

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 20 December 2017**

Present:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Parminder Singh Birdi (Vice-Chair), Sarah Boad, John Cooke, Andy Crump, Andy Jenns, Bill Olnier, Maggie O'Rourke and Heather Timms (Chair)

Other County Councillors:

Peter Butlin - Deputy Leader (Finance & Property)

Kam Kaur - Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation

Officers:

Elizabeth Abbott - Business Partner - Planning, Performance & Improvement

Helen Barnsley - Democratic Services Officer

John Betts - Head of Finance

David Carter - Joint Managing Director (Resources)

Sarah Duxbury - Head of Law and Governance & Interim Head of Human
Resources and Organisational Development

Andy Hickmott - Chief Fire Officer

Allison Lehky - Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Manager

Tricia Morrison - Head of Performance and Interim Head of ICT Services

Rob Moyney - Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Karen Smith - Customer Relations Manager

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillors Judy Falp and Pete Gilbert

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

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 be signed as correct.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

2. Public Question Time

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

3. Questions to the Portfolio Holders relevant to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Following a question from Councillor Maggie O'Rourke, it was agreed that information relating to the Management Change Programme and the number of jobs potentially at risk as a result of the programme would be provided.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation confirmed that there had been an improvement in sickness rates across the organisation over the summer months. As expected there were signs of an increase in sickness levels over the winter months with colds and infections. Councillor Kaur confirmed that there is a lot of work being carried out with managers to support them with sickness levels.

Councillor Maggie O'Rourke asked if the sickness levels at Warwickshire County Council were higher than at other public sector organisations. It was noted by the Committee that this is a subject that could be reviewed by the Staff and Pensions Group with the potential for a Task and Finish Group to be set up. This will be discussed at the next Chair and Party Spokes meeting in February 2018.

Councillor Heather Timms, Chair of the Committee, agreed that the figures requested in relation to sickness would be provided with a briefing note to be circulated to the Committee and that the issue would be discussed at the next Chair and Party Spokes meeting of the Committee. The briefing note is to include figures for each department as well as overall. Information relating to accidents at work, specifically for the Fire and Rescue Service are also to be included.

Following a question from Councillor John Cooke, confirmation was given relating to the new storage location at Hawkes Point. The space includes storage and office space on an industrial estate on Warwick Gates and is scheduled to be in place by 2020. Councillor Peter Butlin, Deputy Leader (Finance & Property), confirmed that work was ongoing relating to the improved use of property and space as part of the One Public Estate programme.

4. Work Programme 2017-18

In relation to library services it was agreed that there would be a discussion at the next Chair and Party Spokes meeting of the Committee in February 2018. The Committee agreed that libraries are a valuable public asset.

Councillor Andy Jenns requested information relating to the sundry debt of the Council and how much of this was collected and how much was written off. The information is to be circulated to the Committee in a briefing note.

Following a question from Councillor Maggie O'Rourke regarding the total amount on VAT claimed back by the Council, John Betts, Head of Finance, agreed to produce a briefing note with this information on. It was noted by the Committee that local government is subject to different tax and VAT schemes than other public organisations such as the NHS.

It was agreed by the Committee that at the next Chair and Party Spokes meeting, future items for the work programme should be discussed. The current work programme runs to February 2018.

Resolved

That the Committee:

- 1) Agrees the updated 2017-18 Work Programme and
- 2) Notes the scheduled future meeting dates.

5. One Organisational Plan Quarterly Progress Report: April-September 2017

Elizabeth Abbott, Business Partner for Planning, Performance & Improvement presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following points –

- The report includes information relating to mid-year performance.
- The full report was presented to Cabinet on 9 November 2017.
- The highlights of the report can be found on page 2 of the report; there are 83 outcomes for the organisation; 29 outcomes relate directly to Resources and Fire & Rescue.

Specific areas of note for the Committee include the number of visits to Warwickshire libraries. The current performance is slightly lower than expected but this is likely to be as a result of the refurbishment of the library in Stratford-upon-Avon. Performance figures are expected to recover in 2018.

There has been a gradual increase in the amount of 'digital assistance' offered to residents although it is unlikely that the performance in this area will reach the target.

With regard to the performance scorecard for the Fire and Rescue Service; one area of note is the number of incidents attended. The scorecard forecasts a year end position of 'Red'. This is in part due to seasonal changes but also as a result of significant policy change resulting in the service attending more non-life risk rescues and entrapments.

The financial commentary of the report (page 8) highlights an underspend of under 1% for the Resources Group. The overspend forecast for the Fire and Rescue Service has increased by £177,000 since the first quarter. This includes a 2% pay rise for staff that has been factored in. Additional forecasting information will be provided following a review in quarter three.

In relation to the savings plan, the Committee noted that the Fire and Rescue Service is currently on track to deliver savings but the Resources Group has a small short fall (page 9 of the report).

In relation to staff vacancies and sickness in the Fire and Rescue Service, it was confirmed that this was being looked at as part of the task and finish group looking at the Integrated Risk Managements Plan for the Fire Service.

In relation to the transformation fund, it was confirmed that although this is a small pot of funding, staff are contributing their own time and resources to the project.

