



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 28 July 2021, 10:30

**Chairman: Mr M Hart**

**Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos**

## **Minutes**

**Members Present:** Mr S Bowen, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mrs E Marshall, Ms N McVey, Mr J Robinson, Mrs D Toynbee

### **197 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr A Amos, Cllr B Brookes, Cllr B Clayton and Cllr R Morris.

### **198 Named Substitutes**

There were no named substitutes.

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

There were no interests declared.

### **200 Confirmation of Minutes**

***RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.***

### **201 Draft Statement of Accounts 2020/21**

The Treasurer presented Members with the draft 2020/21 Statement of Accounts for information prior to approval at the next Committee meeting.

*[Cllr Robinson entered the meeting at 10.34am]*

The Treasurer informed Members that the dates for approval and publishing of the Accounts had been relaxed for a second year due to Covid which meant that this year the Accounts had to be approved and

published by 30 September, which was on track.

***RESOLVED that the Draft Statement of Accounts 2020/21 be noted.***

**202 External Audit Plan (2020/21 Accounts)**

The External Audit Plan, which sets out the work to be undertaken in 2021/22 in respect of the 2020/21 Audit, was presented to Members by the Authority's External Auditor, Grant Thornton UK LLP.

Members were informed that for the last 5/6 years the main focus of the Value for Money aspect of the audit had been on finances, however this year it was much wider with more work on governance arrangements that were in place, how the organisation understood its cost base and the benchmark that was set against other organisations.

Members were pleased to note that the audit had started last week and it was hoped it would be completed by the end of September.

***RESOLVED that the External Audit Plan 2021/22 (2020/21 Accounts) be noted.***

**203 Informing the Audit Risk Assessment 2020/21**

Members were presented with the Audit Risk Assessment carried out by Grant Thornton UK LLP, the Authority's External Auditor, in deriving the External Audit Plan 2021/22 in respect of the 2020/21 Accounts.

Members were pleased to note that there were no specific risks highlighted that were abnormal, or which caused the Treasurer or External Auditor particular concern.

***RESOLVED that the External Auditor's "Informing the Audit Risk Assessment" report be noted.***

**204 Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/21**

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with the Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/21.

Members were informed that the original plan for 2020/21 had been revised in view of the pandemic and some changes had been made, however the coverage achieved was sufficient to provide an opinion with just a few reviews rolled forward to 2021/22. Members were pleased to note that all reviews that took place last year had assurance and there were no high priority recommendations reported.

***RESOLVED that the Committee note the Internal Audit Charter and***

***that the audit plan delivered in 2020/21 had provided an assurance level of “full” for four core financial areas and that no limited or below assurance areas had been reported or any high priority recommendations.***

**205 Internal Audit Draft Audit Plan 2021/22**

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with the Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22.

Members were informed that the Plan, which includes the brought forward audits from last year which were already taking place, was based on risk factors. This Plan was flexible and therefore if Officers decided resources needed to be moved then discussions would take place and the Plan would be altered accordingly. Members were pleased to note that regular updates would be provided to the Committee.

***RESOLVED that the 2021/22 Draft Internal Audit Plan be approved.***

**206 Risk Management and Strategic Risk Register – Annual Update**

The Chief Fire Officer presented Members with an annual update on the Risk Management Framework and Strategic Risk Register.

Members were informed that the Strategic Risk Register and Department Risk Registers were a method for continual monitoring and reviewing of the Service's risks by the Senior Management Board and middle managers informing the Service's objectives and business goals over time. The Authority's Strategic Risk Register is formally reported to Members annually with significant changes being reported to the Audit and Standards Committee in a risk update.

There was a query with regard to the ill health now being a medium risk, the Chief Fire Officer assured Members that although the likelihood was a high risk, the actual impact to the Service was low as the Service had not been hit heavily by Covid during the pandemic. Members were pleased to note that good remote working from home allowed staff to continue to work.

***RESOLVED that the summary of strategic risks and existing controls measures be noted and agreed.***

**207 People Strategy 2020-22: Progress Report Year 1 2020-2021**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented Members with a summary of progress for 2020-2021 in the delivery of the People Strategy 2020-2022.

Members were informed that this Strategy was in its final year of implementation. The 2023-25 Strategy would be presented at the Audit and Standards Committee in January 2022 for ratification.

***RESOLVED that Members note progress made against the People Strategy for 2020-2021.***

**208 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2025 Update for Q4 2020-21 and proposed Equality Objectives 2021-2025**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented Members with a summary of progress against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2025 for Quarter 4 2020-2021 and the Service's proposed Equality Objectives 2021-2025 for approval for publication.

Members were pleased to note the increase of women applicants which was helped by positive action undertaken prior to recruitment offering specific training days and fitness tests to allow for improvement.

***RESOLVED that Members:***

***i) note progress made against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2025 in Q4 2020-21.***

***ii) ratify the Service's proposed Equality Objectives 2021-2025 and approve them for publication on the Service website.***

**209 National Fraud Initiative 2020/21**

The Treasurer updated Members on the National Fraud Initiative.

Members were pleased to note that following investigation of the two matches, it was found that this was local use of a known supplier who was also a retained firefighter. Whilst the employee was not directly involved in the procurement and it was of relatively low value and no fraud was involved, it was identified as a minor area where management oversight could be improved in future.

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

**210 Health & Safety Committee Update**

The Assistant Chief Officer provided Members with a Health & Safety update on activities and items of significance for the reporting period. In particular, work being carried out locally and regionally with particular

focus around guidance released by the National Fire Chiefs Council and worked carried out linked to Breathing Apparatus set failures. Members were pleased to note Covid remains a key area of focus as we emerge from the pandemic and that abuse to staff had decreased and that levels were still relatively low when compared nationally.

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

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

***ii) Health and Safety performance information recorded during  
January to March 2021 (Quarter 4).***

The Meeting ended at: 12:26

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman