



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 19 January 2022, 10:30

Chairman: Mr M Hart

Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos

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

221 Apologies for Absence

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

222 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

223 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no declarations declared.

224 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

225 External Audit Findings Report 2020/21

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

Members were informed that the Audit Findings Report set out any issues that the Committee should consider before approving the accounts, it provided the draft audit opinion and Value For Money conclusion and Members were pleased to note that once again these raised no issues of

concerns.

Members noted that the majority of the Audit was completed at the end of October with the exception of the valuation of properties, which took several further weeks to complete due to previous issues with the valuations undertaken by PPL. New valuations were undertaken by the Police & Crime Commissioner's Property Team upon the Treasurer's request and the Audit was finalised mid December.

Members were asked to approve the Letter of Representation before it could be signed by the Chairman and the Treasurer, to allow the Audit to be formally concluded.

RESOLVED that:

i) the Audit Findings Report be noted; and

ii) the Letter of Representation be approved.

226 Auditor's Annual Report 2020/21

Members were presented with the Auditors Annual Report 2020/21 from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP.

Members were informed that the Auditors undertook a risk assessment to identify any significant risks which needed to be addressed before the value for money conclusion was reached. The Auditors assessed the Authority's financial resilience as part of their work on the value for money conclusion. Members were pleased to note that no issues had been reported and thanked the Auditors for a clear and concise report.

RESOLVED that the Auditors Annual Report 2020/21 from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton UK LLP, be noted.

227 Statement of Accounts 2020/21

The Treasurer presented Members with the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts for approval.

Members were made aware that the Accounts were signed off by the Treasurer on 30 July in line with the Regulations, but after the original date agreed with the Auditors. There had been a number of resources issues, both in the Service and for the Auditors which had resulted in the Audit extending over a longer period than envisaged. The Accounts were not ready for approval by the statutory deadline, and this was recognised by the appropriate public notice.

Members were informed that since the sign off of the Accounts by the

Treasurer, they had been subject to Audit with the result that a number of changes had been made. Some of these had been of a minor nature, mainly typographical, or updating of the Notes to the Accounts to improve the disclosure and the property valuation changes had also been included.

Having already considered the Audit Findings Report (item 225 above) Members were asked to approve the Statement of Accounts, which when published would include the Audit Opinion and the approved Annual Governance Statement.

RESOLVED that having already noted the Audit Findings Report, the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 be approved.

228 Internal Audit Draft Audit Plan 2022/23

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service provided Members with the Draft Audit Plan for 2022/23.

Members noted that the Plan would be reviewed regularly and would remain reasonably flexible with any changes being discussed with the Treasurer and reported to Committee for the justification of any changes.

RESOLVED that the 2022/23 Draft Internal Audit Plan be approved.

229 Internal Audit Progress Report 2021/22

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with an update in regards to the delivery of the Internal Audit plan 2021/22.

Members were pleased to note that the Safeguarding and Young Firefighters review had been finalised and the Payroll review had been completed and would be reported to Committee as soon as it was finalised. Members were pleased to note that there were no exceptions to be reported and with ongoing reviews taking place, were satisfied with the progress.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

230 People Strategy 2022 - 2025

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented Members with the People Strategy 2022 – 2025 for consideration and approval.

Members noted that there were five key aims of the strategy, which would be delivered over the next 5 years starting in April 2022, and an action plan would be reported to the Committee yearly.

Members thanked Officers for providing a very well presented document which aided the understanding with the graphics and were pleased to note that further documentation would be provided in the same way as and when they were updated.

RESOLVED that the Authority considers and approves the People Strategy 2022 – 2025.

231 Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2020/2021 and Equality Objectives Progress Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented Members with the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2020/2021 and the Service's Equality Objectives 2021-2025 for Q1-Q2 2021-2022.

Members were reminded that the Gender Pay Gap was not about paying men and women differently in the same role. Members noted the contents of the report and approved it for publication.

Members were pleased to note that more female members of staff were moving to senior level roles within the Service. The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that he was very positive in the direction the Service was travelling.

Following discussion it was agreed that Cllr E Marshall and Cllr N McVey would share the role of Member Champion, alongside Cllr Bowen who had confirmed he would stand again in June 2022.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

i) notes the content of the Equality & Gender Pay Gap Report 2020/2021 and approves its publication.

ii) notes the progress made against the Equality Objectives 2021-2025 for Q1–Q2 2021/2022.

iii) appoints Cllr E Marshall and Cllr N McVey jointly as additional Members of the Audit and Standards Committee as Member Champion for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

232 Prevention Cause of Concern – Action Plan Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented Members with an update on the action plan created to discharge the Cause of Concern issued by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in relation to Prevention Activity.

The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that he was pleased with the Service's progress and the fact that there was no immediate reinspection was testimony to the work that had been done.

RESOLVED that the update on the action plan created to discharge the cause of concern in relation to Prevention activity be noted.

**233 Health and Safety Committee Update: July – September 2021
(Quarter 2)**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented Members with the Health and Safety update on activities and items of significance.

Members noted the report and were pleased that the general number of incidents were decreasing which was testament to the health and safety procedures in place.

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 2021 (Quarter 2).***

The Meeting ended at: 12:06

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman