

MINUTES OF CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 29 NOVEMBER 2017

Present: Councillors Chapman, Duckett, Headley (Chair), McVicar and Waheed
CFO P Fuller, ACO Z Evans, AC D Cook, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers

17-18/CS/30 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

17-18/CS/31 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

17-18/CS/32 Communications

The Group received the Minutes of the meeting of the ICT Shared Service Governance Board held on 26 September 2017.

ACO Evans advised that a report on the Authority's use of mod.gov would be submitted to the meeting of the full Authority on 14 December 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the ICT Shared Service Governance Board held on 26 September 2017 be received.

17-18/CS/33 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

17-18/CS/34 Corporate Services Performance 2017/18 Quarter 2 and programmes to date

ACO Evans submitted the Corporate Services programme, projects to date and performance against Corporate Services performance indicators and associated targets for the second quarter of 2017/18.

The Asset Management System project had been postponed due to limited capacity to support the development of the project. The project would be reconsidered in Summer 2018 and would be removed from the programme until that time. The paper based system currently in use was robust and this system would continue until an electronic system was developed and implemented.

The Website Procurement and Development project was rated as green as the development of a new website was being progressed and it was anticipated that the new website would be launched by March 2018.

The Fire Safety Management Information System project was currently reporting as amber due to the limited capacity within the ICT Team.

The Workbench Development – Sickness Absence Application had been completed and would be removed from the programme report. This had streamlined the sickness reporting process.

The Workbench Development – Non-Sickness Absence Application had not yet been completed and was reporting as red as the completion date of September 2017 had been missed. It was expected that this would now be completed by mid-January 2018.

The iTrent/MIS Synchronisation project was reporting as red as the completion date of September 2017 had been missed and would be completed by mid-March 2018.

The Training Centre Administration workstream was reporting as amber and a further update would be provided at the next meeting of the Group.

The HR/Payroll System and Services was reporting as amber although the system has been implemented successfully. The project had been audited by the external auditors and was being rated as amber to enable the high level of monitoring to continue by the project board.

The Retained Recruitment, Telephony Systems Replacement and the Community Defibrillator projects were green.

The Desktop Refresh project was substantially complete with only a small number of complex cases awaiting migration.

ACO Evans then reported on the second quarter performance information. All ICT indicators and all but one workshop indicator had met or exceeded target levels.

WS1a (Grade A defect response time (within 1 hour)) was reporting as amber for the quarter. AC D Cook advised that there had been a technician vacancy and this had affected the rota group. This post had now been successfully recruited to, with the applicant completing the training required to join the rota group. As such, performance against the indicator should improve in future quarters.

FNP5 (percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days) was also reporting as amber, as it had missed its target of 96% by 2%. The processing of invoices had been delayed in certain departments due to changes in staffing, leave and sickness. The Finance Team was liaising with the departments concerned to ensure that performance against this indicator improved.

FNP6 (percentage of debt over 90 days old) had missed its target of 2.55% and was 9.66% at the end of the reporting period. There had been vacancies in the Finance Team during the period and following the successful recruitment to the post, the total debt outstanding as at 30 September 2017 was £37,000, with only £271.20, or 0.73%, over 90 days old.

The Chair suggested that the wording of FNP6 be revisited at the Group's target setting meeting on 13 March 2018 to ensure that debt over 90 days was being measured against the percentage of the total debt that had been raised.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress made on Corporate Services Programmes and Performance be acknowledged.
2. That the Group consider amending the wording of FNP6 (percentage of debt over 90 days old) at its target setting meeting in March 2018.

17-18/CS/35 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced her report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports. No extensions had been requested and all the actions from previous audits had been completed.

All actions arising from the Annual Governance Statement were in progress.

RESOLVED:

That progress made to date against the action plans be acknowledged.

17-18/CS/36 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring 2017/18

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, submitted the forecast year-end budget position as at 31 October 2017. The forecast non-salary underspend was £24,500 and the forecast salary underspend was £65,000, resulting in a total forecast underspend of £89,500.

He reported that the underspend may be allocated to replace the earmarked reserves that had been used during the year.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer reported on the variations to the Capital Programme. The first was an additional £80,000 that was required to complete the refurbishment and upgrade of the Smoke House, which would be funded from the property earmarked reserve.

The Group was being asked to approve the addition of £25,000 for an aerial drone to be purchased in conjunction with Bedfordshire Police, funded by the collaboration reserve. The initial capital costs and the ongoing revenue costs would be split proportionally between the two organisations.

AC D Cook advised that the drone specification was currently out to tender. Drone pilot training would be provided through the Fire Services College and would incorporate Civil Aviation Authority guidance and information about the interaction with and no-fly zones around the County's airports.

In response to a question about the planned non-uniform efficiency saving which would not be achieved due to the ongoing necessity for the post, ACO Evans reported that investigations were ongoing to mitigate against this.

RESOLVED:

1. That the forecast outturn for revenue and capital be noted.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to add an aerial drone to the capital programme, to be purchased in conjunction with Bedfordshire Police.

17-18/CS/37 Treasury Management Mid Year Review Report

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, introduced the Treasury Management Mid-Year review report which provided an update of the Authority's treasury management to 30 September 2017.

The Authority currently had investments with Barclays Bank, Santander, Qatar National Bank and Goldman Sachs. The use of money market funds would be considered for short-term investments.

It was noted that Members had received training from the Authority's treasury management advisors at a Member Development Day on 4 July 2017. The Authority's treasury management advisors were now known as Link Asset Services.

Councillor Duckett suggested that the Authority consider lending to neighbouring local authorities on a short-term basis as it may be mutually beneficial to the authorities involved. Central Bedfordshire Council regularly borrowed funds from its neighbouring local authorities.

It was not clear whether this would be permitted under the Authority's current Treasury Management Strategy and this could be considered at its annual review, with advice being sought from the Authority's treasury management advisors.

Questions were also posed regarding ethical investments and ACO Evans suggested that an equality impact assessment may need to be completed in relation to the Authority's investment activity. A policy statement on the issue of ethical investment could be added to the Strategy when it was next reviewed by the Group.

In response to a question, the Head of Finance and Treasurer confirmed that the figures detailing the Authority's interest rate exposure related to the amount of interest.

The Chair commented that there were now no limits set out for the maturity structure of borrowing and that these may need to be introduced.

The Chair also suggested that the limits for external debt and the operational boundary as set out in the prudential indicators may need to be reviewed as they appeared not to allow the Authority any flexibility.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that he would liaise with Link Asset Services to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation and calculations relating to these limits.

Members agreed that it would be useful to include a session on the prudential indicators during the next training session treasury management.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be acknowledged.
2. That the following be considered during the next review of the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy:
 - (a) lending to neighbouring authorities;
 - (b) the development of a policy statement on ethical investment;
 - (c) the prudential indicators and the limits for external debt.
3. That training on the prudential indicators be offered to Members as part of the Treasury Management training.

17-18/CS/38 Review of Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group Effectiveness

The Group considered the following questions relating to its effectiveness during 2017/18:

- i. Does the Group/Committee consider that they have been effective and discharged their responsibility in regard to the Group's/Committee's terms of reference?
- ii. Considering the Group's/Committee terms of reference are there any areas that have not been considered and should be addressed?

- iii. Does the Committee/Group consider any training and development that would assist them with the areas of work of the Group/Committee?

The Group went through its terms of reference and agreed that it was fulfilling the majority of its responsibilities effectively.

During discussion, the Service Efficiency Plan was identified as an area that would benefit from greater Member scrutiny.

It was agreed that the Group should continue to focus on commissioning and overseeing reviews into specified areas of work on a more frequent basis and select items to consider in greater depth.

Members supported the continuation of training on the Statement of Accounts and treasury management and agreed that it would be useful for members to receive training on understanding the Service's assets, including IT, fleet and property. In this respect, it was suggested that Members may benefit from a property tour or greater access to the assets of the Service.

CFO Fuller expressed the view that this could be accommodated during some of the scheduled station visits, particularly in stations where specialist equipment and/or teams were located.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Group's discussion of its effectiveness be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 18 January 2018 to review the Fire Authority's Effectiveness in 2017/18.

17-18/CS/39 ICT Shared Service Agreement Extension

ACO Evans presented a report to advise the Group of the approaching five year end date for the ICT Shared Service Agreement with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority and to seek the Group's support for the extension of that agreement. She tabled Schedule 3: the financial arrangements, for Members' information.

She confirmed that each Authority was responsible for its own budgets. Costs were captured as part of the budget monitoring process and were allocated in accordance with usage.

In response to questions, ACO Evans assured the Group that an exit clause (set out in Section 16 of the agreement) remained in the agreement which would allow either Authority to terminate the agreement prior to the end of the five year period.

A review of the structure in the Shared Service was currently being undertaken to ensure that the Service was resourced to adequately address the business change projects and programmes whilst continuing to deliver "business as usual" work requirements.

It was acknowledged that the introduction of the ICT Shared Service had improved performance against the performance indicators and increased customer satisfaction levels. It also enabled each Service to benefit from a greater breadth of ICT skills.

The Chair commented that the section on data protection would need to be updated to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations.

RESOLVED:

That the Authority be recommended to extend the Shared Services agreement between Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority for a further period of five years with the same terms as the existing agreement, acknowledging that the agreement would have to be amended to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

17-18/CS/40 Corporate Risk Register

AC D Cook submitted an update on the Corporate Risk Register.

There were no changes to individual risk ratings. There had been updates to the following risks:

CRR29 (If we do not communicate well, both internal and external to the Service, then we will suffer from poor staff morale, miss the opportunity to promote ourselves and the excellent work we do and potentially impact upon our ability to deliver a full range of services): significant progress had been made in relation to the development of the Service's new website. A focus group had been held with the service provider and a "base camp" facility was being introduced to facilitate the exchange of information and the resolution of any issues arising during the course of the project.

CRR05 (If we are unable to provide adequate asset management and tracking facilities then we may cause serious injuries to our staff due to a lack of safety testing. We may also incur unnecessary significant costs and be in breach of health and safety legislation): as reported earlier in the meeting, the current paper-based system was robust. Research into cloud based asset tracking systems would be undertaken in Summer 2018.

CRR04 (If there are a large number of staff absent from the workplace then our ability to deliver services to our communities is severely compromised and our reputation will be adversely affected): all staff were sent an e-voucher for a flu vaccination, although the take-up was not as high as the Service would have hoped and this will be reviewed next year.

RESOLVED:

That the development of the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Corporate Services be noted and approved.

17-18/CS/41 Review of Work Programme 2017/18

Members considered the Work Programme for 2017/18.

ACO Evans reported that the Asset Management Strategy would be submitted to the Group's next meeting. The ICT and Fleet Asset Management Plans would be considered at the Group's meeting in June 2018 with the Property Asset Management Plan submitted in September 2018. This would enable to the Group to consider the individual documents in greater detail.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme for 2017/18 be received.

The meeting ended at 11.24 am