

CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

25 JUNE 2021



PRESENT: **CHAIR:-** Councillor Ashley Waters - Middlesbrough Council

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Tom Cassidy, Ben Clayton

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Naweed Hussain

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Billy Ayre

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Steve Matthews

INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Steve Harwood
Mr Paul McGrath

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

MAZARS
Mr Gavin Barker – Audit Engagement Lead

IN ATTENDANCE
Head of Risk and Performance
Head of Finance and Procurement

APOLOGIES

FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Adam Brook, Cliff Foggo – Redcar & Cleveland

13. **WELCOME**
The Chair welcomed new Members Tom Cassidy, Ben Clayton and Steve Matthews to the meeting.
14. **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**
It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.
15. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 26 February 2021 be confirmed.
16. **REPORTS OF MAZARS**
 - 16.1 **Audit Progress Report**
The Audit Engagement Lead (AEL) provided Members with an update on the progress of the 2020/21 audit and reported that owing to workload and resource pressures this would not be completed by September, as previously reported in the Audit Strategy Memorandum.

16.1 Audit Progress Report cont.

Mazars was now working to a revised timetable which aimed for a completion date of end of November 2021 and preliminary work was underway with Teesside Pension Fund to avoid the further delays in seeking Pension Fund assurances as experienced in 2020.

The AEL reported that these difficulties reflected the significant challenges in the local audit sector nationally which was exacerbated by the pandemic with only 45% of 2019/20 audits meeting the November 2020 deadline.

He referred Members to the National Publications from:

- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA)
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- National Audit Office (NAO)
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Paul McGrath asked for assurances that there would not be any consequences for the Authority for the auditors not hitting the statutory deadline. The AEL confirmed that there were no direct consequences.

Steve Harwood asked what had been the main source of delay. The AEL confirmed that remote working and the loss of several key members of staff in a short period of time had caused difficulties and created a backlog.

RESOLVED – that the Audit Progress Report be noted.

17. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

17.1 Forward Work Programme 2021/22

The ACFO-Strategic Planning & Resources (ACFO-SPR) outlined the Forward Work Programme for 2021/22, 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 2021/22 outlined at Appendix 1 be approved.

17.2 Annual Performance Report 2020/21

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 which had been aligned to the Brigade's strategic goals, aims and associated outcomes.

Members received a presentation of performance which took into account the Covid-19 pandemic. Key areas are highlighted below:

- Total incidents were 7781 - a decrease of 852 (-10%) compared to last year.
- The largest decreases compared to 2019/20 were 14% reductions in both Secondary Fires at 3018 (-487) and Special Services at 1159 (-181), 7% reduction in Primary Fires at 743 (-54) and a 4% reduction in False Alarms at 2816 (-123).

17.2 Annual Performance Report 2020/21 cont.

- There have been 15,556 HFSVs completed - a reduction of 2290 (13%) compared to 2019/20. Included within these were 2,585 Safe and Well Visits (down 15% with 472 fewer than last year).
- 858 inspections of Industrial and Commercial Premises were carried out - a reduction of 693 (-45%) on last year.
- Additional Covid Support Activities include 41 PPE collections and distributions for partners, 965 deliveries of essential items to vulnerable persons (prescriptions, food parcels and pulse oximeters), 70 training sessions for care homes and 1532 hours of staff volunteering to support the vaccination programme, 230 vaccinations delivered by Brigade personnel.
- Accidental Dwelling Fires had increased by 5 incidents to 160 – a 3% increase from 2019/20 with increases in Middlesbrough of 15% to 53 incidents (+7), Hartlepool of 19% to 31 (+5) and Stockton of 6% to 51 (+3) with a decrease in Redcar and Cleveland of 29% to 25 incidents (-10). The main causes being cooking (38 incidents – 24%), electrical (30 incidents – 19%) and radiated heat (29 incidents - 18%).
- Deliberate Fires have decreased by 14% (-522 incidents) to 3201 compared to 2019/20. Included within these, 389 (12%) were deliberate primary fires a reduction of 55 incidents (22%) on last year and 2812 (88%) were deliberate secondary fires -14% and 467 fewer incidents than last year. Main causes were vehicles (161 / 41% of all deliberate primary fires) and refuse (1,641 / 58% of all deliberate secondary fires).
- Response Standards:
 - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 5.79 seconds
 - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds, Actual 90 Seconds
 - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 4.53 Minutes
 - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 6.46 Minutes
 - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.07 Minutes
- Sickness Absence is 8.05 shifts per person – a reduction of 14% (1.31 shifts per person) compared to 2019/20. 4,076 duty days lost to sickness in 293 occurrences by 204 individuals including 451 duty shifts lost to Covid related absence. Average length of sickness was 14 shifts per occurrence.
- There was a decrease in sickness levels across all staff groups with the exception of Whole-time which increased by 0.13 shifts (1%) to 9.60: Fire Control reduced by 2.19 shifts (-37%) to 3.81; Retained by 3.33 shifts (-40%) to 4.97 and Green Book by 4.22 shifts (-40%) to 6.43.
Main causes of sickness absence are Mental Health – 684 shifts (17%); Upper Limb - 443 shifts (11%) and Covid Related – 451 shifts (11%).
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 52 incidents – 13% increase on 2019/20 (6 incidents).

