



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 17 January 2024, 10:30

**Chairman:** Mr M Hart

**Vice-Chairman:** Mr A Amos

## **Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr A Amos, Mr B Clayton, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart

### **0291 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Boatright-Greene, Cllr B Brookes, Cllr E Marshall, Cllr N McVey, Cllr R Morris and Cllr D Toynbee.

### **0292 Named Substitutes**

There were no named substitutes.

### **0293 Declarations of Interest (if any)**

There were no interests declared.

### **0294 Confirmation of Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **0295 Internal Audit Progress and Audit Plan Revision Report**

The Treasurer, on behalf of the Interim Audit Team Leader of WIASS, presented an update regarding the delivery of the Internal Audit plan 2023/24 and the 2023/24 Audit Plan Revision.

The Treasurer explained to Members that normally the Head of WIASS, as Chief Internal Auditor, would attend this meeting to present the report. However unfortunately WIASS lost both the Head and deputy Head at around the same time and the service had been operating with an interim Audit Lead until the new Head started in late February. The interim Audit Lead was unable to attend in person.

Members were informed that the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24

continued to see progress, however revisions had been made to the plan due to resourcing issues. There had been no significant reduction in risk assurance and coverage. For the 2023/24 finalised reports issued to date there were no high priority recommendations to report and robust management action plans had been agreed and are in place to address the findings from the review. All finalised reviews would be reported to the Committee on completion.

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

**0296 National Fraud Initiative 2022/23**

The Treasurer updated Members on the National Fraud Initiative (NFI).

Members were pleased to note that the outstanding data matches all referred to one report which had now been fully investigated and no fraud had been detected.

***RESOLVED that the Committee noted that the process of examining all National Fraud Initiative matches was now complete and no fraud had been detected.***

**0297 Safeguarding Assurance – Annual Report**

The Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Prevention updated Members on the Service's commitment to safeguarding.

Members were pleased to note that it was mandatory that all staff completed the level of safeguarding training which was relevant to their role. Staff were also regularly informed of developments in safeguarding policies and procedures with a suite of promotional items such as posters and credit cards on the safeguarding reporting procedure. Triple play videos had also been produced to assist staff in embedding their understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding safeguarding and the Service website and SharePoint sites had been reviewed and updated.

Members also noted that all activities related to safeguarding continued to be developed and evolved to align with the Safeguarding Fire Standard and Prevention Strategy. Activities would be quality assured, monitored and reviewed regularly.

***RESOLVED that the progress of the Prevention department's activity against the Fire Standards Board's Safeguarding Fire Standard be noted.***

**0298 Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2022-2023 and Equality Objectives Progress Update**

The Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Prevention presented the Equality and Gender Pay Gap Report 2022-2023 and a summary of work completed during Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2023-2024 against the Service's Equality Objectives 2021-2025.

It was questioned why the data for gender reassignment was not published. The Assistant Chief Officer explained that due to low numbers it was omitted to avoid identifying employees. It was suggested that if it stated that there were less than 1%, this would not identify anyone. Officers agreed to look into this further.

Members thanked Officers for a very positive and understanding report and approved it's publication on the Service website.

***RESOLVED that:***

***i) Members noted the content of the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2022-2023 and approved its publication on the Service website.***

***i) Members noted the good progress made against the Service's Equality Objectives.***

**0299 Update on the Activities of the Women@HWFire Group**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the work of Women@HWFire group.

Members noted that the work delivered by Women@HWFire demonstrated the organisational commitment to supporting under-represented groups within HWFRS. It had added significant value to multiple areas of work and continued to influence the changing profile in operational and support staffing managerial roles across the Service. The group remained committed to driving diversity within HWFRS as an organisational priority.

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

**0300 Health and Safety Committee Update: April to Sept 2023 (Quarters 1 & 2)**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented a Health and Safety update on

activities and items of significance for quarters 1 and 2, April to September 2023.

Members noted the National, Regional and local activities that had taken place during the 2 quarters. Members also noted that although the total number of safety events reported had increased by 17 compared to the previous quarters, the 10 Near Hit reports (something with the potential to cause harm) indicated a positive step forward for safety reporting.

Members also noted that in comparison to Quarter 1, there had been a slight decrease in the total days/shifts lost to sickness absence for all staff (Q1 at 2.31 versus Q2 at 2.29), with 848 day/shifts lost overall. The 3 main causes of sickness absence were; Mental Health (44%) Muscular-Skeletal (MSK) (30%), and Respiratory (11%). Members had concern with the increase of Mental Health cases. The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that although there was an emerging trend, the Service provided support with specialised counsellors where appropriate.

***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 Sept 2023 (Quarters 1 & 2)***
- iii) Workforce Health & Wellbeing performance (Quarters 1 & 2)***

The Meeting ended at: 11:55

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman