

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group
26 November 2015
Item No. 4**

MINUTES OF CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillors T Brown (Chair), F Chapman, P Downing and M Headley

CFO Fuller, ACO Evans, SOC T Rogers, Mrs A Ashwood, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers

15-16/CS/015 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Castleman and D McVicar.

15-16/CS/016 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

No declarations were made.

15-16/CS/017 Communications

The Group received the Minutes of the ICT Shared Service Governance Board meeting held on 14 April 2015 for information.

15-16/CS/018 Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2015 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

15-16/CS/019 Corporate Services Performance 2015/16 Quarter 1 and Programmes to Date

ACO Evans introduced the performance report for the first quarter of 2015/16. She drew Members' attention to the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure project which was currently amber rated as completion had been delayed to ensure alignment to the priorities of both Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services. This included alignment to the prioritisation of this Service's Retained Availability System. This Group would continue to receive updates on the completion of the project.

Members noted that all the performance indicators were achieving or exceeding target levels for the first quarter and suggested that the targets would need to be scrutinised during the annual target-setting meeting in February 2016.

The Chair suggested that the target for FNP5 (percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days) should be revised upward to 100% at that time.

The view was expressed that there may be some areas where the Group wished to retain or decrease targets as a result of increasing budget pressures on the Service, and that areas of work and corresponding targets would need to be prioritised.

Members noted that the performance against the ICT targets had improved since the introduction and bedding in of the ICT Shared Service.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made on Corporate Services Programmes and Performance, particularly the improvement in performance against the ICT performance indicators, be acknowledged.

15-16/CS/020 New Internal Audit Reports

ACO Evans submitted the internal audit report on Business Continuity including Risk Management. This audit had been completed on 13 August 2015 and finalised at 7 September 2015. The audit conclusion was green and the Authority could take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this area were suitably designed, consistently applied and operating effectively.

There were two low priority recommendations arising from the report, both of which had already been completed.

RESOLVED:

That the attached 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/021 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

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

There were a number of actions that were due for completion in March 2016. The follow-up audit was also arranged for March 2016.

ACO Evans advised that, arising from a request from the Chair, recommendations which included a large amount of work would also include milestones so that Members could more effectively scrutinise progress made.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made to date against the action plans be acknowledged and that the extensions to completion dates be agreed.

15-16/CS/022 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring 2015/16

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, presented the forecast year-end position for 2015/16. There was currently an £11,000 forecast non-salary underspend and £155,000 forecast salary underspend. The salary underspend was mainly the result of a lower than anticipated fire fighters pay award of 1%. He confirmed that any surplus at the end of the financial year was transferred into the reserves.

In response to a question on the spending to date, the Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that there were a number of areas in which spending was phased and not spread evenly throughout the year. For example, areas of finance and community safety had higher level of spends later in the financial year.

It was noted that there was also likely to be an underspend in relation to the Retained Duty System (RDS).

ACO Evans advised that the recent Pensions Ombudsman's decision in Milne v. Government Actuaries Department on commutation factors affected approximately 60 individuals and this would need to be reflected in the accounts.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the Head of Finance and Treasurer requested that the Group recommend that the Fire and Rescue Authority approve the purchase of three fire appliances from lease at a cost of £48,000. He reported that the cost of a two-year lease for these vehicles would be £49,000. If approved by the full Fire and Rescue Authority, there would be a reduction in the leasing budget for the next financial year.

Members discussed the issues raised around fitness equipment and leisure facilities raised during the station visit to Potton. The Chief Fire Officer advised that this was being considered further.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to:
 - (a) note the forecast outturn; and
 - (b) approve the addition to the Capital Programme.
2. That the Group receive information on the phasing of the Community Safety budget and a list of leased vehicles, along with the costs and lease periods, at its next meeting.

15-16/CS/023 2016/17 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, introduced his report on the budget setting process for the 2016/17 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. This included two Member Budget Workshops in November 2015 and January 2016 in preparation for the submission of the final budget to the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority on 11 February 2016.

The view was expressed that the Autumn Statement was unlikely to be received before the first budget workshop.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that he had been approached by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire in relation to a proposed bid to Innovation Fund administered by the Home Office for future collaborative work. The Chief Fire Officer would be meeting with the Chief Constable to discuss the expression of interest.

RESOLVED:

That the report and timescales within be agreed.

15-16/CS/024 Utility Usage and Procurement

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, submitted a report on utility usage and procurement as requested by the Group at its last meeting. He advised that the Service procured gas and electricity through the LASER Group of 115 local authorities and its water from Affinity Water and Anglian Water. The total annual spend on utilities was £206,000.

In relation to water usage, both Biggleswade and Stopsley Fire Stations appeared to have high usage and this would be investigated further. Previous high water usage at Ampthill and Luton Fire Stations had been due to water leaks which had now been repaired.

Bedford, Dunstable and Woburn Fire Stations had high usage of electricity. It was noted that Bedford and Woburn Fire Stations did not have gas supplies and Dunstable Fire Station was used by third parties. A full-time firefighter was based at Woburn Fire Station. There was a possibility that a sub-meter could be installed in Dunstable Fire Station to ensure that hirers were paying for the correct level of utility usage.

Gas usage was high at Harrold, Luton and Shefford Fire Stations. Harrold had high gas usage because a full time firefighter was based at the station due to crewing requirements. There was a Combined Heat and Power Unit at Luton Fire Station which was faulty but this had now been repaired and gas usage should decrease at that site. Shefford Fire Station was also used by the Ambulance Service. To reduce utility usage at that station, motion sensor lighting was being installed.

It was hoped that the installation of Automatic Meter Readers would assist the Fire Service in recognising any exceptions more quickly so that these could be investigated and resolved.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be acknowledged.
2. That Members receive a timetable for when the issues relating to the stations identified in the report as being high users of utilities would be resolved.

15-16/CS/025 Annual Review of the Operation of ICT Shared Service Agreement

Mrs A Ashwood, the Head of Strategic Support, introduced the first annual review of the ICT Shared Service to the Group for information. The review had been presented to and considered by the ICT Shared Service Governing Body.

The review covered the following areas: the quality of the Shared Service; the effectiveness of budgetary and financial management arrangements; the effectiveness of systems, processes and procedures; development in legislation and policy guidance; and planning for the development of the Shared Services.

The Head of Strategic Support highlighted a number of areas of significant improvement, including response times, improved Service Desk availability, a more resilient network and savings in joint procurement.

She assured Members of the cross-charging arrangements and that this Service was a strong and equal partner in the Shared Service.

It was noted that individual members of staff were employed by one of the Services to maintain employment rights and control.

ACO Evans advised that this was causing a degree of tension and that the benefits of this model or an alternative model was being investigated.

Members discussed a report which had been presented to a previous meeting of the full Fire and Rescue Authority that suggested the creation of a shared service company to run the ICT Shared Service, with both Services maintaining governance control. Members had commented at the time that further options should be considered before any decision was made, and that this should be undertaken by this Group.

ACO Evans advised that reports would be presented to Members of this Group on the results of the customer satisfaction survey and options for future delivery models at a meeting later in the year.

RESOLVED:

That the outcome of the first annual review of the operation of the ICT Shared Service and progress in the operations, planning and development be noted.

15-16/CS/026 Corporate Risk Register

SOC T Rogers submitted the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Corporate Services.

The changes to individual risk ratings were as follows:

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: the residual impact had been reduced from 4 to 3 and the risk rating had reduced from 16 to 12 as the business continuity arrangements had been tested during recent industrial disputes.

CRR43: If the Service suffers a terrorist attack then there is the potential for elements of the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) to be compromised, our ability to respond to emergency incidents could be significantly affected, we would be unable to fulfil our duties under the Civil Contingencies Act and our reputation could be adversely affected: the residual impact had been reduced from 4 to 3 with the overall reduction in the risk rating from 16 to 12 as a significant amount of progress had been made in relation to the control measures.

SOC Rogers also reported on the following updates to the individual risk ratings:

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: a new team to progress a software solution for asset management tracking had been created and it was hoped that a supplier would be selected by the end of the year.

CRR 23: The Service IT infrastructure is unable to handle secure e-mails from external partners: a software solution for managing the transmission of secure emails within the Service had been identified for implementation and was due for completion in September 2015.

CRR39: If we have inadequate data management due to poor implementation, inappropriate specification of requirements or poor quality control measures then we are at risk of using the wrong information throughout the organisation and thus potentially affecting the delivery of our services: an additional control had been introduced.

SOC Rogers also reminded Members that that Service's Business Continuity and Risk Management arrangements had been audited by Baker Tilly and had received a green audit opinion.

Members queried whether the extract from the Corporate Risk Register was classified information and why it could not be provided with the rest of the agenda papers. CFO Fuller advised that this would be investigated.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/CS/027 Work Programme and Review of Paperless Meeting

Members discussed the continuing trial of paperless meetings. It was agreed that the trial would continue and no recommendation to the full Fire and Rescue Authority would be made at this stage.

It was noted that training for Members may be required and that this should be provided individually as Members were in possession of different electronic devices.

Mrs A Ashwood, the Head of Strategic Support reported that the Service was considering the procurement of modern.gov, the system used by Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils to publish committee papers electronically. It was anticipated that this could be fully functional by the start of the 2016/17 financial year and would facilitate access to agendas and Minutes of meetings of the Fire and Rescue Authority and its relevant Member groups.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Work Programme be received.
2. That a report on lease vehicles be added to the Work Programme for the 26 November 2015 meeting.
3. That the Group continue its trial of paperless meetings and that training on accessing electronic agendas effectively be made available for any Member of the Group who requires it.

The meeting ended at 11.46am.