CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

23 AUGUST 2019

PRESENT:

CHAIR:-
Councillor Norah Cooney – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Stephen Thomas
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Teresa Higgins (sub), Ashley Waters
REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Billy Ayre, Adam Brook
STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Andrew Stephenson
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Paul McGrath, Mr Steve Harwood
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Chief Fire Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer
MAZARS
Ross Woodley (Audit Manager),
IN ATTENDANCE
Head of Risk and Performance, Head of Finance

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor Marjorie James – Hartlepool Borough Council
Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council
Councillor Woodhead – Stockton Borough Council
Mr Gavin Barker – Mazars

In accordance with Standing Order No. 35, Councillor Higgins substituted for Councillor Bill Woodhead.

38. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

39. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 28 June 2019 be confirmed.

40. REPORTS OF MAZARS

40.1 Annual Audit Letter Year Ending 31 March 2019

The Audit Manager (AM) presented the Annual Audit Letter 2018/19 summarising work undertaken for Cleveland Fire Authority for the year ended 31 March 2019. This included:

- Executive Summary
- Audit of the Financial Statements
- Value for Money Conclusion
- Other reporting responsibilities
- Fees
- Forward Look

The AM referred Members to the Financial Outlook at Page 13 of the report and stated that the Authority has done well to maintain or improve services over this period whilst keeping within budget every year and it is also on course to deliver the 2019/20 budgeted savings of £671,000.

The Authority has just been inspected by the HMICFRS and expects to receive its report and grading in late 2019. Irrespective of the grading, the Authority will need to draw up an action plan to respond to opportunities for improvement identified by the HMICFRS and delivering further improvement at a time of significantly diminishing resources will be challenging.

Councillor Stephenson asked were they aware of any concerns at this present time falling out from the HMICFRS Inspection. The AM replied not at this present time and we will not be aware of any until the written report from the HMICFRS is issued in December 2019.

RESOLVED - that the report be approved.

40.2 Audit Progress Report – August 2019

The Audit Manager (AM) presented the Audit Progress Report which covered:

- The 2018/19 Audit
- National Publications
- Contact details

The AM stated that 2018/19 audit has been concluded and work has commenced on 2019/20 audit. The AM highlighted 3 areas within the report;

- National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework for the Fire Service in England, Home Office, April 2019 - This guidance has been developed jointly between the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Home Office (HO) to provide guidance and advice to Fire and Rescue Services in order to deliver the effective coordination of resources before, during and after major incidents. Furthermore, it sets out the critical situational awareness reporting arrangements which will facilitate central government's decision making that is designed to protect and reassure local communities during emergencies.

- Local Government Governance and Accountability, Public Accounts Committee, May 2019 – The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) concluded that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) *'has been reactive and ill-informed in its approach to oversight of the local governance system*'. The report recommended that MHCLG write to the PAC within 6 months setting out:
  - Its overall plan for improving its oversight
  - Its progress in working more efficiently with other government departments to understand overall pressures on service sustainability
  - Its objectives for the promised local governance panel and the means by which the panel's effectiveness will be assessed
  - Progress in setting up the new panel, including its work programme and
  - The concrete actions the panel will take; the timetable and intended outcomes the panel will be working towards

- Fire and Rescue Service Inspections 2018/19 – A Summary of Findings from Tranche 2, HMICFRS, June 2019 – The HMICFRS have inspected 16 services in the second tranche of inspections. Until every service is inspected they do not have a complete national picture but some themes are emerging. They will form judgements and make recommendations as part of the first State of Fire and Rescue report which they will publish later this year, but this report contains two recommendations:
  - There should be more consistency, for example in how fire and rescue services define risk and calculate and communicate standards to the public; and
  - The fire sector also needs more support to change and modernise.

Mr Harwood asked if the Brigade have submitted a response to the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 Call for Evidence. The CFO stated that the Brigade have sent a very detailed response and agreed to forward it to Mr Harwood, Councillor Ayre and Councillor Thomas as requested.

RECOMMENDED

i) that the report be noted.

ii) that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 response be sent to the above Members and Mr Harwood.

41. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

41.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2019 – July 2019

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 July 2019 which had been aligned to the Brigade's three Strategic Priorities. The report summaries are detailed below:

- Total incidents stand at 3392 an increase of 189 (+6%) compared to the same period last year.
- The largest increase is in secondary fires which have seen an increase of 196 compared to 2018/19 and they account for 47% of all incidents attended followed by Special Services (+29) and Primary Fires (+9).
- There has been 4061 HFSV completed which is a reduction of 381 (9%) compared to 2018/19. Included within these HFSV were 333 Safe and Well Visits.

