

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 NOVEMBER 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 Head 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, Jason Kirby - Emergency Response Special Project Officer, Jamie Morris - Support and Educational Manager, Lisa Nicholson - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Sam Campbell - Committee Manager, Gavin Barker - External Audit (Mazars), 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

80/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - There were no apologies for absence.

81/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

82/20 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

83/20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

84/20 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meetings of 25 September and 30 October 2020.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

85/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Gavin Barker and Ross Woodley (Mazars) delivered an external audit progress update.

Further to Mazars' previous update (Minute 67/20 refers), the Pension Fund assurance had been completed and Mazars had almost finished its evaluation. Since the Committee's previous meeting, changes to the value of property assets as a result of Covid-19 had necessitated further revision of the accounts, which were due to be considered by Humberside Fire Authority (HFA) at its extraordinary meeting on 27 November 2020. After the accounts had been approved, Mazars would present a final follow-up letter to close the 2019/20 external audit process.

Resolved - That the update be received.

86/20 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - No update was presented to the Committee.

PERFORMANCE, RISK AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

87/20 HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT - SECOND QUARTER 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Service's performance during the second quarter of 2020/21.

The Service had continued to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected many aspects of its work. During the reporting period, 16 accidents were recorded compared to 21 during the same period in the previous year. The number of accidents was also significantly lower than the three-year rolling average (22) for the same period. However, this needed to be considered in the context of overall reduced activity as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the nature of the work undertaken by the Service, 87 percent of accidents reported were sustained by full-time and on-call firefighters.

While the number of near-misses reported equalled the number of actual accidents (16), the number reported had decreased by around 50 percent during the reporting period. The Service would work to ensure that all near-misses were reported. The Health, Safety and Environment Section had begun to deliver training again following an initial pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Training would continue to be an essential part of developing a safety-conscious culture.

Resolved - That the report be received.

88/20 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT - SECOND QUARTER 2020/21 - The Director of Service Delivery Support provided an update in relation to performance reporting.

The Service had begun to use new software to track its performance which would significantly change the way in which performance was reported. The Service delivered a presentation to at the Member Day held on 2 October 2020, explaining the new performance and risk reporting system.

The Service had performed well in relation to all performance measures during the reporting period:

Performance Indicator	Quarter 2 Total Number	Upper Threshold (UCL3)	July		August		September	
			Monthly Total	Threshold Performance	Monthly Total	Threshold Performance	Monthly Total	Threshold Performance
SPI 2.2 Total Deliberate Fires	95	50	30	20	27	23	38	12
SPI 2.3 Accidental Dwelling Fires	72	39	24	15	20	19	28	11
LPI 2.3c Other Accidental Fires	33	17	12	5	10	7	11	6
SPI 2.4 Deliberate Secondary Fires	481	219	145	74	129	90	207	12
SPI 2.5b False Alarms Non-Domestic	296	116	94	22	110	6	92	24

The Service continued to monitor a number of key strategic risks:

Strategic Risk	Update	Risk Level
Further Reduction in External Financial Support <i>A further reduction in external financial support for the 4yrs from 2018/19 to 2021/22. Risk affecting whether the Authority can balance its budget</i>	An updated report, presented at the September Fire Authority Meeting, set out an initial estimated £1.3 million deficit for the 2021/22 period, with a further report going to the October Fire Authority Meeting on measures to try and balance the budget for next year.	Critical
Emergency Services Network <i>The Emergency Services Network (ESN) is the government's chosen option to replace the Airwave system, which 107 police, fire and ambulance services in England, Scotland and Wales (the emergency services) use for communications between control rooms and the field.</i>	Through the creation of a project risk register, any arising issues are identified and presented to the board. (see strategic project update for more information).	Critical
Outcome of Grenfell Report <i>Action required by HFRS following the outcomes from the Grenfell Report</i>	Confirmation of the Grenfell Infrastructure funding grant (£124,606.57) has been received and a return has been made to accept by the Executive Director & S151 Officer. Financial and progress monitoring returns are required as a condition of the grant, the first of these will be due by the 31 January 2021. Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry has recommenced following a summer recess and is currently hearing evidence.	High
Coronavirus Pandemic <i>Risk of critical staff shortage and/or closure of workplace(s) resulting from exposure to Coronavirus from direct infection or cross contamination</i>	All buildings are Covid- secure and two rounds of individual staff impact assessments have taken place. All sections are now returning to Business as Usual, albeit in a modified way. All Business Continuity arrangements remain in place pending a localised outbreak. Currently there is no significant impact on the Service.	High

As was usual for the second quarter, there had been a rise in the number of secondary fires due to Halloween, Bonfire Night and young people not being at school. The Service's average emergency response time for the attendance of the first fire appliance at an incident was five minutes and 44 seconds, with the second appliance arriving, on average, after around eight minutes. It was noted that part of the improvement to the

Service's response times would be due to the reduced amount of traffic and the reduced number of incidents.

