
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



19 FEBRUARY 2016

PRESENT:

CHAIR:-

Councillor Mick Stoker – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor Naweed Hussain

STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillor John Gardner

REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillors Mary Lanigan, Billy Ayre

INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Mr Mike Hill

AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Director of Community Protection, Director of Corporate Services, Legal Adviser and Monitoring Officer, Treasurer

MAZARS

Ross Woodley (Audit Manager), Mark Kirkham (Audit Director)

BRIGADE OFFICERS

Head of Finance, Head of Risk and Performance

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor Stephen Akers-Belcher – Hartlepool Council

Councillor Tom Mawston – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Mr Jeff Bell – Independent Person

AG15. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

AG16. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 13 November 2015 be confirmed.

AG17. REPORTS OF MAZARS

AG17.1 Audit Strategy Memorandum

The Audit Director (AD) Mark Kirkham presented the Audit Strategy Memorandum Report which covered:

- Audit scope, approach and timeline
- Significant Risks
- Value for Money Conclusion
- Fees for audit and other services

He reported that the challenging but achievable savings proposed in the revised CIRMP should address the reductions in funding for the four years up to 2019/20.

AG17.1 Audit Strategy Memorandum continued

Audit Manager (AM) Ross Woodley outlined the following three significant audit risks:

- Management override of controls
- Revenue recognition
- Pension Estimates (IAS 19)

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted.

AG17.2 Value For Money Conclusion Risk Assessment

The Audit Director (AD) Mark Kirkham presented the Value for Money Conclusion Risk Assessment and reported that “In all significant respects, the audited body had proper arrangements to ensure it took properly informed decisions and deployed resources to achieve planned and sustainable outcomes for taxpayers and local people”. He reported that the assessment overall has not identified any initial significant risks for the VFM conclusion.

Audit Manager (AM) Ross Woodley highlighted 2 amber issues under sustainable resource deployment and further work will be carried out around these 2 areas and it is anticipated this evidence should reduce the RAG rating to green.

Councillor Stoker asked if these 2 issues would turn green by September 2016. The Treasurer responded that these risks will be reviewed when year-end and financial information is available and it is anticipated this will result in green ratings.

Councillor Ayre asked why the report states we have difficulty in recruiting retained firefighters? The Director of Community Protection (DCP) stated that we do not have any difficulties and that we have sufficient firefighters and appliances ready to operate. He added that we have secured transitional funding from the Government to ensure competence issues are maintained.

Councillor Ayre stated that since negotiations on changing of working hours will no longer be implemented, were there any further updates? The DCP reported that we were unable to come to an agreement with the FBU on the 3 watch system, which has resulted in reverting back to the original plan outlined in the CIRMP which will be implemented from 1 April 2016. He reported these plans will affect firefighters based at Marine Fire Station and the loss of the Hydraulic Platform from Middlesbrough Fire Station with all staff being relocated to other stations.

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted.

AG18. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

AG18.1 Organisational Performance and Efficiency Report April – December 2015

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the following performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April to 31 December 2015:

Incident Summary

7,175 incidents reported, increase of 5.36% compared to 2014/15

AG18.1 Organisational Performance and Efficiency Report April – December 2015 cont'd

Fire Fatalities and Injuries

We have had one cooking related fatality in 2015/16 in the Stockton District compared to 2 fatalities the previous year.

Injuries remain unchanged from 2014/15 at 18. Injuries include 7 overcome by gas/smoke, 6 burns/scalds, 4 physical (cuts / abrasions) and 1 breathing difficulties.

ADF's (Accidental Dwelling Fires)

ADF's have reduced by 29% with 46 incidents since last year. We are still on target to surpass our best performance ever. Top causes being 31% electrical, 22% cooking and 14% careless handling. Cost implications are £2.65 million so far this year (£25,000 per ADF). Wards with the highest incidents are Park, Park End, Beckfield and Newport (Middlesbrough), Victoria and Manor House (Hartlepool).

Deliberate Fires

Incidents have fluctuated over the last four years. In 2015/16 we have seen an increase of 13% since the previous year. Deliberate fires account for 77% of all our fires we attend.

Deliberate primary fires account for 11% (267) of all deliberate fires, with the main incidents being 57% vehicle fires compared to 43% the previous year.

Deliberate secondary fires account for 89% (2155) of all deliberate fires and the main causes were 67% rubbish fires, 26% grassland and 2% fences and outdoor structures. Wards with the highest incidents South Bank, Dormanstown and Kirkleatham (Redcar) Brambles, Thorntree, Longlands and Beechwood (Middlesbrough).

Response Standards

The Brigade has a 2 minute benchmark for call handling and mobilisation of the appropriate response. Our target is 98% and our current performance stands at 91% with 610 calls out of a total of 7074 exceeding 2 minutes.

