

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT: Independent Co-opted Members Mr D Chapman (Chairperson), Mr M Allingham, Mr J Doyle, Mrs P Jackson, Mr A Smith, Mrs M Thomlinson and Mr C Vertigans.

Councillor Green attended as an observer.

Phil Shillito - Deputy Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director Service Delivery, Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Steve Topham - Director of Service Support, Simon Rhodes - Head of Corporate Assurance, Martyn Ransom - Head of Finance, Jason Kirby - Temporary Head of People and Development, Steve Duffield - General Manager Community Preparedness, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Samm Campbell - Committee Manager, Peter Harrison - Internal Audit (TIAA) and Ross Woodley - External Audit (Mazars) were also present.

The meeting was held remotely via video-conference (Zoom). The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m.

PROCEDURAL

1/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - There were no apologies for absence.

2/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

3/21 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

4/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA -

Minute 88/20 - A member queried whether the Service had decided to publish details of complaints on its website. The Service had considered the Committee's suggestion and was due to publish summaries of complaints received imminently.

Minute 90/20 - The Employee Assistance Programme cost the Service around £6,000 per annum. This represented a saving of around £9,000 and offered employees access to more services than they had had previously.

Minute 94/20 - An update on the establishment of a joint programme with Yorkshire Ambulance Service in relation to psychological wellbeing would be circulated following the meeting.

Minute 96/20 - TIAA was due to undertake an investigation in relation to the two items of correspondence received by the Committee. A summary of TIAA's findings would be reported to the Committee at a future meeting.

GOVERNANCE

5/21 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meetings of 27 November and 7 December 2020.

Resolved - (a) That the update be received, and

(b) that the Committee's thanks be recorded for all Humberside Fire and Rescue Service staff, especially those working outside of their usual roles in support of other services in the effort to deal with Covid-19.

Audit

6/21 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Ross Woodley (Mazars) delivered an external audit progress update.

An extraordinary meeting of the Fire Authority had been held on 27 November 2020 in order to approve the final accounts and conclude the external audit for 2019/20. The audit plan for 2020/21 would be the first under the updated Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office during the previous year. Under the new Code, the value for money conclusion would no longer be binary, but a narrative including details of any weaknesses as they were identified, with a dedicated report at the end of each year. The draft plan would be presented to the Committee at its meeting due to be held on 22 February 2021.

Mazars and the Service had been able to meet the deadline for the audit of the final accounts (31 November 2020) which had been extended earlier in the year in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. This had been achieved despite delays (Minute 85/20 refers) while, nationally, 95 percent of audits had been submitted late.

A Member asked how the Service had progressed in relation to gender representation among firefighters. The number of female firefighters employed by the Service had been steadily increasing in line with national figures. However, recruitment during the previous 20 years had not been significant and it would take time to change. The Service's most senior female employee was at grade 13, sitting just under the directors in the Service's structure. Among firefighters specifically, the most senior female employee was a station manager.

Resolved - That the update be received.

7/21 EXTERNAL AUDIT LETTER - Ross Woodley (Mazars) submitted the annual external audit letter.

The annual external audit letter summarised audit activity in relation to the 2019/20 accounts and value for money and Mazars had given an unqualified opinion as follows:

Area of responsibility	Summary
Audit of the financial statements	Our auditor's report issued on 27 November 2020 included our opinion that the financial statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position as at 31 March 2020 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended; and • have been prepared properly in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20
Other information published alongside the audited financial statements	Our auditor's report included our opinion that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the other information in the Statement of Accounts is consistent with the audited

	financial statements.
Value for money conclusion	Our auditor's report concluded that we are satisfied that in all significant respects, the Authority has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2020.
Reporting to the group auditor	In line with group audit instructions, issued by the NAO on 4th November, we reported to the group auditor in line with the requirements applicable to the Authority's WGA return.
Statutory reporting	Our auditor's report confirmed that we did not use our powers under s24 of the 2014 Act to issue a report in the public interest or to make written recommendations to the Authority.

There remained significant concern and uncertainty around pensions, with the remedy for the Sargeant/McCloud and Matthews/O'Brien cases yet to be finalised and implemented. Within the letter, Mazars had detailed a number of fee increases, explaining which were single charges resulting from extra work undertaken due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and charges that would recur. Covid-19 would continue to be the most significant operational and financial challenge ahead, including the impact of lost revenue resulting from a decrease in collected council tax. A revised financial plan had been submitted to the Fire Authority at its meeting of 7 December 2020. Other issues included the potential for all fire and rescue services to be overseen by local police and crime commissioners, a matter currently under consideration by the Government.

