



Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority

Audit and Standards Committee

Wednesday, 24 April 2019, 10:30

Chairman: Cllr M Hart

Vice-Chairman: Cllr A Amos

Minutes

Members Present: Ms P Agar, Mr A Amos, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr Al Hardman, Dr K Pollock, Professor J W Raine

120 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mr M Hart and Ms K Guthrie.

121 Named Substitutes

There were no named substitutes.

122 Declarations of Interest (if any)

There were no interests declared.

123 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 22 January 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

124 External Audit Plan 2019/20 (2018/19 Accounts)

The External Auditor presented Members with the Audit Plan that sets out the work that will be undertaken during the audit of the 2018/19 Accounts.

Members noted that the Authority faces significant financial challenges ahead, in particular with regard to pensions.

[Cllr Hardman entered the meeting at 10.38am)

RESOLVED that the External Audit Plan 2019/20 (2018/19 Accounts) be noted.

125 External Audit Progress Report 2018-19

The External Auditor presented Members with an Audit Progress report and Sector update which updated them on the progress in delivering their responsibilities as external auditors.

Members were pleased to note that the Fire Service has a 'clean bill of health'.

RESOLVED that the External Auditor's "Audit Progress report and Sector Update" be noted.

126 Informing the Audit Risk Assessment 2018-19 Accounts

The External Auditor presented Members with the Audit Risk Assessment carried out by Grant Thornton UK LLP in deriving the External Audit Plan 2019/20 in respect of the 2018/19 Accounts.

Members felt reassured and thanked Grant Thornton for the work they had done.

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

127 Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with a progress update on the 2018/19 audit plan delivery.

Members were assured that there were no high priorities or risks to report and that recommendations made in regards to the reports produced throughout the year were being addressed through robust management action plans and in a timely manner.

Members were advised that a 'light touch audit' in future would provide a better coverage in less time. The Treasurer agreed that a 3 year cycle would enable a full audit of each area over the 3 years.

Members were pleased to note that the previous Gartan issues relating to payroll had been resolved.

The Head of Internal Audit confirmed that the Authority had good control which was helped by working closely with the management team.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

128 Internal Audit Draft Audit Plan 2019/20

The Head of Internal Audit Shared Service presented Members with the Draft Audit Plan for 2019/20.

Members noted that the Audit Plan had been agreed by the Treasurer and considered by the Senior Management Board in March and feedback had been included in the Plan.

RESOLVED that the 2019/20 Draft Internal Audit Plan be approved.

129 Annual Compliments, Complaints, Concerns and Requests for Information 2018/19

Members were presented with details of compliments, complaints, concerns and requests for information made by the public to the Service over the past 12 months.

Members were reassured 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.

Members requested that any suggestions for improvements following the investigation of the complaint/concern be reported to future meetings.

Members were pleased to note that the Service received three times the amount of compliments than complaints/concerns.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes that during the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019:

- i) a total of 290 requests for information about the Service were received;**
- ii) a total of 102 compliments and donations were received from the public;**
- iii) 33 complaints about Service activities were made; and**
- iv) 20 complaints or concerns were received about activities carried out by other organisations or individuals.**

v) None of the complainants appealed the response provided and no complaints were passed to the Local Government Ombudsman for investigation.

130 Draft Annual Governance Statement 2018/19

Members were presented with the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2018/19 for approval.

Members noted from the self assessment that the Authority had provided evidence of compliance with all the core and supporting principles of good governance. There were no areas where immediate action was required.

Members also noted that there were two areas (shown within Core Principles A and F) where the direction of travel improved during 2018/19. This was due to the review of the Whistleblowing Policy which was to be considered elsewhere on the agenda and the commencement of the Review of Financial Regulations.

Members were reminded that the Committee had delegated responsibility to approve the Annual Governance Statement which would accompany the Statement of Accounts. The Annual Governance Statement would also be published alongside the unaudited statement of accounts at the beginning of the period for public inspection, commencing in early June.

Members thanked officers for the excellent work.

RESOLVED that the Draft Annual Governance Statement 2018/19 be approved.

131 National Fraud Initiative 2018/19

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

Members were assured that a final report would be brought to the next Audit and Standards Committee to provide final details in relation to creditor matching reports and any new reports published in the interim.

The Treasurer was pleased to inform Members that there had been no fraud for the past 7 years.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the process of examining all National Fraud Initiative matches is underway and that no fraud has been detected in relation to the completed review of employee matches.

132 Review of the Whistleblowing Policy

Members were presented with the Authority's Revised Whistleblowing Policy, which had recently been reviewed and updated.

Members were reminded that the Policy was designed for staff, contractors and the public to feel able to report any concerns they may have about improper conduct and to be confident their concerns would be investigated without fear of reprisal.

RESOLVED that the revised Whistleblowing Policy be noted.

133 Gender Pay Gap Report

Members were presented with data detailing the gender pay gap in the Service. Members were also informed that the data was published on the Service's website and the government's reporting website annually in accordance with legal requirements.

Members were made aware that this report was only for the Gender Pay Gap and not the Equal Pay Audit which measures whether men and women in the same employment performing equal work receive equal pay.

Officers were pleased to announce that a number of female candidates had been successful at the recent crew commander process and that the first female operational station commander had just taken up her role within the Service.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The gender pay gap figures be noted;**
- ii) Progress to bridge the gender pay gap be monitored via the Senior Management Board (SMB); and**
- iii) It be noted that the Gender Pay Gap Report was published on the corporate website and government's reporting website and includes a signed statement confirming the information was accurate.**

134 Health and Safety Committee Update

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

A Member was concerned about decontamination facilities at fire stations. They were assured that all firefighting PPE was laundered by an outside company.

Members thanked officers for the excellent report.

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

- i) Health and Safety performance information recorded during October to December 2018 (Quarter 3);**
- ii) The involvement of the Service in a number of Health and Safety initiatives.**

To close the meeting, the Chairman expressed how pleased he was with the audit, maintenance and the general running of the Authority and thanked officers.

The Meeting ended at: 11:27

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Chairman