



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 18 January 2023, 10:30

Minutes

Members Present: Mr A Amos, Mr D Boatright, Mr S Bowen, Mr B Brookes, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mrs E Marshall, Ms N McVey

0256 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr B Clayton, Cllr R Morris and Cllr D Toynbee.

0257 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

0258 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no interests declared.

0259 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

0260 External Audit Findings Report 2021/22

The External Auditor, Grant Thornton UK LLP, presented the Audit Findings Report for consideration and the Letter of Representation for approval.

Members were disappointed that the Audit had not been completed, which was mostly due to the incompleteness of audit work on land and building valuations currently being undertaken.

The External Auditor advised that the Accounting entries for the valuations used were all correct, but there were additional questions about the valuations themselves.

[Cllr A Hardman entered the room at 10.40am].

Members therefore were not able to approve the Letter of Representation and the Audit Findings Report could only be noted.

RESOLVED:

***i) that the Audit Findings Report be noted; and
ii) that representations be made to CIPFA and the National Audit Office regarding the treatment of property valuations within the accounts.***

0261 Statement Of Accounts 2021/22

The Treasurer presented the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts.

Unfortunately, due to the incompleteness of the Audit, Members were unable to approve the Statement of Accounts. Members noted that it was hoped the final Accounts would be presented at the Authority meeting on 13 February 2023, subject to the completion of the valuations. If this was not possible, the next convenient meeting would be the Audit and Standards Committee meeting on 19 April 2023.

[Cllr D Boatright entered the meeting at 10.51am].

RESOLVED that the approval of the Statement of Accounts be deferred pending completion of the external audit.

0262 External Auditors' Annual Report 2021/22

The External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP presented the Auditors Annual Report 2021/22.

Members noted the financial pressures that will be faced over the coming years and that further savings plans would be required to address the structural budget gap and future budgetary pressures in particular with pay costs and inflation.

RESOLVED that the Auditors Annual Report 2021/22 from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP, be noted.

0263 Internal Audit Draft Audit Plan 2023/24

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented the Draft Audit Plan for 2023/24.

Members were pleased to note that operational progress against the internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 will be closely monitored and the Head of

Internal Audit Shared Service will report the position to the Committee along with any exceptions identified during follow up work.

There was discussion relating to building maintenance and construction programmes. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that a full survey looking at the carbon footprint at all locations would be built into the property schedule which would look at the energy usage. Members were also pleased to note that the build programme was accelerating despite a challenging financial background.

RESOLVED that the 2023/24 Draft Internal Audit Plan be approved.

0264 Internal Audit Progress Report

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented an update in regard to the delivery of the Internal Audit plan 2022/23.

Members were pleased to note that there were no high priority recommendations reported and robust management action plans had been agreed and were in place to address the findings from the review. Follow ups completed to date had not identified any material exceptions to report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

0265 Contract Standing Orders

The Head of Legal Services presented amended Contract Standing Orders for approval.

It had been recommended that the threshold at which competitive quotes would be required be increased to £15,000 instead of £5,000. Members instead decided that this figure be increased to £20,000 as it would help facilitate the continued use of local suppliers wherever possible and create less work for the Service.

RESOLVED that the Fire Authority be recommended to approve the amended Contract Standing Orders set out in Appendix A.

0266 Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2021-2022 and Equality Objectives Progress Update

The Assistant Director of Prevention presented the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report – 2021-2022 and a summary of progress against the Service's Equality Objectives 2021-2025 for Q1-Q2 2022-2023.

Although it was disappointing to note that there was a decrease of 1%

from last year of the number of operational female staff, it was positive to learn that an action plan for 2023-2025 was being developed to support recruitment and career progression to the most under-represented groups, most notably women into operational roles and also into more senior level positions. The new Inclusion & Organisational Development Manager would be supporting the delivery of these priorities.

Members were pleased with the continued support available to staff with with dyslexia and other types of neurodiversity and noted the fantastic outcomes where support and guidance had resulted in staff thriving in the workplace.

Members approved the Equality and Gender Pay Gap Report 2021-2022 for publication on the Service's website.

RESOLVED that:

i) the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2021-2022 be approved for publication; and

ii) progress made against the Equality Objectives 2021-2025 for Q1–Q2 2022-2023 be noted.

0267 Update on the Prevention Cause of Concern

The Assistant Director of Prevention presented an update on the Service's progress against the Cause of Concern issued by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in relation to Prevention Activity.

Members were informed that the Inspectorate revisited the Service between 22 and 24 November 2022 to talk with relevant people, assist with triangulating evidence and review the systems and processes in place following the issuing of the Cause of Concern. Following that there was a hot debrief on 2 December 2022 with the Chief Fire Officer and Inspectorate and although there was no clear indication that the Cause of Concern had been discharged, the Chief Fire Officer felt confident that this would be the case due to investing heavily in prevention activity.

It was hoped that the Service would receive the outcome of the revisit on Friday 20 January 2023 and Members would be informed as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the update on the Service's progress against the Cause of Concern in relation to Prevention activity be noted.

0268 Update On Activities Of Women @HWfire group

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

Members were pleased to note the work delivered by Woman@HWFire which demonstrated the organisation's commitment to supporting under-represented groups within HWFRS.

RESOLVED that the activities of the Women@HWFire group since it was set up in 2019 be noted.

0269 Health and Safety Committee Update: April to June 2022 (Quarter 1)

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the Health and Safety update for Quarter 1 on activities and items of significance.

Following a query, Members were pleased to note that the sickness levels within the Service were low in comparison with other authorities, despite the increase in respiratory conditions during the quarter.

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 April to June 2022 (Quarter 1); and***
- iii) Workforce Health & Wellbeing performance (Quarter 1).***

0270 Health and Safety Committee Update: July to September 2022 (Quarter 2)

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the Health & Safety update for Quarter 2 on activities and items of significance.

Members were pleased to note that following the resignation of the Health and Safety Advisor, a new Advisor had been recruited and would be starting later this month.

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 July to September 2022 (Quarter 2); and***
- iii) Workforce Health & Wellbeing performance.***

The Meeting ended at: 12:17

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman