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# CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

## MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



19 May 2017

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**PRESENT:**

**VICE CHAIR:-**

Councillor Paul Kirton – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

**REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Councillor Neil Bendelow

**HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Councillor Rob Cook

**INDEPENDENT PERSONS**

Mr Mike Hill

**AUTHORISED OFFICERS**

Chief Fire Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Treasurer, Head of Internal Audit

**MAZARS**

Ross Woodley (Audit Manager)

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Head of Risk & Performance,

**APOLOGIES**

**FOR ABSENCE:**

Councillors Norah Cooney, Brian Dennis – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

Councillor Gillian Corr – Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council

Councillor Ray Martin-Wells – Hartlepool Borough Council

Mr Jeff Bell – Independent Person

Mr Peter Devlin – Finance and Monitoring Officer

**69. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**

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

**70. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 24 February 2016 be confirmed.**

**71. REPORTS OF MAZARS**

**71.1 Audit Progress Report**

The Audit Manager (AM) Ross Woodley gave a verbal update due to the restrictions around the General Election and Purdah.

Councillor Cook asked why a written report could not be circulated.

The AM replied that the direction set by Mazars Standards and Risk Department is not to comment on any policy issues which could be perceived as interfering with June's election.

## **71.1 Audit Progress Report (cont.)**

He informed members that last year Mazars successfully trialled the early audit timetable which will be compulsory from 2018 and that this years' audit would start on 5 June 2017 and be substantially complete by the end of July. There are extra challenges this year in completing the time table, however Mazars are still confident they will meet the July date.

## **71.2 Request for Declarations**

The AM presented the report Request for Declarations which 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

**RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted and responses to the questions detailed in the report be presented at the next Audit & Governance Committee meeting on 25 August 2017.**

## **72. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

### **72.1 Annual Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2016/17**

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the year ending 31 March 2017.

The HoRP contextualised the area in which Cleveland Fire Authority operates and detailed the established Performance Assessment Framework which is used to assess performance in 12 key areas.

#### **Service Demand**

He reported that we have responded to 10,951 incidents which is +2470 (+29%) from the previous year. This year we have attended and assisted in 2928 Emergency Medical Response (EMR) calls which equates to 27% of all incidents.

20,257 Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV) have been undertaken (57% coverage across Teesside) which is one of the highest numbers nationally. This is a reduction of 3767 (-16%) from the previous year due to the fact we now also carry out Safe and Well Visits of which 918 have been completed.

#### **Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADF's)**

There has been an increase of 7 ADF's compared to 2015/16, however looking at figures from 2003/4 we had 499 ADF's, shortly after this time HFSV's were introduced and now the figure stands at 137, a reduction of 73% which is an indication of the effectiveness of HFSV's.

Top causes of ADF's are 26% cooking related, 25% electrical and 20% radiated heat.

## 72.1 Annual Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2016/17 (cont.)

### **Deliberate Fires**

We have had 2704 Deliberate Fires compared to 2889 the previous year.

Deliberate primary fires account for 14% (389) of all deliberate fires. The main types being 57% vehicle fires, 16% shed/hut fires and 16% dwelling fires.

Deliberate Secondary fires account for 86% (2315) of all deliberate fires. The main types being 78% rubbish fires, 17% grassland fires and 3% outdoor structures.

### **Emergency Medical Response (EMR)**

As part of the EMR national trial we have attended 2928 incidents, 72% of which were in Redcar & Cleveland. On 93% of occasions we have attended before the ambulance and provided medical treatment to the patient.

Cleveland Fire Brigades' average time to respond from time of call to attendance at the scene is 8-13 minutes. NEAS backup time to take over the treatment of the patient is 11-31 minutes. Without these EMR calls the average time a person would have waited for medical treatment would be 19-44 minutes.

### **Sickness Absence**

We have incurred on average 8.49 duty days sickness absence for each employee. This is a 14% (1.05 shifts) increase from the previous year.

In all staff groups we have seen an increase in level of staff sickness, Wholetime +3%, Retained +11%, Control +148% and Green Book +32%.

Main causes of sickness absence this year are Anxiety / depression 26% (1199 shifts), Lower Limb 15% (704 shifts), Upper Limb 9% (422 shifts). Sickness absence this year has cost the Brigade £877,000.

### **Annual Priorities**

These are detailed in the 2016/17 Service Plan.

The status of Annual and Corporate Priorities are:

- 9 completed
- 5 in progress
- 2 deferred

### **Response Standards**

The response benchmarks are based on risk for fire related incidents and a blanket benchmark for RTC. Our target for all benchmarks is 75%. We significantly exceed these benchmarks in all cases. In total our overall performance averages at 96%.

## 72.1 Annual Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2016/17 (cont.)

### **Operational Assurance**

In 2015/16 there have been no inspections on the Brigade's operational competence. However the internal self-assessment process that is adopted to ensure the front line services delivered remain effective and indicates that the external assessments conducted in 2014/15 remains valid.

### **Good Corporate Governance**

As part of governance arrangements, Mazars review the Brigades financial statements each year to ensure they show a true and fair reflection of financial position.

For the financial statements for 2015/16 Mazars came to the conclusion that they do represent a true and fair reflection and hence have issued an unqualified opinion on these financial statements

### **VFM: External Audit Judgement**

Mazars have reviewed the Brigade in terms of its Value for Money to the public and businesses of Teesside. They review against 2 criteria's:

- The Brigades financial resilience
- How the Brigade has secured economy effectiveness and efficiency in what we do

The Brigade received a positive assessment against both of these categories.

