

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



28 JUNE 2024

PRESENT:

CHAIR:- Councillor Mary Ovens - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

MIDDLESBROUGH
Councillor Naweed Hussain

STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Jim Beall, Andrews Sherris

REDCAR AND CLEVELAND
Councillor Steve Kay

INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Steve Harwood

AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Chief Fire Officer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer,
Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Strategic Planning & Resources
Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Community Protection

BRIGADE OFFICERS
Head of Finance & Procurement
Risk & Performance Officer

AUDITORS
Mr Gavin Barker - Audit Engagement Lead – Forvis Mazars LLP
Mr Noel Adamson - Head of Internal Audit – Hartlepool Borough Council

**APOLOGIES
FOR ABSENCE:**

Cllr Gary Allen – Hartlepool Borough Council
Cllr John Kabuye – Middlesbrough Council
Cllr David Taylor – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Cllr Stefan Houghton – Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Mr Paul McGrath – Independent Person
Treasurer

12. **WELCOME**
The Chair welcomed Councillor Steve Kay back to the Authority following his re-appointment by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council at its meeting on 27 June 2024.
13. **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**
It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.
14. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Extraordinary Audit & Governance Committee held on 19 April 2024 be confirmed.

15. REPORT OF FORVIS MAZARS LLP

15.1 Auditor's Annual Report – year ended 31 March 2024

The Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) presented the Auditor's Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2023 which had been considered in draft by the full Authority at its Annual Meeting on 7 June 2024.

The AEL reported that an unqualified audit opinion was issued on 10 June 2024 on the 2022/23 Financial Statements and referred Members to the Value for Money commentary which recognised the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. He added that no significant weaknesses had been identified in those arrangements and praised the Authority for continually managing its financial position despite the very difficult operating environment for public services.

The AEL confirmed this opinion was further supported by the Authority achieving consistent 'Good' ratings by the HMICFRS and commended staff for their excellent performance. He reported that the 2022/23 Audit Certificate was not expected to be issued until later in the year as National Audit Office clearance was still outstanding.

He informed Members that this would be his final meeting with the Authority and he would be replaced by James Collins. Jack Brown would be replacing the recently retired Audit Manager.

Councillor Kay highlighted the delays caused by waiting for Pension Fund Auditor and National Audit Office assurance and asked what fire and rescue services could do to address this. The AEL reported that the Audit had been ready to sign-off since the end of April and acknowledged that while Pension Fund Auditor assurance and waiting to go through the committee cycle had slowed the process down it was still an improvement on previous years.

Councillor Beall thanked the AEL for the work he had put in to completing the Authority's audit to ensure a swift conclusion and asked whether improvements could be expected moving forward. The AEL confirmed that Forvis Mazars LLP would be the Teesside Pension Fund auditors for 2023/24 therefore could prioritise issuing timely pension fund assurance.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

16. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

16.1 Forward Work Programme 2024/25

The ACFO-SPR outlined the Forward Work Programme for 2024/25, 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.

RESOLVED – that the Forward Work Programme 2024/25, outlined at Appendix 1, be approved.

16.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2023 – March 2024

The Risk & Performance Officer (R&PO) gave a presentation outlining the annual performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024, which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes.

The presentation highlighted the following key performance:

- Total incidents were 8,665 (-473/-5%) compared to the 5-year average for the equivalent period. Total mobilisations were 13,769.
- Special Services were up 12% (+173) with 1,574 incidents recorded.
- Secondary Fires were down with 3,086 incidents reported (-19%).
- Primary Fires were down 0.4% (-3) with 807 incidents and False Alarms were up 4% (+107) with 3,134 incidents recorded.
- There was a 6% reduction in Emergency Calls to Fire Control (-825 calls) with a total 12,288 calls taken in comparison to the 5-year average.
- There have been 33,088 Safer Homes Visits interventions with 19,683 completed.
- 1,747 audit inspections of Industrial and Commercial Premises were completed/attempted.
- 100% of the 225 Building (72d) Risk Inspections programmed for 2023/24 were completed.
- Accidental Dwelling Fires decreased by 13% to 216 incidents (-27) compared to 2022/23 but were up 15% on 5-year average (+24).
- Compared to the 5-year average there was a 19% (-762) decrease in Deliberate Fires and a 33% decrease compared to 2022/23 (- 1,617).
- Non-Fire Emergency Incidents were up 12% (+163) on 5 year average at 1,552:-
 - Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) at 365 incidents (+15%)
 - Suicides/Attempts at 94 incidents (+81%)
 - Hazmat/Spills & Leaks at 169 incidents (+16%)
 - Rescue Release / Effect Entry at 259 incidents (+9%)
 - Flooding at 90 incidents (+41%)
 - Assistance & Medical at 165 incidents (-4%)
- Emergency Response Standards
 - Building Fires 1st Appliance - Target 7 Mins, Ave 5.58 mins for 2023/24 (+10% on 2022/23)
 - Building Fires 2nd Appliance - Target 10 Minutes, Ave 8.03 mins for 2023/24 (+7% on 2022/23).
- Sickness Absence is 13.74 shifts per person compared to 11.68 Nationally (CFB is 18% higher).
- There was an increase in all sickness levels across Whole-time at 14.43 shifts (11.27 shifts National average), Fire Control at 9.22 shifts (12.11 National average), Green Book at 14.35 shifts (9.77 National Average) and On-call at 11.33 shifts. (15.99 shifts national average).
- Total 7,548 Duty Days lost to Sickness Absence in 586 occurrences by 333 individuals. Average length of 12.9 shifts per occurrence.
- Total estimated cost of sickness absence April 2023 to March 2024 is £1.9m.

Councillor Beall thanked the R&PO for the presentation and congratulated the Brigade on the level of preventative work it had carried out. He also noted the rise in the number of suicide related incidents attended and asked how crews manage to engage with them. The CFO reported that the Brigade shares data with other agencies which allows them to target the most vulnerable members of the community.

16.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2023 – March 2024 cont.

Councillor Kay referred to the Brigade's substantial sickness levels and asked how effective the measures in place were. The CFO reported that the Brigade had a new Occupation Health provider with a new remit for managing sickness. He acknowledged the rise in mental health sickness and the complex nature of managing this and hoped to change the narrative towards getting people back into work.

Councillor Ovens asked what support was in place for crews attending RTCs. The CFO confirmed there was trauma support available to all crews, plus additional support as needed.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted.

16.3 Internal Audit Progress Report

The CFO presented the audits undertaken to date and highlighted the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. He confirmed that since the report was published the Pensions Audit had now been completed.

RESOLVED - that the progress made to date in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 Internal Audit Plans be noted.

17. REPORT OF THE TREASURER

17.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2023/24

The Head of Internal Audit (HoIA) reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period April 2023 to March 2024. 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.

18. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

18.1 2023/24 Outturn and Financial Report

Due to the absence of the Treasurer Members agreed to consider this item at the meeting on 23 August 2024.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

19.1 The Chair took the opportunity to formally thank Gavin Barker for his many years Audit work with the Members and Officers and wished him well for the future.

**COUNCILLOR MARY OVENS
CHAIR**