It was agreed that a breakdown of the transformation project costs would be provided to the Committee.

In relation to preventable fire deaths a question was raised regarding the inclusion of a light aircraft accident. The Committee raised concern that a random incident could count against the performance of the Service. Rob Moyney, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, confirmed that the cause of death is always determined by the Coroner and in relation to the light aircraft accident the cause of death was fire. However, with regard to the recording of preventable fire deaths, work was being undertaken to change this indicator so that the term 'preventable' was no longer used.

In relation to the A444 project it was agreed that a briefing note would be provided with the latest information to update members.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the progress of the delivery of the One Organisational Plan 2020 for the period of April-September 2017, as contained in the report.

6. Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge 2016 Action Plan Update

Rob Moyney presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following points –

- Good progress has been made with the Fire Service Action Plan with the majority of actions now complete.
- With regard to Community Fire Safety, work has been carried out with Staffordshire Fire Service who have supported further development in this area.
- Further progress has been made with work on the Adult Social Care Programme although future work is subject to further funding being available from the Better Social Care Fund.
- There is now a dedicated officer working on the Business Continuity Plan.
- With regard to the Home Office Fire Reform Programme and the introduction of a National Fire Inspectorate, it was confirmed that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has been confirmed in the first group of services to be inspected between April and June 2018. Further information is expected in January 2018.

Resolved

That the Committee

- 1) Notes the latest position on progress against the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge 2016 undertaken in Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service (WFRS).
- 2) Requests details to be provided of the proposed savings from collaborative working as well as a full appraisal of options for potential mergers.

7. A Report on the Operational Performance of Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service 2016-17

Rob Moyney highlighted the following points –

- The report summarises the performance of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service in comparison to 44 other fire services.
- Despite the different report methods, the performance of Warwickshire Fire Service is good.

Following a question from the Chair of the Committee it was confirmed that following the Home Office Inspectorate Review, some standardisation of the performance review is expected.

- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has enhanced the services it provides to the most vulnerable
- With regard to the issue of deliberate fires across the county there has been an increase over the summer months during the hot, dry period of weather in the first quarter; but there is a lot of work done by the arson prevention team.

The Committee noted that some performance indicators are reportedly slightly differently in certain fire services so discrepancy is to be expected.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

8. Treasury Management Monitoring Report

John Betts presented the report to the Committee explaining that work had been done to ensure it was a more reader-friendly report that uses easier terminology. The report also includes definitions for some of the terms used.

With regard to investments, Warwickshire County Council is currently delivering above target. Officers review if there are any more opportunities for investment while maintaining low risk. The County's overriding strategy for treasury management is low risk.

There has been no borrowing so far this year and there is no intention to borrow at this point.

Warwickshire County Council's Treasury Management is currently well within the set operating limits and well within the set interest rate risks – all interest rates are fixed.

Resolved

That the Committee notes the Treasury Management report in respect of the first half of 2017-18.

9. Customer Feedback in Warwickshire County Council: Annual Report April 2016-March 2017

Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager presented the report to the Committee which details how the Council is managing customer feedback.

Members were asked to note that customer feedback is a very small part of all customer interaction. The customer relations team respond to questions, comments, compliments and complaints.

The last 12 to 18 months has seen an increase in the use of open, digital channels for customer interaction. Following a question regarding non-digital opportunities for customer interaction, Karen Smith confirmed that vulnerable people still have a range of opportunities to contact the Council. These options were also available for those without access to a computer, non-English speaking residents and those with cognitive impairments. Digital Access is one option but not the only option.

There has been a shift in the type of feedback sent to the Council and this was currently being reviewed. There are options on each webpage of the website for customers to leave feedback; complaints or compliments but it was noted that complaints often mean that something needs to be 'fixed' so contact has to be made.

Karen Smith and Councillor Kam Kaur will meet with Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service in the New Year to discuss options to give compliments more weight.

Resolved

That the Committee note the Annual Report.

10. Verbal Update - Staff Pulse Survey

Allison Lehky, Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Manager provided an update to the Committee following the briefing note that had been circulated to members prior to the start of the meeting.

The Pulse Survey was sent to all staff in May 2017 and the results were published in September 2017. It was conducted as part of the Engagement Strategy and followed the main staff survey. All staff are given the opportunity to complete the pulse survey.

The report highlighted that one area for improvement would be to review the low response rate and explore why staff were not completing the survey.

It was also noted that some staff had not been aware of the link between the organisation's action plan and the results of the 'You Said, We Did'. As a result there will be more branding of the 'You Said, We Did' promotions to show the link to the action plan.

It was confirmed that all data is measured on equality and diversity. Some staff with disabilities have raised some issues through the survey which are currently being reviewed with the Equality Group.

11. Urgent Matters

Councillor Heather Timms confirmed that a Universal Credit Member Development session has been arranged for Councillors on 27 February 2018 at 2pm (Committee Room 2).

All members of the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to attend.

12. Any other business

None

13. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee was confirmed as 28 February 2018 at 2 p.m. in CR2, Shire Hall.

The meeting rose at 15.27pm

.....
Chair