

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

21 AUGUST 2026

- PRESENT:**
- CHAIR** - Councillor Jim Beall - Stockton Borough Council
 - HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL**
 - Councillors Leisa Smith, Christine Wiley
 - STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**
 - Councillor John Gardner
 - INDEPENDENT PERSONS**
 - Mr Steve Harwood
 - AUTHORISED OFFICERS**
 - Interim Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer
 - Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer,
 - ACFO - Strategic Planning, People & Resources
 - Temporary ACFO - Service Delivery
 - BRIGADE OFFICERS**
 - Assistant Director - Assurance & Governance
 - Area Manager – Prevention, Protection & Training
 - Intelligence Manager
 - AUDITORS**
 - James Collins - Audit Director, Forvis Mazars
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**
- Catherine Magog – Head of Internal Audit
 - Dennis Hall – Independent Person
 - Councillors Naweed Hussain, John Kabuye – Middlesbrough Council
 - Councillor Steve Kay – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
 - Councillors Stefan Houghton, Andrew Sherris – Stockton Borough Council

34. **DECLARATION OF MEMBER'S INTERESTS**
It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.
35. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 26 June 2026 be confirmed.
36. **REPORT OF MAZARS**
- 36.1 **Audit Strategy Memorandum 2025/26**
The Audit Engagement Director (AED) presented the Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ending 31 March 2026 which covered:
- Audit Scope, Approach & Timeline – on target to commence fieldwork in October and have the Audit completed ahead of the January 2027 deadline.
 - Significant Risks – these have been identified and require more work
 - Re-building assurance – programme for management to rebuild assurance to include work completed for the Authority's 2024/25 closing financial statements
 - Materiality

36.1 Audit Strategy Memorandum 2025/26 cont.

- Audit fees and other services - proposed fee of £109,708 with additional fees for rebuild of assurance work to be confirmed.
- Confirmation of Independence
- Value for Money – areas identified as significant weaknesses during the 2024/25 audit work relating to the CIC and associated governance arrangements remain significant weaknesses for 2025/26. No additional weaknesses have been identified during the planning work to date and the expectation is that the CIC will have a lesser impact this year.

Councillor Beall asked whether the issues associated with the CIC last year could have repercussions on this audit. The AED confirmed that the group accounts do not appear and informed the Chair that assurance could be re-built

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

37. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

37.1 Key Performance Indicators (Q1)

The Assistant Director of Governance & Assurance (ADG&A) presented the key areas of performance for the period 1 April to 30 June 2026 and informed Members that the key performance indicators had been revised to align to the new Community Risk Management Plan 2026-30 and Service Plan 2026/27.

KPI 1: Safer Homes Visits

3,665 safer homes visits completed in Q1 achieving 94% of the target (3900), resulting in a shortfall of 235 visits. Compared to the 5 year average for Q1 we are -1410.

KPI 2: Prevention Referrals

69% of prevention referrals attempted within Q1. A total of 1,422 referrals were received with 983 meeting the applicable service standard and 439 recorded as outside of the standard. Ongoing issues with the CSS are resulting the in service standard compliance only being captured when an in person home visit has occurred as the measure is not yet linked to the contact attempt booking system which may result in under-reporting of performance.

KPI 3: Safeguarding Referrals

The 34 safeguarding referrals that were raised in Q1 were all submitted within a 24 hour period.

The Chair asked whether the Brigade received feedback from the local authorities regarding safeguarding referrals. The Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery (T/ACFO-SD) confirmed that annual feedback from TSAB was that referrals were always of a very high standard which allowed them to be processed with ease.

KPI 4: Fire Safety Audits

179 audits completed in Q1, a reduction of -107 compared to the 5 year average. 63% completed against set target of 283; 104 audits below the projected target. This is due to delayed programme launch whilst external assurance activity was undertaken to ensure methodology was robust as well as further training required for protection staff for various premises types.

37.1 Key Performance Indicators (Q1)

Mr Steve Harwood commended the Brigade for its safety audits and recognised that these figures do not capture the time spent answering email and telephone calls from businesses seeking fire safety advice.

KPI 5: Unsatisfactory Fire Safety Audits

179 audits completed in Q1 with 139 (78%) reported as unsatisfactory. The high percentage of unsatisfactory audits indicates that the RBIP is correctly identifying premises requiring intervention.

KPI 6: Operational Fitness Assessments

93.1% of fitness tests completed in Q1. This is below target due to the time lapse between annual testing episodes and long term absences of some operational staff.

KPI 7: Operational / Fire Control Maintaining Competency

84% of competency achieved by Operational and Fire Control staff. This exceeds the target of 83%.

KPI 8: Completion of Mandatory Corporate E-Learning

In Q1 11% (14 of 123 personnel) of corporate staff have completed their 5 mandatory e-learning modules. This is 72% below target. Monitoring arrangements are being communicated to Heads of Service to ensure their staff meet the mandatory training requirements.

Members asked whether staff had deadlines to complete e-learning and requested a breakdown of completion across all five areas be brought to the next meeting. The ACFO-Strategic Planning, People & Resources (ACFO-SPP&R) confirmed that this was a new measure and was useful for highlighting a gap. She acknowledged that this offered much room for improvement for the next quarter.

KPI 9: Workforce Availability

84.16% of the workforce were available in Q1. 11.9% of the workforce had a sickness absence during Q1 and 3.87% were absent from their substantive role due to reasons including modified duties, suspension, family leave and trade union leave.

Councillor Wiley asked how the Brigade compared to other areas on sickness absence. The ACFO-SPP&R confirmed that it was in the top quartile in the country and the HR team was rolling out sickness absence training to all managers to address this issue.

KPI 10: 999 Calls

4,181 emergency calls received in Q1 with 3,167 (76.33%) answered within 7 seconds. -1.84% compared to 2025/26. This is 19% below the set target of 95%. This indicator requires further review as it is now being reported differently compared to previous years.

Councillor Smith asked why the 2023/24 response standards appear to be faster. The Interim Chief Fire Officer (ICFO) reported that environmental factors including weather can influence the volume of calls and impact response standards. He confirmed that the Brigade uses intelligence to identify risks and adapt the strategy accordingly.

KPI 11: First Appliance to Building Fires

600 mobilisations to building fires in Q1 with an average attendance time of 00:06:16. The 5-year average in Q1 is 00:05:35. Attendance time remains to exceed the 7 minute target. Compared to the same quarter the previous year attendance time is +00:00:12.

37.1 Key Performance Indicators (Q1) cont.

KPI 12: Second Appliance to Building Fires

456 mobilisations to building fires in Q1 with an average attendance time of 00:08:12. +00:00:04 compared to the previous year. The 5 year average in Q1 is 00:07:39. Second appliance attendance is exceeding the 10 minutes target.

KPI 13: RTC Attendance Time

83 mobilisations in Q1 achieving an average attendance time of 00:06:34 which is well within the 8 minute target. Compared to the 5 year average the average attendance time is +00:00:81. This demonstrates effective emergency response performance for time critical RTC incidents. Performance in this area will continue to be monitored alongside road risk, incident location and appliance availability.

KPI 14: First Appliance Building Fires 90% of Occasions

In Q1, of the 600 mobilisations the first appliance met the 10 minute attendance time on 92% of occasions exceeding the 90% target. The service will continue to monitor and investigate any incidents falling outside of the 10 minute threshold.

KPI 15: Fire Fatalities

0 fire fatalities in Q1. 12 fire fatalities across a 5 year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26. Performance will continue to be treated as a high risk due to the potential severity of any future fatal incident.

KPI 16: Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs)

57 ADFs in Q1. Compared to the 5 year average this is an increase of +6. Target of 48 exceeded which requires further scrutiny with analysis focusing on incident cause, location, repeat properties, vulnerabilities and any emerging themes. This analysis will inform where prevention activities should be directed.

KPI 17: Deliberate Dwelling Fires

24 incidents occurred in Q1. +2 compared to the 5 year average. The rate of incidents per 100,000 population is 4. Target of 18 exceeded (+33%). Further analysis to be carried out to inform operational intelligence, prevention activity, partnership work with Cleveland Police, LAs and housing providers.

KPI 18: Deliberate Primary Fires

In Q1 there has been 162 deliberate fire incidents, +10 against set target (+7%). Although the variance is not significant, deliberate primary fires remain a key area of risk due to potential impact on life, property and community confidence. The 5 year average for Q1 is 146.

KPI 19: Deliberate Secondary Fires

913 incidents in Q1 against a target of 1,214. This is a positive position. We will monitor to ensure this is sustained and continue to carryout effective partnership work.

KPI 20: % Time Appliances Available for Operational Response

In Q1 Crews were available for 75% of the time across both Wholetime and On Call. Some On Call stations recorded low levels of availability during Q1 which has reduced the overall position.

37.1 Key Performance Indicators (Q1) cont.

KPI 21: Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI)

96% of SSRIs at level 3, 4 and 5 completed in Q1. This exceeds the 95% target. This provides positive assurance that Crews have access to current risk information for the majority of higher risk premises.

KPI 22: Compliant Spend

This data is reported annually and will be available in Q4.

Councillor Beall requested more information on this KPI be available for Members for the next meeting.

KPI 23: Emergency Response Fleet Availability

During Q1 there has been no occasions whereby Technical Hub has not been able to furnish front line crews with a reserve appliance. Target set at 95%, 100% achieved.

KPI 24: % Systems Availability

This relates to uptime of critical operational systems including control room mobilising systems (99.99% availability) and station end mobilising equipment (99.94% availability) with information produced from the PRTG Network Monitoring System. Target set at 99%, this was achieved.

KPI 25: RIDDOR

0 RIDDOR reported in Q1. The 5 year average incidents in Q1 is 1. Target tolerance to Q1 is 2 incidents. This is a positive indicator of the Services commitment to maintaining a safe working environment.

