



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 21 April 2021, 10:30

Chairman: Mr M Hart

Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos

Minutes

Members Present: Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr S Bowen, Mrs E Eyre BEM, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Mr M Hart, Mr R J Morris, Dr K Pollock, Mr L Stark, Mrs D Toynbee

188 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies received.

189 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

190 Declarations of Interest (if any)

Cllr P Agar declared that she was a member of the LGPS Pensions Board.

191 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

192 Internal Audit Progress Report 2020/21

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with an update in regards to the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21.

Members were pleased to note that there were no indications of any 'high' priority recommendations to be reported on the reviews that were progressing through clearance and draft report stages. There were 2 reviews that would not be completed during 2020/21, namely

Safeguarding and Young Firefighters and Volunteering which would be risk assessed as part of the 2021/22 audit plan and rolled into the 2021/21 plan if necessary.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

193 Draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21

The Head of Legal Services presented the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 for approval.

[Cllr R Morris entered the meeting at 10.40am].

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 vast majority of assurances were green. In relation to data management, where there had been a change to requirements under the GDPR, the Head of Legal Services explained that a project plan from the external consultants had been followed for implementation, all stages of which had been achieved and were fully compliant, however additional stages had been added for minor refinements.

Members raised concern with the wording 'holding staff to account' in appraisals. The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that this was CIPFA's terminology which the Service followed, and gave complete assurance that individual appraisals definitely had 360 degree feedback to ensure staff felt valued. It was suggested that the Annual Governance Statement should emphasise the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (Core Principle A) and provide further details of staff engagement (Core Principle B).

RESOLVED that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 be approved for publication following a minor amendment to be agreed by the Chairman.

194 National Fraud Initiative 2020/21

The Treasurer presented Members with an update on the National Fraud Initiative 2020/21.

Members were informed that there were 225 data matches this year, down from 333 the previous year, which had all been investigated and, except 2 which were still under review, no fraud had been detected.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes:

i) that the process of examining all National Fraud Initiative matches

is almost complete and no fraud has been detected so far; and

ii) that two matches are still under review and outcomes will be reported back to the next meeting of this Committee.

195 Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2020/21

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 were 53 complaints received in the past 12 months, 40 of which were activities of the Service. Each complaint was investigated and written responses were provided for each. There were 6 that were considered the Service was at fault and remedial action was taken and 4 people who were dissatisfied with the response from the investigating officer and those cases were reviewed by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. One person was still dissatisfied and took the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman, however they declined to investigate.

Compliments were down by 50% compared to last year which was thought to be because a lot are received as a result of home fire safety checks, which last year was 46% fewer.

There were 276 Freedom of Information requests received, which actually resulted in over 1200 pieces of information requested.

Members were assured that officers were satisfied that there were no significant levels of recurring themes or trends in the concerns and complaints being reported to give any cause for concern.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes that during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021:

i) a total of 276 requests for information containing 1,224 queries about the Service were received;

ii) a total of 50 compliments were received from the public;

iii) 40 complaints about Service activities were made;

iv) 13 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals; and

v) 4 of the complainants appealed the response provided and one

was passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation.

196 Health and Safety Committee Update

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

Members were informed that Quarter 3 October to December is normally a very busy quarter for the Service for operational training activity. Due to training being restricted, this reflected the lower amount of injuries and accidents.

There was concern from a Member of the possible long term affects of contamination and the national research on the high incidents of cancer for retired firefighters. The Chief Fire Officer commented that certain types of cancer are doubling in retired firefighters which is why staff are educated in their cleanliness and hygiene routine and decontaminated kits are stored in sealed bags. The Chief Fire Officer also assured Members that the 2 remaining retained stations that do not have a separate area for kit are now on the build programme in Herefordshire.

There was concern from a Member of the firefighters' knowledge of vehicles with lithium iron batteries which when caught fire are unable to be distinguished. The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that staff are trained in all the hazardous materials and was confident with the training provided, however agreed to discuss with the training department to ensure this area was highlighted further.

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
October to December 2020 (Quarter 3).***

The Meeting ended at: 11:46

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman