

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – MINUTES

Date: Thursday 1 October 2020

Time: 14:00 – 14:40

Place: Virtual Meeting

Present: Councillors Bond, Gardener (Vice-Chairman), Gowing, Harford, Kindersley, McGuire (Chairman) and Scutt

Officers: Jon Anderson – Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Dawn Cave – Democratic Services Officer, Dan Harris – Head of Internal Audit, Chris Parker – Area Commander, Stuart Smith – Group Commander and Deb Thompson – Scrutiny and Assurance Manager

90. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Bond joined the meeting late.

91. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

92. MINUTES – 16 JULY 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on the 16 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

93. INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Committee received a report on performance against the Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan performance measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a considerable impact, both positive and negative, on some performance measures. Average attendance for the first pump to incidents in both urban and rural areas had improved considerably, to 7 minutes 49 seconds and 11 minutes 45 respectively. An anomaly was noted in the urban figures provided, and it was agreed that this would be checked and confirmation circulated. **Action required: ACFO.** The improvement resulted from reduced traffic during the lockdown period, and increased On-Call availability from people working at home or being furloughed. Response to all incidents within 18 minutes had increased to 95.1%, which was above the target, and was again mainly attributable to the reasons outlined above.

The numbers of primary and secondary fires had increased, and the increases were mainly domestic fires. Fortunately there had been no fire deaths, but there had been a very slight increase in fire casualties, although most of these had been minor injuries.

There had been a significant drop (54%) in the number of road traffic collisions (RTC's) due to fewer people being on the roads, and also a reduction in the number of special services attended in total.

For equality and diversity indicators, the diversity of job applicants and employees had increased in all areas over the last five years, most significantly, there was a higher rate of female applicants. However it was acknowledged that much work was still to be done in this area, especially around the diversity of operational staff.

The number of engagements with businesses had reduced over the period due to some businesses being closed or operating at a reduced level over the pandemic period.

During discussion of the report, individual Members queried:

- the “discriminative nature of fire” (paragraph 4.1 of the report). Officers confirmed that this referred to the way in which fires were more likely to affect certain groups e.g. poorer individuals or those from BAME backgrounds, and that elderly individuals involved in fire were more likely to die;
- if the reduction in RTCs was proportionate to the reduction in traffic, or whether it was the case that proportionately there were actually more RTCs, due to some individuals driving irresponsibly on empty roads? Officers were unsure whether the reduction was proportionate but agreed to follow this up. **Action required: ACFO.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

note and comment on the contents of the performance report in Appendix 1.

94. REVIEW OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Members considered the Member-led review of health and wellbeing, presented by Councillor Harford, who had led the Review.

Councillor Harford thanked all those who had contributed to the report, especially Deb Thompson, and those who had taken part for their open and honest responses. It was reassuring that continuing commitment to communities was at the heart of service delivery. The first recommendation was that the Service should continue to work at the action plan it had set

itself, and that action plan should be reviewed appropriately to pick up relevant changes e.g. changes of personnel. Evidence from Officers indicated an outward facing service with leadership willing to share and profit from good practice in investing in people. The report also recommended that there should be a further review, as 2024 was some years away, and things could change quickly.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Harford for her comprehensive report.

During discussion of the report, individual Members:

- noted an issue with the appendices (technical issue that was explained);
- commended Councillor Harford and Deb Thompson for all their hard work and producing such a succinct report from the wide range of information collated;
- commented that it was pleasing to note that Councillor Harford concluded that the Service was authentic in its commitment to helping people, and there was no evidence of any kind of toxic culture, for which senior management should be congratulated;
- observed that whilst there were many negative effects of the pandemic it was good to see some positives.

It was resolved to note the report.

95. MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN AND UPDATE ON THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Committee considered an update on the Service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that this had been the subject of an Authority Member Seminar recently and many of the issues had already been explored at that forum. A number of activities that had been reduced or suspended during the pandemic were slowly being reintroduced, e.g. re-crewing roaming appliances.

An inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was due week commencing 5th October, and the Chairman would be interviewed as part of the process.

The Committee Chairman advised that along with the Vice Chairman, he had had opportunity to go through the Service's self-assessment return to the Home Office recently with Area Commander Parker and Group Commander Smith. In addition, the inspection had been discussed at the recent Member Seminar.

A Member observed that whilst most of Cambridgeshire was low to medium risk in terms of increasing COVID-19 cases, there was higher incidence in

Peterborough and Cambridge City was also a potentially risky area as students returned. He suggested that it may be worth adding this point to any submission, i.e. that the Service recognises that the pandemic remains a fluid situation and there were potential risks in Peterborough and Cambridge; a Cambridgeshire Member supported these comments. **Action required:** Officers agreed to add this in to the return to HMICFRS.

The Committee Chairman thanked Officers for the report and commented that he was confident that the Inspection would go well and the verdict would be that CFRS had performed well during the pandemic.

It was resolved to note the detail within the report.

96. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the Internal Audit progress report. Dan Harris, Head of Internal Audit, advised that whilst four reports had been listed as being finalised since the last Committee, the Governance Fire Authority report had actually been considered by the Committee at its previous meeting.

Two of the final reports, *Procurement – Proactive Processes* and *Risk Management* both had Reasonable Assurances, whilst the final audit report on *Fleet Management – Policies and Procedures* had an 'Advisory' opinion. In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that an 'Advisory' may be issued if a review was not complete, or was an evolving area.

The Internal Audit team was very grateful to Officers and Members that they were still able to operate remotely during the pandemic, and gave particular thanks to Officers for allowing Internal Audit colleagues to access information, and being available for virtual meetings. As a result, good progress had been made, with half of the Internal Audit programme delivered with no significant weaknesses being identified in processes.

There was a discussion on the Governance report, where concerns had been expressed relating to a declaration of interest made by a Councillor, who was a Member of the Police and Crime Panel. The Chairman commented that the Councillor has no authority or pecuniary interest in Cambridgeshire Constabulary, which was why this had not been flagged up, but had made the declaration in the interests of transparency. The Chairman commented that it would be helpful to have an assessment at the time of the meeting or subsequently if a declaration was relevant.

A Member commented that the layout of the report this year was easier to follow than previously.

It was resolved to note the report.

97. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme. More detail would be added to the programme once meeting dates for 2021/22 had been agreed at the Fire Authority meeting later in the month.

There was a discussion on the likelihood of face to face meetings recommencing. One Member pointed out that it made sense to continue Committee and informal meetings virtually, in the interest of saving Member resources, although he conceded that some meetings e.g. Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority, may need to take place face to face as they were more formal. However, he felt the default option for most meetings should be virtual. The Chairman commented that this issue continued to be debated at both local and national level, and advice would emerge in due course.

It was resolved to note the work programme.

CHAIRMAN