KPI 26: Accidents Causing Injury

5 incidents in Q1 involving staff. This is 71% of the target tolerance of 7. Each incident has been investigated and reviewed to identify any common causes or emerging trends. Compared to the 5 year average in Q1 incidents have reduced by -3.

KPI 27: Near Misses

In Q1 there has been 6 near miss incidents, +1 compared to the 5 year average. This is viewed as a positive indicator with a strong safety culture. The rate of incidents per 1,000 employees is 11.

KPI 28: Violence to Staff

9 violence to staff incidents reported in Q1, -1 compared to the 5 year average. The service has a 0 tolerance for violence to staff incidents. All reports are thoroughly investigated and where worn, all body worn footage is reviewed to support any investigations. Rate of incidents per 1,000 employees is 17.

The Committee thanked the officers for the new format of the performance report which gave them confidence that the Brigade was performing well. The ADG&A confirmed this had been designed with input from every department to ensure the KPIs were meaningful and would be reviewed annually to ensure they remain relevant.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

37.2 Internal Audit Progress Report

The ACFO-SPP&R presented the audits undertaken to date and highlighted the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. She confirmed that 13 audits have been identified within the 2026/27 programme with 1 completed and scored satisfactory (on-call firefighter claims) to date.

Members asked if a further column could be added to the table to show which quarter each audit is expected to be completed in.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the progress made against the 2025/26 and 2026/27 Internal Audit Plans.

37.3 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

The ADG&A presented the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) which identifies the strategic threats and risks to the achievement of the Authority's vision and evaluates the risk and summarises the control measures identified to reduce these risks.

The CRR was reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) in August 2026 to ensure it reflects the current situation regarding existing and potential risks the Brigade could face. The following changes were agreed:

Risk Score Revisions

- Capacity and / or skills to deliver the Risk Based Inspection Programme (decrease)

Risk Removal

- In-house Community Safety System Functionality

RESOLVED – That the Corporate Risk Register be noted.

37.4 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2026/27

The Treasurer presented the current position as of 30 June 2026 and informed Members that there was a forecast outturn position of £0.237m underspend owing to the phasing of commitments on premises, supplies and services and transport costs as detailed at Appendix 1.

The Treasurer reported a forecast outturn position of £3.035m underspend against a Capital Budget of £8.853m for 2026/27 which consists of four elements, including an element of capital expenditure to be deferred to 2031/32. Members were referred to Appendix 2 for the progress for each project within the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED – That the budget position as at 30 June 2026 be noted.

38. JOINT REPORT OF THE TREASURER & CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

38.1 2025/26 Financial Report

Members scrutinised the draft 2025/26 Financial Report which had been prepared in accordance with the relevant accounting standards and will be subject to independent audit by Forvis Mazars, with any material amendments reported back to the Committee later in the year.

38.1 2025/26 Financial Report cont.

The Treasurer referred Members to the Financial Report at Appendix A which contained the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement (pages 63 – 66). This summarises the results of the annual review of internal controls and primarily assesses the adequacy of the Authority's governance arrangements and identifies where improvements can be made to provide a better quality public service.

The Treasurer confirmed that an Internal Audit Review of the Annual Governance Statement had been undertaken and a copy of the letter from the Head of Audit and Governance was attached at Appendix B.

A checklist of questions provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy to aid Members understanding of the Authority's Financial Statements was provided at Appendix C.

The Treasurer thanked officers from the Authority and Hartlepool Borough Council for the significant work undertaken to complete the accounts by 4 June 2025, ahead of the 30 June deadline.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement as detailed on pages 63 to 66 of Appendix A be approved.**
- (ii) Members noted that the Financial Report detailed at Appendix A will be subject to the completion of the independent audit by Forvis Mazars and details of any audit amendments will be reported to this Committee later in the year.**

39. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

39.1 Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 (inc.2025/26 Outturn and Q1 Review)

Members received a review of Treasury Management activity for 2025/26 including the 2025/26 prudential indicators and an update for the first quarter 2026/27 Treasury Management. The report covered:

- Economic background and outlook for interest rates
- Interest rates forecast
- Prudential Indicators and Compliance Issues 2025/26
- Regulatory Framework Risk & Performance 2025/26
- Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 1st Quarter Review
- CIPFE Treasury Management Code of Practice

The Treasurer reported that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) continues to benefit from careful management of investments which is providing £0.250m support for the revenue budget up to and including 2030/31. However, this support will eventually need to be replaced with budget reductions as interest rates come down and reserves are used.

The MTFS also benefits from previous decisions to lock into low interest rates for capital borrowing which will assist the Asset Management Plan's significant borrowing requirements up to March 2030.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

40. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

40.1 Wildfires

The ICFO provided an update to Members on the recent unprecedented spate of wildfires which at its height saw 11 concurrent fires across the UK. He confirmed that he had deployed staff to Suffolk, Derbyshire and Cambridgeshire to provide resilience and thanks from those services had been received.

COUNCILLOR JIM BEALL
CHAIR