

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on 22nd October 2014 at 6.30pm

Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot,
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD

Members: * Councillor Frank Abe
(* *present*) * Councillor Debs Absolom
Councillor John Lenton
* Councillor Iain McCracken
Councillor Eileen McElligott
Councillor Ishrat Shah
* Councillor Alan Ward
Councillor Richard Willis

In Attendance: Gerry Barry (Information Manager, IM)
SM Eddie Cardoso (FBU Representative)
Jan Chadaj (Interim Head of IT, IHIT)
Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Nick Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review, GMPR)
Linda Pye (Clerk)
Nikki Richards (Interim Head of Strategic Planning and Programme
Management, IHSPPM)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer, CO)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR)

Action

233. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Eileen McElligott, John Lenton and Richard Willis.

234. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Members or Officers.

235. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9th SEPTEMBER 2014

RESOLVED THAT:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2014 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising:

224. Follow Up to the Internal Audit Annual Report 2013/14 – The Chairman asked for clarification on whether the bid for funding had been approved which would allow an external company to monitor drivers' licenses automatically. The ACFO confirmed that he would check and

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would notify Members of the Committee.

The minutes referred to a meeting which had taken place on 2nd September 2014 to discuss risk management training and that an update would be provided following the meeting. The Chairman noted that he had not yet received an update and he asked if this could be picked up.

ACFO

228. Member Development – Six Monthly Update - The Minute stated that the Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee would ask the Chairman of the Authority to write to all Members to encourage them to become engaged in the Member development process. The Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee confirmed that this action was still outstanding and that he would formally write to the Chairman of the Authority to request him to write to all Members.

Chairman

229. Corporate Risk Register – The minute from the last meeting noted that there had been a lot of information to digest and that Members should be given more time to look through the information provided. Any comments should be fed back to the ACFO in advance of the next meeting. The ACFO confirmed that no comments had been received from Members and the report was due to be brought back to the next Audit and Governance meeting. However, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had taken on responsibility for risk management and as a consequence it might be necessary to amend the register. It was therefore suggested that a revised version would be circulated to Members at the next meeting for further comments.

DCFO

The Chairman referred to any risks identified in respect of the terror threat level and the ACFO confirmed that he would have a discussion with Members on this issue outside of the meeting.

236. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

None referred.

237. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR) introduced the report which recommended that the Fire Authority approve the draft Local Code of Corporate Governance.

The DR explained that the Fire Authority was responsible for ensuring that its business was conducted in accordance with the law, whilst adhering to proper standards and ensuring that public money was safeguarded, used efficiently and properly accounted for. Good corporate governance aided transparency and accountability and helped the authority to measure performance against agreed objectives. The authority therefore had to put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which the authority was required to produce, was approved at the September Committee meeting. In addition the authority also adopted a Code of Corporate Governance (consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE

Framework – ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’.) The Code set out publicly the way the Fire Authority would meet its commitment to demonstrate that it had the necessary corporate governance arrangements in place to perform effectively and was therefore a key component of the authority’s governance arrangements.

The format of the Code had been revised following the completion of the annual review of the effectiveness of the Fire Authority’s corporate governance arrangements and the change in format of the AGS and had been set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The format would be kept under review and amended if required.

If agreed the Code would be referred to the Fire Authority for approval and along with the AGS would form part of the Authority’s Constitution.

RESOLVED THAT:

The draft Local Code of Corporate Governance for 2013/14 be agreed and be referred to the Fire Authority for approval.

238. COMPLAINTS 2013/14

Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) provided the Committee with information about the complaints received by the RBFRS during 2013/14. The ACFO explained that every complaint was thoroughly investigated and findings used to improve Services. All complaints had been investigated by the appropriate manager in accordance with the complaints procedure. No appeals had been referred to the Information Commissioner,

During 2013/14 30 complaints had been received the majority of which (20 complaints) pertained to Service Delivery. Trend data had been used to develop the following categories of complaints: driving (8), noise/nuisance (1), professionalism/ conduct (19) and other (2) and these had been set out in detail in the report together with the outcomes achieved.

