
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

27 JUNE 2025

PRESENT:

CHAIR:- Councillor Jim Beall - Stockton Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
 Councillor Christopher Wallace
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
 Councillor John Kabuye
REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
 Councillor Steve Kay
STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
 Councillor Andrew Sherris
 Councillor Stefan Houghton
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
 Mr Steve Harwood
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
 Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer,
 ACFO - Director of Strategic Planning, People & Resources
BRIGADE OFFICERS
 Head of Risk & Performance
 Head of Finance & Procurement
 Station Manager Richie Brown (Observing)
AUDITORS
 James Collins – Audit Director & Engagement Lead, Forvis Mazars
 Noel Adamson – Head of Internal Audit, Hartlepool Borough Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: ACFO - Director of Service Delivery
 Councillors Naweed Hussain, Dennis McCabe – Middlesbrough Council
 Councillor John Gardner – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

11. TRIBUTE TO COLLEAGUES

The Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer (LAMO) paid tribute to Mr Paul McGrath who passed away suddenly on 26 April. Mr McGrath had been an Independent Person on this committee since 2019 and his valued support and expertise will be sorely missed.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) informed Members that two Cleveland Fire Brigade colleagues had also sadly passed away in recent weeks – Charlotte Charles, Youth Engagement Coordinator and Neil Allport, Wholetime & On-call Firefighter. Colleagues and families of both members of staff are being supported by the Brigade.

The Chair initiated a minute's silence to remember fallen colleagues.

12. DECLARATION OF MEMBER'S INTERESTS

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

13. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2025

Councillor Houghton noted the incorrect spelling of his name within the apologies of the previous meeting minutes. The LAMO confirmed these will be rectified.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 21 February 2025 be confirmed.

14. TO RECEIVE THE REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

14.1 Forward Work Programme 2025/26

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Director of Strategic Planning, People & Resources (ACFO-DSPPR) outlined the Forward Work Programme for 2025/26, as detailed at Appendix 1, in accordance with the requirements of the Authority's Standing Orders.

She noted that the Forward Work Programme will remain flexible to allow consideration of additional items should they arise and confirmed that progress updates on the Brigade's Community Risk Management Plan 2026-30 work would also be considered.

Councillor Kay referred to delays in the submission of draft accounts in recent years. The ACFO-EDSPPR confirmed this would be covered at Agenda Item 7.1, however, gave assurances to Members that draft accounts would be submitted within the statutory guidelines for 2024/25.

The Treasurer reported that Forvis Mazars had been awarded the contract as auditors of the pension fund and will be undertaking both the statement and the pension fund auditing work which is hoped to reduce the delays experienced in recent years.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Work Programme 2025/26 be approved.

14.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2024-25 (Q4)

Members received a presentation by the Head of Risk and Performance (HoR&P) which covered the following key areas of performance covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:-

Actual Demand

- Fire Control Calls – 13,458
- Mobilisations – 13,964
- Incidents attended – 9,660
- Safer Homes Visits – 21,797 completed / 34,261 interventions
- Industrial and Commercial Audits – 1,038 (including attempted) 557 (+135 attempted, 312 reactive audits and 34 low risk audits outside of the RBIP
- Casualties – 2 fire fatalities, 18 fire injuries, 8 RTC fatalities, 170 RTC serious injuries.

All Incidents – From April 2024 to March 2025 the Brigade have attended 9,660 incidents. Compared to 2023/24 this is an increase of +995 (+11%). We have also seen an increase of +542 (+6%) compared to the 5 year average.

14.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2024-25 (Q4) cont.

All Incidents Cont. CFB remained the second highest rated nationally in 2023/24 for all incidents. The increase is mainly due to the large increase in deliberate secondary fires which are +26% compared to the previous year. DP asked if we recorded the amount of time spent at each incident.

Primary Fires – In Q4 there has been 902 primary fire incidents. This is an increase of +95 (+12%) compared to the previous year. There has been an increase also against the 5 year average and the Brigades set target at +68 (+8%) and +10 (+1%) respectively. Nationally CFB have reduced from the highest rate in 2022/23 to fourth in 2023/24. Primary fires are predominantly vehicle fires equating to 64% (416 incidents) followed by dwelling fires at 26% (236 incidents). 42 primary fires occurred within Holme House Prison which is an emerging demand of the Brigades resources.

Secondary Fires – 3,879 incidents in Q4. This is an increase of +793 (+26%) compared to 2023/24, an increase of +153 (+4%) against the 5 year average and +48 (+1%) compared to the Brigades set target of 3,831. Cleveland remained the highest nationally for secondary fires in 2023/24. The majority of secondary fires relate to refuse fires at 74% (2,868). Service demand is higher in Redcar and Cleveland with 31% of secondary fires occurring in this district, closely followed by Middlesbrough district with 28%.

Accidental Dwelling Fires – In Q4 there has been 168 incidents which is -21 (-11%) compared to the previous year. Compared to the 5 year average we have also seen a decrease of -12 (-7%) and -3 (-2%) compared to target. Cleveland sat in the lowest quartile in 2023/24. The highest rate of fires have occurred within the 'high' range with 1.26 fires per 1,000 dwellings. 71% of dwelling fires, including accidental and deliberate have had a low severity outcome.

Safer Homes Visits – 21,797 visits completed in Q4 with 34,261 interventions. +2,114 compared to 2023/24 and +3,322 compared to the 5 year average. We have seen a decrease against target with a reduction of -1,471. CFB has the third highest rate of SHVs nationally. 88% of SHV were completed by operational crews (19,234) which is an 11% increase from the previous year. 15% of visits resulted in referrals.

