

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

23 AUGUST 2024

- PRESENT:**
- CHAIR:-** Councillor Mary Ovens - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
MIDDLESBROUGH
 Councillors Naweed Hussain, John Kabuye
STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
 Councillors Jim Beall, Stephan Houghton, Andrews Sherris
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
 Mr Steve Harwood
 Mr Paul McGrath
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
 Chief Fire Officer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer,
 Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Strategic Planning & Resources
 Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Community Protection
BRIGADE OFFICERS
 Risk & Performance Officer
AUDITORS – FORVIS MAZARS
 Mr James Collins - Audit Engagement Lead
 Mr Jack Brown - Audit Engagement Manager
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**
- Cllr Gary Allen - Hartlepool Borough Council
 Cllr Steve Kay - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
 Head of Finance & Procurement
 Treasurer

27. **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**
 It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.
28. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 28 June 2024 be confirmed.
29. **REPORT OF FORVIS MAZARS LLP**
 29.1 **Auditor's Update**
 The Chair welcomed James Collins, Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) and Jack Brown, Audit Engagement Manager (AEM) to the meeting.

29.1 Auditor's Update cont.

The AEL provided Members with a verbal update covering:

- New Back Stop arrangements
- Conclusion of the Authority's 2022/23 Audit
- Proposal to commence the Authority's 2023/24 in October 2024 and conclude ahead of February 2025 deadline.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) noted that the Brigade's HMICFRS inspection was also due to commence in October.

Mr Paul McGrath asked whether the Forvis Mazars merger would alleviate some of the pressures. Mr Collins reported that there continued to be resource challenges in recruitment and retention of staff however this position may change in the future.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

30. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

30.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report - April to June 2024 (Q1)

The Head of Risk & Performance (HoR&P) gave a presentation outlining the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April to 30 June 2024, which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes.

The presentation highlighted the following key performance:

- Total incidents April to June 2024 (Q1) - 2,296 which was 10% less than the same period in 2023/24 and -11% compared to 5 year average.
- Total fires for Q1 2023/24 were 1,101 (-17% on 2023/24 and - 23% on 5 year average) with Cleveland having the national highest rate for 2023/24.
- Total fire control calls were 3,216 (- 9% to 2023/24 and -12% on 5 year average for the equivalent period).
- Total mobilisations were 3,470 which is an average of 19 mobilisations per shift and 1.5 per incident.
- Automated Fire Actuations (AFAs) were up 19% for domestic properties with 176 incidents reported and 13% for non domestic properties with 110 incidents reported compared to 2023/24.
- Deliberate vehicle fires were up 37% (22 incidents) compared to 2023/24 and 26% on five year average (+17 incidents).
- Deliberate dwelling fires were up 54% (7 incidents) to 2023/24 with a total of 20 fires reported in Q1. Cleveland remained highest national rate for 2023/24.
- Deliberate secondary fires were down 18% (178 incidents recorded compared to 2023/24 and down 20% on 5 year average (200 incidents).
- Deliberate primary fires totalled 129 incidents to date which was 3% increase to both 2023/24 (4 incidents) and 5 yr average.
- Secondary fires saw a 19% decrease with 885 incidents reported (-206 incidents to 2023/24) and 27% decrease on 5 year average (-323 incidents).
- Accidental Dwelling fires totalled 43 incidents for Q1 which was a 16% reduction (8 incidents) to 2023/24 and equivalent to 5 year average.
- Primary Fires totalled 215 incidents which was 8% reduction on 2023/24 (19 incidents) and 6% reduction on 5 year average (-14 incidents).
- There have been 5,719 Safer Homes Visits completed with 9,970 interventions which was a 19% increase to 2023/24 and 27% on the 5-year-average.

30.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report - April to June 2024 (Q1) cont.

- 244 Audits (including attempted audits) of Industrial and Commercial Premises were carried out – a 2% increase to 2023/24). This comprised of 109 completed audits, 106 were reactive audits and 29 attempted audits.
- 1,101 fire incidents were attended making up 48% of the total number of incidents. This is a 17% reduction compared to 2023/24 and a 23% reduction on 5-year-average.
- 1,195 non-fire incidents were attended making up 52% of all incidents. This is a 3% reduction to 2023/24 and 5% increase on 5 year average.
- Sickness Absence is 2.38 shifts per person which is a decrease of 20% to 2023/24 (2.96 shifts) and equivalent to the 5 year average. It is a 7% reduction on the 2.55 shift per person target.
- There was a decrease in sickness across Wholetime (-11% on equivalent period for 2023/24 and 5 year average), Fire Control (-50% on 2023/24 and -25% on 5 year average) and On-Call (-75% on 2023/24 and 40% on 5 year average) with increases for Green Book sickness (+16 on 2023/24 and +50% on 5 year average).
- Total 1,283 Duty Days lost to Sickness Absence in 118 individuals.
- Response Standards:
 - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 6.03 seconds
 - Call Handling: Target 100 seconds, Actual 84 seconds
 - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 5.55 minutes
 - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 7.48 minutes
 - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 6.42 minutes