Councillor Iain McCracken stated that he would have liked to have seen comparator data with those complaints received in the previous year. The ACFO confirmed that he would circulate that information prior to the next meeting but that the number of complaints in 2013/14 was comparable with those in the previous year. On the positive side a number of those items included as complaints were where contact had been made with the authority on certain issues and it might be that these should be disregarded in future due to the requirement to report publicly on the number of complaints received.

ACFO

Councillor Frank Abe noted that the nature of the complaints varied from using a mobile phone whilst driving to blue light issues where cars had had to move out of the way and damaged their wheels on the curb. He felt that the Fire Authority should give the benefit of the doubt to Officers in the instances where there was no evidence to back up the allegation.

The Chairman confirmed that he would not want to see the Fire Authority discredited and therefore he agreed that any issues which were not genuine complaints should be separated out in future. The ACFO

ACFO

confirmed that he would revisit the list and would confirm the end of year performance against that revised list of complaints. Councillor Alan Ward stated that it would also be useful to set out the number of complaints which had been upheld and those which had not been upheld. It was noted that in terms of discipline any complaint would be investigated and if upheld a note might then be placed on the individual's personal record file.

Councillor Alan Ward made reference to the complaint made on page 39 of the agenda whereby it was stated that the Fire Authority had not circulated a precept leaflet, instead relying on members of the public having access to the internet to obtain information. He asked if the Fire Authority had a policy. The DR said that if requested the Fire Authority would print off the information held on the website and send it in hard copy to individuals but that this was not something that happened on a regular basis. Copies were also placed in libraries. The ACFO confirmed that it was a result of the Fire Authority going digital that the complaint had arisen in the first instance.

RESOLVED THAT:

- (a) The report be noted;
- (b) The list would be amended so that only genuine complaints would be included in order to report accurately on end of year performance in this area.

239. EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME

Paul Southern, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), provided the Committee with a briefing note on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP). This was a cross government, multi-agency programme that would deliver the communication system of the future to the emergency services and other public safety users throughout Great Britain. The system would be called the Emergency Services Network (ESN).

ESN was the name of the mobile communications network which would provide integrated critical voice and broadband data services to all three emergency services (police, fire and ambulance). ESN was different to other communication networks as the users involved in maintaining public safety and saving lives required a mobile communications network with extensive coverage, high resilience, enhanced security and with specific functionality that allowed them to communicate even under the most extreme of circumstances. The three emergency services had been closely involved in developing an understanding of future operational needs together with defining requirements which would provide a system appropriate for the future where data was expected to dominate communications.

In addition to the emergency services, over 300 other organisations were active users of the current communication services and they were known as sharers and ESMCP was working with them to optimise their transition

to ESN, enabling them to benefit from economies of scale whilst maintaining existing inter-operability arrangements.

The programme was now in the procurement phase and Invitations to Tender had been issued in the Summer of 2014.

The RBFRS was part of the South Central Group and arising from this was the Fire Customer Group which was led by ACFO Furlong from Oxfordshire FRS with Temporary Area Manager Paul Maynard from RBFRS as Deputy Chair. The RBFRS transition date had originally been scheduled to be 2019 but due to contract extension issues with Airwave a programme of compressed transition was introduced which moved this forward to 2018. RBFRS would be one of the last groups to enter into transition, and therefore it should be able to learn any lessons arising from those who had gone before.

Two key areas of concern were around the billing arrangements and funding. Prior to implementation the anticipated service would need to be analysed and a service usage and cost report would need to be produced. Following approval, all billing details would need to be confirmed and set up. At present the RBFRS received a grant to cover the Airwave costs of approximately £260k per annum. On transition, there was the likelihood that this would no longer be available and costs would be incurred. Those costs were an unknown quantum at present as the programme was still in the tender stage. However, the ACFO confirmed that he would keep Members informed of the situation and this would be included on the Risk Register. The Programme Board would be presenting a set of papers in December to the Fire Authorities to seek assurance that they were content with the direction of travel with the transition solution and the technical solution, with ICF proposals and with the cost sharing and funding methodology.

