

MINUTES OF CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 7 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillors A Brown (Chair), F Chapman, M Headley, D McVicar and M Riaz

Mr J Atkinson, AC C Ball, Mr G Chambers, ACO Z Evans, CFO P Fuller and SOC T Rogers

15-16/CS/42 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P Downing.

15-16/CS/43 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

No declarations were made.

15-16/CS/44 Communications

The Group received the Minutes of the meeting of the ICT Shared Governance Board held on 22 October 2015.

With regard to Minute 151005 it was reported that the combined Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services Project Plan was making progress and the pilot testing was now live in Bedfordshire.

With reference to Minute 151007 – ICT SS Survey Outcomes – the Survey had been prepared and it was ready to be issued.

15-16/CS/45 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2015 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

15-16/CS/46 Corporate Services Performance 2015/16 Quarter 3 and programmes to date

ACO Evans introduced the performance report for the third quarter of 2015/16. She referred Members in particular to the “rag” rating which had been used and that all the projects, as set out in Appendix A, Corporate Services Programme Report, were “green”. In the Summary of Corporate Services Programme Report, as set out in Appendix B, there had been one Workshop indicator WS1a, Defect Response Time (1 hour) which was rated as “amber” and this had been caused by a single incident where the Duty Mechanic had been dealing with an incident and was therefore unable to attend a further incident. ACO Evans acknowledged the desire to review targets which would occur later on the agenda.

AC Ball commented that where the indicator returns related to a low number of incidents, this could inevitably lead to a significant difference in percentage terms.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on Corporate Services Programmes and Performance be acknowledged.

15-16/CS/47 Proposed Corporate Services Indicators and Targets for 2016/17

ACO Evans introduced the proposed suite of Corporate Services performance indicators and targets for 2016/17. She referred Members in particular to the notes on section 6.3 of the report which showed good performance improvement. She added that the indicators were stretching for future monitoring, also reporting that the utility consumption figures would not be available until the end of March 2016 and these would therefore be reported to the June 2016 meeting of the Group.

ACO Evans reminded Members that they had requested further information against which the indicators could be benchmarked and this had been included in the report.

The Chair commented that he was pleased with the improved performance of the indicators relating to FNP5 and FNP6. He also mentioned, in relation to FNP8, that the interest rates should be monitored as there was the potential that these could change.

Councillor Headley commented that it was helpful that the targets were robust and acknowledged the effective process, noting some of the more challenging indicators. He suggested that, in the medium term, as budgets became tighter that consideration

might be required as to whether some targets should be reduced in order to save money. The Chair agreed that a paper could be prepared for a future meeting of the Group so that Members could consider the targets on which they wished to focus, given these circumstances. He reiterated the need for challenging targets. CFO Fuller responded that this would need careful consideration as there could be an impact on service delivery. Mrs Ashwood commented that the Corporate Management Team assessed these matters on a regular basis and there was an opportunity to consider the strategic links between targets and service requirements.

RESOLVED:

1. That the suite of Corporate Services performance indicators and targets for 2016/17 be endorsed.
2. That the intention for the Corporate Management Team to consider the links between targets and service requirements be noted.

15-16/CS/48 New Internal Audit Report Completed to date

ACO Evans introduced the report on the audit of Governance, which had received a Green – Substantial Assurance rating, with only four recommendations being made which had a low impact on the Service. She added that the audit of Governance would also be reported to the Audit and Standards Policy and Challenge Group.

The Chair was pleased to note the reference in the audit to Members being able to place reliance on the assurances which had been provided.

RESOLVED:

That the Internal Audit Report be received and the associated Management comments/actions which will be added to the Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report, be endorsed.

15-16/CS/49 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

ACO Evans submitted the report detailing progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports and from the Fire Authority's 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED:

That progress made to date against the action plans, be acknowledged and the recommendation to extend the completion date, be endorsed.

15-16/CS/50 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring 2015/16

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, presented an update on the revenue budget and capital programme as at 31 January 2016. The forecast non-salary overspend was £166,000 and the forecast salary underspend was £624,000, giving a total forecast underspend of £458,000 and it was proposed that this should be allocated to an earmarked reserve.

In response to a question, Mrs Ashwood advised that the Service had taken the opportunity to re-tender the photocopy contract and it had been determined that it would be more cost effective to change the provider, even though there would initially be some changeover costs, which should be recouped in the longer term. CFO Fuller commented that the costs of the existing provider would have continued to increase if this action had not been taken.

