CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

28 JUNE 2019

PRESENT:

CHAIR:-
Councillor Norah Cooney – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Marjorie James
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Teresa Higgins (Sub), Naweed Hussain, Ashley Waters
REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Billy Ayre, Ashley Brook
STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Andrew Stephenson
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Messrs Steve Harwood, Paul McGrath
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Director of Corporate Services/Clerk, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer
MAZARS
Ross Woodley, Audit Manager
Gavin Barker, Audit Director
IN ATTENDANCE
Director of Technical Services, Head of Risk and Performance, Head of Finance, Head of Internal Audit (Hartlepool Borough Council)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:
Councillor Stephen Thomas – Hartlepool Borough Council
Councillor William Woodhead – Stockton Borough Council

In accordance with Standing Order No. 35, Councillor Higgins substituted for Councillor Stephen Thomas.

12. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Clerk sought nominations for the position of Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2019/20. Councillors Cooney and James were subsequently proposed and seconded whereupon nominations were closed. A vote was undertaken and Councillor Cooney received five votes to Councillor James' two votes. Councillor Stephenson abstained from voting.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Cooney be appointed Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for the ensuing year (2019/20).

13. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

14. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for the position of Vice Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2019/20. Councillor Naweed Hussain was subsequently proposed and seconded there being no other nominations. Councillor James wished for it to be recorded in the minutes that had a vote been taken she would have abstained.

RESOLVED – that Councillor Naweed Hussain be appointed Vice Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee for the ensuing year (2019/20).

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 22 February 2019 be confirmed.

16. REPORT OF THE CLERK

16.1 Forward Work Programme 2019/20

The Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) outlined the Forward Work Programme for 2019/20, as detailed at Appendix 1, in accordance with the requirements of the Authority's Standing Orders. The DoCS noted that the Forward Work Programme will remain flexible to allow consideration of additional items should they arise.

Councillor James requested that the Treasurer considered utilising CIPFE / LGA training as part of Member training. The Treasurer confirmed he would explore the cost implications and bring the details back to this committee.

RESOLVED:-

(i) that the Forward Work Programme 2019/20 outlined at Appendix 1 be approved.

(ii) That the Treasurer explores the option of using CIPFE/LGA training providers for future Member Development.

17. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

17.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2018/19

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) gave a detailed presentation focussing on the Brigade's performance against the Brigade's Performance Assessment Framework for the period April 2018 to 31 March 2019. This included the following key performance details:

- Fire Control dealt with 12,598 emergency calls in 2018/19 - a minor increase of 18 calls from the previous year.
- Total incidents stand at 8772, an increase of 205 (+2.4%) compared to the same period last year. Main changes are due to the decrease in special services and primary fires (428 / 36 respectively) and increase in secondary fires (666 incidents).
- Automatic False Alarms have reduced by 11% to 1093 incidents primarily due to the implementation of the Brigade's Unwanted Fire Signals Strategy for Accidental Fire Alarms in non-residential buildings.

17.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2018/19 cont.

- Deliberate Fire incidents were 3658 for 2018/19, an increase of 680 compared to 2017/18 (23%). Of these 388 were Deliberate Primary Fires (decrease of 3%) and 3270 were Deliberate Secondary fires (27% increase). This makes Cleveland the highest rate of deliberate fire in the country (52.61 per 10,000 population compared to 14.51 per 10,000 population nationally).

- Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs) have reduced by 20% since 2017/18 (from 142 to 113 incidents) with no change in Hartlepool and decreases in Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. The main causes are cooking related (21%), careless handling (20%) and radiated heat (19%) and electrical (19%)

- The Brigade's main preventative services for ADF's are Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) and Safe and Well Visits. In 2018-19 the Brigade has conducted 18,108 Home Fire Safety Visits and 2,927 Safe and Well Visits as well as 1,459 inspections of Industrial and Commercial buildings.

- Accidental Dwelling Fire fatalities – 2 incidents for 2018/19 (reduction of 50%)
- Accidental Dwelling Fire injuries – 8 (11% reduction)

- Response Standards:
  - Call Answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 7.5 seconds
  - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds - Actual 77 Seconds
  - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 4.48 Minutes
  - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 6.44 Minutes
  - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.46 Minutes

- Compared to 2017-18, overall Sickness Absence in 2018-19 increased by 18% (1.2 shifts) to an average of 7.95 shifts per person. Green Book increased by 6%, Fire Control increased by 118%, Wholetime increased by 25% and Retained decreased by 6%.

- The main causes of sickness for 2018/19 were anxiety/depression (20%) and lower limb (20%).

The Director of Technical Services (DoTS) noted that the Brigade has the lowest rate of accidental fires in the home and the fastest emergency response times. In addition the Brigade carries out the highest number of Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs), Safe & Well Visits (SWVs) and business inspections making Cleveland the safest place to live in the country.

Mr Steve Harwood asked how many of the 1459 premises inspected resulted in enforcement action. The DoTS confirmed that 9 prohibition notices and 3 enforcement notices were issued which was low due to the promotional work the Brigade does with occupants to teach them how to better regulate their own areas.

Councillor Waters asked how 4 sickness shifts per person equated in monetary terms. The DoTs confirmed there was no direct salary cost but there were costs associated with bringing staff in off duty. He outlined the Duty Shift System used by operational staff and confirmed this offered a very efficient way of managing staff and keeping cost down.

