



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 16 April 2025, 10:30

**Chairman: Mr M Hart**

**Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos**

## **Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr B Clayton, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mrs E Marshall, Ms N McVey, Ms D Toynbee

### **0338 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr B Brookes and Cllr R Morris.

Cllr Hart explained that he had to leave at 11.15am in order to attend a funeral. If the business had not been concluded by then, a Chairman would be elected from the floor to enable the meeting to continue.

### **0339 Named Substitutes**

There were no named substitutes.

### **0340 Declarations of Interest (if any)**

There were no interests declared.

### **0341 Confirmation of Minutes**

***RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.***

### **0342 Internal Audit Progress Report**

The Head of Internal Audit - WIASS updated the Committee regarding the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

Members were pleased to note that 5 assignments had been completed and finalised, 1 assignment was at the fieldwork stage and a report would be issued shortly and 3 assignments were in progress and work was

being prioritised for completion in the next month. There was concern that the Cyber Security audit had not yet been completed, which had an anticipated reporting date of April 2025. Members were assured that this would be completed by the end of April 2025.

Members noted that now the Service was fully resourced, the new 80% team productivity target had been reached at the end of February, which was set for achievement by 31 March 2025. At the beginning of the financial year productivity was running at 66%. The Treasurer confirmed that he was pleased with this progress and the work of the Internal Auditor should be recognised.

There were approximately 10 days of assurance work left on the remaining in progress assignments. The Annual Internal Audit Opinion for 2024/25 would be presented at the next meeting.

***RESOLVED that the report be noted.***

#### **0343 Internal Audit Plan 2025/26**

The Head of Internal Audit - WIASS presented the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan for approval.

Members noted that an audit operational programme was discussed and agreed with the Strategic Leadership Board on 17 March 2025 which was now being brought before Members for consideration and approval, with or without amendments. The audit programme proposed was for a total provision of 104 audit days, as agreed with the Treasurer, including support days and management of delivery. Members were pleased to note that the charges for 2025/26 had been reduced by approximately £5,000.

Progress against the Internal Audit Plan would be closely monitored and the Head of Internal Audit would report the position to Committee along with any exceptions identified during follow up work.

***RESOLVED that the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 was approved.***

#### **0344 Update of the Constitution**

The General Counsel, Clerk and Monitoring Officer presented the minor updates to the Authority's Constitution for review.

Members noted that this had been a comprehensive review of the Authority's existing Constitution, it was still fit for purpose with few substantive changes proposed other than updating relevant financial limits/thresholds and adopting a new simplified code of conduct in line

with the LGA model form. The opportunity had also been taken to ensure the wording of the Constitution more explicitly reflected the HMICFRS 'characteristics of good'.

Members requested under the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, paragraphs 3.7 and 5.4 to settle any claim discussion should also include the Chairman to the Authority as appropriate. Although this is common practice anyway, it was agreed to add the wording for completeness. Under the Articles of Constitution, 6.4 Call in (b) - Deputy Monitoring Officer to be added in the absence of the Monitoring Officer.

The proposed amendments were agreed by Members, with the additions added, and recommended to the full Authority for adoption.

***RESOLVED that draft amendments to the Constitution be recommended to the full Authority for adoption.***

#### **0345 National Fraud Initiative 2024/25**

The Treasurer presented a report to allow Members to scrutinise the Authority's approach and response to the National Fraud Initiative (NFI).

Members noted that the initial NFI reports were received in February 2025 and as usual the very low overall number of matches meant that every one would be examined in detail and this process was now underway. Progress was not as advanced as it would normally be at this time as the finance team had been focussing their resources on the financial statements, however the historical track record of NFI meant this was a low risk and highly likely that no fraud would be detected.

A final report would be brought to the next Audit and Standards Committee to provide final details in relation to any outstanding matches.

