



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority
Audit, Scrutiny and Standards Committee
Wednesday, 14 January 2026, 10:30

Chair: Mr D Morehead
Vice-Chair: Mr C McSweeney

Minutes

Members Present: Mr A Amos, Mr A Bailes, Mr S Bastow, Mr O Cleary, Mr D Davies, Mr M Dunkley, Mr C McSweeney, Mr D Morehead, Mr R M Udall

0365 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr D Aubrey, Cllr R Morris and Cllr T Wells.

0366 Named Substitutes

Cllr B Hopkins substituted for Cllr D Aubrey.

0367 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no interests declared.

0368 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

[Cllr A Amos entered the meeting at 10.31am].

0369 External Audit Completion Report and Letter of Representation 2024/25

The Treasurer introduced the report and commented that this was the first audit by Bishop Fleming and was the easiest to date.

[Cllr O Cleary entered the meeting at 10.34am].

The External Auditor went through the Audit Completion Report

explaining that they anticipated issuing a disclaimed opinion due to the lack of assurance over opening balances arising from the late production of the 2023/24 financial statements by the Authority. There was discussion in regard to the specific significant risks highlighted, in particular to the valuation of land and buildings. The Auditors had requested detailed floor plans of every building however this had never been required before and there was a large cost implication which needed further consideration.

There was discussion in regard to the audit fees and whether they were value for money. The Treasurer responded that the audit fees across the whole of the local government sector had increased considerably, they were not disproportionate to other fees. The audit contracts were led nationally by the LGA with an extensive tender process and valuation. The fees had been market tested and were the best available.

The Treasurer confirmed that the Authority did have the ability to challenge the fee for the Audit, however they would not be received until February, once the accounts had been signed off.

Members approved the Letter of Representation.

RESOLVED that:

i) the Audit Completion Report was considered before approving the Statement of Accounts; and

ii) the Letter of Representation was approved.

0370 Statement of Accounts 2024/25

The Treasurer presented the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 for approval.

Members were reminded that the draft accounts had been signed off on 20 June 2025 and published immediately and since then there had been no fundamental changes to the Accounts, but there had been some presentational and disclosure improvements.

Members were asked to approve the final Statement of Accounts 2024/25 which would enable the External Auditor to issue an Audit Opinion as soon as it was ready. This would then be published in the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 together with the already approved Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 be approved.

0371 External Audit Annual Report 2024/25

The Treasurer introduced the External Audit Annual Report 2024/25 for Members' consideration and scrutiny of Management responses to recommendations.

The External Auditor presented the audit conclusions and key findings arising from the value for money work. A few recommendations had been raised with management and comments had been received back.

Members scrutinised the Auditor's recommendations and management responses particularly in relation to KPIs and budget risk information and Members agreed that the KPIs were unnecessary and Auditors could review achievements in the performance reports available.

Members were pleased that there were no weaknesses or risks, just a way of doing things better. It was a very positive report and improvements on the issues raised last year.

RESOLVED that the External Audit Annual Report 2024/25 be accepted in whole.

0372 Internal Audit Progress Report

The Head of Internal Audit - WIASS presented an update regarding the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26, the results of which would be used to form the annual opinion on the Service's framework of internal control, risk management and governance.

Members were pleased to note that good progress was being made, delivery of the Internal Audit Plan was on track and all remaining work for the current financial year was scheduled in and resourced.

The Annual Report would be presented at the April meeting and thanks were given to Service staff during the audit process, which could only be completed with their support.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

0373 People Strategy 2025-2030

The Assistant Chief Officer - Director of Prevention presented a report to provide Members the opportunity to review and scrutinise the People Strategy 2025-2030. The Strategy was designed as a high-level enabling strategy which identified key aims, to support the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and overall strategic

priorities.

Members noted that the Strategic Leadership Board would have overarching responsibility for monitoring the delivery of the strategy through the annual business plans devolved through to the respective Directorate/Departmental Leads.

The People Strategy would be reviewed in 2030 in conjunction with strategic plans.

Members approved the People Strategy, which would be communicated across the workforce and published on the Service website.

RESOLVED that having scrutinised the details of the People Strategy 2025-2030, it be agreed that the People Strategy be approved. In particular it be noted that:

i) The People Strategy 2025-2030 supports the delivery of the Core Strategies;

ii) The People Strategy reflects the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services; and

iii) Progress against the People Strategy will be regularly reviewed.

0374 Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2024-2025 and Equality Objective Progress Update

The Assistant Chief Officer - Director of Prevention presented a report for Members to scrutinise the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2024-2025 and progress made against the Service's Equality Objectives.

Members were pleased to note that female representation continues to increase at a consistent pace on an annual basis, with the proportion of women across the Service at 21% (an increase of 1% from 2024). In particular 34% of Middle and Strategic leaders are women and women make up 54% of Support staff roles.

Members were also pleased to note that the Service is confident that its gender pay gap does not result from paying men and women differently for the same work, but is a result of the roles in which they work and the salaries these roles attract. Men and Women performing the same role receive equal pay. However the Service currently consists of more men than women, with an underrepresentation of women in senior operational positions.

Members agreed that the Service is achieving demonstrable progress

against its Equality Objectives, reaffirming its commitment to meeting the needs of our communities.

Members approved the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2024-2025 for publication on the Service website with gender pay gap information being reported to the government reporting website as per the Regulations.

RESOLVED that having scrutinised the details of the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2024-2025 and progress made against the Service's Equality Objectives, those details be accepted and approved, and the following headlines be noted:

i) The Equality and Gender Pay Gap Report 2024-2025 meets the requirement to publish equality information annually;

ii) The Gender Pay Gap as of 31 March 2025 is 5.1%; and

iii) The Service is achieving demonstrable progress against its Equality Objectives, reaffirming its commitment to meeting the needs of the Community.

0375 Update on the Activities of the Women@HWFire Group

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented an update on the work of the Women@HWFire group.

Members noted that the work delivered demonstrates the organisational commitment to support under-represented groups within HWFRS. It has added significant value to multiple areas of work and continues to influence the changing profile in operational and support staffing managerial roles across the Service. The group remains committed to driving diversity within HWFRS as an organisational priority.

RESOLVED that the activities of the Women@HWFire group be noted.

[Cllr C McSweeny left the meeting at 12.14pm].

0376 Safeguarding Assurance Annual Report

The Assistant Chief Officer - Director of Prevention provided an update on the Service's commitment to safeguarding, and progress against the Safeguarding Fire Standard for the year January - December 2025.

Members were pleased to note that the Safeguarding Fire Standard is firmly embedded within HWFRS, with substantial assurance demonstrated across the Standard's criteria. Continued progress against the Safeguarding Fire Standard is reviewed quarterly and informs the

Prevention Directorate's annual planning.

It was agreed that safeguarding referral data would be added to the next quarterly performance report for Members' information.

RESOLVED that having scrutinised the progress of the Prevention department's activity against the Safeguarding Fire Standard, Members are recommended to conclude that the Service has substantial assurance of the Standard's requirements and have identified targeted actions to build upon existing strengths and drive continuous Service improvement.

0377 Health and Safety Committee Update: July 2025 to September 2025 (Quarter 2)

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented a Health and Safety update on activities and items of significance.

Members were pleased to note that the total number of safety events reported in Quarter 2 had decreased compared to the previous quarter driven by less vehicle collisions.

Two events had been reported to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) under the RIDDOR regulations, due to a loss of working days/potentially dangerous occurrences, both of which also had a specialist investigation. There were also 4 Specialist Investigations carried out in Quarter 2. No investigations identified any significant issues or causes for concern.

RESOLVED that the following issues be noted:

- i) The involvement of the Service in Health and Safety initiatives;***
- ii) Health and Safety performance information recorded during Quarter 2 2025/26; and***
- iii) Workforce Health & Wellbeing performance Quarter 2 2025/26.***

The Meeting ended at: 12:27

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman