

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JULY 2020

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 Briggs and Councillor Green attended as observers.

Christine Cooper - Temporary Director of People and Development, Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Niall McKiniry - Director of Service Improvement, Steve Topham - Director of Service Delivery Support, Simon Rhodes - Head of Corporate Assurance, Martyn Ransom - Head of Finance, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Samm Campbell - Committee Manager, Gavin Barker - External Audit (Mazars), Ross Woodley - External Audit (Mazars) and Andrew McCulloch - Internal Audit (TIAA) were also present.

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

PROCEDURAL

44/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - There were no apologies for absence.

45/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

46/20 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

47/20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

48/20 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting of 26 June 2020.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

48/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Gavin Barker and Ross Woodley (Mazars) presented the draft Audit Completion Report for 2019/20.

The draft Audit Completion Report 2019/20 had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The deadline for publication of unaudited accounts had been extended from 31 May to 31 August in the light of the ongoing pandemic. Mazars and HFRS had adhered to the original date for submission of the audited accounts by 31 July 2020. It had been the intention both organisations to submit the final Audit Completion Report to the meeting of the Fire Authority due to be held on 24 July 2020. However, the audit of the Pension Fund Account had been delayed until the end of August 2020, meaning that, while the Authority would still be able to approve its audited accounts, Mazars' final audit opinion could not yet be signed off. Additionally, the Audit Certificate would not be issued until all audit work had been completed, including the Whole of Government Accounts, the submission date for which had been moved back by the National Audit Office. Auditors were awaiting instruction from the National Audit Office.

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the extra work undertaken during the year, Mazars and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service were pleased to have been able, for the most part, to abide by the original plan for completion of external audit in 2019/20.

While the Pension Fund Account was yet to be audited fully, there were no significant issues to date. Along with property, plant and equipment, pensions represented one of the most significant risks to all fire and rescue services and was, therefore, subject to annual audit. No concerns had been highlighted in the value for money conclusion.

A Member noted that the Committee's name was incorrectly cited within the report and Mazars agreed to amend this prior to submitting the report to the Fire Authority at its meeting due to be held on 24 July 2020.

Resolved - That the draft report be received.

49/20 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Andrew McCulloch (TIAA) presented a report summarising progress in relation to the internal audit.

TIAA had completed all possible audit activity to date, but some scheduled activity had been delayed due to COVID-19. All but one of the remaining audit activities were scheduled and would take place during August and September 2020.

A Member queried whether a management response had been received in relation to TIAA's 'priority 1' recommendation concerning transmission of data to East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Payroll Department. The Committee was assured that this recommendation had been addressed during the intervening time.

A Member noted that TIAA had assessed the Service's key financial controls, offering a judgement of 'limited assurance'. TIAA would follow up its assessment with the authority at the first available opportunity and agreed to update the Committee at a future meeting.

Resolved - a) That the update report be received, and
b) that the Committee be updated in relation to TIAA's assessment of key financial controls at a future meeting.

50/20 AUDITED ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20 - The Head of Finance presented a report summarising the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2019/20.

The Annual Statement of Accounts had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. While the final audited version of the accounts was yet to be published, the version received by the Committee was, barring a minor amendment concerning emolument, the version due to be submitted to the Fire Authority for its approval on 24 July 2020.

Resolved - That the Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/20 be received.

PERFORMANCE, RISK AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

51/20 DRAFT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Service's performance during 2019/20.

This report represented the culmination of the quarterly reports received by the Committee in relation to both operational and staffing performance (including absence management). For the 2019/20 report, the Service had increased the use of infographics in

order to simplify the associated data to make it more accessible to members of the public. The following points were highlighted:

- Automatic fire alarm activations in non-domestic premises had decreased since 2018/19.
- Accidental dwelling fires had decreased, but those of high severity had increased by one.
- The number of fatalities resulting from accidental dwelling fires had increased from one in 2018/19 to two in 2019/20. The Service's target in relation to this would always be zero.
- The Service's protection activity had increased which had resulted in an increase in notices issued.
- The percentage of dwelling fires receiving a mobilisation within 90 seconds of an emergency call (85.71 percent) was higher than the Service's target (75 percent), but lower than the percentage achieved in 2018/19 (89.47).
- The Service had not met its targets in relation to the use of gas and electricity due to remaining inefficiencies in some of its systems, but it had exceeded its target in relation to diesel and water usage. In addition, the Service was in the process of reviewing its fleet (not including fire appliances) and examining the prospect of leasing hybrid vehicles.
- Short-term staff absence rates had decreased, but the average number of days absent from work per employee had increase from 6.83 in 2018/19 to 8.24 in 2019/20 due to an increase in the number of long-term absences.