RESOLVED:

1. That the forecast outturn be noted.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to allocate the year end forecast underspend to a joint working/collaboration earmarked reserve.

15-16/CS/51 Treasury Management Strategy and Practices

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, introduced his report on the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy and Practices. He highlighted that the Annual Treasury Management Statement was to be recommended to the Fire Authority. He also highlighted the following issues from the report:

- A Member Development Day had taken place on 2 July 2015.
- The Fire Authority's borrowing requirement from the Public Works Loan Board was approximately £10 million.
- The Treasury Management Statement had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Code and the guidance of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

Mr Chambers added that consideration was currently being given to investment in "overnight" money markets in order to diversify the Authority's investments. In response to a question, Mr Chambers advised that there were a few non-significant amendments which were required to the Strategy and that he would be updating these before they were forwarded to the Fire Authority.

In relation to a further question concerning the 2.1% annual increase in the fee for Treasury Consultancy Services being paid to Capita Asset Services, Mr Chambers advised that he would review the details of the contract, however, he confirmed that this had been entered into following a tender process.

RESOLVED:

That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to adopt the updated:

- (i) Treasury Management Strategy Statement
- (ii) Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Annual Investment Strategy
- (iii) Treasury Management Practices

15-16/CS/52 Utility Usage

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, introduced his report which provided an update on progress on Utilities Usage. The report also set out the arrangements which were currently being planned. Smart Meters had been introduced in order to obtain real time information direct to the website.

Mr Chambers advised that a report showing the outturn for 2015/2016 would be submitted to the Group for their June 2016 meeting. He added that the current report set out the areas where improvements had been made concerning utility usage. He hoped that Members would have the opportunity to see some of these improvements during their Station visits.

In response to a question concerning the laundry/dry rooms at fire stations, it was reported that full time stations had the provision of an industrial washing machine as well as having domestic machines. It was noted that Firefighters uniforms were cleaned on a contract basis.

The Chair was pleased to report that Shefford Fire Station did not now have lighting switched on all night. Mr Chambers mentioned that a number of retained stations were also used by the Ambulance Service therefore it was possible that they were responsible when lighting was used through the night.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report and progress being made, be noted.

15-16/CS/53 Provision of ICT Equipment for Paperless Meetings Trial

Mrs A Ashwood, Head of Strategic Support, introduced the report on the provision of ICT equipment for the paperless meetings trial. She confirmed that the trial had started in 2015 and that laptops from the Training Centre had been used to support meetings. She highlighted that a survey of ICT equipment used by Members had been undertaken and this had been set out in Section 3 of the report.

Mrs Ashwood advised that with the planned development of Modern.gov, corporate iPads would be provided for which training would be available to Members. This would be on the basis of one to one and group sessions, also other guidance would be available. With regard to the implementation of Modern.gov, further information was being obtained.

Councillor McVicar highlighted a potential difficulty with the security software which had to be provided for equipment which occasionally made some applications inaccessible. Mrs Ashwood advised that the Service was in discussion with Local Authorities concerning the software protection they used. She commented that the Government's strategy was that public services should generally have open networks and that their business should be described as "official" rather than have a higher confidential classification. She reiterated that any information held by the Service and the Authority could be the subject to a Freedom of Information request.

In response to a question, Mrs Ashwood advised that Modern.gov would take around 12 months to implement with trials being undertaken internally before reaching a decision as to which Member meeting would first use the new system.

RESOLVED:

That the provision and plans for the paperless meetings trial, be accepted.

15-16/CS/54 Corporate Risk Register

ACO Evans introduced the report concerning the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Corporate Services. She advised that there had been no changes to individual risk ratings in the Register, however, there had been a number of updates to individual risks actions.

RESOLVED:

That the review by the Service of the Corporate Risk Register in relation to Corporate Services be approved.

15-16/CS/55 Review of Work Programme for 2015/16

The Policy and Challenge Group received its updated work programme and reviewed its seventh paperless meeting. CFO Fuller advised Members that the work programme listed the routine work of the Group and there was an opportunity to review the programme. It was noted that the scheduled meetings already had a full programme of work.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme 2015/16 be received and the "cyclical" agenda items for each meeting in 2016/17 be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.48 am