Councillor Iain McCracken confirmed that he would like to be kept informed on this issue and that it should be included as a standing item on future Audit and Governance Committee meetings. He stated that this issue had been presented at the last LGA Fire Commission meeting and he confirmed that he would let the ACFO have the notes and slides from that meeting after he had conferred with Councillor Paul Bryant who had also attended. The programme appeared to be on track but it was likely that there would be a core offering with any 'extras' requiring additional funding.

CO

Councillor Alan Ward asked who would be providing funding and what rationale was being used to allocate it. The DR stated that it would form part of the New Burdens funding. Following the 09/11 incident it was recognised that communications at a major incident were inadequate. This would enable the Fire Authority to have a more robust system in place. The DR confirmed that this was also a standing item on the Treasurers meetings. However, the key issue was that this Government could not commit spending for another Government.

RESOLVED THAT:

- (a) The verbal update be noted;

- (b) This item to be included as a standing item at future meetings of the Audit and Governance committee.

240. FIREWATCH PID

Jan Chadaj, the Interim Head of IT, IHIT provided the Committee with a verbal update on the Firewatch PID as requested by the Committee at the 9th September 2014 meeting. As requested at that meeting all problems had been fixed apart from one and two new issues had also arisen. The next fix was due on Friday 24th October 2014 where two critical issues would need to be addressed. The user group felt that the delay in getting a fix in place due to the contractor missing deadlines was unacceptable and the Fire Authority was chasing on a daily basis. The last fix date had been missed by two months. The date for mobilisation had been set at March 2015.

Councillor Iain McCracken queried whether any penalty clauses had been included in the contract. The IHIT confirmed that the contract stated that all new releases would be fixed in due time and that there were no loop holes within the contract. Hampshire was also in a similar position and manual work arounds were in place. The IHIT confirmed that the Fire Authority could now retest within days due to the work undertaken by the user group.

RESOLVED THAT:

The verbal report be noted

241. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Gerry Barry, Information Manager (IM), provided the Committee with a verbal update on information management in the authority as follows:

- TVFC CoCo: Work associated with the Code of Connectivity (CoCo) to enable the Fire Authority to connect to Government Airwave system was progressing on target. It was hoped that the Fire Authority would be able to complete and submit the Annex C (technical requirement declaration) for approval in the third week of November 2014 which would then go forward to the Cabinet Office for approval.
- Most of the drafting work for the Information Governance Strategy was complete and departments were reviewing the activities to determine how they could be accommodated in their work schedules so that the implementation plan could be finalised and captured in risk registers.
- The rollout of protective marking (GPMS) had started with Information Management and Human Resources and progress would be reviewed in December.
- The RBFRS had introduced procedures for the redacting of sensitive information which was in response to a breach of information security at another Fire Authority which related to a document which had been placed on their website and subsequently deleted but which was

restored from the document's bit stream. The RBFRS procedure was a simple one using a manual process.

- RBFRS was starting a project to identify appropriate permissions/access to files and folders on network drives. This had been given a high priority as the risk of unauthorised access associated with any delay was not considered to be acceptable. However, external resource would be used to minimise the impact on IT. A set price had been negotiated for a 12 week time period which could be extended at no extra charge if this was necessary.
- A security review would be taking place following the move to the new BHQ. This would include an assessment of information that RBFRS held in order to plan archive arrangements and scanning of hard copy records that needed to be retained for a prolonged period of time.

RESOLVED THAT:

The verbal report be noted.

242. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 10th December 2014 at 6.30pm, Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7DS

(The meeting concluded at 7.17pm)