



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 6 July 2016 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors S Wright, R Polhill, P Booher, A Dirir and E Johnson

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that this meeting would be audio-recorded.

B Chair and Membership of Committee 2016/17

Members were asked to note the appointment of a Chair, Deputy Chair and membership of the Governance and Constitution Committee for 2016/17, as agreed by the Fire Authority at its annual meeting on 15 June 2016 and listed below:

Councillors:

S Wright – Chair

P Booher

A Dirir

E Johnson

D Marren

R Polhill – Deputy Chair

Substitute Members:

H Deynem

J Mercer

Members were also reminded that Mrs L Thomson and Mrs A Ruddy attend the Committee in a non-voting advisory capacity.

RESOLVED: That

[1] Membership of the Committee and appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair be noted.

C Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Marren.

D Declarations of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

E Minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee

RESOLVED: That

[1] the minutes of the meeting of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on Wednesday 30th March 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 DRAFT ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2015-16

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report to Members and explained that it gave them the opportunity to review the draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2015-16 prior to its presentation to the Fire Authority in September 2016. He provided Members with a summary of the background to this report and advised that one of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (2012) was the publication of an Annual Statement of Assurance. He explained that the Framework specified that the Statement should provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters.

He advised Members that the Local Code of Corporate Governance Framework already provided the Service with a simple structure for monitoring compliance and provided assurance under the six principles of the Code of Corporate Governance. It was decided by this Committee in November 2013 that the same process would be adopted for monitoring compliance with the National Framework requirements by adding a principle 7. He highlighted to Members Appendix 2 of the report which included a full review of evidence for the National Framework, detailed within principle 7 and the Local Code of Corporate Governance framework detailed within principles 1 – 6. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services concluded by confirming that the Service's internal auditors, Merseyside Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), had confirmed that it considered that the format of the Statement of Assurance remained fit for purpose.

A Member referred the Committee to the draft Statement of Assurance 2015-16 which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. He commented that Warrington BC Members had recently received training on the Treasury Management Strategy and queried whether this training could be provided for Fire Authority Members. It was agreed that a training session would be beneficial for members and the Democratic Services Manager advised that this could take place as part of the Members Induction session on Finance and Budget Setting.

A Member queried the meaning of the term 'partner' in the context of the document. She asked if there could be further clarification on how the Authority ensured that the roles and responsibilities of partners were defined. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Members that there were agreements between the Authority and partners to protect the Cheshire Fire and Rescue

Service brand. He drew Members' attention to key improvement areas that had been identified. One of these referred to the development of a partnership toolkit which would provide descriptions of and resources related to partnerships and collaborations. This would be submitted to the Governance and Constitution Committee for review.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services also referred Members to the section on the Blue Light Collaboration Programme within the draft Statement of Assurance 2015-16. He explained that this programme was not a partnership and that the Authority would be entering into a number of contracts due to the significant obligations and liabilities that the collaboration entailed.

A member queried the presentation of figures in respect of the carbon reduction target and suggested that it would be useful to have progress on carbon reduction by tonnes measured as a percentage against the 40% reduction target. She also suggested that it would be helpful to have a timescale for elements of the environmental strategy included in the report.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2015-16 be approved for submission to the Fire Authority in September 2016.

3 REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report which provided an update on the current position in relation to Whistleblowing. The Authority's policy and procedure on Whistleblowing was attached as Appendix 1 in the report and it was noted that the Government had issued further guidance for employees since the policy was adopted. He explained that the current Policy would be updated and presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Members that the Authority had not received any complaints under the Whistleblowing Procedure since the last report to the committee in 2014.

Members discussed their experiences of Whistleblowing policy and procedures within their own unitary areas and the role that Members played in the process.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the content of the report be noted; and

[2] a further report be presented to the next meeting of this Committee when the current Whistleblowing Policy has been further reviewed and updated.

4 ANNUAL REPORT - CORPORATE COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced this report and advised Members that it provided information regarding compliments and complaints received about the Service during the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. He explained that this report was presented annually to this Committee in this format.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services described the Service's two-tier approach to complaints, which aimed for all complaints to be resolved at initial contact allowing them to be classed as informal. He referred Members to a table in the report which contained performance comparison figures from the past five reporting periods. He highlighted that there had been a reduction of informal complaints and that no formal complaints were received throughout 2015-16.

A Member referred the Committee to a complaint regarding a school visit and queried how the Service ensured that pupils were happy to participate. An independent member informed the Committee that schools now asked for written consent from parents for children to participate in these events.

Members wished to thank those involved with handling complaints and compliments and felt that the report helped affirm the view that the Service was performing well.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the information regarding Compliments and Complaints made during the period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 be noted.

5 SUMMARY OF MEMBERS ATTENDANCE JUNE 2015 TO MAY 2016

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that this report provided Members with information in relation to Members' attendance for the Committee's consideration. He referred Members to Appendix 1 attached to the report, which summarised Member attendance at the Fire Authority and three main committees for June 2014 to May 2015.

Members were asked to consider whether they wished to further discuss the principles previously adopted in respect of the monitoring of attendance. Members were in agreement that there were no concerns arising from the findings of this report.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the summary of Member attendance at meetings of the Authority and its three main Committees for 2015-16 be noted.