
CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING



24 AUGUST 2018

- PRESENT:**
- CHAIR:-**
Councillor Norah Cooney – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL**
Councillor Marjorie James
- MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**
Councillor Teresa Higgins
- STOCKTON ON TEES**
Councillor Mick Stoker
- INDEPENDENT PERSONS**
Mr Mike Hill, Mr Steve Harwood
- AUTHORISED OFFICERS**
Chief Fire Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer
- MAZARS**
Cameron Waddell (Engagement Lead), Ross Woodley (Audit Manager),
- IN ATTENDANCE**
Head of Risk and Performance, Head of Finance
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillor Neil Bendelow – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Councillor Naweed Hussain – Middlesbrough Council
Councillors Gillian Corr, Paul Kirton– Stockton Borough Council

42. **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**
It was noted no Declarations of Interest were submitted to the meeting.
43. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 29 June 2018 be confirmed.
44. **REPORTS OF MAZARS**
- 44.1 **Audit Progress Report – August 2018**
The Engagement Lead (EL) presented the Audit Progress Report which covered:
- The progress of the 2017/18 Audit
 - National Publications and Other Updates
 - Contact details

The Engagement Lead (EL) stated that 2017/18 audit has been concluded and work has commenced on 2018/19 audit. The EL informed members that this would be his final year as Engagement Lead and that Gavin Barker would be his replacement. The Chair thanked the EL on behalf of the Committee and wished him well.

RECOMMENDED - that the report be noted.

44.2 Annual Audit Letter Year Ending 31 March 2018

The Audit Manager (AM) presented the Annual Audit Letter 2017/18 summarising the work undertaken for Cleveland Fire Authority for the year ended 31 March 2018. This included:

- Executive Summary
- Audit of the Financial Statements
- Value for Money Conclusion
- Other reporting responsibilities
- Fees
- Forward Look

The AM referred Members to the Financial Outlook at Page 11 of the report and stated that the Authority has made good progress in addressing all challenges, however many more may lie ahead. Firefighter pay negotiations provide operational as well as financial challenges and in addition during 2018/19 the Authority is to receive its first inspection from HMICFRS. From this inspection the HMICFRS will provide graded judgements in its report as to how we are performing as a Brigade across the board.

Moving forward the AM said that Mazars are looking forward to working closely with the Authority, Members and Officers in delivering the Code of Audit Practice responsibilities.

Mr Harwood asked what the Brigades view was on Building Regulations. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) replied that a gap analysis on the Dame Judith Hackett report has been carried out. The findings of this report are being presented at Executive Committee on 31 August 2018. The CFO stated that these findings can be readily available for this Committee.

Councillor James stated that we should not hold out any hope of the Dame Judith Hackett report making a significant difference within buildings and in particular with reference to sprinklers. Hartlepool Borough Council is championing of the installation of sprinkler systems and the Education and Skills Funding Agency provide the majority of money for the installation of sprinklers in schools. Councillor James added that the findings of the report are welcomed at this Committee but we anticipate that it will be a long time before the outcome of the inquiry is released. CFO agreed and stated that some level of change will fall out from the inquiry with regards to accountability and legislative changes but when we do not know.

RESOLVED - that the report be approved.

45. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

45.1 Review of the Corporate Risk Register

Members considered the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed in July 2018 by the Active Risk Team. The outcome of this review was detailed at Appendix 1 and the CFO highlighted the following :

Reputational Damage – Outcomes from recent high profile official reviews which include the Kerslake Report – ‘An Independent Review into the Preparedness for, and Emergency Response to the Manchester Arena attack on 22 May 2017’ and Dame Judith Hackett report - ‘Building A Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety’ following Grenfell may impact on the Fire and Rescue Services reputation and public confidence. The Brigade is currently undertaking a gap analysis on both of these reports.

Vulnerability – A review and update of the Safeguarding procedures, Community Safety Strategy along with the development of the Community Health Strategy and Safer Homes Strategy will be undertaken which will decrease risk associated with the level of vulnerabilities within our communities.

General Data Protection Regulations – a report on the current position was to be presented at this meeting.

Mr Harwood stated that as we are currently on budget and in balance should we be a low risk with regards to finance. The CFO replied that whilst we are currently managing the budgets there is no guarantee that austerity will cease. The Treasurer added that the risk rating is currently based on the uncertainty of future Government reductions.

Councillor James asked what plans have the Brigade in place due to Brexit. Even though this may not affect us directly it could be an additional pressure on the budget. The Treasurer stated that we will underspend on the current budget which will help if needed, however at present it is difficult to establish how Brexit will directly affect us.

Councillor James asked could we work collectively with other Fire and Rescue Services to put pressure on the Government for preparation post Brexit. The CFO replied that work is currently underway at a national level to explore the impact of Brexit and we will be keeping a watching brief of outcomes from this work. We will also liaise with constituent authorities if any work has commenced / been completed in this respect.

Mr Hill asked with regards to Community Engagement how we are involving the community when writing the strategy. CFO stated that it is difficult to demonstrate a coherent view on this but that we do engage with a whole host of groups within the community on a daily basis and this has been considered when writing the draft strategy.

Councillor James added that we are invited into the homes of people within the community that are sometimes hard to reach and the utilisation of that allows us to form strategies and to identify what their needs are from the Brigade as a service.