17.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2018/19 cont.

Councillor James sought clarity on the Brigades Duty Shift System in connection with how this affects pay and queried whether there could be a situation where the same people are selected to work extra and how this impacts their pay. The DoTS confirmed that a rota is devised annually which plots out shifts for the year for every operational member of staff equally which ensures operational cover. This consist of days when they must work (Blue) and days when they may be called in (Grey) and ensures all operational personnel fulfil their contractual obligation of working 2190 hours per year.

Councillor Hussain asked for details relating to the recent fire at Marton Country Club. The DoTS confirmed that the Brigade had delivered a speedy response and at its height had 11 appliances in attendance including aerial capability. The operation lasted almost 24 hours and the Brigade focused on ensuring the surrounding buildings were kept safe.

Councillor Higgins queried why some residents were still not in their homes following evacuation after concerns about asbestos risk. The DoTS reported that as debris from the fire had been deposited into nearby gardens, Public Health England and Middlesbrough Council had a duty of care to ensure the public remained safe until the area had been decontaminated.

Councillor Higgins placed on record sincere thanks to all the crews involved in the Marton Country Club fire for keeping the community safe.

Councillor Ayre highlighted mental health-related sickness absence and whether the Brigade was able to attribute the stress to work or home life. The DoTS confirmed that stress related sickness was a challenge across the public sector and he acknowledged the difficulties in determining whether stress is work or home related. Irrespective of the cause, he confirmed that staff were supported through referral to the onsite doctor and occupational health nurse and if it is determined the stress is work related an action plan is agreed to support that person in the workplace. Councillor Ayre said it was encouraging to hear this.

The DoCS confirmed that the Brigade had recently linked up with Redcar MIND to train Blue Light Champions across the Brigade to recognise mental health issues in staff. Mr Harwood praised the Brigade for implementing ‘stress initiatives’ which are having a positive impact on sickness figures.

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted

17.2 Internal Audit Progress Report

Members received details of the position and completion of the 2018/19 Internal Audit Programme and the 2019/20 Internal Audit Programme progress to date and considered the recommendations / actions contained within the action plans from previous Internal Audits.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the Audit position and completion of the 2018/19 audits be noted.

(ii) That the progress made to date in the 2019/20 Internal Audit Plan be noted.

17.3 Corporate Risk Register – February 2019

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed in April 2019 by the Active Risk Team as part of the Brigade's strategic planning process. The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted.

18. JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND TREASURER

18.1 Outturn and Financial Report (including the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts)

Members scrutinised the 2018/19 Financial Report (included the Statement of Accounts) which covered:

- Revenue Position at 31 March 2019
- Capital Budget
- 2018/19 Pre-Audit Financial Report
- Annual Governance Statement
- External Auditors Update

The Treasurer informed Members that the Annual Governance Statement was included in the Financial Report at Appendix E and would be approved as part of that process.

The Audit Manager gave a brief update and confirmed that the audit would be completed ahead of the statutory deadline of 31 July 2019 and would be approved by the Authority at its meeting on 26 July 2019. He concluded that the accounts were of a 'good quality with very few issues'.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the position as at 31 March 2019 be noted.

(ii) That the 2018/19 Annual Governance Statement as detailed at pages 81-84 of Appendix D be approved.

(iii) Members noted that the Financial Report detailed in Appendix D would be subject to the completion of the independent audit by Mazars and details of any audit amendments will be reported to the Authority on 26 July 2019.

(iv) Members noted the opportunity to raise questions and/or seek clarification of information included in the pre-audit Financial Report in the period up to 26 July 2019, when the audited Financial Report will be presented to the Authority for final approval.

19. REPORTS OF THE TREASURER

19.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2018/19

The Head of Internal Audit (HoIA) reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period April 2018 to March 2019. He confirmed that the systems reviewed annually by Internal Audit have provided consistently high assurance that they are fundamentally operating as intended and that where weaknesses had been identified corrective action has been taken without delay.

RECOMMENDED - That the contents of the report be noted.

19.2 Audit 2018/19 Request for Declarations

The HoIA presented Members with a proposed response to a letter received from the Director of the Authority's External Auditor Mazars regarding processes, arrangements and compliance with laws and regulations and the prevention and detection of fraud. The proposed response, attached at Appendix 1, included:

- Questions and arrangements for preventing and detecting fraud
- Questions about arrangements for complying with law and regulations
- Questions about the appropriateness of the going concern assumption

RESOLVED – that the letter at Appendix 1, outlining how the activities of the Committee comply with the International Auditing Standards, be approved and the Chair be authorised to respond accordingly to the external Auditor.

19.3 Role of the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in Public Service Organisations

The Treasurer reported that the role of the Chief Finance Officer is designated as the Treasurer at this Authority. He stated that the Treasurer had reviewed the CIPFA statement – 'The Role of the CFO in Public Service Organisations' and confirmed the CFA complied with the requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

RECOMMENDED – that it be noted that the CFA complies with the CIPFA requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

19.4 Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government

The Treasurer reported that the CIPFA statement – 'The Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government' had been reviewed by the Treasurer and confirmed that the CFA complied with the requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

RECOMMENDED – that Members note that Cleveland Fire Authority complies with the CIPFA requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

COUNCILLOR NORAH COONEY
CHAIR