Resolved - (a) That the annual external audit letter be received, and

(b) that the Committee's thanks be recorded for the efforts of both the Service and Mazars to successfully meet the 31 November 2020 deadline.

8/21 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Peter Harrison (TIAA) delivered an internal audit progress update.

Covid-19 continued to be the most significant risk to internal controls both strategically and operationally. The pandemic had necessitated new ways of working, which TIAA had borne in mind throughout the audit process. TIAA had completed six audits, with one more planned audit yet to be conducted, and an additional audit (Minute 4/21 refers) which was ongoing:

- Performance Monitoring - evaluated as 'substantial'. TIAA's recommendations were being implemented and the new performance monitoring system (based on thresholds) had improved reporting. Testing by TIAA had not revealed any issues.
- Health and Safety - evaluated as 'reasonable'. Few recommendations were made and it was agreed that the full report would be circulated to the Committee prior to its February 2021 meeting.
- Arson Prevention - evaluated as 'substantial'. TIAA made only one priority-3 recommendation in relation to arson prevention, finding no significant issues.

- ICT Cyber Security - evaluated as 'reasonable'. Two priority-2 recommendations had been made relating to the security of computer password standards and the number of privileged accounts on the Service's systems.
- Business Safety - evaluated as 'reasonable'. TIAA issued one priority-2 and three priority-3 recommendations.
- Key Financial Controls - evaluated 'substantial'. No anomalies had been identified during TIAA's testing. With many officers working remotely, it was increasingly important that good controls were in place. TIAA made no recommendations in relation to key financial controls.

A Member asked about phishing; fraudulent communications designed to appear legitimate in order to get recipients to surrender information such as personal data and passwords. Awareness of phishing among the Service's staff remained an ongoing piece of work, with training and information delivered regularly. As part of its education process, the Service also conducted phishing exercises to see how many times a fake web-link or document would be accessed by staff.

A Member queried whether the recommendations resulting from the audit of ICT Cyber Security had been implemented by December 2020 and it was confirmed that they had been. The Service had drafted a policy on home working and had circulated it for consultation. Following the consultation process, the policy would be considered by the Fire Authority for approval.

An audit of the risk of staff shortages affecting business continuity had been planned for March 2021 but the Service had requested that the subject of the audit be changed. A Member asked why the Service had requested this change of topic and was informed that the matter of how the final audit topic should be used was still under discussion.

- Resolved -**
- (a) That the update be received;
 - (b) that the audit report relating to health and safety be circulated to the Committee prior to its next meeting, and
 - (c) that the Committee be informed of the final topic for the 2020/21 internal audit programme.

PERFORMANCE, RISK AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

9/21 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS CLOSE-DOWN TIMETABLE 2020/21 - The Head of Finance submitted a report summarising the close-down timetable for the annual accounts.

The Service planned to complete the close-down process a month ahead of the deadline (30 September 2021) in order to undertake further quality assurance. The Head of Finance explained that the Service had been successfully building a resilient team that did not rely too heavily on any one member of staff.

- Resolved -** That the report be received.

10/21 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS - PERIOD ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2020 - The Head of Finance submitted the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2020.

Contrary to earlier expectations in the light of the ongoing pandemic, the Service had underspent in many areas. The receipt of the Covid-19 grant funding had been a significant help. Spending had decreased in areas such as travel and fuel and some capital projects had been pushed back as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. The Goole Fire Station, uniform and personal protective equipment (PPE) projects had been pushed back to the 2021/22 financial year and discussions with Humberside Police about Howden Fire Station were ongoing. The Service was in the process of measuring staff members for the replacement of their PPE.

Resolved - That the Management Accounts be received.

11/21 REVIEW OF ANTI-FRAUD RELATED POLICIES - The Head of Corporate Assurance provided an update in relation to the review of anti-fraud related policies.

The annual review of anti-fraud related policies had been undertaken in a more detailed way than it had in previous years with the involvement of two Members of the Committee. The changes to the policies would be implemented and the policies uploaded to the Service's website.

Resolved - That the update be received.

12/21 HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE - The Head of Corporate Assurance provided the Committee with a verbal update in relation to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service's (HMICFRS).

