CLEVELAND FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

15 NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT:

CHAIR:-
Councillor Norah Cooney – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Marjorie James,
MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
Councillors Teresa Higgins (sub), Ashley Waters
REDCAR & CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL
Councillor Billy Ayre
INDEPENDENT PERSONS
Mr Steve Harwood
AUTHORISED OFFICERS
Chief Fire Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Treasurer, Legal Adviser & Monitoring Officer
MAZARS
Mr Gavin Barker - Audit Director
IN ATTENDANCE
Head of Risk and Performance, Head of Finance

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor Naweed Hussain - Middlesbrough Council
Councillor Adam Brook – Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Councillor William Woodhead - Stockton Borough Council
Mr Paul McGrath – Independent Person
Mr Ross Woodley – Audit Manager, Mazars

In accordance with Standing Order No. 35, Councillor Higgins substituted for Councillor Bill Woodhead.

62. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

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

63. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 23 August 2019 be confirmed.

63.1 Matters Arising

Mr Steve Harwood confirmed that he had received the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 response as requested at the meeting on 23 August 2019. The CFO noted that since the last meeting Phase 1 of the Grenfell Inquiry had been published and would have significant implications for this Authority.

63.1 Matters Arising cont.

He added that an internal group had been set up to consider the operational issues and on a national level these would be considered by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). He noted that a summary report would go to the Authority and an action plan would come to the Audit & Governance Committee for scrutiny.

Mr Harwood suggested that often developers prioritise economy over safety and acknowledged the Authority's stance on sprinklers in residential properties to save lives, which he did not feel was echoed in other fire authorities.

Councillor James felt that the process of the inquiry was wrong and the element involving building regulations should have been addressed first. She called for changes in planning legislation.

64. REPORT OF MAZARS

64.1 Audit Progress Report – November 2019

The Audit Director (AD) presented the Audit Progress Report which covered:

- 2019/20 Audit Progress
- National Publications
- Contact details
- 2018/19 Additional Fee letter

The AD referred Members to the additional fee letter at Appendix 1 and stated that an additional fee of £950 (+vat) was being sought to cover additional work undertaken beyond that normally expected, namely in relation to accounting for IAS 19 pensions in light of the national issues that arose in relation to the McCloud judgement.

The CFO asked if the General Election in December would impact on budget setting for the Authority. The AD acknowledged that it was impossible to take a medium term view and while it did not expect the Authority to know its position until the New Year, he would be responding to how it manages its challenges.

RESOLVED - that the report be noted.

65. REPORTS OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

65.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2019 – September 2019

The Head of Risk and Performance (HoRP) outlined the performance of the Brigade for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 October 2019 which had been aligned to the Brigade's three Strategic Priorities. The report summaries are detailed below:

- Total incidents stand at 5601 an increase of 201 (+ 3.7%) compared to the same period last year.
- The largest increase is in secondary fires which have seen an increase of 218 compared to 2018/19 followed by Special Services (+25) and Primary Fires (+42).
- There have been 8093 HFSV completed which is a reduction of 828 (9%) compared to 2018/19. Included within these HFSV were 774 Safe and Well Visits.

65.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April – September 2019 cont.

- Accidental Dwelling Fires – 28% increase (+18) from 2018/19. Increases in Middlesbrough (+19) and Redcar and Cleveland (+9) and decreases in Hartlepool (-3) and Stockton (-7). The main causes being cooking related (22%), careless handling (18%) and electrical (17%).
- Deliberate Fires have increased by 326 (15%) compared to the same period in 2018/19. Included within these, 245 were deliberate primary fires (+ 5%) and 2326 deliberate secondary fires (+16%).
- Primary Fires – increase by 5% from the previous year. Main causes are vehicles (51%) and dwellings (22%).
- Response Standards:
  - Call answering: Target set at 7 seconds, Actual 6.6 seconds
  - Call Handing: Target 100 seconds - Actual 87 Seconds
  - Building Fires 1st Appliance Target 7 Minutes, Actual 4.58 Minutes
  - Building Fires 2nd Appliance Target 10 Minutes, Actual 7.06 Minutes
  - RTC Target 8 Minutes, Actual 5.14 Minutes
- Sickness Absence - 2019/20 has seen an increase of 51% (1.81 shifts) from this same quarter in 2018/19. 2951 duty shifts lost to sickness. In all staff groups we have seen an increase – Wholetime +28%, Retained +113%, Control +60% and Green Book +89%. Main causes of sickness absence are anxiety / depression 25% (745 shifts), lower limb 19% (552 shifts) and upper limb 10% (300 shifts). Sickness absence so far this year has cost the Brigade £674,071.
- Violence to Staff Incidents – 24 incidents (increase from 17 in 2018/19). 6 RIDDOR and 9 accidents resulting in injury due to the incident with Bravo 4 appliance.

