

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 JANUARY 2024

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, Graeme Dickson – Station Manager (Control), 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, Dan Meeke – Head of Emergency Preparedness and Control, Jamie Morris – Designate Head of Corporate Assurance, Gareth Naidoo – Senior Corporate Assurance Officer, David Robinson – Internal Audit (TIAA), Emma Appleton – Deputy Monitoring Officer/Secretary, and Rob Close – Committee Manager.

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

1/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Apologies for absence were received from Gerry Wareham.

2/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – No declarations of interest were made with respect to any items on the agenda.

3/24 MINUTES – Resolved – (a) *That minute 49/23 be amended to read that ‘Officers were satisfied that the Service was receiving value for money for its staffing pay overspent.’*

(b) *That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.*

4/24 AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT – The Committee received a report of Mazars, the Authority’s external auditors, detailing the annual accounts for 2022/23. The Committee was advised that the report was expected to be finalised at the 9 February 2024 meeting of the Humberside Fire Authority and the opinion on the financial statements was expected to be unqualified. The audit completion report, issued on 24 August 2023, explained that the 2022/23 audit was substantially complete but there would be a delay issuing their opinion because they were unable to conclude their work addressing the significant risk arising from the defined benefit pension scheme until the audit of the East Riding Pension Fund (ERPF) was substantially complete.

Resolved – *That the report be received.*

5/24 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2022/23 – The Committee received a report of the Joint Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Section 151 Officer detailing the annual accounts for 2022/23. It was noted that these accounts would be taken to the 9 February 2024 meeting of the Humberside Fire Authority for final approval.

The Committee commented that they felt greater background context should be provided around the Service Performance Indicators (SPI) in the Annual Accounts going forward.

Recommended – (a) *That a link to the bi-annual or annual performance report be included in the Service Performance Indicator section of the report in future.*

Resolved – (b) That the report be received.

6/24 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS – The Committee received a report of TIAA, the Authority’s internal auditors, detailing internal audit activity. The Committee was advised that, two final reports were signed off since the publication of the agenda and would be brought to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee. Furthermore, it was expected that the financial controls report would also be signed off for the next meeting.

The Committee considered the number of high-risk business premises inspections completed, which showed 97 visits had been booked in and 658 visits completed against a delivery plan target of 1029. Of the 658 visits, 518 inspection audits had been completed and 140 were unable to complete. In terms of the number of RBIP premises crew engagements visits completed, 2003 engagements had been completed against a delivery plan target of 2952. Of the 2003 engagements, 1263 had engagements delivered and 740 were unable to be completed. It was further noted that 51 per cent of inspections resulted in further action or enforcement and 86 per cent of statutory consultations were completed in time (15 working days). It was noted that the Service was responding to statutory consultations within the given timeframes but was not reflected in the latter figure due to the way data had to be recorded nationally. Likewise, the Service was confident in its inspection statistics, and any incomplete visits would be returned in the system for competition. Managers were sighted on performance results, being discussed at Directorate level on a weekly basis and further shared with the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) and Executive Team for further monitoring.

Resolved - *That the report be received.*

7/24 REVIEW OF ANTI-FRAUD RELATED POLICIES – The Committee received a report of the Head of Corporate Assurance detailing the Service’s anti-fraud policies. The Committee was given an overview of the Anti-Bribery Policy, Anti-Money Laundering Policy, Professional Standards Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, and Professional Standards Whistleblowing Policy. Following a review, no material changes were made.

The Committee asked how the Service ensured staff knew about these policies. It was advised that all policies were available online and were each subject to consultation with staff feedback welcome. Where appropriate, staff also had to undertake e-learning packages.

It was noted that both HMICFRS and the Service’s own internal auditors, TIAA, had due regard to the robustness of the Service’s processes for managing any fraud related matters, paying particular attention to the Service’s Anti-Fraud related policies.

Under the introductory section to both the Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering policies it mentioned that the Authority would not “tolerate fraud or corruption by its Members (which includes Independent Co-opted Members), employees, suppliers, contractors, partners, or service users.” It was suggested that ‘volunteers’ also be included in this section. Also under Section 9. *Disclosure Procedure* of the Anti-Bribery Policy, it was suggested that further commentary be added that reminds staff not communicate in any way to the individual their intention to report, or subsequent reporting, the matter to the MLRO..

In considering the Whistleblowing Policy, the Committee suggested that under Section 9. *How to raise a concern* Under a dedicated email address for the Chair of the GAS Committee should also be included under the Alternative Contacts.

Recommendation -

- a) That 'volunteers' also be included in the introductory section of both the Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering policies when stating that the Authority "will not tolerate fraud or corruption by its Members (which includes Independent Co-opted Members), employees, suppliers, contractors, partners, or service users."
- b) That, under Section 9. *Disclosure Procedure* of the Anti-Bribery Policy, further commentary be added to remind staff not to communicate in any way to the individual their intention to report, or subsequent reporting, the matter to the MLRO.
- c) That, under Section 9. *How to raise a concern* of the Whistleblowing Policy, a dedicated email address for the Chair of the GAS Committee be included under the Alternative Contacts.

