

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



FIRE AUTHORITY

20 FEBRUARY 2026

PRESENT:

CHAIR:- Councillor Jim Beall – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors John Kabuye, Dennis McCabe

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Steve Kay

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor John Gardner

INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Steve Harwood

AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer
ACFO – Director of Strategic Planning, People & Resources

BRIGADE OFFICERS
Area Manager - Assistant Director of Prevention, Protection & Planning
Area Manager - Assistant Director of Operations
Assistant Director of Governance & Assurance
Risk & Performance Officer

AUDITORS – FORVIS MAZARS
Mr Jack Brown – Audit Manager

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

ACFO - Director of Service Delivery
Councillor Christopher Wallace – Hartlepool Borough Council
Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council
Councillors Stefan Houghton, Andrew Sherris – Stockton on Tees B.C.
Head of Finance & Procurement

95. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

96. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 20 November 2025 be confirmed.

97. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF FORVIS MAZARS

97.1 Audit Completion Report – Year Ended 31 March 2025

Members received the Audit Completion Report for the 2024/25 audit which contained:

- Executive Summary
- Audit Approach & Risk Summary
- Significant Findings
- Value for Money

97.1 Audit Completion Report – Year Ended 31 March 2025 cont.

The Audit Manager (AM) confirmed that the report had been considered by the full CFA on 13 February 2026 and it was his aim to sign it off that day and publish a follow up letter confirming that the internal control recommendations have now been resolved.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that this was due to the absence of Group Accounts following the liquidation of the CFBRMS C.I.C. in July 2025 and was not a direct reflection on the Brigade. He reiterated the importance of having clear messaging around this.

RESOLVED - that the Audit Completion Report for the year ended 31 March 2025 be noted.

98. TO RECEIVE THE REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

98.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report – 2025/26 (Q3)

The Risk & Performance Officer gave a presentation outlining the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April to 31 December 2025, which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes.

The following key areas of performance were highlighted:

- Total number of fire control calls were 13,016 (+27% compared to the 5-year average).
- Total number of Safer Homes Visits interventions were 17,601 with 12,904 completed (73% conversion rate) -7% compared to the 5 year average.
- Total number of incidents April to December 2025 (Q3) were 9,164 (+26% to the 5-year average).
- Total number of primary fires were 776 (+15% compared to the same period in 2024/25, and +17% compared to 5-year average). These were predominantly vehicle fires (45% - 350 incidents).
- Total number of secondary fires were 4,398 (+40% compared to the same period in 2024/25, and +46% compared to the 5-year average). These were predominantly refuse fires (54%).
- Total number of accidental dwelling fires were 154 (+18% compared to the same period in 2024/25, and +10% compared to the 5-year average). These had occurred in buildings identified as very high within our Building Risk Assessment, 47% of incidents involved households in the 36-65 age category.
- Total number of deliberate fires was 4,315 (+33% compared to the same period last year, and +38% compared to the 5-year average). Cleveland remained the highest area for deliberate fires nationally during 2024/25.
- Total number of industrial & commercial audits completed were 184 (-86% compared to the RBIP target, and -20% compared to 2024/25. 95% of completed RBIP audits carried out in 2025/26 to date have been deemed unsatisfactory, which is assurance that these audits are being completed correctly.
- Whole time crews mobilise within 2 minutes of instruction to 93% of occasions.
- On-call crews mobilise within 5 minutes of instruction on 62% of occasions.
- Sickness of all staff, wholetime and on call has reduced year on year, with Musculo-skeletal being the main cause of sickness absence (39% in Q3 2025/26, -6% compared to the same period last year) and 59% of sickness classed as long-term.

98.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report – 2025/26 (Q3) cont.

The CFO advised members that musculoskeletal has become the main cause of sickness absence and contributes to more duty days lost (1,682) compared to mental health absence (1,206).

Councillor Kay thanked officers for the exceptionally high quality presentation and asked for more information about the increase in secondary fires in the Redcar & Cleveland area compared to 2024/25. The Area Manager – Prevention, Protection & Planning (AM-PP&P) confirmed that these figures reflected a spike in secondary fires in East Cleveland at the end of the Summer and in addition there had been an increase in incidents in the urban areas.

Councillor Kabuye referred to the 38 incidents of violence to staff reported and asked what the Brigade was doing to address this. The CFO reported that crews had body worn cameras and there was CCTV on appliances so any incidents of violence to staff can be recorded and the footage given to police to pursue prosecutions.

The Chair asked for further details about what Home Safety Visits entail. The ACFO-SPPR confirmed the focus had moved towards quality rather than quantity and crews were encouraged to spend time and focus on the most vulnerable to ensure relevant referrals are made. She added that ELT was currently working on setting realistic targets for 2026/27 to reflect this new focus.

The Chair referred to the high number of deliberate vehicle fires and asked if the Brigade received any input from other agencies to address these. The CFO confirmed that officers were heavily involved with the safer partnership groups and had full support from Cleveland Police.

RESOLVED- that the report be noted.

98.2 Internal Audit Progress Report

The ACFO-SPPR presented an update on audits undertaken to date, highlighting the outcomes relating to limited/satisfactory assurance. These included the audits from the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 programmes.

She informed Members that two improvement actions remained for the 2023/24 audits relating to value added tax which were on track to be completed by 31 March 2026.

RESOLVED - that the progress made against the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 Internal Audit Plans be noted.

98.3 Progress Against Revenue & Capital Budget 2025/25 (Q3)

The Treasurer presented the current position as of 31 December 2025 and reported the net forecast revenue budget underspend of -£61k which was a better position than forecast due under occupancy on the pay budget (£-660k) and non-budget savings identified totalling a £-744k underspend. The pay and non-pay underspends will be allocated to off-set one-off pressures already identified and will provide increased financial / service resilience.

98.3 Progress Against Revenue & Capital Budget 2025/25 (Q3) cont.

The capital budget for 2025/26 is £7.077m comprising of 47 schemes, actual spend, including commitments at December was £1.179m, with a further £3.275m forecast by the end of the financial year. The forecast outturn on the capital programme is currently a year-end underspend of £2.623m. The financial position and progress for each project in the capital programme for 2025/26 is detailed in Appendix 2.

RESOLVED - that the position as of 31 December 2025 be noted.

99. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE TREASURER

99.1 Internal Audit Plan 2026/27

The Treasurer presented the Internal Audit Plan indicating the proposed coverage for 2026/27.

He reported that in order to comply with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), Internal Audit was subject to a five-yearly External Quality Assessment (EQA). This had been undertaken in December 2024 by CIPFE which provided satisfactory assurance that the Authority's internal audit service conforms with PSIAS.

The Treasurer also confirmed that Internal and External audit work was integrated to avoid duplication and minimise costs to the Authority.

RESOLVED - That the 2026/27 Audit Plan be approved.

COUNCILLOR JIM BEALL
CHAIR