

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 APRIL 2021

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

Councillors Briggs, Davison and Green attended as observers.

Phil Shillito - Deputy Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director Service Delivery, Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Niall McKiniry - Director of Service Improvement, 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, Ruth Gilmour - Head of Human Resources, Sam O'Connor - Head of Organisational Development, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Sam Campbell - Committee Manager, Andrew Townsend - Internal Audit (TIAA), Andy McCulloch - 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

28/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - There were no apologies for absence.

29/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

30/21 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

31/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

32/21 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meetings of 26 March 2021.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

33/21 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Ross Woodley (Mazars) submitted the draft External Audit Strategy Memorandum for 2020/21.

No changes had been made to the audit plan considered at the Committee's previous meeting (Minute 21/21 refers) and the timelines had since been agreed, with most of the audit due to be completed by early July 2022. The Pension Fund Account would be audited earlier than it had been in the previous year, potentially by August 2022.

Resolved - That the update be received.

34/21 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21 - Andy McCulloch (TIAA) submitted the Internal Audit Annual Report 2020/21.

Three of the individual audit reports were yet to be finalised and the final version of the Internal Audit Annual Report would be submitted to the Fire Authority at its meeting due

to be held on 30 April 2021. While Covid-19 had significantly impacted the Service during 2020/21, the impact on the internal audit process had been minimal. Of the 10 audits conducted during the year, three had concluded with 'substantial assurance' and seven with 'reasonable assurance' judgments. The majority of the recommendations related to policy and adherence to policy and none of the audits had yielded a 'category 1' recommendation.

Resolved - That the report be received.

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

35/21 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 28 FEBRUARY 2021 - The Head of Finance submitted the management accounts for the period ending 28 February 2021.

The management accounts were the final ones that would be received by the Committee during the 2020/21 financial year. The accounts projected a £440,000 underspend. The Service had underspent in some areas as a result of Covid-19 and provision had been made for priorities predicted for 2021/22. There had been some slippage in the Capital Programme. The Service's reserves have increased from £10.9m to around £13m which will reduce as a result of the priorities addressed during 2021/22. A Member queried why the Service had continued to invest money for such low returns and the Head of Finance explained that there were limits on the amounts that the Service could hold in its bank current accounts at any one time and that investments had been made to avoid extra charges and minimise risk by ensuring that the Authority's cash balances are held across a number of different counterparties.

Resolved - That the management accounts for the period ending 28 February 2021 be received.

36/21 CIPFA FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CODE RISK ASSESSMENT UPDATE - The Head of Finance submitted the CIPFA Financial Management Code risk assessment.

The CIPFA Code of Practice had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Service's associated risk assessment showed that it was already broadly compliant with the Code. It would need to be fully compliant by 2022, but only three points on the risk assessment remained to be addressed.

Resolved - That the update be received.

37/21 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21.

An updated version of the draft Annual Governance Statement, which took into account recently published CIPFA guidance, had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The updated version would be received by the Fire Authority at its meeting due to be held on 30 April 2021. The Annual Governance Statement was linked to the Service's corporate risk management processes and an internal audit of governance had been undertaken during 2020/21. A Member highlighted the need for the Statement to be updated in the light of the Committee's recently-reduced membership. A Member queried whether the Committee would be offered some form of annual appraisal by the Fire Authority.

Resolved - (a) That the report be received;

(b) that the draft Annual Governance Statement be updated to incorporate recent changes to the Committee's membership, and

(c) that the Chair of the HFA and the Monitoring Officer consider an appraisal process for the GAS Committee.

38/21 HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE - The Director of Service Improvement provided the Committee with a verbal update in relation to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service's (HMICFRS).

A Member Day had been held in order to discuss the contents of the Inspectorate's annual State of Fire and Rescue Report. No new recommendations had been made, but the six recommendations made in the previous year's report had yet to be actioned by the Government. The Service had been preparing for its next inspection, which would take place in September 2021 at the earliest.

