

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 22 February 2017**

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors John Appleton, Nicola Davies, Neil Dirveiks, Brian Hawkes, Keith Kondakor, Phillip Morris-Jones, Chris Saint and Matt Western (Chair)

Other County Councillors

Alan Cockburn - Portfolio Holder for Finance & Property
John Horner - Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
John Betts, Head of Finance
David Carter, Joint Managing Director
Andy Hickmott, Chief Fire Officer
Tricia Morrison, Head of Performance
Rob Moyney, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Rebecca Roberts, Arson Reduction Officer
Sushma Soni, Performance & Improvement Officer
Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Peter Fowler and Councillor Bernard Kirton.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meetings held on 14 December 2016

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2016 be signed as a correct record following an update to include member's request for online access to a full telephone directory.

Matters Arising

Members wished it to be noted that the information requested regarding mobile coverage across the county was relating to mobile data coverage rather than coverage just for calls.

2. Public Question Time

There were no public questions received or presented at the meeting.

3. Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

There were no questions presented to Cabinet Portfolio Holders at the meeting.

4. Work Programme 2016/17

The Chair informed the committee that an additional meeting of the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been provisionally booked for early June. Following the election in May, it was considered prudent to arrange a meeting, prior to the July meeting, in order to discuss the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) action plan. The meeting will also consider the Cross Party Fire Working Group and how to move forward with both groups.

With regards to the procurement in the Fire Service members noted that the Government is promoting co-operation amongst neighbouring fire services and where possible, this is the route that WFRS takes.

Following a discussion about the work programme for the Committee after the election in May, members agreed with the topics that had been suggested by the Chair and Party Spokes Members. This includes business rates, the financial impact of the budget on Adult Social Care, and update on the MASH and the new legal and catering services. In addition to the proposals put forward members requested that the committee looks at the technology used by the Council, and in particular the Digital by Default programme. Information regarding the West Midlands's Combined Authority (WMCA) Interface was also requested; in particular, information relating to the financial impact of the WMCA on the County Council.

Members agreed that reports relating to capital slippage be added as an item on the work programme (for every other meeting).

A fully updated work programme will be published prior to the meeting in July 2017.

There was a request from members that consideration be given to bringing the start time of the committee meeting forward to 13.45 allowing members with commitments outside the county council a chance to avoid heavy traffic and other travel issues. It was noted that while most members supported this request, it will be a decision for the Chair to make before the next meeting.

Resolved

The Committee agrees the updated 2016-17 Work Programme and notes the scheduled future meeting dates. Members will be advised in good time of any changes to the start time of future meetings.

5. One Organisational Plan (OOP) Quarterly Progress Report:

Tricia Morrison, Head of Performance, gave a brief introduction to the report which relates to Quarter 3 performance (for year three of the existing OOP). It was noted that the report provides specific information which falls under the remit of the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

With reference to point 3.4.7 of the report, members sought reassurances regarding the pension funds. It was confirmed that Government was insisting that authorities pooled pension resources in order to reduce fees. A decision has been taken to transfer £1.8 billion of assets in the Warwickshire Pension Fund to the Border to Coast Pension Partnership. A report is due to be presented to the March meeting

of the full council and it is hoped that full implementation of the transfer will have started by April 2018. Confirmation was given to members that full control of investment distribution remains with the council.

Concern was raised regarding the switching off of some traditional communication channels as noted on page 11 of the report. David Carter, Joint Managing Director, confirmed that the council cannot afford to keep all communication channels open and that the council is behind on digital targets. He was able to reassure members that assisted access would always be available to residents who needed it and that the council would not become remote from the general public. Members were reminded that their decision not to close some libraries had ensured that residents would continue to have access to One Stop Shops and face-to-face interaction.

With regards to Information Incidents, as reported on page 11, David Carter confirmed that this related the sending of information rather than any hacking events. Although the incidents are running slightly above average, members were asked to note that none had been significant enough to warrant a report to the Information Commissioner.

With regards to incidents of hacking, members were reassured that all security issues are monitored. The latest incident of hacking was a result of initial hacking on the wordpress.com website which is used by the council, rather than a direct attack on the council. It had resulted in disruption to the main website but a second fire wall prevented it reaching the main council systems.

Following a question relating to the monitoring reports (page 12 of the report) it was confirmed that much of the work is still manual and so can be time consuming. Work is in progress with regards to cost centre codes and account codes to make the process faster and more accurate.

