

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 SEPTEMBER 2024

PRESENT: Independent Co-opted Members Chris Brown (Chair), Melissa Dearey, Nigel Saxby, and Gerry Wareham.

Officers Present: Matthew Sutcliffe – Assistant Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director of Corporate Services, Martyn Ransom - Executive Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer, Steve Duffield – Area Manager of Service Improvement, Jason Kirby – Area Manager of Emergency Response, Jamie Morris –Head of Corporate Assurance, Gareth Naidoo – Senior Corporate Assurance Officer, Mike Anthony – Group Manager (CRMP), Dominic Purchon – Head of Protection, David Robinson – Internal Audit (TIAA), Emma Appleton – Deputy Monitoring Officer/Secretary, and Rob Close – Committee Manager.

Rejoice Mapeto (Mazars) was in remote attendance.

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

39/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – No apologies for absence were received.

40/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – No declarations of interest were made with respect to any items on the agenda.

41/24 MINUTES – **Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

42/24 FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT UPDATE – PERIOD ENDING 30 JUNE 2024 – The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Finance/Section 151 Officer summarising the Authority’s current financial position based on information to 30 June 2024. It was advised that the revenue budget was £0.299m underspent, the capital programme remained on budget against its £10.921 allocation and the pensions account was £16.404m in deficit, although it was stressed that this deficit was covered by the Home Office. Moreover, the Committee was guided through some presentational changes to the new reporting format.

The Committee generally appreciated the presentational changes which made up the report and suggested that officers consider providing further narrative detail in relation to the high strategic risk rating contract management. They went on to challenge officers on what was being done to manage the 2024/25 contract management risks. Officers appreciated that a lack of narrative provided limited context but assured the Committee that inclusion in the contract high strategic risk recording did not necessarily mean that work was yet to commence to resolve those risks. It was also explained that non-uniformed employees’ status in the period three 2024/25 Revenue Monitoring detail was rated as ‘Red’ because of the yet to be settled green book pay award.

Noting the recent publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase Two report, the Committee asked if the recommendations contained would have an impact upon the Authority’s financial planning. Officers explained that an update on the latest report would be brought to the next meeting of the Fire Authority, however, it was unlikely that such actions would pass the materiality threshold for report, although officers acknowledged that an explanation explaining this in the financial statement may be prudent.

The Committee sought further clarity on the projected variance resulting from lower rates of pay between trainee, development and competent rates of pay for firefighters. Officers explained that the Authority had recruited significantly with new starters progressing through the Authority's firefighter development pathway and its associated pay bandings. The variance in this instance referred to the extent of employee progression and subsequently remuneration.

Referencing the target Non-Pay Efficiency Savings of £0.285m, the Committee asked officers how feasible they thought this target was. Members were reminded that historically, £0.300m was targeted and was achieved as some discretionary budgets were not utilised.

Resolved – That the Finance and Procurement Update be received.

43/24 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS – QUARTER TWO – The Committee received a report of TIAA, the Authority's internal auditors, detailing the internal audit reports and Summary Internal Controls Assurance.

Four audits had been completed since the last reporting period. The first audit reviewed Application and Management of Tactical Plans receiving substantial assurance and two priority three action points. The second audit reviewed the Management of Statutory Building and Licensing Consultation receiving reasonable assurance and one priority two and two priority three action points. The third audit reviewed Application and Management of Disciplinary Procedures received reasonable assurance and two priority two action points and two priority three actions points. The final audit reviewed Training Records receiving reasonable assurance and one priority two action point. There were no changes to the approved plan for 2024/25. A draft report had been issued for the Firefighter Development Pathway audit.

The Committee sought further clarity on the use of Microsoft Planner referenced in the Tactical Plans Audit. Officers explained that Microsoft Planner presented consistency gains across the Authority allowing a more uniformed approach to tactical implementation across directorates. While there were still some legacy spreadsheets still in operation, these did not hold personal data and was not considered to be a significant risk.

In relation to the Application and Management of Disciplinary Procedures audit, the Committee asked if the exemptions presented any particular risk of challenge. The Internal Auditor felt assured that the decisions to exempt the disciplinary procedure was valid and the approvals process to do so was sound. Further to this, the Committee asked how investigation notes would be digitised. Officers noted that, while this was good practice, it was not always possible to directly input investigation notes digitally although they stressed at all handwritten notes were scanned and digitally stored.

The Committee asked how developments in breathing apparatus equipment was cascaded through the workforce. Officers explained that the Authority benefitted from a well-developed programme to roll out training to all staff. Although, some staff on long term sick would remain listed as outstanding for training, upon their return an individual development plan would be devised to ensure all outstanding training was undertaken before being available for operational duty.

Resolved – That the Internal Audit Reports be received.

44/24 HMICFRS STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR – THE HANDLING OF MISCONDUCT IN FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES - The Area Manager of Service Improvement delivered a verbal report on the publication of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 'Standards of Behaviour – The Handling of Misconduct in Fire and Rescue Services' on 1 August 2024.

The findings of the report were informed by a thematic inspection of ten different fire and rescue services (FRSs), which included Humberside (November 2023), delivered between October 2023 to January 2024. The report made 15 recommendations across three themes. In total, as some of the recommendations have multiple parts, 35 actions have been identified requiring evidence to demonstrate Service compliance, with many of already established practices in the Service.

It was important to note the findings in the report were not individually attributed to any of the ten FRSs inspected, with no individual assessment grading issued.

The report recommendations and resulting actions would be addressed and managed by Corporate Assurance through the Service Improvement Plan (SIP).

The Committee asked what efforts the Authority made to strengthen its anti-corruption processes. Officers stated that drug and alcohol testing was in operation across the Authority in addition to security checking for relevant staff. It was stressed that significant safeguards were also in place for those members of staff who may be subject to allegation.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

45/24 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2024/25 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2024/25.

Resolved – That the work programme for 2024/25 be approved