The CFO thanked the HoR&P for the detailed report and highlighted that while Cleveland remained in the top four nationally for deliberate fires it was one of the lowest for accidental dwelling fires.

Mr Steve Harwood asked for further information on the 75% of commercial audits which were identified as unsatisfactory. The CFO reported a change in the Brigade's approach and that fire safety officers were working closely with local authorities and building standards to address any issues. He added that the Brigade takes a proportionate view to ensure that premises are safe to operate for staff and people who use them.

Councillor Kabuye recognised the Brigade's slight improvement nationally regarding deliberate fires and asked how that position could be further increased. The CFO reported that a lot of issues were emanating from deliberate firesetting linked to deprivation and serious crime which could only be resolved with a joint focus from police and other local authorities. He confirmed that the Brigade had launched an Arson Strategy earlier that year but it was too soon to evaluate whether it had been successful.

Councillor Beall congratulated the Brigade for delivering areas of exceptional performance despite scarce resources and asked what measures were in place to reduce the number of Automated Fire Actuations (AFAs). The CFO reported that 42% of all calls taken are false alarms but are dealt with on the assumption that there is a fire. He noted that while the Authority has the remit to charge persistent offenders the current approach is to work with management to ensure their systems are working.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

30.2 Internal Audit Progress Report

The CFO presented the audits undertaken to date and highlighted the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. He confirmed that the issue identified on the Creditors Audit had been immediately rectified.

RESOLVED - that the progress made against the 2023/24 and 2024/25 Internal Audit Plans be noted.

30.3 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2024/25

The CFO presented the current position as at 30 June 2024 and informed Members that the forecasted outturn position was an overspend owing to the phasing of commitments on premises, supplies and services and transport costs as detailed at Appendix 1.

The CFO reported a forecast outturn position of £1.663m underspend against a Capital Budget of £8.782m for 2024/25 which consists of three elements, including an element of capital expenditure to be deferred to 2025/26. Members were referred to Appendix 2 for the progress for each project within the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED - that the position as at 30 June 2024 be noted.

30.4 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) which had been reviewed by the Active Risk Team in July 2024 and the Executive Leadership Team in August 2024. The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1 and the CFO referred Members to paragraph 4.4 which detailed the following changes:-

- New and emerging risks
- Changes to existing risks
- Risks to be deleted from the CRR

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

31. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

31.1 2023/24 Outturn and Financial Report

The Chair informed Members that in the absence of the Treasurer the CFO would be outlining the report, which had been deferred from the previous meeting on 28 June 2024. The CFO outlined the report which covered:

- Revenue Position at 31 March 2024
- Capital Position at 31 March 2024
- The Financial Report 2023/24
- Annual Government Statement
- National Update on Action to Tackle the Local Audit Backlog

Councillor Kabuye referred to the Authority's uncertain financial environment and asked whether this was expected to change under the new government.

31.1 2023/24 Outturn and Financial Report cont.

The CFO reported that while the fire service was not one of the new government's priority areas the Authority would continue to lobby for a three-year settlement. This would allow the Treasurer to make appropriate planning for the potential £2.6m deficits over the medium term.

Members scrutinised the Annual Governance Statement and agreed that they did not have any issues regarding the content.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement as detailed on pages 82 to 87 of Appendix A be approved.**
- (ii) That Members noted that the Financial Report detailed in Appendix A would be subject to the completion of the independent audit by Forvis Mazars and details of any audit amendments would be reported later in the year.**

32. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

32.1 Retirement of Chief Fire Officer

The Chair acknowledged that this was the last meeting of the Committee before the retirement of CFO Ian Hayton and took the opportunity to extend sincere thanks for the 49 years' dedicated service and the difference he has made to the communities of Teesside. On behalf of Members, Cllr Ovens wished CFO Hayton well for a long, happy and healthy retirement.

COUNCILLOR MARY OVENS
CHAIR