With regards to the complaints upheld by the Ombudsman David Carter confirmed that the cases related to maladministration leading to injustice.

Members questioned the performance figure of 0.04% regarding the performance on page 16 of the report which relates to the Capital programme variance and requested that the information be checked.

A question was raised regarding the number of Home Fire Safety Checks that have been carried out (page 16 of the report). It was confirmed that the number carried out can fluctuate depending on if officers need to be redirected to other issues across the county but overall, the service was on target to complete 4000 by the end of the year.

Members requested further fire and rescue service performance information relating to the attendance of second appliances. Rob Moyney, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, was able to confirm to members that reviews are carried out as to why targets were missed and that in the majority of cases it was due to the geography of the incident and the availability of retained duty system (RDS) fire fighters. Members agreed to revisit this topic at future meetings and asked that a second briefing note be sent out with performance information (following the original briefing note that was circulated to members on 17 October 2016).

The discussion moved onto the level of vacancies for RDS fire fighters and what can be done to improve the situation. Rob Moyney confirmed that the issues faced by

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue service highlighted a national problem with the recruitment and retention of fire fighters. Solutions are being investigated including the introduction of joint PCOS and RDS officers; which may prove especially useful in the most non-urban locations. All innovative ways forward are being investigated.

Members acknowledged the improvement made in performance relating to staff sickness and how it showed an overall improvement in communication.

Resolved

The Committee notes the key messages set out in the report and requests that further reports and briefing notes be prepared as set out in the minutes.

6. Deliberately Started Fires in Warwickshire.

Rob Moyney, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented the highlights of the report to the committee, noting in particular that although there has been a steady increase in deliberate fires across Warwickshire, the overall number of incidents is down 23.8% on the same period last year.

It was confirmed to members that Nuneaton and Bedworth is a target area for arson prevention and is where the focus of resources are.

Rebecca Roberts, Arson Reduction Officer, gave a presentation to the committee, highlighting the type of work that is carried out across the county. In particular, members were informed of the actions plans that are put in place following agencies working together (including the police, housing associations and Network Rail).

Members were shown information relating to the Dob 'Em In campaign which has proved to be successful in encouraging people who may have been witness to an arson incident to come forward and report it to the Police, or Fire Service.

With regards to individuals who make a threat of arson, members were informed of the preventative work carried out, across agencies, in order to manage the risk. This can include working with parole boards in providing advice.

Resolved

The Committee notes the contents of this report.

7. Verbal update regarding the Peer Review.

Rob Moyney updated members noting that the full report from the peer review had been received in January 2017 and that work was now being undertaken to produce an action plan. The report had noted that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service was one of the most high performing and successful services across the country with a high level of positive engagement. Front line fire fighters had also reported high levels of satisfaction with their equipment.

The report had highlighted some challenges for the service including the uncertainty the service faces in view of the move to the Home Office. Challenges around maintaining staff as well as their health and well-being had also been included in the report.

Rob Moyney informed members that the key themes of the report include improving communications, managing capacity and focusing on resources, as well as building on the existing good work being carried out. It was confirmed that the additional meeting planned for June 2017 would include a further update on the IRMP.

8. Update regarding Business Rates and Capital Slippage.

Briefing notes were circulated to members of the committee.

John Betts made three key points in addition to the information on the briefing note with reference to business rates. Firstly, the revaluation of business rates should see the overall bill for Warwickshire decrease. Secondly, a response is due on 3 May relating to the technical aspects of business rates which include tier splits and appeals. Finally, it was confirmed that officers will be watching how the tax base develops for 2020.

Following a request from members it was agreed that briefing note would be produced showing how dependant Warwickshire is on the small number of large businesses across the county.

With regards to capital slippage, it was agreed that a report would be produced for every other meeting of the committee, starting in July 2017.

9. Urgent Matters

None

10. Any other business

Members of the committee wish to put on record their thanks to all the officers who have produced reports or given presentations over the last year. The standard of all the work produced has been excellent and members are very grateful for everyone's hard work.

With regard to the election in May, the Chair expressed his thanks to those members who would not be standing again for all their work on the committee. And for those standing for re-election, he wished them good luck and best wishes.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee was confirmed as 19 July 2017 at 2 p.m. in CR2, Shire Hall.

The meeting rose at 15.58

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Chair