

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group
7 March 2016
Item 4**

MINUTES OF CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2015

Present: Councillors T Brown (Chair), F Chapman, P Downing, M Headley and M Riaz
CFO Fuller, SOC T Rogers, Mrs A Ashwood, Mr J Atkinson and Mr G Chambers

15-16/CS/028 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D McVicar.

15-16/CS/029 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

No declarations were made.

15-16/CS/030 Communications

The Group received the Minutes of the ICT Shared Service Governance Board meetings held on 22 July and 8 September 2015 for information.

15-16/CS/031 Minutes

The Chair requested an update report on the actions taken to address utility usage issues at stations identified within the report presented to the last meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2015 be confirmed and signed as a true record.
2. That an update report on actions taken/planned as a result of the utility usage issues identified at particular stations, including Shefford Fire Station, be presented to the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

15-16/CS/032 Corporate Services Performance 2015/16 Quarter 2 and Programmes to Date

Mrs A Ashwood, the Head of Strategic Support, introduced the performance report for the second quarter of 2015/16.

She provided an update on the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure project and advised that the rollout was now back on track for its original completion date.

Significant progress had also been made in relation to the HR system that had been added to the Capital Programme at the last FRA meeting.

There was only one performance indicator that was not RAG rated as green for the quarter, FNP5 (percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days), which was amber as it had missed the target by .23%.

Members expressed the view that there should be no uncontested invoices which were not paid within 30 days and this target would be revisited at the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/CS/033 Fuel Cards

SOC J Roberts presented the report updating Members on the processes and additional measures that had been implemented following an audit of Service Fuel Cards in September 2014. These processes had been in place since the end of 2014/beginning of 2015 and the actions taken to address recommendations arising out of the audit would be confirmed during the next follow-up audit.

He assured Members that no incidents of fraud had been detected during the initial audit and subsequent reviews.

In response to a question, SOC Roberts advised that there had been no incidents of misfuelling as the majority of the fleet used diesel.

RESOLVED:

That the findings of the report be acknowledged.

15-16/CS/034 New Internal Audit Reports

Mrs A Ashwood, Head of Strategic Support, introduced the report on the audit of procurement, which had received an amber/green rating, with two medium and two low recommendations. All four recommendations were due to be completed by the end of November 2015.

The results of two Thematic Reviews which RSM had conducted across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Essex on Communications and Fuel Cards were also presented to the Policy and Challenge Group for information. There were no formal recommendations arising from these reviews, only comments and observations. However, all learning points would be taken on board.

In response to a question, SOC Roberts advised that the Service bulk bought diesel and that there were fuel installations at all full-time fire stations. The tanks at Headquarters had a storage capacity of 13,500 litres.

The use of red diesel was discussed and it was noted that red diesel was used in the Aerial Platforms as they were classified as plant rather than road vehicles.

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/035 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

Mrs A Ashwood, Head of Strategic Support, 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.

The two key outstanding actions were the improvement of the Service's system for tracking its operational equipment and the development of a centrally managed Asset Register.

Mrs Ashwood reported that, following discussions with RSM, the second action had been superseded.

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, advised that the recommendation to develop a centrally managed Asset Register had arisen from the annual audit of Key Financial Controls carried out earlier in the year. The external auditors had not expressed any concern with the spreadsheets that had been maintained up to that point for the year-end accounts for assets over £10,000. Regular spot checks were also undertaken. The Service had expressed concern to RSM about the purchase of a system solely for this purpose and whether this represented value for money.

However, it was recognised that, if the software solution identified for the tracking of operational equipment had the capacity to also serve as a central asset register, this action would be completed. Funding had already been earmarked in the Capital Programme for the provision of a solution for the tracking of operational equipment, up to a value of £100,000.

Members were advised that the two projects were separate although the solution may be the same. The tracking of operational equipment was of greater importance as it related to health and safety and presented a greater level of risk to the Service if not completed. The current system, whereby spreadsheets were held centrally but stations retained paper records, left the Service vulnerable to equipment being separated from the relevant paper records. Management safeguards were in place but the Service was seeking to engineer out the risks.

Further discussion with RSM would take place when they returned in early 2016 for the audit of Key Financial Controls.

RESOLVED:

1. That progress made to date against the action plans be acknowledged.
2. That further information on the negotiations with RSM over the recommendation to develop a centrally managed Asset Register be provided to the Policy and Challenge Group at its next meeting.

15-16/CS/036 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 30 September 2015. The forecast non-salary underspend was £11,000 and the forecast salary underspend was £262,000, giving a total forecast underspend of £273,000.

Further to comments made at the FRA meeting, the Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that he had not provided more detail on the budget forecast outturn as the budget profiling appeared to be accurate at the six-month stage.