RECOMMENDED:-

- (i) that the report be noted.**

45.2 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2018 – July 2018

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 July 2018 which had been aligned to the Brigades 3 Strategic Priorities. The report summaries are detailed below:

- Total incidents stand at 3208 a reduction of 363 (-10%) compared to the same period last year.
- The largest increase was in secondary fires which have seen an increase of 52 compared to 2017 and they account for 43% of all incidents attended followed by False Alarms (1082) accounting for 34% of all incidents.
- EMR incidents have reduced from 346 to 15. Only 2 retained stations now participate in EMR.
- Accidental Dwelling Fires – 26% decrease (-14) since 2017. Increases in Hartlepool and Stockton and decreases in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. The main causes are constant with previous years which are electrical, cooking related and radiated heat.
- Nationally there has been 27,525 ADF's of which 142 occurred in our Brigade areas. 0.5% of the national total. Our main preventative services for ADF's are Home Fire Safety Visits and Safe and Well Visits. Nationally 616,875 Home Fire Safety Visits have been conducted of which 20,259 are in this Brigade area 3% of the National total.
- Deliberate Fire fatalities – 0 incidents
- Deliberate Fire injuries – 0 incidents
- Deliberate secondary fires have increased by 71 (6%) from 2017. Main causes being 58% refuse, 39% grass and 2% outdoor structure.
- Deliberate Primary Fires – reduction by 6% (9)
- Response Standards:
 - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 7.4 seconds
 - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds - Actual 104 Seconds
 - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 4.43 Minutes
 - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 6.44 Minutes
 - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.13 Minutes
- Sickness Absence - 2017/18 saw a significant reduction in staff sickness with quarter 1 seeing a decrease of 1% in overall staff sickness. Wholetime and Retained have experienced increases of 32% and 23% respectively. Fire Control has decreased by 65% and Green Book has seen the biggest decrease of 69%. Main causes being lower limb (263 shifts lost), Gastro-Intestinal (166 shifts lost) and Mental Health (123 shifts lost)
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 10 incidents (+100%) from 2017/18.
- RIDDOR Accidents – 1 Wholetime and 1 Green Book member of staff.

Mr Harwood asked if there was a possibility that Violence to Staff incidents could become RIDDOR incidents. The HoRP stated that all Violence to Staff incidents are investigated and reported to Police. The CFO stated that we are about to enter a pilot whereby our Firefighters will wear body worn cameras to ensure that the perpetrators of physical or verbal abuse are caught on camera.

Councillor James stated that Violence to Staff and False Alarms cost the Brigade money that we do not have and is seeing no one being fined for these crimes. She asked should we be working out a cost to claim back from the Criminal Justice System. The CFO said that in relation to media issues we do have an evidence file containing some high profile cases. In relation to Deliberate and Malicious calls we

have a process in place with a telecommunications agency to block certain numbers where necessary and regarding reclaiming money from the Courts we will look into this.

Councillor James asked regarding Arson issues could the Brigade work collectively, through the Safer Partnership Meetings, with the other Authorities to utilise their news sheets and to get messages out to the public on costs that are wasted on these types of calls and where the money could be utilised productively elsewhere.

The CFO commented that Cleveland staff do more preventative and protection work than any other Fire and Rescue Service which is reflected in Cleveland having the lowest ADF's results in the country.

45.3 Sickness Analysis Report 2017/18

The HoRP presented the Sickness Analysis Report which provides members with a profile of the sickness absence nationally and within the Brigade, by staff group, the main causes and how the Brigade compares with other Fire and Rescue Services.

The DoCS commented that it is great to see at the end of a 4 year plan that the sickness figures have dramatically improved considering we have had some significant long term sickness over this period. The DoCS added that the current strategy will expire on 31 March 2019 and we are currently developing a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2019/20 – 2021/22 concentrating on Mental Health, Physical Health, Health Promotion and Healthy Eating.

Councillor Stoker asked if there was any correlation with staff cuts and sickness due to worry and stress about jobs. The DoCS replied that the sickness levels actually improved around this time.

Mr Harwood asked do we keep records of musculoskeletal injuries related to work and otherwise. The DoCS said that we keep records and hold focus groups to discuss incidents in and outside of work. All incidents occurred at work are immediately reviewed by the Brigade's Health and Safety Team.

RECOMMENDED – that the report be noted.

45.4 General Data Protection Update Report

The CFO presented the report which detailed the work the Authority has undertaken to achieve compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). A 12 step guide was published by the Information Commissioner's Office which we have adhered to. The next step is to assure the Authority's compliance and this will form part of an exercise of the Information Management Audit to be undertaken by Hartlepool Borough Council's auditing team and is scheduled to take place between October to December 2018.

RECOMMENDED –

- (i) that the Authority's progress made to comply with EU General Data Protection Regulation be noted.**

45.5 Internal Audit Progress Report 2017/18

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.

RECOMMENDED

- (i) that the 2017/18 Internal Audit position and outstanding action plans be noted.**
- (ii) that the progress made to date in the Internal Auditor Plan 2018/19 be noted.**

45.6 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2018/19

The Head of Finance (HoF) presented the current position as at 30 June 2018 and informed Members of the forecasted outturn position which shows a net underspend of £0.710m. He confirmed that the under-spend forecast is predicted on the pay award for fire fighters not exceeding the 2% provision included in the base budget and that if this level is exceeded there will be an in year additional cost which would therefore reduce the forecast underspend. More significantly there would be an under budgeted increase in recurring costs in 2019/20 which would increase the forecast deficit for that year.

RECOMMENDED

- i) that the position at 30 June 2018 be noted.**
- ii) that Members note that a proposed strategy for using the forecast managed under-spend will be developed as part of the 2019/20 budget process.**

47. REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

47.1 Business Report

The Legal Advisor and Monitoring Officer (LAMO) informed Members of a recent case decision relating to the operation of the Code of Conduct and consideration of the relationship with a staff grievance procedure. The report also covered other pertinent information relating to the operation and maintenance of an effective standards regime within the Authority.

RECOMMENDED – that Members note the report

COUNCILLOR NORAH COONEY
CHAIR