

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



24 JUNE 2022

- PRESENT:**
- CHAIR:-** Councillor Steve Matthews - Stockton on Tees Borough Council
- HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL**
Councillor Ben Clayton (Sub)
- MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**
Councillor Jon Rathmell
- STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**
Councillor Lynn Hall (Sub)
- INDEPENDENT PERSONS**
Mr Steve Harwood
Mr Paul McGrath
- AUTHORISED OFFICERS**
Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer,
Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Community Protection
- MAZARS**
Mr Gavin Barker - Audit Engagement Lead
Joanne Greener - Audit Manager
- IN ATTENDANCE**
Head of Internal Audit – Hartlepool Borough Council
Head of Risk and Performance
Head of Finance and Procurement
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Strategic Planning & Resources
Councillors Billy Ayre, Martin Fletcher, Cliff Foggo - Redcar & Cleveland
Councillors Angela Falconer, Leisa Smith - Hartlepool Borough Council
Councillor Teresa Higgins – Middlesbrough Council
Councillor Luke Frost – Stockton Borough Council

In accordance with Standing Order No. 35 Councillor Ben Clayton substituted for Councillor Billy Ayre and Councillor Lynn Hall substituted for Councillor Angela Falconer.

14. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer (LAMO) sought nominations for the position of Chair of Cleveland Fire Authority's Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23. He asked Members to be mindful that only two Audit & Governance Committee Members were present along with two substitute Members. Councillors Rathmell and Hall asked for the appointment to be made at this meeting to avoid further delay. Councillor Clayton requested the appointment should be made at the August meeting owing to the small numbers present. Members voted in favour of appointing at this meeting.

Councillor Steve Matthews was nominated and subsequently seconded.

14. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR cont.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Steve Matthews be appointed Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23.

15. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.

16. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for the position of Vice Chair of Cleveland Fire Authority's Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23.

Councillor Jon Rathmell was nominated and subsequently seconded. Councillor Clayton raised an objection to nomination.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Jon Rathmell be appointed Vice Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23.

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 25 February 2022 be confirmed.

18. REPORT OF MAZARS

18.1 Audit Strategy Memorandum

The Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) presented the Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ending 31 March 2022 which summarised the audit approach, highlighted significant audit risks and areas of key judgements. The report covered:

- Engagement and Responsibilities Summary
- Engagement Team
- Audit scope, approach and timeline
- Significant risk and other key judgement areas
- Value for money arrangements
- Fees for audit & other services
- Commitment to independence
- Materiality and Misstatements

The AEL confirmed that Mazars was still waiting for Whole of Government Accounts guidance which was preventing the 2020/21 audit from being finalised. This was now expected to be published in summer 2022.

RESOLVED – that the Audit Strategy Memorandum be noted.

19. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

19.1 Forward Work Programme 2022/23

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) outlined the Forward Work Programme for 2022/23, as detailed at Appendix 1, in accordance with the requirements of the Authority's Standing Orders. He noted that the Forward Work Programme will remain flexible to allow consideration of additional items should they arise.

RESOLVED – that the Forward Work Programme 2022/23 outlined at Appendix 1 be approved.

19.2 Organisational Performance Report April 2021 – March 2022

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes.

Members received a presentation of performance as highlighted below:

- Total incidents were 9,919 – the highest number of incidents ever attended and an increase of 980 incidents (+11%) compared to last year.
- The largest decrease compared to 2020/21 was Special Services with 1,653 incidents - 300 (15%) fewer incidents. The largest increase was in secondary fires with a total of 4,312 incidents – an increase of 1,152 (37%). Primary fires were 868 (127 - 17% increase) and false alarm calls were 3,032 – only 2 incidents more.
- There have been 28,901 Safer Homes Visits targeted with 20,577 completed which was a 3,934 (24%) increase on the 3-year-average.
- 1,789 inspections of Industrial and Commercial Premises were carried out – an increase of 787 (127%) on 5-year-average.
- Accidental Dwelling Fires had increased by 20 incidents to 180 – a 13% increase to 2020/21 with increases in Middlesbrough of 24% to 51 incidents (+10), Hartlepool of 27% to 33 (+7), Stockton of 31% to 59 (+14) and Redcar and Cleveland of 28% to 37 incidents (+8). The main causes being electrical (40 incidents – 22% increase), careless handling (36 incidents – 20% increase) and cooking (35 incidents - 19% increase).
- Deliberate Fires have increased by 39% (1,279 incidents) to 4,532 compared to the 5-year average. Included within these, 465 (10%) were deliberate primary fires an increase of 63 incidents (16%) on the 5-year average. 4,067 (90%) were deliberate secondary fires an increase of 43% (1,217 incidents) compared to 5-year-average. Main causes were vehicles (268 / 58% of all deliberate primary fires) and refuse (2,701 / 67% of all deliberate secondary fires).
- Response Standards:

• Call answering:	Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 6.07 seconds
• Call Handling:	Target 100 seconds, Actual 83 seconds
• Building Fires 1st Appliance	Target 7 Minutes, Actual 5.06 minutes
• Building Fires 2nd Appliance	Target 10 Minutes, Actual 7.06 minutes
• RTC	Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.30 minutes
- Sickness Absence is 11.90 shifts per person – an increase of 47% (3.82 shifts per person) compared to 5-year-average. 6,253 duty days lost to sickness in 640 occurrences by 346 individuals. Average length of sickness was 11 shifts per occurrence.

19.2 Organisational Performance Report April 2021 – March 2022 cont.

- There was an increase in sickness levels across all staff groups with the exception of Retained Whole-time at 6.52 shifts with a reduction of 4% (0.03 shifts). Fire Control increased by 186% (13.4 shifts) to 20.57 shifts; Whole-time increased to 12.7 shifts (47%) 3.87 shifts and Green Book by 5.1 shifts (56%) to 14.19 shifts.
- One third of all staff have had 'no' sickness during the year.
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 75 incidents – 74% increase on 5-year- average. 79% occurred at incidents. 41% occurred in Hemlington Ward, Middlesbrough.

The HoRP reported that the Brigade had delivered quite exceptional performance against a complex area profile which included high levels of social deprivation with some communities living in close proximity to high hazard industries. Despite this challenge, communities in Cleveland still receive the highest number of safer homes visits and can expect the fastest response times in the country.

Steve Harwood commended the Brigade on the number of building safety inspections carried out and its pro-active approach to preventing industrial / commercial fires. Councillor Hall gave praise for the increase in safer homes visits and referrals which offer a valuable route of contact for the public.

Members raised concern about the increase in violence to staff incidents and requested an update on prosecutions. ACFO-CP confirmed that there had recently been a successful prosecution supported by footage obtained from body worn cameras. He reported that partnership work was being targeted in wards where violence to staff incidents were most problematic.

Paul McGrath thanked the HoRP for the presentation and applauded the Brigade's 'phenomenal' results. He referred to the consistent increase in deliberate fires and asked how the Brigade would tackle this issue. The ACFO-CP confirmed that the NE region had the highest deliberate fire rates in the country and a regional working group had been established to look at the causal reasons for deliberate fires. In addition, the Brigade was represented on the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Arson Reduction Board.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted

19.3 Internal Audit Progress Report

The CFO presented the audits undertaken to date and highlighted the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. He also gave a position statement regarding the actions set out in the audit action plans.

RESOLVED:-

- that the audit position of the completed 2021/22 Audits be noted.
- that the progress made to date in the Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 be noted.

19.4 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Active Risk Team in May 2022 and by the Executive Leadership Team in June 2022.

19.4 Review of the Corporate Risk Register cont.

The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1 and the CFO referred Members to the outcome at paragraph 4.4 which detailed no new and emerging risks and the following changes to existing risks:

- Organisational Learning and COVID 19 reduced rating from 6 (medium) to 3 (low).

RESOLVED – that Members noted the Corporate Risk Register, at Appendix 1.

20. REPORTS OF THE TREASURER

20.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2021/22

The Treasurer reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period April 2021 to March 2022. He confirmed that the systems reviewed annually by Internal Audit have provided consistently high assurance of an effective and satisfactory audit provision.

RESOLVED - That the contents of the report be noted.

20.2 Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government

The Treasurer reported that the CIPFA statement – ‘The Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government’ had been reviewed and confirmed that the CFA complied with the requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED – that Members noted that Cleveland Fire Authority complies with the CIPFA requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

20.3 Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Public Service Organisations

The Treasurer reported that in his role of Chief Finance Officer for the Authority he had reviewed the CIPFA statement – ‘The Role of the CFO in Public Service Organisations’ and confirmed the CFA complied with the requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED – that it be noted that the CFA complies with the CIPFA requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

21. REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISER AND MONITORING OFFICER

21.1 Standards Report

The LAMO provided Members with an update on the Government’s response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) review of local government ethical standards (January 2019).

He referred Members to Government’s response contained at Appendix 1 which stressed a commitment to working with local government and representative authorities in ensuring the highest ethical standards.

The LAMO highlighted the comments of the Chair of the CSPL, Lord Evans of Weardale, which stated:

21.1 Standards Report cont.

'While we note the government's commitment to further work to support local government, the Committee is disappointed that many of its careful recommendations have not been accepted. It was clear from our evidence that the sector backed our call to strengthen the arrangements in place to support high ethical standards, whilst respecting the benefits of a localised approach.'

We are pleased that many local authorities have already reviewed their approach as a result of this work and are adopting the best practice points from the report. Across all tiers of local government, decisions are taken about a wide range of local services using public funds, so it is important that there are robust governance arrangements that command public confidence.'

The LAMO agreed to keep Members informed on any further consultations or future developments as they arise.

RESOLVED – that the contents of the report be noted.

**COUNCILLOR STEVE MATTHEWS
CHAIR**