He commented that the Authority would be asked to consider how best to utilise the underspend at a future meeting.

There were no changes to report to the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the report be considered and the forecast outturn be noted.

15-16/CS/03 Treasury Management- Mid-Year Review Report to 30 September 2015

Mr G Chambers, Head of Finance and Treasurer, introduced his report on the treasury management activities of the Authority up to 30 September 2015.

He confirmed that the Authority sought to maximise its investments and gave the example of the transfer of funds from a Capita brokered account with Santander at 0.6% to an account direct with Santander with interest rate of 0.9%. All investments were approved by Capita, as the Authority's treasury advisers.

The Authority's budgeted investment return for 2015/16 was £99,400 and the Authority was on target to achieve this.

In response to a question, Mr Chambers confirmed that the Authority would be considering the use of Money Market Funds for short-term investments as the rate of return could be much higher.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

15-16/CS/038 Annual ICT Shared Service User Survey

Mrs A Ashwood, the Head of Strategic Support, presented the results of the annual ICT Shared Service User survey. A survey had initially been undertaken in 2010 and then again in 2014 with the intention of surveys being conducted annually from that point. The same questions had been used as for the previous surveys to provide benchmarking information. The survey was open to all employees in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services (number of personnel in Bedfordshire was 552). The results had improved in the majority of areas, although it was acknowledged that the response rate of 19% was low and that no responses had been received from Retained Duty staff at either Bedfordshire or Cambridgeshire (number of Retained personnel in Bedfordshire was 136).

Ways of engaging with the retained staff would be explored, as it was recognised that they accessed ICT services in a different way to wholetime staff.

Mrs Ashwood commented that the rollout of the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure would improve the user experience, particularly in relation to video streaming of training materials, but that there were some actions that could be taken in the interim.

She advised that the additional comments and free text were still being analysed and would be available for submission to the next meeting of the Policy and Challenge Group.

Members expressed disappointment at the low rate of return and the lack of response from retained staff.

CFO suggested that Members could obtain views on satisfaction with the ICT Service during visits to retained stations.

In response to a comment on question 7 (the Service Desk keeps you informed of progress with your problem), which had seen a decrease in satisfaction from the 2010 survey, Mrs Ashwood explained that this was the result of culture change, as members of staff used to be able to get a personal response by approaching members of the ICT staff in their office or during break times. The process of responding to faults had now been formalised and all calls were categorised and dealt with in priority order. The user received an initial response, but if it was a minor fault the user may not receive a further update until the job was completed.

RESOLVED:

1. That the outcome of the ICT Shared Service User Survey be received and the areas of improvement and focus of further analysis be noted.

2. That the analysis of the comments and free text be presented to the Policy and Challenge Group at its next meeting.

15-16/CS/039 Corporate Risk Register

SOC T Rogers submitted the Service's Corporate Risk Register in relation to Corporate Services. He advised that there were no changes to individual risk ratings and provided the following updates to the individual risk ratings:

CRR08: Inability of supplier to maintain supplies: The Service's key suppliers had been identified and robust business continuity and monitoring arrangements were in place to ensure service delivery in the event of a business interruption to their services. The Finance Team also undertook annual financial checks with key suppliers to provide a further level of assurance.

CRR27: If we receive a poor budget settlement from Government and the Local Authorities covering both revenue and capital funds, and we have an adverse response from our Council Tax Precept consultation processes, then our ability to deliver a full range of services could be significantly affected: The impact of the Autumn Statement had not yet been quantified.

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: Following a review of physical security arrangements, changes to parking and traffic flow at Service Headquarters were being considered.

RESOLVED:

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

15-16/CS/040 Review of Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group Effectiveness 2015/16

Members who had not previously returned their questionnaire results were given hard copies of the questionnaire to complete at the conclusion of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. That the effectiveness of the Group be considered.
2. That the results of the questionnaires completed by the Members be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 27 January 2016 to review the Fire Authority's effectiveness in 2015/16.

15-16/CS/041 Work Programme and Review of Paperless Meeting

The Policy and Challenge Group received its updated work programme and reviewed its sixth paperless meeting.

The provision of devices and the need for a system that would enable Members to access papers remotely, such as modern.gov, was discussed.

CFO advised that the Chair and Vice-Chair were currently trialling iPads and that the provision of devices for all Members could be considered, although it was recognised that some Members may wish to use their own devices to access papers electronically.

Additional ICT training for Members could also be provided if necessary.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Work Programme be received.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to roll out the trial of paperless meeting to the other Policy and Challenge Groups and the Audit and Standards Committee from January 2016.
3. That the Fire and Rescue Authority consider the provision of standard ICT equipment for all Members of the Authority which is capable of running the Authority's preferred solution for the electronic publication of agendas and Minutes.

The meeting ended at 11.20am.