



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Thursday, 08 October 2020, 10:30

Chairman: Mr M Hart

Vice-Chairman: Mr A Amos

Minutes

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

177 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr E Eyre, Cllr K Hey and Cllr K Pollock.

178 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

179 Declarations of Interest (if any)

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

180 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

181 Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

The Head of Legal Services presented Members with evidence compiled during the self assessment review which provided the assurances that sit behind the Annual Governance Statement. Members were also asked to approve the draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20.

Members were reminded that a few years ago they would have seen a lot

of amber and some red on the document. The Head of Legal Services was pleased to report that the Service was now at the stage that everything was green except for Managing Data which indicated that there were minor actions needed. Internal Audit had conducted a follow up inspection to the GDPR audit that had been undertaken in 2019 and confirmed that the previous recommendations had been implemented, further details of which were mentioned in agenda item 9 'Internal Audit Progress Report 2020/21'.

The Head of Legal Services was also pleased to announce that external consultants Aristi, who act as the Service's virtual Data Protection Officer, had undertaken a virtual audit last week confirming that out of the 66 areas, 50 of those were compliant which was excellent news.

A Member queried how the Service was maintaining staff appraisals during the pandemic and the Head of HR was pleased to report that managers had been advised over the last few months to continue them virtually or face to face where it allowed. The Head of HR was asked to provide information relating to the percentage of appraisals carried out following the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 be approved.

182 Audit Progress and External Audit Findings Reports 2019/20

The Treasurer introduced the External Auditors' reports for consideration and the Letter of Representation for approval.

The External Auditors, Grant Thornton, then explained in detail the work they do around the accounts and the value for money. The main headline was Covid-19 where the impact was considered, remote working had brought challenges and therefore some audits had taken longer than normal which could have an impact on fees.

They were pleased to report that the pre audit financial Statement of Accounts were published on 29 May, which was well before the revised deadline and thanked the Finance team for a good quality set of accounts with only a few amendments required.

The External Auditors concluded that the work was complete and they were in a position to provide an un-qualified opinion on the Accounts with a clean Value for Money judgement in due course.

[Cllr Bowen joined the meeting at 10.51am].

RESOLVED that:

i) the Audit Progress Report and the Sector Update 2019/20 be noted;

ii) the External Audit Findings Report 2019/20 including an unqualified opinion on the 2019/20 accounts be noted; and

iii) the Letter of Representation be approved on behalf of the Authority.

183 Statement of Accounts 2019/20

The Treasurer presented the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts for approval.

Members were pleased to note that the Accounts were signed off on 29 May 2020 in line with the underlying requirements of the Regulations.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be approved.

184 Annual Statement of Assurance 2020-21

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the draft Statement of Assurance 2020-21 for publication.

It was noted that the reference to the PCC Business case would be updated prior to publication to reflect the latest position and that additional text would be added to the key to the pie chart.

Members were made aware that the finalised version would be published on the Service's website and would include updated hyperlinks to the latest Statement of Accounts, Annual Governance Statement and the External Audit letter.

RESOLVED that the draft Statement of Assurance 2020-21 be approved for publication, following amendment to text relating to the PCC Business Case and the addition of text to the key to the pie chart.

185 Internal Audit Progress Report 2020/21

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

Members were made aware that due to the Covid-19 response, the Plan had been slow to start due to the restrictions of access to systems as there was no remote access available to WIASS. The Treasurer confirmed that this was just an oversight and there was a simple technical solution for remote access going forward.

With regard to KPIs, the team involved unfortunately had their priorities changed resulting in the KPI audit being rescheduled for later in the year.

With regard to GDPR, assurance was given to Members that those action plans had now been implemented in full and confirmed that they were now considered satisfied.

There was concern from Members of the incomplete audits this year but were assured that work would be undertaken by prioritising on a risk basis for a reasonable conclusion.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

186 Health and Safety Committee Update

The Head of Operational Support presented Members with an update on the activities and items of significance from the Service's Health and Safety Committee.

Members were made aware of the decrease in safety events compared to the last quarter which were reflective of the more limited activities undertaken during the Covid-19 lockdown.

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

i) Health and Safety performance information recorded during April to June 2020 (Quarter 1); and

ii) The involvement of the Service in Health and Safety initiatives.

187 Equality Monitoring 2019/2020 – Interim Report

The Head of Community Risk and HR & Development presented Members with the Service's Equality Monitoring 2019/20 interim report for approval.

Cllr Oborski, one of the EDI Champions, attended the meeting and commended the report, expressing that even due to restrictions placed on the Service by Covid-19, excellent progress had been made.

One Member expressed concern at the wording of some of the guidance

relating to the Equality Act and would be in contact with Officers following the meeting.

A request was made by Members to provide trend information in future reports to monitor progress. Officers agreed to provide this at future meetings.

Members were also informed that there was a programme of communications for Black History month.

RESOLVED that the Equality Monitoring 2019/20 interim report be approved for publication.

The Meeting ended at: 12:03

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman