

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 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 and Gavin Barker - External Audit (Mazars) were also present.

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

PROCEDURAL

30/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - There were no apologies for absence.

31/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

32/20 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

33/20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - Members discussed the following matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2020:

- Minute 23/20 - The investigation into the fire-related fatality had concluded that the cause of the fire had been a faulty electric blanket. Members were informed that the ARK Project had encountered some issues in relation to funding but that the Service and the University of Hull remained committed to its delivery.

GOVERNANCE

34/20 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting of 15 May 2020.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

35/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Gavin Barker (Mazars) presented a report summarising progress in relation to the external audit.

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 planned to adhere to the original date for submission of the audited accounts by 31 July 2020, rather than avail themselves of the offered extension of 30 November 2020. Mazars planned to present the draft audit completion report to the Committee at its meeting of 13 July 2020. Mazars had

continued to maintain regular contact with relevant HFRS officers during the national lockdown and all audit activity would be conducted remotely.

Resolved - That the update report be received.

36/20 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20 (UNAUDITED) - The Head of Finance presented a report summarising the unaudited Annual Statement of Accounts for 2019/20.

The draft version of the accounts appended to the report differed slightly from what had since been published on the Service's website. The Service had done well to publish its unaudited accounts so early given the ongoing pandemic and lockdown measures. In the draft version of the accounts circulated with the agenda, the Service had cited a £19,000 overspend in the revenue outturn; since the report had been written, officers had clarified that the final revenue outturn figure was a £120,000 underspend.

The Service's revenue reserves had increased slightly since the previous year to £10.9m. Capital spending had slipped due to the cessation of projects as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and, while underspent in 2019/20, would be spent as part of the 2020/21 capital programme. The Service had reduced its long-term borrowing to £13.5m through prudent use of its cash-flow. Budgets would be tightly managed in the following years as a result of the likely reduction in income from council tax.

A Member asked why the Service's revenue reserves had dropped from £18.6m in 2012/13 to £10.9m in the current year. The Service's reserves had been used to fund significant and planned projects such as the building of the Clough Road station and not to cover overspends in the revenue budget. Reserves of around £10m had been deemed prudent by the Section 151 officer and represented around 25 percent of the Service's total annual revenue budget. The recently published State of Fire and Rescue Report highlighted concerns about the large amounts held in reserve by some fire and rescue services, but the Service compared favourably in terms of its reserves as a proportion of revenue.

A Member asked whether the slippage on the dignity works project under the capital programme had caused an issues in the allocation of firefighters to stations. The slippage had not caused any issues and Service was committed to continuing the project during 2020/21.

Resolved - That the Annual Statement of Accounts 2019/2 (Unaudited) be received.

37/20 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 - The Head of Finance presented a report summarising the Treasury Management Annual Report 2019/20.

The Service's investments had returned £69,044 in interest during 2019/20, which was slightly more than had been expected given that interest rates had been historically low. The Service had also reduced its long-term borrowing to £13.5m, therefore reducing the amount of interest paid on its loans. At no point during 2019/20 did the Service breach any limits on borrowing and the report contained no other concerning information.

Resolved - That the report be received.

38/20 DRAFT ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STATEMENT 2019/20 - The Director of Service Improvement presented a report covering the draft Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement 2019/20.

The Statement was the result of a recommendation made by the Committee that the Authority make and approve an annual statement in relation to fraud and corruption. There had been no reports attempted bribery, fraud or corrupt activity in the organisation in 2019/20. The Service had specific insurance against fraudulent activity to mitigate potential losses.

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

(b) that the sentence in the Statement relating to the Committee's nominated Anti-Fraud and Corruption link-Members' responsibility be amended as appropriate.

PERFORMANCE, RISK AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

39/20 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 Inspectorate's inspection activity had been suspended as a result of the ongoing pandemic. The Service had continued to maintain weekly contact with its liaison officer, Davinder Johal. The Inspectorate was in the process of deciding how to proceed in the light of the pandemic. The Service had continued to work towards the aims set out in its Improvement Plan, which contained recommendations for improvement made by the Inspectorate and by the Service following its first inspection.

Resolved - That the update be received.

40/20 INSPECTION OF MEMBER REGISTERS - The Member Registers of Interests and Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality were made available for inspection by any Member of the Committee as part of their monitoring role.

41/20 INSPECTION OF OFFICER REGISTERS - The Officer Registers of Interests and Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality were made available for inspection by any Member of the Committee as part of their monitoring role.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

42/20 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2020/21 - **Resolved** - that a work programming session be held in June 2020 to determine the topics for the Scrutiny Programme for 2020/21.

43/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS -

PRE-DETERMINED ATTENDANCE - A Member asked whether the Service had pre-determined levels of attendance at certain types of incident, such as a fire at a high-rise residential building. This was a recognised practice nationally and the Service did have standard levels of attendance for a variety of potential incidents. Following the Grenfell Tower Tragedy, the Service had increased its standard level of response to similar incidents to include four (one more than previously) fire appliances, including one high reach hydraulic platform. However, the Control Room did have the power to allocate more resources to any incident following the assessment of risk based on the information it had received.

Meeting closed at 11.15 am.