### **Comparison against other FRS's**

We obtain comparator information from 2 main sources

- Family Group - How the number of incidents we are attending compares with other Brigades
- CFOA Occupational Health Group - How our sickness absence compares against other FRS

Of those areas we compare ourselves with other Brigade's;

4 indicators remain in top quartile or have improved their quartile position:

- Primary Fire Injuries
- Accidental Dwelling Fires
- Accidental Dwelling Fires Fatalities
- Accidental Dwelling Fire Injuries

3 remain in their original quartile (quartile 2 or 3):

- Primary Fires
- Primary Fire Fatalities
- WT Staff Sickness

## **72.1 Annual Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2016/17 (cont.)**

6 have reduced their quartile position or are in the bottom quartile

- Deliberate Fires
- Deliberate Primary Fires
- Deliberate Secondary Fires
- Retained Staff Sickness
- Control Sickness
- Non Uniformed Staff Sickness

### **Customer Care**

96% of responses received from the public indicate that they are satisfied / very satisfied with the services provided by the Brigade or how we have dealt with a compliant.

Councillor Bendelow referred to EMR and stated that we must have saved a lot of lives in assisting North East Ambulance Services (NEAS) with these calls.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) stated the best we can do is to hand the casualty over in a stable condition. If we do this we have done our job and done it well.

Councillor Cook asked if the sickness figures include both long term and short term sickness. The HoRP confirmed that the figures include both long term and short term sickness absence.

The Director of Corporate Services (DoCS) stated that even with the launch of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy there is still no improvement with sickness levels. The DoCS is working on producing a national and local sickness absence report which compares figures with other FRS's and other Sectors. The DoCS suggested that this be presented at the next Audit and Governance Committee.

The DoCS added that due to severe cuts, staff are taking on extra roles and additional work and this is one of the things we will be focusing on when looking at sickness levels.

The CFO stated that some causes have been because of serious illnesses and we will not end the career of someone who has a life threatening illness. When the Home Office carry out their inspections they will look in-depth at sickness levels and league tables will be produced across all FRS's.

Mike Hill stated that what we are discussing around sickness is very relevant and should be published as it would be of interest to people nationally.

Councillor Cook asked with regards to response standards why the target is set at 75%.

The CFO replied that the Fire Authority can set these targets and that the 75% currently set is a reflection of our historic response standards.

## **72.1 Annual Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report 2016/17 (cont.)**

Councillor Cook said if we know we are going to meet this every year shouldn't this target be increased.

The CFO stated that last year the performance was 71% so did not meet the target.

Mike Hill stated that when members of the public call 999 all they really want to know how long the appliance will take to arrive.

The DoCS gave an update on Equality and Diversity and stated that she will be carrying out an analysis of our work profile and this will be presented at the next Audit and Governance Committee meeting.

Mike Hill stated that this is necessary and it is important that the Brigade keeps members updated with Equality and Diversity.

Combining the information presented an overall performance assessment of Good was reported. This is the same rating as previous years.

The CFO stated in relation to the risk in the community, finances have been cut, we have seen a reduction in staff and yet we still have the same level of deprivation in our communities. The CFO recognised the workforce for their work and efforts and thanked them for their contribution.

**RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted**

## **72.2 Internal Audit Report 2016/17**

The DoCS summarised the progress on the recommendations contained within the Action Plans from Internal Audits carried out to date and listed the areas subject to Audit Review during the period April – June 2017.

Councillor Kirton asked was it not private and confidential with regards to tender for contracts and the amount that is bid.

The CFO replied that we must publish anything which exceeds £5000.

The Head of Internal Audit (HoIA) confirmed that this is the case and that there is a transparency code of conduct on what information has to be published.

**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.**

## **72.3 Performance Targets 2017/18**

The CFO presented the report which highlighted:

- Two pronged approach / process
- Summary of the proposed reductions

### **72.3 Performance Targets 2017/18 (cont.)**

Each year the Brigade reviews and where necessary revises its targets in line with the Authority's Strategic Goals and Aims with the intention of using the targets to drive continuous improvement in services. After the targets are calculated professional judgement is used to validate the targets set and to determine whether the specific target for each indicator:

- Promotes continuous improvement
- Maintains performance
- Is stretching but achievable

Councillor Cook asked how we compare targets against other FRS's and are targets set nationally.

The CFO stated that there are currently no national targets.

**RECOMMENDED – that Members note the targets for 2017/18 outlined in the report at Appendix 1.**

### **73. REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

#### **73.1 Internal Audit Outturn Report 2016/17**

The HoIA reported the outcomes of the audit work covering the period April 2016 to March 2017. 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 have been identified corrective action has been taken without delay.

**RECOMMENDED – that the report be noted.**

#### **73.2 Role of Chief Finance Officer**

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.**

#### **73.3 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 it be noted that the CFA complies with the CIPFA requirements as detailed in Appendix A of the report.**

**73.4 Annual Governance Statement 2016/17**

The Treasurer advised Members that the CFA had a statutory responsibility to ensure that its financial management is adequate and there is a sound system of internal controls to facilitate the effective delivery of its functions, including the arrangements for the management of risk.

He advised that the Treasurer to the Authority was responsible for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the Annual Governance Statement, a copy of the 2016/17 Annual Governance Statement was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The Annual Governance Statement had been reviewed and all significant internal control issues identified and updated and will form part of the CFA's 2016/17 Financial Statement. An Internal Audit Review of the Authority's Annual Governance Statement had been undertaken and a copy of the resulting report was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the report be noted**
- (ii) that the 2016/17 Annual Governance Statement at Appendix 1 be approved for inclusion in the Financial Report.**

**COUNCILLOR PAUL KIRTON**  
**VICE CHAIR**