Resolved - *That the Authority be assured of the review process and effectiveness of each anti-fraud related policy.*

8/24 SCRUTINY ITEM: CONTROL EXERCISE AND DEBRIEF – The Committee received a report of the Head of Emergency Preparedness & Control detailing Control involvement in the Service's exercising and debriefing processes.

The Service was committed to ensuring that areas of improvement highlighted in the 2022 HMICFRS report in relation to Control involvement in the Service's exercising and debriefing processes were fully addressed. Improvements that had been to date were:

- Control staff were now embedded in Emergency Preparedness which coordinated engagement with national, regional, and multi-agency exercises.
- The trial appointment of a Control competent Station Manager within Emergency Preparedness to coordinate operational risk, exercises, interoperability business continuity and multi-agency engagement.
- The appointment of a Control specific training Watch Manager who had specific responsibility for developing, planning, and implementing Control exercises, development, and learning.
- Control staff were now able to contribute to and attend operational debriefs including multiagency JESIP debriefs.

The Service's Exercise Policy had been reviewed to include Control as an integral part and was currently being consulted upon. This exercise policy included training schedules which would embed competent and resilient fire control capability, resourced to meet the demand placed upon it. Fire Control would be prepared and empowered to manage emergency calls from when they were received, through to the conclusion of incidents and beyond, providing the best possible service to the public. Simulations would exercise Fire Control employees to gather and share information to make informed and proactive decisions. This would include mobilising resources, provide safety, evacuation, and fire survival guidance to the public and partner agencies in an accessible way, contributing to the effective, safe, and coordinated resolution of local, regional, and national incidents.

The Committee then considered the following aspects:

- **Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response** – It was noted that Humberside Fire and Rescue were not mandated to submit an Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response like other statutory services. However, the Service worked closely with multi agency partners and still gained benefit from those broader skill sets.

- **Effective Multi Agency Working** – A number of procedures had been put in place to ensure smooth lines of communications in multi-agency scenarios including dedicated phone lines and a clear communications plan between comparable officers.

Resolved –

- a) *That the Committee endorses the Service's commitment to Control involvement in the Service's exercising and debriefing processes.*
- b) *That the Committee receive a further update as part of its 2024/25 Scrutiny Work Programme.*

9/24 SCRUTINY ITEM: UPDATE REPORT ON GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES – The Committee received a report of the Head of HR which provided a further update on the grievance procedures (previously considered by the Committee at its meeting of 3 July 2023) and, in particular, on the development and utilisation of the People Dashboard. The report also provided a summary of the outcomes arising from the HMICFRS thematic inspection in November 2023, the subject of which was the Service's handling of misconduct. In addition, the report also informed Members of the recently introduced requirement to submit data returns on misconduct statistics to HMICFRS on a bi-annual basis.

The Committee was advised that the aim of the Service's People Dashboard was to provide a comprehensive view of key data related to its employees including matters of employee relations and measure employee satisfaction in terms of the Service. The Dashboard would initially collate key data relating to absence, grievances, disciplinaries, performance and capability and complaints received from external parties. It would also collate data relating to 'soft' HR metrics such as employee satisfaction with the use of 'customer' surveys focussing predominantly at first around the service provided by Human Resources. The Dashboard data would be used to support strategic planning and data-driven decision-making. It would also be used to identify trends and patterns of behaviour which would then influence the learning, training and support provided to managers by the Human Resources team.

On 13 July 2023, the Home Secretary commissioned HMICFRS to undertake a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services in England. To support this work and its ongoing monitoring of this area, all fire and rescue services were required to submit bi-annual data returns to HMICFRS relating to misconduct statistics. The Service's People Dashboard data would be used to provide those returns.

The Committee then considered the following aspects:

- **Development of the Dashboard** – It was explained that the dashboard was developed internally with the Service's own Digital Services team.
- **Reporting** – Once fully embedded it was the intention of the Service to report the findings of the dashboard to the Humberside Fire Authority (through the bi-annual and annual performance reports) and regularly to the Strategic Leadership Team. General complaints data, managed by Corporate Assurance, would also be collated in the People Dashboard in order for the Service to gain a holistic view of overall complaints, internally and externally, and any emerging patterns or trends associated with them.

Resolved – *That the Committee endorses the Service’s continued commitment to promoting and maintaining good working relationships with its employees and to the use of data relating to this matter in support of the same.*

10/24 MEMBERS’ ALLOWANCES – The Committee received a verbal report from the Joint Deputy Chief Finance Officer & Deputy S.151 Officer explaining that, following a benchmarking exercise, a report would be submitted to Humberside Fire Authority on 9 February 2024.

Resolved – *That the update be noted.*

11/24 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2023/24 – The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee’s Scrutiny Programme 2023/24.

It was suggested that the Committee might wish to consider the Service’s Values and Culture Action Plan in response to the recommendations made HMICFRS in its report *Values and culture in fire and rescue services* published in March 2023 as the remaining scrutiny topic of the Committee’s 2023/24 work programme (currently to be confirmed).

Resolved - *That the Committee receive the Service’s Values and Culture Action Plan in response to the recommendations made HMICFRS in its report ‘Values and culture in fire and rescue services’ as its final scrutiny topic of its 2023/24 Work Programme.*

12/24 VOTE OF THANKS – The Committee gave a vote of thanks to Kathryn Lavery, whose meeting this would be her last as a Member of the GAS Committee.