A Member noted the Service was satisfied that it had met some targets despite not exceeding the previous year's performance, citing the example of first engine response to dwelling fires and road traffic collisions. While the target of 90 percent had been exceeded, 2019/20's percentage had been 96.86 compared to 2018/19's 97.95.

A Member queried the use of smiling and sad faces in relation to some measures but not others. The Service had used faces to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with different performance measures, but used text where faces would not be appropriate. As a result, the Committee suggested that the system be reviewed and replaced with, for example, a traffic light system.

A Member asked why there was a disparity in the Service's performance in Hull and North East Lincolnshire compared to North Lincolnshire and East Riding of Yorkshire. Both North Lincolnshire and East Riding of Yorkshire contained rural, low-population areas primarily served by on-call stations, which led to two issues: distances for appliances to travel to reach incidents and the recruitment of on-call firefighters. The Service would continue to work to recruit on-call firefighters in these areas.

Resolved - a) That the report be received and commended for its clarity and simplicity, and

b) that the report be revised, taking into account the Committee's suggested amendments, prior to its receipt by the Fire Authority on 24 July 2020.

52/20 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Annual Statement of Assurance.

Resolved - That the report be received.

53/20 THE PUBLIC SAFETY REDESIGN PROGRAMME (SRP) 2017-20 - POST IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW - The Director of Service Delivery Support submitted a report summarising the impact of the Public Safety Service Redesign Programme.

The Public Safety SRP had been established in 2017 and had been a significant piece of work in improving the Service. The SRP had arrived at nine recommendations, resulting in outcomes including the restructure of the organisation. The SRP's progress and outcomes were affected by some highly important events including the Grenfell Tower Tragedy and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. The Service was in the process of developing a new SRP, recognising that it would need to continue to change, adapt and improve.

Resolved - That the report be received.

54/20 LGA CONSULTATION ON DRAFT CODE OF CONDUCT - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary submitted the Local Government Association's consultation on its draft code of conduct.

Every fire authority in the country had adopted a code of conduct, but there was no national requirement in terms of their contents. A number of model codes of conduct existed and the LGA's draft had been written to replace its own existing code which, it considered, was no longer fit for purpose. While there would be no requirement to adopt the LGA's model code of conduct, it aimed to represent a gold standard in terms of content.

Resolved - That the Committee respond to the consultation collectively through Mandy Tomlinson.

55/20 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).

The second round of inspections was due to commence in 2021 and would likely be preceded by a series of thematic inspections focussing on COVID-19. It was expected that the Home Office would commission these inspections based on the existing three areas of assessment, but that reports would be narrative rather than graded. It was also expected that the second annual State of Fire and Rescue Report would focus on these thematic inspections and build on the recommendations of the previous year's report.

The Service's designated inspector had left HMICFRS and a replacement was expected to have been recruited by September 2020. The Service continued to correspond regularly with designated liaison officer at HMICFRS, Davinder Johal.

The Service Improvement Plan, which had been developed following the Service's previous inspection by HMICFRS, continued to operate and the Committee had used the Plan to inform its Scrutiny Programme 2020/21.

Resolved - That the update be received.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

56/20 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2020/21 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2020/21.

Resolved - That the Scrutiny Programme 2020/21 be approved subject to the addition of scoping questions agreed by the Committee.

57/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS -

58/20 ACTION SCHEDULE - *Resolved* - That the Committee receive an action schedule tracking its recommendations at future meetings.

59/20 TRAINING - The Committee was due to receive a training session from Professor John Cade of Birmingham University on 5 August 2020 at the Service's Headquarters.

60/20 COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION - The Committee was keen to ensure that council tax collection rates were monitored in the light of the expected decline resulting from COVID-19. The Committee was informed that this information was routinely reported to the Fire Authority.

61/20 MEMBER DAYS - *Resolved* - That the quality of recent Member Days be commended.

Meeting closed at 11.20 am.