In relation to response benchmarks, we significantly exceed these benchmarks in all cases bar one. In total, our overall performance averages at 95.4%.

Sickness Absence

Overall staff sickness has reduced when compared to last year by 0.14 shifts. Wholetime sickness has reduced by 0.84 shifts a 14% decreased from last year. Retained sickness has risen by 0.06 shifts a 1% increase compared to the previous year. Control Room sickness has increased to 1.04 shifts a 46% increase from last year and Green Book sickness has had the biggest increase at 3.04 shifts, a 53% rise when compared to last year. Cost of this sickness absence equates to £557,163. Main causes of sickness across the board are musculoskeletal and mental health issues.

The HoRP stated that we have a new approach to HFSV targeting which includes the use of Exeter Data which is a national initiative whereby Public Health England supplies the Brigade with the address, age and sex of everyone over 65 who is registered with a GP.

The DCP added that as older people are more likely to die in a fire, we look at areas where significant number of fires are occurring and use a targeted approach. He reported that by using Exeter data this will enable the Brigade to target HFSV's to the most vulnerable.

AG18.1 Organisational Performance and Efficiency Report April – December 2015 cont.

Councillor Ayre stated that it is very encouraging to see us supporting vulnerable people through the use of this data.

Councillor Ayre requested clarification on the difference between a primary fire and a secondary fire. The DCP stated that a primary fire is related to a property or something of material value and a secondary fire (also known as an F3) is relating to a fire of no material value i.e. grass fire, rubbish fire.

Councillor Ayre expressed his concerns of numerous incidents that have occurred within his ward area over the bonfire period. The DCP stated that a great deal of preventative work is carried out leading up to and throughout this period which includes targeting schools to give education on the impacts. He reported that we have seen year on year reductions throughout the bonfire period and it is no longer our busiest period of the year.

Councillor Hussain asked what impact the recent flooding has had on the Brigade. The DCP reported that the Authority is more fortunate with regard to flooding. We have mapped out areas across the Brigade and we ensure we keep dry appliances to respond to these incidents.

Mr Hill asked why we have not achieved Investors in People. The Director of Corporate Services (DCS) reported that the Brigade has achieved a number of assessments and due to the limited resources, Investors in People had been deferred but we still operate through the Investors in People framework.

Councillor Gardner asked what was our marketing budget. The DCP stated that the budget is £100,000 per year which is used to make improvements to website, radio and TV adverts and various displays for campaigns carried out throughout the year. He reported that we have had a number of changes within the Communications Team and as a result we now have an increased number of followers on Twitter and Facebook which enables us to reach more people when delivering hard hitting messages.

He informed Members that the Kitchen Safety week campaign was launched last week and was fronted by Lynn Ford who lost her son 10 years ago as a result of a chip pan fire.

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted

AG18.2 Scrutiny of Internal Audit Reports 2015/16

The DCS summarised the progress on the recommendations contained within the Action Plans from Internal Audits carried out to date.

RECOMMENDED – that the progress made to date by Brigade and Proper Officers in achieving the recommendations contained within the Internal Auditor’s Actions Plans be noted.

AG18.3 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2015/16

The Head of Finance (HoF) informed Members of the progress against the approved 2015/16 Budgets up to 31 December 2015 and the forecast year end outturn as detailed at Appendix 1 and 2. The HoF indicated that these figures have been reflected in the recently approved MTFS.

Appendix 1 summarised the key budget variances between expected and actual expenditure and income, and the reasons for the forecast outturn, which reflect two key issues:

- Operational Budgets – forecast outturn £1.143m underspend
The forecast outturn mainly reflects lower occupancy levels as a result of retirees not being replaced to facilitate the implementation of the CIRMP.
- Capital Finance Costs – Forecast outturn £0.
As reported to the Fire Authority the previous years underspend reflected the phasing of the Asset Management Plan and was a temporary saving. No variance is anticipated this year.

Appendix 2 is a monitoring statement which includes physical as well as financial information on each Capital Scheme so that physical progress can also be monitored throughout the year.

RECOMMENDED – that the position up to 31 December 2015 be noted.

AG19 REPORT OF THE TREASURER

AG19.1 Internal Audit Plan

The Treasurer presented the Internal Audit Plan and informed Members of the direction of internal audit activity sought approval of the annual operational Internal Audit Plan 2016/17.

RECOMMENDED

- (i) that the report be noted**
- (ii) that the Audit and Governance Committee review the authorities Annual Governance Statement at its meeting on 20 May 2016.**

RESOLVED - that the 2016/17 Internal Audit Plan be adopted

COUNCILLOR MICK STOKER
CHAIRMAN