



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 19 April 2023, 10:30

Chairman: Mr M Hart

Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos

Minutes

Members Present: Mr D Boatright, Mr S Bowen, Mr B Brookes, Mr B Clayton, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mrs E Marshall, Ms N McVey, Mr R J Morris

0271 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr A Amos and Cllr D Toynbee.

[Cllr Boatright entered the meeting at 10.31am].

0272 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

0273 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no interests declared.

0274 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In respect of minute 0260 External Audit Findings Report 2021/22 (to make representations regarding property valuations), the Treasurer advised that this was delayed pending the completion of the audit. Having received confirmation on 13 April that this was complete, the Treasurer advised that this will now be done.

0275 Internal Audit Progress Report

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with an

update in regards to the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2022/23.

Members were pleased to note that there were no high priority recommendations reported. With regard to the review of Payroll, Members were assured that there was a clear management plan now in place to address the points identified. All finalised reviews will be reported to Committee in due course.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

0276 Internal Audit Plan 2023/24

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with the 2023/24 Audit Plan Revision.

Following the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 18 January, the Strategic Leadership Board considered some revisions to the Plan which were accepted by Internal Audit that reflected the current risk and changing environment. Members were assured that there should be no issues reporting the annual opinion at the end of 2023/24.

RESOLVED that the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan Revision be noted.

0277 Annual Governance Statement

The Head of Legal Services presented the draft Annual Governance Statement for approval.

Members were informed that the Authority has to review its governance arrangements once a year via self assessment. Members were pleased to note that the Authority had provided evidence of compliance with all the core and supporting principles of the CIPFA/Solace Code of Good Governance.

There were no areas where immediate action was required and there were no areas where the direction of travel had decreased during 2022/23 or where the status was less than satisfactory.

Members were pleased to note that for another year all areas were 'green' which gave the assurance necessary to approve the draft annual statement. Members gave compliments for all the work that was done to ensure compliance.

RESOLVED that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved.

0278 National Fraud Initiative 2022/23

The Treasurer updated Members on the National Fraud Initiative.

Members were informed that this was a biennial exercise for local government and other public bodies currently undertaken by the Cabinet Office to identify data matches to eliminate the possibility of fraud and/or error.

It was anticipated that the results of this year's exercise would mirror previous exercises, none of which had identified any frauds involving HWFRS.

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

RESOLVED it be noted that:

- i) the process of examining all National Fraud Initiative matches is underway and that no fraud has been detected; and**
- ii) a further update relating to the completion of the fraud initiative will be brought to a future meeting.**

0279 Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2022/23

The Head of Legal Services presented a report on compliments, complaints, concerns and requests for information made by the public to the Service over the past 12 months.

Members were informed that there was an increase in the number of complaints received over the past 12 months compared to last year and were assured there were no recurring themes or trends in the concerns and complaints to give any cause for concern.

Members were assured that all complaints are investigated by duty officers, draft responses are sent to Legal Services to be reviewed and all complainants can ask for a further review by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer or make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

There was concern over the number of driving incidents, however reassurance was provided by the Chief Fire Officer that these were low level incidents and were in proportion to the number of miles that were driven. All incidents were analysed and investigated.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes that during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

- i) a total of 297 requests for information containing 774 queries***

about the Service were received. No requests were passed to the Information Commissioners Office for review.

ii) a total of 60 compliments were received from the public;

iii) 39 complaints or concerns about Service activities were made; and

iv) 26 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals;

v) 4 of the complainants appealed the response provided but none were passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for further investigation

vi) the Service has recently implemented an external, confidential reporting line for complaints and concerns which will be included in future reports.

**0280 Health and Safety Committee Update: October to December 2022
(Quarter 3)**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the Committee with a Health and Safety update on activities and items of significance.

Members were pleased to note that the number of safety events recorded in Quarter 3 had decreased by 3 compared to the previous quarter. The most significant decrease was in the personal injuries category which decreased by 6.

The Chief Fire Officer provided an explanation into the national review of contaminants. It is possible there could be legal cases in the next few years as some research had shown there are a certain type of cancers that firefighters may be more likely to contract. Over recent years a range of measures have been introduced for cleaning so as to minimise the risk to staff.

Members were pleased to note that fitness equipment had now been introduced across most stations and with the help of newly qualified in-house Personal Trainers, the Service was now in a position to work with employees to make sure their fitness is maintained.

Members were pleased that the violence against staff was at zero, which it hadn't been over the past few years. The Chief Fire Officer reaffirmed that violence was very tame within the two communities and was very rare.

RESOLVED that the following issues, in particular, be noted:

- i) The involvement of the Service in Health and Safety initiatives;**
- ii) Health and Safety performance information recorded during October to December 2022 (Quarter 3); and**
- iii) Workforce Health & Wellbeing performance (Quarter 3).**

0281 Late item: Statement of Accounts 2021/22

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this Late Item pursuant to section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 as a matter of urgency on the grounds that

- a decision is required before the date of the next scheduled meeting of the Committee so as not to impact upon the preparation of the 2022/23 accounts.**

The Treasurer presented Members with the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 to be approved. Members were reminded that at the last meeting in January the Auditors had expected the remaining work to take 2 weeks, however this had actually taken 3 months and notification was only given on Thursday last week that the audit of the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 was complete.

Members were informed that the Accounts were fundamentally unchanged from the draft version issued in January and the audit findings report was similarly unchanged. Therefore the Accounts were ready for approval by Members.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 be approved.

The Meeting ended at: 11:32

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman