

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 11 July 2018**

Present:

Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sarah Boad, John Cooke, Judy Falp, Pete Gilbert, Andy Jenns, Maggie O'Rourke, Bob Stevens and Heather Timms (Chair)

Other County Councillors:

Peter Butlin - Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property
Andy Crump – Portfolio Holder for Fire & Community Safety
Kam Kaur - Customer and Transformation

Officers:

Helen Arkell	Strategic Asset Manager, Property Services
Elizabeth Abbott	Business Partner, Planning, Performance & Improvement
Kushal Birla	Head of Customer Service
David Carter	Joint Managing Director (Resources)
Craig Cusack	Commercial Enterprise Lead
Tejay De Kretser	Customer Service Business Development & Improvement Manager
Sarah Duxbury	Head of Law and Governance & Interim Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Andy Hickmott	Chief Fire Officer
Chris Norton	Strategic Finance Manager, Corporate Financial Services
Janet Purcell	Democratic Services Manager
Virginia Rennie	Strategic Finance Manager
Steve Smith	Head of Property Services

Other Attendees

One – Press

1. General

(1) Apologies

An Apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Bill Olnier. Councillor Richard Chattaway replaced Councillor Olnier for this meeting.

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

None

(3) Minutes of the meetings held on 25 April 2018 and 15 May 2018

Resolved

That, subject to the addition of Councillor Judith Falp to the list of attendees in the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2018, the minutes of the meetings held on 25 April 2018 and 15 May 2018 were approved as correct records.

Minutes of 25 April 2018 - Matters Arising

Minute 4 – HMICFRS inspection

Andy Hickmott, Chief Fire Officer, reported that the Fire and Rescue Service inspection had taken place, with 11 inspectors covering the whole of the service and over one quarter of staff having some form of engagement with the Team. Andy Hickmott reminded members that Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service was one of 15 inspections in the first tranche and that there would follow a very detailed moderation process before the formal report is published in the autumn. It was noted that the report would be shared with the Fire and Rescue Service a few weeks prior to publication to check for any inaccuracies but that publication was embargoed until the date for publication set by the HMICFRS.

The Committee was advised that the inspection process does not include interviews of councillors as the focus is on the operation of the service not its governance. Councillor Andy Crump, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, did however attend the strategic briefing that was delivered by the Service to the Inspectorate before the fieldwork week took place. Andy Hickmott gave assurance that there had been no unexpected major issues in the initial feedback and, in line with previous inspections, work was already underway on developing an action plan.

It was agreed that the Committee be sent a briefing note of the informal feedback, appreciating that this could not be public until the formal publication of the report.

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

The Committee noted the items listed for forthcoming consideration by Cabinet or individual Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Bob Stevens asked whether the item on Community Engagement proposed for Cabinet on 24 July had been considered by any member group prior to its scheduling for Cabinet and questioned whether it could be considered by Overview and Scrutiny prior to consideration by Cabinet. The Committee was advised that there would be opportunity for member debate when the item is put to full Council.

4. Work Programme 2018-19

The Committee agreed the work programme set out in the report and that the establishment of the Fire and Rescue Service IRMP Task and Finish Group be considered at the Chair and Group Spokespersons meeting on 10 September 2018.

5. One Organisational Plan Progress Report: April 2017-March 2018

Elizabeth Abbott, Business Partner, Planning, Performance & Improvement, presented the year- end report on performance for those areas within the remit of the Committee.

Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Maggie O'Rourke asked how the targets were arrived at for Fire and Rescue and why five of the targets had a 'red' rating for not having been reached. Andy Hickmott explained that in comparison to the previous year, the service had been attending more calls, including ones that have discretion to attend, and this should have been taken into account when setting the target. Councillor O'Rourke asked whether the response to discretionary calls was impacting on the service response times and was assured by Andy Hickmott that high priority incidents were always responded to appropriately.

Councillor Sarah Boad asked whether it can be unhelpful to be driven by targets, given that events were unpredictable (for example the recent grass fires) and not within the control of the Fire and Rescue Service. Andy Hickmott advised that measurements against targets give an overall view but it is important to look at the type of attendance to see if there are any concerns.

Councillor Richard Chattaway expressed concern at the number of red indicators and asked how these are being addressed and whether this would be an area covered in the HMICFRS inspection.

Councillor Andy Crump, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, replied that it was important to look at the targets in context and he would look at any view on this from the inspection, for this authority and others. The Committee was advised that response times are within the normal range of Shire Fire Services, but an exact comparison cannot be made as each authority sets its own standards according to their local circumstances.

Councillor Chattaway sought assurance that the changes that had been made some years back to the response time standards were not having a negative impact on public safety.

The Chair advised that this is an area that would have been looked at by the inspection and is appropriate for the Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group to consider if there is concern.

The Chair, on behalf of members, asked that their thanks be passed to the Service for their work during the recent hot weather and in assisting Fire and Rescue Services in other areas.

Capital Programme

The Committee received the six monthly update on capital programme slippage.

Members sought assurance that there is adequate staff to manage and deliver the Council's capital projects, in particular the local member projects supported by the delegated budgets as these appeared to be suffering slippage. The Committee was reminded that the capital slippage was largely on developer funded projects which were not within the Council's control.

Members expressed concern that slippage in one project can sometimes impact on other projects and were particularly concerned that slippage does not impact on services such as Education. Councillor Singh Birdi suggested that, although the County Council did not have direct control over many of the projects, ways should be found to exert influence to lessen the impact of delays and ensure appropriate timing of projects (for example avoiding three major projects starting in an area at the same time).

Councillor Peter Butlin, Deputy Leader, advised that he had a working group looking at the capital programme, including how schemes are costed and costings projected over future years. Councillor Richard Chattaway requested that Councillor Peter Butlin consider including Labour Group membership on the working group.

The Chair agreed that the Chair and Spokespersons meeting consider how the issue of capital programme management, and also slippage on member delegated budget schemes, could best be scrutinised by the Committee.

6. Digital Transformation Update

Tejay De Krester, Customer Service Business Development & Improvement Manager, presented a report setting out progress on Digital Transformation.

The following points were raised by the Committee:

- Members welcomed the removal of the need for the public to register in order to report issues (such as potholes) but noted that it would still be necessary to ask for email addresses/personal details in order to provide some services (e.g. Blue Badge).

- Website downtime should be avoided (and explained if necessary). Councillor Cooke reported that the gypsy and traveller reporting webpage did not work when he used it and Tejay undertook to investigate this and added that she would also give figures on website down time but added that it is very rare for the whole website to be down and when it is it is usually for a very short time.
- Improved presentation of information that is more user friendly and includes links to related services (e.g. school admissions to include reference/link to school transport, or other areas a parent may wish to know before making an application).
- Information should be up to date and old content removed (for example the information on potholes). There will be improved management of the webpages. Individual officers will no longer be able to put content on the websites, ensuring a consistent approach to style and content.
- There must be adequate 'back-office' support for the website and services.

Councillor Richard Chattaway added that he would like to see a telephone number on the Council's website. Kushal Birla, Head of Customer Service, explained that the Council's general telephone number was not put on the home page as the aim is to encourage a change in behaviour whereby people navigate to the service they want where a telephone number may be found but the intention is to include a 'live chat' facility for customer services.

Members were also assured that General Data Protection Regulations were being met and that the website had a privacy statement.

Tejay undertook to circulate an update on the issues raised by members and it was agreed that the Committee receive the action plan and timescales for implementation.

7. Treasury Management Monitoring Report 2017-18

Chris Norton, Strategic Finance Manager, presented a report summarising the Council's investment position and performance (which showed a to return above target) and position on debt financing. The Committee noted that it was not possible for the Council to repay Public Works Loan Board borrowing without incurring high redemption costs. However, maturing debt of £1.5m has been repaid and no new long term borrowing had been undertaken in 2017/18.

The Committee did not identify any concerns and thanked Chris for the report.

8. Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge 2016 Action Plan Closure

Andy Hickmott presented the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge 2016 Action Plan Closure report.

The Committee agreed to endorse the closure of the Action Plan, recognising that the areas listed in 2.1.1 – 2.1.5 of the report would be undertaken as part of the HMICFRS process.

9. Urgent Matters

None

10. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

11. Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2018

Resolved

That the exempt minutes of the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 April 2018 be agreed as a correct record.

12. The Estate

Steve Smith, Head of Property Services, presented a report setting out the metrics of the Council's land and property estate and work being undertaken to ensure the estate remains fit for purpose in the future. He explained that the aim is to reduce the Council's reliance on property.

Councillor Richard Chattaway asked whether the Council has the capacity to keep up the pace on delivery. Steve Smith assured the Committee that the focus is always on prioritising projects and added that Transforming Nuneaton is a key priority and has commitment from partners.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and looked forward to further updates.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.

.....
Chair