

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.