- Accidental Dwelling Fires – 10% increase (+4) from 2018/19. Increases in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland and decreases in Hartlepool and Stockton. The main causes being electrical, cooking related, careless handling and negligent use of equipment.
- Deliberate Fires have increased by 247 (18%) compared to the same period in 2018/19. Included within these, 138 were deliberate primary fires (-1) and 1472 deliberate secondary fires (+248).
- Deliberate secondary fires have increased by 248 from 2018/19. Main causes being 63% refuse and 32% grass.
- Primary Fires – reduction by 1% from the previous year. Main causes are vehicles (49% and dwellings (22%).
- 157 Non domestic false alarms this period which is 26 (14%) fewer than the same period in 2018. The overall total since the introduction of the Unwanted Fire Signals Strategy which was introduced in 2017 has decreased by 24% (171).
- Response Standards:
  - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 5.95 seconds
  - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds - Actual 86 Seconds
  - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 4.54 Minutes
  - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 7.08 Minutes
  - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.21 Minutes
- Sickness Absence - 2019/20 has seen an increase of 52% (0.82 shifts) from this same quarter in 2018/19. 1327 duty shifts lost to sickness. In all staff groups we have seen an increase – Wholetime +16%, Retained +124%, Control +624% and Green Book +221%. Main causes of sickness absence are anxiety / depression 25% (334 shifts), lower limb 18% (241 shifts) and upper limb 12% (162 shifts). Sickness absence so far this year has cost the Brigade £306,570.
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 12 incidents (2 over target set at 10). 3 RIDDOR and 3 accidents resulting in injury due to the incident with Bravo 4 appliance.

Mr Harwood stated that of the 391 industrial inspections only 1 has resulted in Enforcement and this shows the high level of service and standards that are provided within the fire safety department. The CFO replied that we have embraced a partnership approach with our local businesses and the last thing we want to do is destroy anyone's business and livelihood therefore we continue to work closely with them to improve safety within their workplace.

Mr Harwood asked relating to the 5 RIDDOR how many resulted in an injury. The CFO replied that this was due to a single incident which involved an appliance overturning on route to a high rise incident. An investigation is ongoing and the outcomes will be presented at the Executive Committee in October 2019.

41.2 Sickness Analysis Report 2016/17 – 2018/19

The Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) presented the Sickness Analysis Report which provides members with a profile of the sickness absence nationally and within the Brigade over 3 years, by staff group, the main causes and how the Brigade compares with other Fire and Rescue Services.

The number of days lost to sickness across Fire and Rescue Services in 2018/19 was 371,000, an increase of 7% from 2016/17. The cost of that sickness to the public purse is £77.6m. Cleveland Fire Brigade has witnessed a 7.5% decrease (349) in days lost to sickness over the same period the previous year. However in 2018/19 sickness still remains high at 4,307 days and cost the Brigade £861,000.

Our new Health and Wellbeing Strategy is now in place and focuses on physical health, mental health and health promotion. We have an abundance of further planned activities set out in our 4 year improvement action plan against which we can measure progress in delivering our strategy and achieving our ultimate outcome which is a healthier workforce.

Mr McGrath asked if there has been national research into sickness. The CFO replied that the Brigade work closely with MIND and we also have the Firefighters Charity which now deals with a lot of mental health issues for all emergency services. We continue to work with the Police and Public Health England to ensure that we deal with all issues holistically.

Councillor Stephenson asked comparing operational and green book staff is it generally the same members who are have sickness absence. The DoCS stated that we have management case conferences to deal with all sickness absence and we continue to work with Human Resources and Occupational Health in this respect.

RECOMMENDED – that the report be noted.

41.3 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed in July 2019 by the Active Risk Team. The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1 and the CFO highlighted the following:

Reputational Damage – Outcomes from recent high profile official reviews which include:

- Analyse common themes from HMICFRS Tranche 2 inspection outcome reports
- Analyse inspection outcome report for Cleveland Fire Brigade when published.

The CFO stated that we are conscious in relation to the outcome of the HMICFRS inspection and we have plans in place relating to media with regards to the results of the report which will be published in December 2019.

Councillor Higgins highlighted the need for increased public awareness of our fantastic performance and in maintaining prevention work within the public whilst being faced with further Government cuts over the next 4 years. The CFO informed Members that a letter from the Chair and himself has been sent to all 6 Local MP's relating to the significant and continuous financial cuts that have been unjustly and unfairly applied by Government to its level of funding, and that these cuts have been made to a service that has also had to deal with the unique and challenging operating environment that is present in Teesside. The letter stated that the Authority would be supportive of facilitating a parliamentary briefing to explore how best to support and secure a local case for fairer funding for CFA, its staff and the wider community.

A further discussion took place between members on austerity measures and the impact of Brexit on public funding.

RECOMMENDED
i) that the report be noted.
ii) that a copy of the letter which was sent to the 6 Local MP's be sent to all Members

41.4 Internal Audit Progress Report 2018/19
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.

RECOMMENDED
(i) that the 2018/19 Internal Audit position and outstanding action plans be noted.
(ii) that the progress made to date in the Internal Auditor Plan 2019/20 be noted.

41.5 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2019/20
The Head of Finance (HoF) presented the current position as at 30 June 2019 and informed Members of the forecasted outturn position which shows a net underspend of £0.789m. This is based on a planning assumption that any pay settlement for firefighters above 2% is fully funded by the Government, as stated by the national employers organisations in their negotiations with the FBU. The forecast managed

underspend mainly reflects continued action by the CFO to manage vacancies to provide flexibility to address forecast budget deficits in 2020/21 and future year. It also reflects permanent procurement savings which can be built into the 2020/21 budget of £0.125m

RECOMMENDED
i) that the position at 30 June 2019 be noted.

42. ANY OTHER BUSINESS
The CFO informed Members that this was the HoF, Cliff Cordiner's last meeting due to retirement after 33 years' service. The CFO and all Members thanked Mr Cordiner for his many years of professional and dedicated service to the Authority and wished him well in his retirement.

COUNCILLOR NORAH COONEY
CHAIR