

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 JULY 2023

PRESENT: Independent Co-opted Members Chris Brown, Melissa Dearey, Kathryn Lavery and Nigel Saxby,

Officers Present: Matthew Sutcliffe – Assistant Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director of Corporate Services, Steve Duffield – Area Manager of Service Improvement, Christine Cooper – Executive Director of People and Development, Jon Henderson – Area Manager of Prevention, Protection, Fleet and Estates, Jason Kirby – Area Manager of Emergency Response, Jamie Morris – Designate Head of Corporate Assurance, Martyn Ransom – Joint Deputy Chief Finance Officer & Deputy S.151 Officer, Gareth Naidoo – Senior Corporate Assurance Officer, Anne Scott – Head of Human Resources, Andy McCulloch – Internal Audit (TIAA), Lisa Nicholson – Monitoring Officer/Secretary, and Rob Close – Committee Manager.

Councillor Briggs was also in attendance.

The meeting was held at the Humberside Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Kingston upon Hull.

35/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Apologies for absence were received from Gerry Wareham.

36/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – No declarations of interest were made with respect to any items on the agenda.

37/23 MINUTES – *Resolved* – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

38/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 – The Committee received a report of the Deputy Joint Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Section 151 Officer detailing the final outturn report. The Committee was advised that the interest earned from the Authority's temporary investments was significantly higher than anything earned before as a result of interest rate increases. Long term debt was falling, and no new debt was accrued. Prudential indicator two showed that that Authority was slightly under borrowed, indicators four and five showed that the operational boundaries for external debts had not been breached, capital financing costs ranged from three to four per cent, and the maturity profile for debts was spread and none were breached.

It was clarified that all debts were set at fixed low rates agreed during periods of the most favourable interest rates.

The interest earned from the Authority's temporary investments would form part of the outturn position and contributed to the Authority's underspend. There was an ongoing review of the capital programme that would be presented to the Committee before the end of the year.

***Resolved** - That the update be noted.*

39/23 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS – The Committee received a report of TIAA, the Authority's internal auditors, detailing the internal audit reports. The Committee was advised that the internal auditors were exploring new ways of working to continuously improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the work. Work was being done to use data analytics

to test against full data sets, spot hidden risks, to target test and to provide 'proof in total' assurance adding credibility and value to reports.

A more detailed update as to how data analytics would be integrated into the internal audit process would be provided to the Committee at a later date.

Resolved - *That the update be noted.*

34/23 SCRUTINY ITEM: GRIEVANCE – PROCEDURES – The Committee received a report of the Head of Human Resources detailing the Authority's policy and procedure for staff grievances. Grievances were defined as a work concern, problem or issue raised by an employee. The aim of the policy was to enable any single employee or group of employees to voice any concerns they may have and to have confidence that their concerns would be dealt with in a fair, consistent, timely and transparent manner.

There were three stages of employee grievance starting with informal grievances made directly to the employee's line manager before an informal discussion. Secondly, a formal hearing would take place, conducted by an appointed hearing manager of a more senior level than the individual's line manager and supported by HR. The individual also had the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or represented by a Trade Union representative. Finally, when an employee remained dissatisfied with the outcome at stage two, they had the right to appeal with a different hearing manager more senior than those involved in stages one and two. The manager would be supported by HR and the individual had the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or represented by a Trade Union representative. Once the appeal hearing had taken place, the process was concluded and there was no further right of appeal.

During the reporting period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 there were 15 grievances raised. Promotion procedures and terms and conditions were the two highest areas by staff using the grievance Policy and procedure. The highest proportion of the grievances raised came from operational staff, most of whom were in a leadership position. More men than women raised grievances, and all but one, who preferred not to say, were white/white other.

The Committee then considered the following aspects:

- **Consultation** – The consultation on the policy review was engaging with the Authority's senior leadership team, trade unions, staff forums and the wider workforce.
- **Areas of Grievance** – Resulting from the majority of grievances citing issues with internal recruitment, work was done to increase transparency through recruitment briefings.
- **Resolutions** – The ratio of grievances being upheld was considered appropriate by HR professionals. Moreover, all staff who made grievances were signposted towards occupational health. It was considered that, while the overall number of appeals were high, it was expected that employees would take the opportunity to exhaust the process to its conclusion.
- **Freedom to Speak Up Guardian** – The Committee was supportive of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian however suggested the Authority may want to consider offering the position to the wider Authority staff. Additionally, it was suggested that the National Guardian's Office could further support with training.
- **Appeal Hearings** – While the current appeal hearing panel of two was operational, the Committee suggested a third member should be on the panel, and, for Stage 3 hearings, could include a Member of the HFA, particularly, in instances of senior leadership disputes.

- **Reporting** – The Authority felt that the overall low number of grievances was indicative of a well-functioning organisation. Moreover, alternative avenues to engage with senior leadership and HR likely alleviated some disquiet in the workforce. The Committee expressed an interest in seeing how the Authority's reporting compared to that of neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services and its own figures from previous years.
- **Equality Impact Analysis (EIA)** – It was suggested that it might be timely for the EIA on the Grievance Policy to be reviewed.

Resolved – (a) *That the Committee endorse the Authority's grievance procedure;*

(b) that Officers consider including an additional Member on the panel for the formal hearing formal stages;

(c) that Officers consider the inclusion of a Fire Authority Member on the panel for a Stage 2 hearing, and

(d) that Officers consider reviewing the Grievance Policy Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) to held inform the Policy

35/23 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2023/24 – The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2023/24.

Resolved - *That the Programme be received.*