

**For Publication**

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group  
14 March 2017  
Item No. 4**

**MINUTES OF CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND CHALLENGE GROUP MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2016**

Present: Councillors F Chapman, P Duckett, M Headley (Chair), D McVicar, M Riaz and Y Waheed  
CFO Fuller, ACO Z Evans, AC C Ball, Mrs A Ashwood and Mr G Chambers

16-17/CS/027 Apologies

There were no apologies.

16-17/CS/028 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

16-17/CS/029 Communications

There were no communications.

The Chair reported that there had been no meetings of the ICT Shared Service Governance Board since the last meeting of the Group.

### 16-17/CS/030 Minutes

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2016 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

### 16-17/CS/031 Corporate Services Performance 2016/17 Quarter 2 and Programmes to Date

ACO Evans submitted the performance report for Quarter 2 of 2016/17 and gave an update on the programmes within the Group's remit. All projects were on target with the exception of the HR & Payroll System and Telephony System Replacement, which were both reporting as amber.

The completion date for the HR and Payroll System had been postponed to January 2017 as there were number of issues that had been escalated to the service provider and had not yet been resolved. The delay would incur additional expenditure of approximately £30,000 and a request to amend the Capital Programme accordingly was included in the report on Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring 2016/17 (Minute 16-17/CS/033 below). The costs related to consultancy and project management support for an additional two months.

The Telephony System Replacement project had been delayed as a result of ongoing work on the Replacement Mobilising System and the rollout of Virtual Desktop Infrastructure.

Mrs A Ashwood, Head of Strategic Support, advised that the greatest need was for the Training Centre, as currently there were not enough telephone lines to meet the level of need. The procurement was currently underway and the Government's Digital Marketplace would be used which would expedite the process. It was anticipated that the part of the project relating to the training centre would be completed in January 2017, which a full roll-out in March 2017. The new system would also provide functionality for instant messaging and video conferencing to improve connection across the Service.

ACO Evans reported on the performance indicators for the second quarter of 2016/17. All fleet and workshop indicators were green for the quarter. These were new indicators for the 2016/17 and would need to be reviewed when Members set the targets for 2017/18 at the Group's next meeting. All ICT indicators, with the exception of IM1 (the number of incidents on mission critical services resolved within 1 hour) were also green.

Three incidents had been identified as mission critical within the reporting period. Two of these incidents had been resolved within the hour. The third incident related to a Ransom Ware Cryptoware virus which took significantly longer than normal to resolve as the virus had to be isolated and the rest of the system swept to ensure that it was clear.

Members suggested that the target for this indicator should be reviewed at the target-setting meeting as, given the small numbers involved, one incident could have a significant impact on the performance figures reported. As this was not core business for the Service, a lower target could be considered.

The view was expressed that human nature was the greatest vulnerability to the spread of a virus and that communications were being circulated to staff to remind them to report any unusual activity on their electronic devices immediately so that viruses could be isolated as quickly as possible.

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, reported on the finance indicators. FNP5 (percentage of uncontested invoices paid within 30 days) had missed target by only 1%.

FNP6 (percentage of outstanding debt over 90 days old) had missed its target and was reporting as red for the quarter. The Head of Finance and Treasurer advised that the Service was now much more robust in charging for its attendance where this was applicable. The total of outstanding debt as at 30 September 2016 was £18,483.27 with £2,909.94, or 15.74%, being over 90 days old. Of the debts in excess of 90 days old, two were being pursued through the small claims court involving bailiffs, one was currently under negotiation of repayment terms and one had been paid.

It was noted that the performance against FNP6 was also significantly affected by a small number of cases and that the target for this indicator should also be reviewed.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress made on Corporate Services Programmes and Performance be acknowledged.
2. That consideration be given to amending the targets for IM1, FPN6 and the fleet and workshops indicators for the 2017/18 performance year at the Group's next meeting.

16-17/CS/032 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring Report

ACO Evans introduced the report on progress made to date against current action plans arising from internal and external audit reports and from the Fire Authority's 2015/16 Annual Governance Statement.

All actions were currently in progress and no extension requests had been received.