The national thematic report focussed on Covid-19 and the reports resulting from its individual inspections of each fire and rescue service had been published by HMICFRS on 22 January 2021. In its summary report, the Inspectorate had indicated that too many firefighters had been prevented from helping the public by undertaking different roles. Locally, however, engagement with the relevant unions had been undertaken early to ensure that agreements over how firefighter could help could be reached.

During its inspection, HMICFRS had found that the Service had been able to maintain its statutory functions as well as helping other services and supporting the community. The Inspectorate had also concluded that this had all been done safely.

The Inspectorate's annual State of Fire and Rescue report was due to be published in March 2021. The Service's next normal, graded inspection was due to be undertaken between September 2021 and February 2022, and the report to be published in summer 2022.

Resolved - That the update be received.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

13/21 PROTECTION ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMERCIAL AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY - The Director of Service Support submitted a report in response to the Committee's scope relating to protection engagement with the commercial and business community.

The Service had begun to change its approach to fire safety inspections in 2018, establishing a new Risk-Based Inspection Programme (RBIP), which had been the subject of the Committee's scrutiny in February 2020 (Minute 28/20 refers). The RBIP's two-tier system

had been shared with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) as it was in the process of developing a national framework for fire and rescue services.

The RBIP provided the Service with the means to conduct its inspection programme in a targeted way, but also to be reactive by training operational staff to engage with businesses in relation to fire safety, thereby providing the Service with intelligence and forwarding concerns to the inspection team. The data used to prioritise inspections took into account many more risk factors than previously.

The Service had worked hard to respond to all of the recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's phase-one report and continued to undertake its responsibilities in relation to the national Building Risk Review (BRR). The recommendations from the phase-one report featured prominently in the Services Improvement Plan, which had been developed following the Service's first inspection by HMICFRS. The Building Safety and Fire Safety bills were both in undergoing the parliamentary approval process, and both bills, when enacted, would place additional duties on fire and rescue services. While there was grant funding available for some of the work resulting from the phase-one report, it was unclear whether extra funding would be made available following the passage of the two bills. The Service was awaiting the publication of the Inquiry's phase-two report, which was likely to have an impact on HMICFRS's inspection process.

The main challenge faced by the Service with regard to furthering its protection engagement with the commercial and business community was that many businesses had been closed for extended periods of time since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions in the UK (since March 2020). With a contemporary national lockdown ongoing, the Service's options in terms of inspecting commercial properties were limited. However, many of the more properties which were closed were not high-risk. The Service had undertaken a lot of engagement with businesses over the phone and planned to restart the programme of seminars online. The Service had continued to undertake its duties in prosecuting breaches of fire safety; two cases were ongoing, one of which was likely to progress to a court trial.

Members asked questions in relation to:

- Work with the University of Hull - The Service remained in frequent contact with the University. The postgraduate student who had initially undertaken the project was no longer able to do so and the University had agreed to find replacement.
- Recruitment - The Service had been working to fill vacancies in its inspection team and to upskill current members of staff in line with the competency framework.
- Engagement by Phone - One of the challenges with this temporary approach had been resourcing it in the light of other, competing duties during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the Services was keen to ensure that its rate of timely consultations in relation to fire safety did not drop below 90 percent. Engagement by phone had still proven to be effective as, in one case, the telephone consultation had led to an inspection in person, which had resulted in the Service issuing a prohibition to the business.
- Commercial Property - There had been no changes with regard to insurance against fire damage as a result of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. A meeting of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) was due to be held, with a focus on the impacts of changes to inspections and duties resulting from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the Building Safety and Fire Safety bills.

The Committee thanked the Service for its work on improving its inspection programme and its support for the business and commercial community. However, the Committee also appreciated that, due to the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Service had not been able to make the progress it had intended to and agreed that an update would be received during its 2021/22 scrutiny programme.

Resolved - (a) That an update on the Service's protection engagement be received during the 2021/22 scrutiny programme;

(b) that the Committee be assured that the new Risk-Based Inspection Programme methodology enables the Service to prioritise and target engagement activities effectively, and

(c) that the Committee note the ongoing impacts of both the Grenfell Tower fire and the Covid-19 pandemic, including the positive changes arising from them.

14/21 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2020/21 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2020/21.

Resolved - (a) That the updates be received, and

(b) that the Workforce Plan be added as a matter for consideration as part of the scrutiny item due to be heard on 12 April 2021, Diversity and Recruitment - Progress and Plans.

15/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - There was no other business.