

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 NOVEMBER 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, Christine Cooper – Executive Director of People and Development, Steve Duffield – Area Manager of Service Improvement, Shaun Edwards – Joint Deputy Chief Finance Officer & Deputy S.151 Officer, Jon Henderson – Area Manager of Prevention and Protection, Jason Kirby – Area Manager of Emergency Response, Jamie Morris – Designate Head of Corporate Assurance, Sam O'Connor – Head of Organisational Development, Martyn Ransom – Joint Chief Finance Officer & S.151 Officer, Claire Tait – Head of Operational Training, David Robinson – Internal Audit (TIAA), Andy McCulloch – Internal Audit (TIAA), Lisa Nicholson – Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Alison Finn – Committee Manager 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.

47/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Apologies for absence were received from Gerry Wareham.

48/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – No declarations of interest were made with respect to any items on the agenda.

47/23 MINUTES – *Resolved* – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

48/23 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS – The Committee received a report of TIAA, the Authority's internal auditors, detailing internal audit activity. The Committee was advised that, since the last Summary Internal Controls Assurance, six final audits were issued. In the final report, the bullying, harassment & discrimination, mobile data terminals, and effectiveness of systems audits all received reasonable assurance while the staff development and service absolutes received substantial assurance.

A fair sample size of staff were selected as respondents to the audit of bullying, harassment & discrimination, with representation from different levels of management. Moving forwards, there was a view to separate the role of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian from Human Resources and broaden it to more members of staff.

The recommendations identified as part of the mobile data terminals audit were managed through the service improvement plan. The Service had since withdrawn from the Home Office connectivity in favour of pursuing a bespoke alternative. 4G enabled devices had already been installed and a full hardware replacement was expected by April 2024 while broader reengineering and training continued. While only mandated to share up to 10km of risk data with neighbouring Fire Authorities, Humberside Fire and Rescue opted to share and receive data from the whole area.

The outstanding 15 recommendations, detailed in the Mid-Year Follow Up Review, were largely outside of the Service's control, with one recommendation being superseded by a subsequent recommendation, and internal audit were satisfied that the delays were not unjustified. It was appreciated that some completion dates for recommendations were ambitious.

It was clarified that station managers were expected to display heat maps in stations. The data that informed those heat maps was collected as part of a briefing held monthly looking over the previous period. Officers were satisfied that the Service was both data rich with effective data intelligence.

Resolved – (a) *That the mid year follow up review be scheduled at the most appropriate point in the year to ensure a more timely update on the progression of recommendations;*

(b) *That the update be noted, and the Committee thank TIAA for their assiduous efforts.*

49/23 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS PERIOD ENDING 30 SEPTEMBER 2023 – The Committee received a report of the Joint Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Section 151 Officer detailing the final outturn report. The Committee was advised that the £0.394m underspend arose from lower green book pay award and ICT costs. Additional investment income and grant funding led to a capital programme underspend.

Officers were satisfied that the Service was receiving value for money for its staffing pay underspend. The vacant temporary roles underspend was invested into other priority areas and had no impact to the permeant baseline budget. Management of these vacant posts was decided at a senior management team level

Resolved - *That the report be received.*

50/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REPORT 2022/23 – The Committee received a report of Joint Deputy Chief Finance Officer updated the Committee on the treasury management activities for the first half of the financial year 2022/23. The Committee was advised that the Service had not taken any short term borrowing in the first six months of the year and was unlikely to undertake short-term borrowing in the second half of the financial year. Moreover, the Service had not undertaken any new long-term borrowing so far this financial year but this position would be reviewed in the second half of the financial year. During the period April to September 2023, the Service operated wholly within the Prudential limits approved.

Resolved - *That the report be received.*

51/23 SCRUTINY ITEM: ON-CALL STAFF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT – The Committee received a report of the Head of Organisational Development detailing the on-call staff learning and development opportunities offered by Humberside Fire and Rescue. The Committee was advised there were a number of challenges for both the Service and On-Call firefighters in achieving and maintaining the required level of competency and standards. These challenges consisted of availability constraints from primary employment and other personal commitments, disruptions from responses demands, maintenance of work life balance, geographical limitations, limited study availability and challenges for promotion.

On call staff were still subject to Performance Development Review (PDR) and Training Needs Analysis (TNA) processes with paid extra hours allowed if sufficient contracted work time was not available. The PDR process included a section on the Core Code of Ethics which was further enhanced through the introduction of a 360-degree feedback tool for all supervisory managers and above. The completion rate for PDR's during 2023 was 94 per cent overall with Emergency Response, including On-Call firefighters, completion rate at 95 per cent. The Service was currently awaiting the results of the RealWorldHR staff survey which might indicate areas of action in relation to on-call personnel and their development or PDR opportunities that could be considered for any further improvements.

The Committee then considered the following aspects:

- **Testing** – Practical testing was the same for both On-Call and Full Time Firefighters which contributed to the Service's ambitions of integration and parity.
- **Development of Training**– Focus groups were held to ensure that the lived experiences of On-Call Firefighters were accommodated into a dedicated work stream develop the training provision of On-Call Firefighters. This resulted in a move towards more localised training sessions planned for appliance training in 2024. Ultimately, the training offer of Humberside Fire and Rescue did not appear to be of detriment to the On-Call Firefighters given its position as the third highest performing Service in the UK on issues of recruitment and retention.
- **Accessibility** – Despite the delays neurodivergence diagnoses from GPs, wherever possible, the Service sought to make reasonable adjustments to the provision of training and the methods of evaluation in the endeavour of equality of opportunity.
- **Availability** – The Service greatly appreciated the dedication of On-Call Firefighters to take time outside of their allotted hours to develop and was exploring opportunities for reward those efforts.

Resolved – *That the Committee endorses the Service's continuing commitment to learning and development for On-Call firefighters.*

52/23 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.*