**RESOLVED:**

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

16-17/CS/033 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring 2016/17

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, submitted the forecast year-end budget monitoring position as at 30 September 2016. He reported that the current forecast non-salary underspend was £43,000 with a forecast salary underspend of £384,000. The salary underspend was largely a result of a reduced firefighters pay award and Retained Duty System vacancies. The total forecast underspend was £427,000.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the review of mobile working and mobile assets was reporting as amber as the majority of this work would be undertaken in 2017/18. The other projects rated as amber were vehicle spend, as this was fluid through the year, the extension and redesign of the BA Technician and Technical Technician workshop, as this project was being scaled down, and the HR and Payroll System which was discussed earlier in the meeting (Minute 16-17/CS/031 refers).

In response to a question from the Chair on the reasons why the half-year salary spend on Control staff was more than half the projected annual spend, ACO Evans advised that this information could be sent to the Chair outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the forecast outturn for the revenue budget and the Capital Programme be received.
2. That the Fire and Rescue Authority be recommended to approve additional capital funding for the HR system project.

16-17/CS/034 Treasury Management Mid Year Review Report to 30 September 2016

Mr G Chambers, the Head of Finance and Treasurer, presented the treasury management mid-year review. The report included a review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy, the Authority's capital expenditure, the Authority's investment portfolio and borrowing strategy, a review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits and an economic update for the first six months of 2016/17.

The amount outstanding on loans from the Public Works Loan Board was £10.087 as at 30 September 2016. No debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the first six months of 2016/17.

The Authority was on target to achieve just under £100,000 in interest on its investments for the 2016/17 financial year.

The Head of Finance and Treasurer drew Members' attention to the average interest rate achieved by the Authority's investments. This was 0.78%, which was higher than the average Local Authority 7 Day Rate over the same period of 0.32%.

It was noted that the Bank of England base rate was now forecast to remain at 0.25%.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be acknowledged.

### 16-17/CS/035 Review of Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group Effectiveness

The Policy and Challenge Group considered the following overarching questions:

- i. Does the Group consider they have been effective and discharged their responsibility in regard to the Group's terms of reference?
- ii. Considering the Group's terms of reference are there any area that have not been considered and should be addressed?
- iii. Does the Group consider any training and development would assist them with the areas of work of the Group?

During consideration of these questions, the Service Efficiency Plan was highlighted as an area that would benefit from greater Member scrutiny.

The view was also expressed that, generally, the work programme appeared to be Officer-led and that Members should be more proactive in initiating reviews and requesting additional reports. Recent examples of this included reports on the charging for use of community facilities and utility usage at the Service's fire stations.

The Group agreed that Members should receive refresher training on treasury management at an appropriate point. It was acknowledged that Members could identify areas for training and development at any time.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the discussion of the Group's effectiveness as set out in this Minute be fed into the facilitated meeting to be held on 17 January 2017 to review the Fire Authority's effectiveness in 2016/17.

### 16-17/CS/035 Corporate Risk Register

Mrs A Ashwood, Head of Strategic Support, presented the update on the Corporate Risk Register.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the Appendix of the report which set out all the risks within the Group's remit.

The Head of Strategic Support advised that there was one update to a risk within the Corporate Services area. The risk in relation to CRR029 (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 that we do and potentially impact upon our ability to deliver a full range of services) had been reduced from 9 to 6 as a result of a positive audit of communications. Work was also commencing on the refresh of the website.

A Member referred to comments made by staff during the Member visit to Leighton Buzzard Community Fire Station and suggested that good communication was of importance ACO Evans replied that internal communications within any organisation with satellite offices would always be a challenge. The Service recognised the importance of effective internal communication and this was an area that was always included in staff surveys. She advised that the Blue Bulletin seemed to be the most popular form of communications amongst staff, except that of face to face, and that a cultural shift was required to maximise the use of technology to improve communications.

**RESOLVED:**

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

16-17/CS/036 Work Programme 2016/17

Members received the Group's Work Programme for 2016/17. The Chair reminded Members that they had the opportunity to add items to the Group's work programme. He suggested that the forthcoming investment in the Service's servers and other ICT infrastructure be added to the Group's work programme.

ACO Evans reported that this was Mrs A Ashwood's last meeting as she was leaving the Service in the New Year, and thanked her for her contribution to the Corporate Services Policy and Challenge Group.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Work programme be agreed, subject to the addition of a report on the investment in the Service's servers and other ICT infrastructure.
2. That Mrs A Ashwood be thanked for her work and support to the Group in her role as Head of Strategic Support and be wished all the best for the future.

The meeting finished at 10.55am.