***RESOLVED that the Committee notes that:***

***i) the process of examining all National Fraud Initiative matches was underway and that no fraud had been detected; and***

***ii) a further update relating to the outstanding matches would be brought to a future meeting.***

#### **0346 2023 Independent Cultural Audit Recommendations Progress Update**

The Assistant Chief Officer - Prevention presented a report for Members to scrutinise the progress against the recommendations from the 2023

Independent Cultural Audit Report conducted by ioda Ltd.

Following the full Cultural Audit Report published in July 2023, 15 recommendations were made aimed at enhancing the Service's overall positive culture and making EDI and ethics the fabric of Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. An action plan was put in place to meet the recommendations over the next two years.

Members noted that significant progress had been made, 10 out of the 15 recommendations were fully met with 5 being partially complete and were expected to be fully completed in 2025/26. Members congratulated Officers in the progress that had been made in such a short space of time.

***RESOLVED that the Committee noted the progress made to meet the 2023 Cultural Audit Recommendations.***

**Cllr M Hart left the meeting at 11.17am, Cllr A Hardman was elected as Chairman for the remainder of the meeting.**

**0347 Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2024/25**

The Assistant Chief Officer - Prevention presented Members with details of compliments, complaints, concerns and requests for information made by the public to the Service over the past 12 months.

Members noted that during 2024/25 there had been a decrease of complaints/concerns received, a slight decrease in the number of compliments received and an increase in the number of requests for information. There was a decrease in the number of concerns received from staff via the internal 'Say So' confidential and anonymous reporting tool and no concerns had been raised via 'Say So PLUS', the confidential and anonymous reporting tool for members of the public.

Members were pleased to note that Officers were satisfied that there were no significant levels of recurring themes or trends in complaints being reported to give any cause for concern.

***RESOLVED that the Committee noted that during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:***

***i) a total of 101 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests containing 374 queries about the Service were received and a total of 11 Subject Access Requests (SARs) were received. There were 209 Miscellaneous Information Requests (MIRs) during this period. No***

**requests were passed to the Information Commissioners Office for review.**

**ii) a total of 57 compliments were received from the public;**

**iii) 32 complaints or concerns about Service activities were made;**

**iv) 20 other complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals;**

**v) None of the complainants appealed the response provided and therefore were not passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for further investigation;**

**vi) 9 concerns were received from staff via the internal 'Say So' confidential and anonymous reporting tool; and**

**vii) There were no concerns received via 'Say So PLUS' the confidential and anonymous reporting tool for members of the public.**

**0348 Health and Safety Committee Update: October 2024 to December 2024 (Quarter 3)**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided Members with a Health and Safety update on activities and items of significance for scrutiny.

Members noted that the total number of safety events reported in Quarter 3 had increased compared to the previous quarter. This was due to an increase in minor vehicle collisions and damage to Service vehicles by third parties and near misses reported by staff which indicated a positive Health and Safety reporting culture within the Service.

One event had been reported to the Health and Safety Executive due to a loss of working days/dangerous occurrences which was related to a potential Breathing Apparatus malfunction. A specialist Investigation was commissioned, the outcome of which was operator error rather than a fault.

Absence due to staff sickness had risen slightly from 2.73 days lost in Quarter 2 to 2.85 days lost per person in Quarter 3.

Cllr B Clayton, who is the Health and Safety Member representative, thanked Officers for his time spent attending the Health and Safety meetings, it was a pleasure to be a representative. He understood how important the Committee was and how simple changes had made a huge

difference to crews.

**RESOLVED that the following issues were noted:**

***i) The involvement of the Service in Health and Safety initiatives;***

***ii) Health and Safety performance information recorded during October - December (Quarter 3); and***

***iii) Workforce Health and Wellbeing performance (Quarter 3).***

The meeting closed with a thank you to Cllr I Hardiman who was retiring after 8 years on the Authority. Cllr Hardiman said he was very proud to have been on the Fire Authority.

The Meeting ended at: 11:45

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman