

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 18 December 2019

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Maggie O'Rourke
Councillor Bill Olnier
Councillor David Reilly
Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi
Councillor John Cooke
Councillor Judy Falp
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Andy Jenns
Councillor Adrian Warwick
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
Rob Powell, Strategic Director for Resources
Vanessa Belton, Performance and Improvement Business Partner
Sarah Duxbury, Assistant Director - Governance & Policy
Liz Firmstone, Service Manager (Transformation)
Mandeep Kalsi, Performance Officer
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities
Steve Smith, Assistant Director - Commissioning Support Unit
Kieran Amos, Chief Fire Officer
Barnaby Briggs, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Ayub Khan, Service Manager (Universal Services)

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Sarah Boad; replaced by Councillor Jerry Roodhouse.

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter Butlin - Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property

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

None

(3) Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 26 September 2019

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019 be approved as a correct record. 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 and Scrutiny Committee

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holders received or presented at the meeting.

4. Work Programme 2018/19

Resolved: That the Committee agrees the updated 2019-20 Work Programme, and that all outstanding actions be followed up, as set out in the report. The Committee notes the scheduled future meeting dates.

5. One Organisational Plan Progress Report

Resolved: That the Committee notes the progress of the delivery of the One Organisational Plan 2020 for the period as contained in the report.

6. Warwickshire Fire & Rescue – HIMCFRS (verbal update)

Barnaby Briggs, Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a verbal update to the Committee in relation to the inspection of the fire service by HMICFRS. It was confirmed that the next round of inspections would be in a similar format to the first one held in 2019. It is anticipated this will take place in Spring 2020. The Committee noted that a request had been made that Warwickshire County Council's internal audit carry out a review on how Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service (WFRS) responded to the first inspection.

Kieran Amos, Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the HMICFRS is currently establishing a benchmark framework for their inspections and that all fire services are expecting to be inspected frequently over the next three to four years. After which, benchmarks will be agreed, and inspections should then be less often.

The Committee expressed concern about the increased burden that frequent inspections places on smaller services and asked that consideration be given as to whether these concerns could be raised at national level.

7. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue - IRMP Post Engagement and Consultation Report

Barnaby Briggs, Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report to the Committee, noting that Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service would not be continuing the Memorandum of Understanding with West Midlands Fire Service, but the Dynamic Cover Programme will continue.

Following a discussion in relation to the responses to the public consultation it was confirmed that the process had included as much promotion as possible as part of a six-week communication, engagement and consultation process. The Committee agreed that Councillors are all responsible for sharing information with residents and that this should include information relating to public consultations. Councillor Dave Reilly suggested that in view of the low number of responses to the consultation, a review of the methodology used would be beneficial. Kieran Amos, Chief Fire Officer thanked the Committee for its feedback stating it would help shape future consultations. It was suggested that future surveys could be tested out on members first.

Resolved: That the Committee notes the outcomes of the six-week Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Action Plan 2019/20 communication, engagement and consultation process.

8. Warwickshire Fire & Rescue - Operational Benchmarking Performance Report of Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service 2018/19

Barnaby Briggs, Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report to the Committee which highlights key performance areas for the fire service.

Kieran Amos, Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he had full confidence in the data included in the report and the level of interrogation and scrutiny the data had gone through before being presented in the report.

Following a question from Councillor Bill Olnier it was confirmed that in relation to identifying arson activity trends, work was ongoing and included close work with partners.

In relation to the performance target for response times, it was confirmed that the standard for Warwickshire is high but that due to geography it is extremely challenging for the fire service to reach this target. However, the Committee was asked to consider the standard of service on arrival at an incident which is also high.

Following a question from Councillor Dave Reilly, the discussion moved to how the fire service works with the Road Safety Partnership. It was noted by the Committee that the Fatal 4 presentations had been successful across the county and that there has been a reduction in road traffic collisions for the age group targeted. It was noted that it is too early to prove any connection at this point.

The Committee noted that extent of the motorway network across Warwickshire. It was informed that the Fire and Rescue Service is frequently required to attend incidence on it. Members requested that consideration be given to how the Fire Service could work with Highways England.