Mr Harwood referred to first appliance availability for retained crews and asked if this was impacted by the availability of retained firefighters. The CFO noted that while the availability, recruitment and retention of on-call personnel was a significant national issue, it did not affect response standards to the community.

Councillor James queried how the Brigade determines whether retained absences are attributable to their main occupation or to their retained role with the Brigade. The CFO confirmed that the Brigade was keen to determine at the earliest opportunity if sickness is work related to put the relevant support in place.

Councillor Ayre queried how near misses were reported. The CFO confirmed the Brigade uses a form to initially report the incident which is then investigated by the Health & Safety Team to ensure appropriate action is taken. He added that near miss reporting by staff was actively encouraged to maintain the Brigade's value of keeping its staff safe at work.

Councillor James asked what happens with the information reported in near misses. The CFO confirmed that it is considered by a joint working group which has representatives from the trade unions and health and safety team and their role is to ensure that accidents do not occur following a near miss.

65.1 Organisational Performance & Efficiency Report April 2019-September 2019 cont.

Councillor James suggested it may be good practice for a Member of the Audit & Governance Committee to sit on the joint working group. The CFO reminded Members that the Audit & Governance Committee had the delegated power to request information be provided on any area for further scrutiny. Councillors Higgins and Waters confirmed they were satisfied that the process of investigating near misses was being carried out appropriately and that the level of information reported to Members was sufficient.

Councillor James asked if the Authority had been prosecuted for any RIDDOR incidents. The CFO confirmed that the Brigade was currently under a level of investigation in relation to the overturning of the appliance in Billingham in April 2019.

Councillor Ayre asked how the Brigade determined whether mental health issues were work or home related. The CFO acknowledged this was very difficult to determine often due to many contributing factors affecting the individual. However, if the Brigade's GP identifies work as the main contributing factor occupational health support is offered. He confirmed there had been a link between violence to staff and mental health issues and that all incidents are debriefed with TRIMS offered, as well as having watch-based support mechanisms in place. He added that the Authority had a Health & Wellbeing Programme led by the Director of Corporate Services which aims to support the health and wellbeing of all staff.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted

65.2 Annual Statement of Assurance 2018/19

Members scrutinised the Annual Statement of Assurance 2018/19 outlined at Appendix 1 of the report which contained details relating to financial, governance and operational matters. The CFO reported that this document was a statutory requirement produced in line with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2012.

Mr Harwood commended the report and praised the Authority for having strong business continuity arrangements in place which he considered indicative of the good management within the Brigade.

RECOMMENDED – That the Executive Committee consider and approve the Annual Statement of Assurance 2018/19 (Appendix 1) at its meeting on 22 November 2019.

65.3 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.

The CFO highlighted the outstanding action relating to 'Procurement – Purchase Fuel Cards' and confirmed this had now been reviewed and a new procedure was currently being produced therefore this action would be completed by the next meeting.

65.3 Internal Audit Progress Report Cont.

RESOLVED:-

(i) that the audit position of the 2018/19 Audits be noted.

(ii) that the progress made to date in the Internal Audit Plan 2019/20 be noted.

65.4 Progress Against Revenue and Capital Budgets 2019/20

The CFO introduced Mr Graham Fowler who had recently been appointed as the Head of Finance (HoF), following the retirement of Mr Cliff Cordiner.

The HoF presented the current revenue position as at 30 September 2019, as detailed at Appendix 1, and informed Members of the forecasted outturn position which shows a net underspend of £0.66m. This reflects workforce planning arrangements to manage vacancy levels in order to support the CIRMP plans for 2019/20, together with procurement savings for utilities, cleaning and security which have been built into the 2020/21 budget. In addition this is based on the planning assumption that any pay settlement for firefighters above 2% is fully funded by the Government, as stated by the national employers organisations in their negotiations with the Fire Brigades Union.

The Capital position as at 30 September 2019 was a forecast underspend of £0.05m with all schemes in the Capital Programme for 2019/20 on target, as detailed at Appendix 2.

RESOLVED - that the position at 30 September 2019 be noted.

COUNCILLOR NORAH COONEY
CHAIR