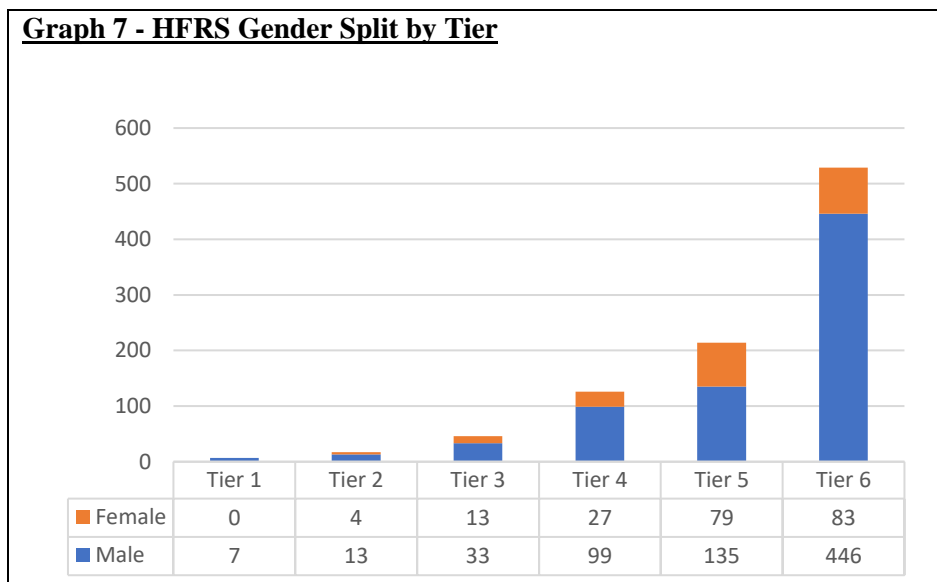
Resolved - That the update be received.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

39/21 DIVERSITY AND RECRUITMENT - PROGRESS AND PLANS - The Temporary Director of People and Development submitted a report on diversity and recruitment in response to the Committee's scope.

The report and its appendices addressed the seven points raised by the Committee. The most recent version of the Service's Workforce Plan had been appended to the report and was in the process of being reviewed following a recent internal audit activity. The report also provided an update in relation to a previous scrutiny item focussed on training, promotion and development (Minute 62/19 refers).

The Service had used a headcount figure of 939, accounting for people holding multiple posts and excluding casual and zero-hour contracts. Overall, the Service employed significantly more men than women (733 and 206). Within the Service, most roles people were employed as either full time (437) or on-call (254) firefighters. Among firefighters, 93.6 percent (647) were male and 6.4 percent were female. The proportion of men in these roles meant that the 78 percent of the Service's employees were male. Among control room and support staff, however, 65 percent were female. The report split the job roles in the Service into six tiers, with tier 1 being the most senior, summarised as follows:



The most populated age-group across the Service was 38-48 years of age and 70 percent of the Service's staff members were over the age of 38. The Service had, in accordance with relevant guidance and the Office for National Statistics, been using the term 'black and minority ethnic' (BAME) in relation to its employees' ethnicities. Since the report had been published, new guidance had been issued which suggested that BAME be replaced with the term 'ethnic minorities'. Of the Service's 939 employees, 888 had identified themselves as non-BAME, 34 had not declared their ethnicity and 17 had identified themselves as BAME. 850 employees had identified as non-disabled, 68 had not declared whether they had a disability and 21 had identified themselves as disabled. 843 employees had identified themselves as heterosexual, 76 had not declared their sexuality and 20 had identified themselves as LGBT+. 484 employees had identified themselves as Christian, 358 had indicated that they did not consider themselves part of a religion, 69 had not declared whether or not they considered themselves part of a religion, four indicated that they were Buddhist, one indicated that they were Muslim and 23 indicated that they were part of a religion other than Christianity, Islam or Buddhism.