The CFO noted that while a reduction in incidents was consistent with the national picture due to the restrictions imposed throughout the pandemic the Brigade has still managed to deliver three times more HFSVs and Fire Safety Inspections than the national average.

The CFO confirmed that 85% of all fire calls were arson related putting Cleveland at the top of the league nationally. He also noted that violence to staff incidents were three times higher in the north east across all emergency services, which required a multi-agency approach to tackle this issue.

17.2 Annual Performance Report 2020/21 cont.

Steve Harwood asked how the Brigade categorises risk levels of properties. The CFO confirmed that risk was dependent on many factors, including how well managed the building is. He confirmed that the Authority had invested in increasing the Fire Protection Team to carry out the risk based inspection programme and it was key to take a balanced approach of prevention, protection and response.

Councillor Waters asked why the Brigade had seen a reduction in safety visits. The CFO noted that many businesses had closed throughout the pandemic which limited opportunities to carry out inspections on premises. Councillor Waters also highlighted the increased crime rate in Middlesbrough and asked if there were any joint initiatives to tackle this. The CFO confirmed that he had met with the PCC that week and had discussed the issue of Cleveland having the second highest crime rate in the country. The CFO was also meeting with the Chief Constable to explore the establishment of a Joint Fire Investigation Team to tackle the high levels of arson.

Councillor Waters expressed thanks to all staff on behalf of the Authority for the work they do to keep Cleveland safe.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted

17.3 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 2020/21 Audits be noted.**
- (ii) that the progress made to date in the Internal Audit Plan 2021/22 be noted**

17.4 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Active Risk Team in February 2021 and by the Executive Leadership Team on 6 April 2021. The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1 and the CFO referred Members to the outcome at paragraph 4.4 which detailed the following new and emerging risks:

- Fire and Rescue Reform
- Pension Reforms
- Digital Transformation
- Organisational Learning and COVID 19
- Capacity to enforce the Regulatory Reform

The CFO also reported a change to the wording relating to EU Exit – end of transition period to reflect the new rules governing the relationship between the UK and EU.

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

18. REPORTS OF THE TREASURER

18.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2020/21

The Treasurer reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period April 2020 to March 2021. 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.

18.2 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 and confirmed that the CFA complied with the requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

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

18.3 Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Public Service Organisations

The Treasurer reported that in his role of Chief Finance Officer for the Authority he 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.

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

18.4 Audit 2020/21 – Request for Declarations

This report was deferred until the Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 27 August 2021.

19. REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISER AND MONITORING OFFICER

19.1 Standards Report

The Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer provided Members with updates on the following Standards issues:

- Progress of the Committee on Standards in Public Life Landscape review of the regulation of public standards ‘Standards Matter 2’ as detailed at Section 3 of the Report.
- Core Code of Conduct for Fire and Rescue Services (England), as detailed at Section 4 of the report.

He reassured Members that the Authority had codes, practices, policies and procedure which were at least consistent with the principles of the Core Code and has examples of good practice that go beyond the five principles which underpin that code.

RESOLVED – that the contents of the report be noted.

COUNCILLOR ASHLEY WATERS
CHAIR