station and hoped to sell the houses separately and receive up to £2.5 million in total for the entire site. It was optimistically envisaged that this would be resolved by the end of the financial year.

There was slower progress regarding the St Ives site: the Service was working with the Health Service to sell the land collectively. Further updates would be brought to Committee. One Member questioned if there were plans in place to consult with the local Town Council so that they were aware of the plan to move, rather than lose the fire station entirely. Officers replied that it was their intention to consult with all existing and potential stakeholders at the appropriate time.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the report.

67. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register - Monitoring Report

The Committee considered the updated strategic risk report, as of January 2024, which highlighted those risks that are considered above the risk appetite of the Authority.

The current financial situation remained one of the highest risks, especially given the withdrawal of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service from the Combined Fire Control arrangement.

Cyber-attacks remained a high risk.

Emerging technologies and particularly electric vehicle (EV), hydrogel fuel and battery energy storage systems were also significant risks.

An officer highlighted point 5.5 from the report, general employment risk. There were longer than average timescales to fill vacancies and that had a subsequent impact on Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) delivery.

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

- Queried if there were arrangements with other authorities to help with emergency staff transfers if necessary. The officer clarified that they could reach out if needed and gave examples such as the Digital Integration Specialist.
- Raised the need for emergency planning in relation to extreme weather, especially flooding. Officers responded that there was no statutory responsibility on fire services to deal with flooding. However, the Service was a key member of the Local Resilience Forum which was legally required to plan for emergencies.
- Officers commented that three risks in the register linked to the improvement of On-Call services. The Service were inviting conversations with local communities and Parish Councils to discuss these issues and to help people understand how services were delivered. The Service wanted to invite and involve people to get feedback.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the strategic risk report.

68. Committee Work Programme

Members noted the forward Work Programme.

Chair