The above compared to a local demographic summarised as follows:

Table 1 - HFRS Diversity Profile Compared to the Humber Area					
Unitary Authority	Population	Gender		Ethnicity	
		Male	Female	White	BAME
Hull	259,778	50.5%	49.5%	89.7%	10.3%
East Riding of Yorkshire	341,173	51%	49%	96.1%	3.9%
North East Lincolnshire	159,821	51%	49%	97.4%	2.6%
North Lincolnshire	170,786	49.3%	50.7%	96.5%	3.5%
Humber Area	931,558	50.5%	49.5%	94.6%	5.4%
HFRS Profile	939	78.1%	21.9%	94.6%*	1.8%*

*3.6% of staff did not declare their ethnicity

While the Service's ageing workforce was of concern, it acknowledged that this represented an opportunity for the workforce to diversify as it replaced retiring employees. The data from the 2021 Census would help the Service to understand its demographics in relation to those of the communities it served. The Service had resolved to open all of its promotional processes to external applicants in future, providing further opportunities to work towards a workforce that reflected the surrounding demographics.

The Service had undertaken some 'positive action' initiatives in the past, but had not yet adopted a strategy or plan. Most recently, the Service had undertaken a campaign (linked with the National Fire Chiefs Council) to increase diversity among on-call firefighters. The Service was in the process of developing a Positive Action Strategy and Framework.

The Committee raised the following points:

- **Positive Action** - The report cited anecdotal evidence of misunderstanding of positive action among staff members and a Member queried whether it might have been confused with positive discrimination. The Service would need to ensure that its

employees understood the concept of positive action and that it did not equate to lowering standards for the sake of diversity.

- **Non-disclosure** - The report had summarised the Service's demographics in relation to protected characteristics and some employees had opted not to disclose in response to some categories. The Committee was keen for the Service to understand the reasons why employees had chosen not to disclose these details.
- **Recruitment** - A member highlighted that the Service had recruited 11 female firefighters since 2017 and asked what the Service had done and intended to do to ensure that the male-to-female ratio began to equalise. Prior to 2017, the Service had not recruited any firefighters since 2007, meaning that the ratio had not been balanced for 10 years. The Service was part of a regional recruitment campaign (the East Yorkshire campaign) which aimed to advertise the benefits of living and working in the region to professionals from a variety of backgrounds. The Service was due to recruit in October 2021 for April 2022 training courses. The Positive Action Strategy and Framework would be applied across the whole Service and would aim to develop and promote a more diverse workforce in the long-term. In addition, the Service was looking into direct access recruitment processes (like those undertaken by Humberside Police in recent years) to potentially recruit people from outside of the organisation into more senior roles.
- **Internal Audit** - TIAA had conducted an audit of workforce planning (appendix 2 to the report) and the Service was in the process of addressing its recommendations. The Committee was keen to ensure that the Service was able to measure and evidence any claims about its workforce and it was agreed that a key aim of the next staff attitude survey would be to establish a baseline in relation to organisational culture. The Committee also asked whether the data presented in the report could be compared to other fire and rescue services to provide further context.
- **Exit Interviews** - The Service currently conducted electronic exit interviews, which could be easily ignored. The Committee agreed that the Service should consider restoring this function to HR in order that exit interviews might be conducted in person, or at least in a more direct manner to improve the response rate so that the Service might understand why employees had resigned.

Resolved - (a) That the Service's future Positive Action Strategy and Framework be applied consistently;

(b) that the Service ensure that its employees fully understand its Positive Action Strategy and Framework;

(c) that the Service gather improved data in order to understand the makeup of its workforce in comparison to local demographics and other fire and rescue services;

(d) that the Service improve its exit interview process to understand why employees leave the Service, and

(e) that the Committee be updated about to the Service's progress in relation to the revision of its workforce plan and the recommendations of the associated internal audit report.

40/21 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2020/21 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2020/21.

Resolved - that a workshop be held prior to the Committee's AGM, due to be held on 14 June 2021, to consider items for the 2021/22 Scrutiny Programme.

41/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - There was no other business.

42/21 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS/PUBLIC - Resolved - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

In making its decision the Committee confirmed that having regard to all the circumstances it was satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

43/21 INVESTIGATION REPORT - Internal Audit (TIAA) submitted an investigation report following whistleblowing allegations.

Resolved - That the report be received.