Deliberate Fires – 4,051 in Q4 which is an increase of +821 (+25%) compared to 2023/24, +144 (+4%) compared to the 5 year average and +303 (+8%) compared to target. Cleveland remained highest nationally during 2023/24. Both deliberate primary and secondary fires have seen an increase year on year at 19% and 26% respectively.

Industrial & Commercial Audits – Q4 had 1,038 incidents in non domestic properties. Compared to the Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) target this is reduced by -48% and against the RBIP from the previous year we have seen a reduction also of -45%. 692 audits have been completed / attempted. 312 reactive audits carried out and 34 low risk audits outside of the RBIP also completed. 80% of RBIP audits were deemed unsatisfactory in 2024/25. 3 of the 14 high risk premises were successfully audited.

Incidents (Higher Hazard Sites) – 23 incidents in Q4, +10 (+77%) compared to 2023/24. Compared to the 5 year average we have seen an increase of +15 (+188%) and compared to target +14 (+156%). 97% of high hazard sites risk information has been reviewed year to date, this is 3% lower than the previous year and the target of 100%.

14.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2024-25 (Q4) cont.

All Staff Sickness – In Q4 11.09 duty shifts per person were lost due to sickness. This is -2.65 (-19%) compared to the previous year, -0.02 compared to the 5 year average and +0.87 (+9%) compared to target. Main cause of sickness are mental health at 31%, Musculo skeletal at 29% and heart/cardiac at 8%. All sickness year on year has reduced with the exception of Fire Control. Mental health sickness remains the main cause however this has reduced from 41% from the previous year. 59% of sickness is due to long term absences.

The ACFO-DSPPR referred to sickness absence and explained that current mental health recording methods do not allow for further categorisation within this area. Work is ongoing nationally to address this and allow fire services to gain a better understanding of specific mental health issues which will support them to raise awareness and support staff wellbeing.

The CFO referred to the Brigade's Safer Home Visits (SHVs) which are higher than the national average and commended this ongoing achievement. He also gave assurance around the ongoing work to reduce attendance at incidents at Holmehouse Prison which included him meeting with the prison's Head of Protection and separately with the Chief Constable. This work has already commenced and focuses on the long-term reduction in the Brigade's attendance to the Prison.

Councillor Kay asked who is responsible for smoke alarm maintenance for devices provided during by the Brigade. The CFO clarified that while maintaining the alarms is the responsibility of the resident, the smoke alarms provided have a 10-year battery life, which will be replaced free of charge when issues are reported. The Brigade also run the 'Test it Tuesday' campaign as a reminder for residents to check the functionality of their alarms.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

14.3 Internal Audit Progress Report

The CFO presented the audits undertaken to date and highlighted the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. He confirmed that:

- 15 audits have been scored satisfactory.
- 12 audits have scored NFA, which is positive.

In relation to the Stores audit, The Head of Finance & Procurement (HoF&P) confirmed ongoing work to improve systems and practices with 4 of the 9 actions from the audit now complete and the remainder on track for completion by the end of July. She added that Stores and Finance are now utilising the same system as Hartlepool Borough Council, which has allowed council staff to work alongside Brigade colleagues to implement these new processes. The Authority will be updated at regular intervals of the system's implementation.

RESOLVED- progress on the recommendations were noted.

14.4 Corporate Risk Register

The CFO presented the Corporate Risk Register and reported changes to pension remedies, increased risk of the CFBRMS C.I.C and on-call recruitment. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) had considered the report in June and acknowledged the control measures which need to be added to the risk register for review and scrutiny.

Councillor Wallace asked if there were any large gaps in on-call availability which may become problematic. The CFO confirmed that currently, all but one station has vacancies, and on-call availability is already problematic, particularly in East Cleveland. The 5-minute radius for on-call has been increased to 10 minutes, and some wholetime firefighters have also taken up on-call on their days off in an attempt to offset this issue.

RESOLVED – That the Corporate Risk Register was noted.

15. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE TREASURER

15.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2024/25

The Head of Internal Audit (HoIA) reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. He confirmed that the systems reviewed annually by Internal Audit have provided consistently high assurance of an effective and satisfactory audit provision.

He gave assurance that the Authority already had good risk management in place and areas for improvement were highlighted in Appendix A. The HoF&P gave assurance to Members that auditors will be approached prior implementation of any new systems to ensure they are compliant and sufficient.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

16. TO RECEIVE THE JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & TREASURER

16.1 2024/25 Outturn and Finance Report

Members scrutinised this joint report which covered:

- Revenue Position as at 31 March 2025
- Draft Financial Report 2024/25 (including Statement of Accounts)
- Annual Governance Statement

The Treasurer thanked the HoF&P and the Hartlepool Borough Council team for their support producing the report and confirmed that the draft accounts would be published by Monday 30 June 2025, in accordance with the statutory deadline. He also added that wording would be reviewed to provide clarity around the certification of CFBRMS C.I.C. accounts prior to signing to reflect that these had not yet been submitted.

The Treasurer referred Members to the Annual Governance Statement contained at pages 69-73 of Appendix B and gave assurance that following review, all significant internal control issues had been identified and updated.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) **That the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement be approved.**
- (ii) **That Members noted that the Financial Report at Appendix B will subject to the completion of the independent audit by Forvis Mazars and details of any audit amendments will be reported to the Committee later in the year.**

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

17.1 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2026-30 update

The ACFO-DSPPR informed Members that the staff and public survey for the CRMP was currently live, and to date had received 891 responses. A number of internal focus groups had been held to consider the different Pillars within the CRMP, with feedback being collated from staff groups and Trade Unions. All feedback will be included when this is presented to the Executive Committee in August.

RESOLVED – That Members noted the verbal update.

COUNCILLOR JIM BEALL
CHAIR