The Committee noted that the Road Safety Partnership recognises that the Fire and Rescue Service has a key role in the partnership's campaigns. The Committee expressed its support for reinstating the partnership and requested sight of the action plan for the partnership.

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety thanked the Chief and Deputy Fire Officers, on behalf of the Committee and the whole of Warwickshire County Council, for everything that they and the rest of the Fire and Rescue Service do.

Resolved: That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

9. Debt Management Process

Liz Firmstone, Finance Service Manager (Transformation) presented the report to the Committee, detailing the overview of the debt management policy and process.

The following points were highlighted to the Committee –

- i) Warwickshire County Council raises approximately 95,000 invoices per year with 70% of invoices in relation to Adult Social Care.
- ii) The latest benchmarking performance shows that the Council is performing well compared to other local authorities.
- iii) In relation to Adult Social Care debt, the Council's performance is consistent with national performance; collecting around 93% in the first 12 months.
- iv) The new financial strategy will be rolled out in the new financial year.

In response to a question from Councillor Bill Oler in relation to debt accumulated through s106 agreements, Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities confirmed that most outstanding invoices were covered by bonds, but that negotiations were ongoing to collect the outstanding money. It was noted by the Committee that any debts relating to road adoptions were part of the planning process and not linked to this report. It was agreed that a report would be added to the work programme for the Committee in relation to the resources available for the road adoption process.

Councillor Judy Falp sought clarification in relation to point 3.4 of the report; school reserves. It was confirmed that there are financial reserves available for schools in financial difficulties – used to resolve cash flow problems. There are no general financial reserves available for schools.

In relation to point 3.5 of the report, the Committee agreed to raise the question of who takes responsibility for dialogue between the Council and the NHS in relation to financial services to the Adult Social Care & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that more detail is required; including information in relation to what are the debts in Adult Social Care and what are the challenges in recovering them.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse questioned the debt in relation to Warwickshire County Council maintained schools; and how much 76%, as stated in point 3.4 of the report was in relation to

schools in financial difficulty. It was confirmed that Councillor Helen Adkins had requested a report on this issue at the full Council meeting on 17 December 2019.

The Committee expressed some concerns that WCC Legal Services may use debt collection agencies. It was confirmed that, at present, the Council does not use debt collection agencies, but this may be considered as part of the new strategy. The new strategy however will focus on how more payment channels can be made available to customers to improve debt collection.

Resolved: That the Committee notes current performance in relation to income management and debt recovery and the planned development of an income management strategy. The Committee also notes the developments that are underway to continue to improve the Council's collection of income and management of debt.

10. An update of the Museum and Archive Service

Ayub Khan, Service Manager (Universal Services) presented an update on the performance of the Heritage and Culture Service following a request for information from the Committee.

The report provided an overview of the service, the delivery of savings targets and performance information. It was noted that although the service is provided by a small team, it is county wide.

Following a question from Councillor Bill Olnor, it was confirmed that the new strategy for the service includes working closely with partners in the district and borough councils. There is a new steering group with representatives from each of the districts and boroughs in Warwickshire and the group is working on joint projects.

The Committee noted the positive effect of digital preservation; allowing the service to preserve more records. Most records now created are done so in a digital format.

It was noted that the move to Hawkes Point will provide an opportunity for more objects to be presented to the public. Work is underway with the Library Service looking at how objects could be lent to schools from April 2020. This is particularly important with the Committee acknowledging the drop in engagement with young people and the need to promote all the assets available from the service. It was noted that the Royal Shakespeare Company held an event in relation to finding the best way to engage with young people across the county.

The following points were also highlighted to the Committee;

- i) Work is underway with Visit England to highlight tourism in the area and promote big events across the county.
- ii) The Canal and River Trust is keen to work with the service having seen the new strategy
- iii) All members are invited to the upcoming roadshows and be as involved as possible.

The Chair recommended that a report be presented to the Committee in twelve months' time to show the development and progress of the new strategy. It was agreed that this would be added to the work programme.

Resolved: That the Committee notes the contents of this report.

11. Urgent Matters

None

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Chair