
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



26 AUGUST 2022

PRESENT:

CHAIR:- Councillor Steve Matthews - Stockton on Tees Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Angela Falconer, Leisa Smith
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Teresa Higgins, Jon Rathmell
REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Julie Craig, Martin Fletcher
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Steve Harwood
Mr Paul McGrath
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer, ACFO –
Strategic Planning & Resources, ACFO- Community Protection
MAZARS
Mr Gavin Barker - Audit Engagement Lead

IN ATTENDANCE

Head of Risk and Performance
Head of Finance and Procurement

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Billy Ayre - Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Councillor Luke Frost – Stockton Borough Council

The Chair welcomed new Members Councillor Julie Craig and Councillor Martin Fletcher to the meeting and thanked Councillor Cliff Foggo for his support and commitment during his time on the Authority.

31. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

32. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 26 June 2022 be confirmed.

33. REPORT OF MAZARS

33.1 Audit Progress Report

The Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) updated Members on the progress of the 2021/22 Audit and outlined National Publications from:

33.1 Audit Progress Report cont.

- Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountability (CIPFA)
- Department for Levelling-Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC)
- National Audit Office (NAO)
- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd
- Home Office

The AEL confirmed that Mazars had raised a query with the Whole of Government Accounts guidance they received for the 2020/21 Audit, which was still ongoing. He expected this would be resolved shortly and they could formally close this audit.

The AEL reported that the Authority's accounts for the current audit year had been published in June ahead of the deadline and there were no material issues to bring to Members' attention. He envisaged a delay in concluding the 2021/22 Audit as Mazars was waiting for assurance from Teesside Audit Fund and anticipated bringing the Audit Completion Report to Members in November 2022.

RESOLVED – that the Audit Progress Report be noted.

34. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

34.1 Organisational Performance Report April - June 2022

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 July 2022 which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes. Key

Members received a presentation of performance as highlighted below:

- Total incidents were 4173 (+896/27%) compared to the 5 year average for the equivalent period.
- Special Services incidents were down 6% with 495 incidents (29 decrease).
- Secondary Fires saw the largest increase with 2155 incidents reported, a 731 increase (55%).
- Primary Fires were up 43% with 382 incidents (114 more) and False Alarms were up 7% at 1117 (76 more incidents).
- There was a 29% increase in Emergency Calls to Fire Control (1339 incidents) with a total 6008 calls taken in comparison to the 5 year average.
- Severe hot weather in July saw 193 calls to Fire Control over the period 19 to 20 July with 135 incidents reported against an average 27 per day.
- There have been 9871 Safer Homes Visits targeted with 5394 completed which was a 1541 (40%) increase on the 3-year-average.
- 445 inspections of Industrial and Commercial Premises were carried out – a 23% decrease (-134 incidents).
- Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs) had increased by 17% to 70 incidents (+10) compared to 2021/22 but CFB still remained one of the lowest rates in the country.
- Compared to the 5 year average there was a 45% increases in ADFs in Middlesbrough with 22 incidents (+7), Hartlepool of 20% to 12 (+2), Stockton of 19% to 22 (+4) and Redcar and Cleveland of 121% to 14 incidents (+7). The main causes being careless handling (16 incidents – 23% increase), electrical (15 incidents – 21% increase), cooking (10 incidents – 149% reduction) and radiated heat (10 incidents – 14% increase).

34.1 Organisational Performance Report April - June 2022 cont.

- Deliberate Fires have increased by 53% (763 incidents) to 2194 compared to the 5-year average. Included within these, 214 (10%) were deliberate primary fires an increase of 68 incidents (46%) on the 5-year average. 1980 (90%) were deliberate secondary fires an increase of 54% (695 incidents) compared to 5-year-average. Main causes were vehicles (98 / 46% of all deliberate primary fires) and refuse (963 / 49% of all deliberate secondary fires).
- Response Standards:
 - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 6.12 seconds
 - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds, Actual 76 seconds
 - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 5.03 minutes
 - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 7.34 minutes
 - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 4.44 minutes
- Sickness Absence is 4.20 shifts per person – an increase of 71% (1.75 shifts per person) compared to 5-year-average. 2262 duty days lost to sickness in 280 occurrences by 227 individuals. Average length of sickness was 8.1 shifts per occurrence. Average cost £140,000 per month.
- There was an increase in sickness levels across all staff groups with the exception of Retained Whole-time at 0.25 shifts with a reduction of 88% (-1.82 shifts). Fire Control increased by 348% (+7.09) to 9.13 shifts; Whole-time increased to 5.08 shifts (103%) +2.58 shifts and Green Book by 1.42 shifts (52%) to 4.13 shifts.
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 11 incidents – 29% (4 incidents) reduction on the 5-year- average.

Paul McGrath asked if there was a correlation between violence to staff incidents and staff absences. The CFO confirmed that the vast number of violence to staff incidents involved objects being thrown at staff and appliances whereas 38% of sickness is mental health related. This was addressed via the Brigade’s comprehensive health & wellbeing approach to staff.

Councillor Higgins praised the hard work of staff to deliver an exceptional service to the communities of Teesside.

Steve Harwood commended the Brigade’s efficient systems in place to filter out non-domestic fire calls and acknowledged the subsequent savings.

Councillor Rathmell highlighted a lack of rural safety guidance across the Brigade area and suggested this could be addressed through the local authorities in conjunction with the Brigade. The CFO acknowledged the significant increase in wildfires both locally and national over the summer months and confirmed that a multi-agency approach via the respective local authorities’ Safer Partnership groups was the way forward.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted

34.2 Internal Audit Progress Report

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.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the audit position of the completed 2021/22 Audits be noted.
- (ii) that the progress made to date in the Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 be noted.

34.3 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) which had been reviewed by the Active Risk Team in July 2022 and by the Executive Leadership Team in August 2022.

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 - Industrial Action
- Changes to existing risks - none
- Risks to be deleted from CRR - Organisational Learning and COVID 19

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

34.4 Progress Against Revenue & Capital Budgets 2022/23

The Head of Finance (HoF) presented the current position as at 30 June 2022 and informed Members that the forecasted outturn position was an overspend of £1.586m. She noted that the uncertainties surrounding pay awards, inflation and energy prices meant that she was unable to report a strong budgetary position at this stage and highlighted that the overspend also reflected the phasing of commitments on premises, supplies and services and transport costs as detailed at Appendix 1.

The HoF reported a forecast outturn position of £1.270m underspend against a Capital Budget of £3.201m for 2022/23 and referred Members to Appendix 2 for the progress for each project within the Capital Programme, with no significant issues to report.

RESOLVED - that the position at 30 June 2022 be noted.

34.5 Violence to Staff Analysis 2021/22

The CFO provided Members with the outcomes of analysis of violence to staff incidents which occurred between 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. The report at Appendix 1 covered the following key findings:

- 2021/22 saw the highest number (75) of incidents in the last 10 years
- Overall number of VTS incidents remain low in comparison to the number of incidents attended
- Nationally in 2020-21, Cleveland Fire Brigade reported incidents that are higher than the national average by 313%
- In 2021/22, 79% (59) incidents occur whilst Brigade staff were attending emergency response incidents with 16 (21%) incidents occurring during other activities. In 2020-21 94% of incidents occurred at emergency response incidents

34.5 Violence to Staff Analysis 2021/22 cont.

- Of the Violence to staff that occurred at emergency response incidents. It could not be determined from the raw information on incidents what the outcome actions were for 20 incidents.
- Body Worn Cameras only appear to have been used at a small number of incidents

Councillor Craig asked if there were plans to change the recording of data capture. The CFO confirmed that while the national Information Recording System (IRS) was currently under review he was confident that Brigade staff were trained to accurately record data.

The Chair asked if Cleveland Police was made aware of all violence to staff incidents. The CFO confirmed that information on all such incidents was shared with police colleagues.

Councillor Rathmell expressed disappointment that 'Operation Bexley' - the three month collaborative trial with Cleveland Police aimed at reducing violence to staff incidents and increasing successful prosecutions had not been fully utilised. The CFO confirmed that analysis on this operation was still ongoing.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

35. JOINT REPORT OF CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

35.1 2021/22 Outturn and Financial Report

The Treasurer reported that against the continuing financial uncertainty and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic the CFO had managed the revenue budget extremely well. He outlined the report in detail which covered:

- Revenue Position at 31 March 2022 (£43,000 underspend)
- Capital Budget Monitoring Statement (Appendix B)
- 2021/22 Pre-Audit Financial Report (Appendix C)
- Annual Governance Statement (Appendix D)
- Information Requested from Mazars (Appendix E)

The Treasurer informed Members that the 2021/22 Financial Report had been prepared in accordance with relevant accounting standards. The audit document and External Auditors report would be presented to the Committee for scrutiny later in the year.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement, detailed on pages 84 to 88 of Appendix C, be noted.**
- (ii) That Members noted that the Financial Report, detailed at Appendix C, will be subject to the completion of the independent audit by Mazars and details of any audit amendments will be reported to this Committee later in the year.**
- (iii) That the submission to Mazars, detailed at Appendix E, be approved.**

COUNCILLOR STEVE MATTHEWS
CHAIR