A Member queried whether the complaints received by the Service could be published on its website alongside the compliments. The Director of Service Improvement agreed to investigate the best way in which to do this.

Resolved - (a) That the report be received, and
(b) that the Service consider publishing details of the complaints it receives on its website.

89/20 OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE - SECOND QUARTER 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the Service's performance during the second quarter of 2020/21.

During the second quarter, 95 percent of operational assurance assessments received had indicated that the hot debrief had been conducted. This represented a significant improvement compared to previous quarters and a 15 percent improvement compared to the same quarter in the previous year. The Operational Assurance team had completed three tactical debriefs during the second quarter, including one in relation to the flooding of Snaith and Cowick, which was subject to ongoing review to ensure that the lessons learned improved practice.

Each operational assurance assessment reported on three key areas: safety critical (SC), areas of concern (AOC) and exceptional practice (EP). Safety critical reporting had reduced to zero and area of concern reporting had reduced by 54 percent (from 54 to 25). Exceptional practice returns had also fallen, with a 24 percent reduction in reporting (from 202 to 154).

The second edition of the NOL Newsletter, provisionally title 'Operational News', had been published. This publication shared information relating to the Service's water assets, drone capabilities, new equipment, fire contaminants, and health and safety incidents.

A Member asked about the Service's role in the event of a terrorism incident. The Service had been asked by the Home Office to develop capability in case of such an incident. The Service's role would be to assist Yorkshire Ambulance Service, working up to the edge of the 'warm zone' to its border with the 'hot zone', within which the police and military would be working. Training and development in relation to terrorism would continue.

Resolved - That the report be received.

90/20 ABSENCE MANAGEMENT - SECOND QUARTER 2020/21 - The Temporary Director of People and Development submitted a report summarising absence management during the second quarter of 2020/21.

Absence management remained a key area of focus and, during the reporting period, the Service had exceeded three of its four targets. Full-time firefighter attendance had been recorded at 96.61 percent against a target of 95 percent and support staff attendance had been recorded at 98.03 percent against a target of 97 percent. Attendance at work by Control Room staff had continued to be affected by a small number of long-term absences among a small team (29.21 full-time equivalent posts).

	2 nd Quarter	2 nd Quarter	2 nd Quarter	Target attendance
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	
Full time	96.55%	95.69%	96.61%	95%

Control	97.41%	88.26%	94.84%	95%
Fire Staff	96.94%	94.85%	98.03%	97%

The Service had seen a 60.54 percent reduction in the number of days lost to sickness in the second quarter of 2020/21 compared to the same period in the previous year. Early indications were that working from home had had a positive effect on the number of sickness absences, perhaps allowing for a better work-life-balance.

	Sum of Days Lost	Establishment	Average Duty Days Lost per person	2020/21 annual target per person	YTD (annual divided by 12 x current month number)
Control	138.00	29.21	4.72	8.70	4.35
Fire Staff	446.98	174.29	2.56	10.00	5.00
On Call	396.90	348	1.14	7.00	3.50
Full Time	1376.00	443.5	3.10	7.00	3.50
total	2357.88	995	2.37		

The Service's infection control measures had been effective in minimising the impact of Covid-19 on its workforce. Absences resulting from Covid-19 were low compared to other fire and rescue services.

	Confirmed Covid	Self Isolation Symptoms of Covid	Self Isolation – Household symptoms	Self isolation – team or watch symptoms	Quarantine – returning to UK from affected area
Control	1	2	3	0	1
Fire Staff	4	9	15	1	0
On Call	12	13	27	15	1
Full Time	16	31	56	37	1
Total	33	55	101	53	3

Mental health, anxiety and depression continued to be the most prevalent cause of sickness absence within the Service, followed by three musculoskeletal issues:

CLG Category	Short Term days lost	Long Term days lost	Total duty days lost
Mental Health Anxiety/Depression	16.05	685.58	701.63
Musculo Skeletal Back	23.10	262.68	313.36
Musculo Skeletal Knee	63.42	249.94	285.78
Musculo Skeletal Lower Limb	21.26	169.96	191.22

A Member asked about the cost of delivering the new Employee Assistance Programme. This Programme had replaced the previous *ad hoc* counselling arrangements and, while providing a more wide-ranging service to employees, cost less to deliver. The Temporary Director of People and Development agreed to update Members with the exact costs.

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

(b) that the Temporary Director of People and Development update Members with the costs related to the delivery of the Employee Assistance Programme.

91/20 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR UPDATE REPORT 2020/21 - The Head of Finance submitted a mid-year update report in relation to treasury management.

At its meeting of 13 March 2020, the HFA had approved the annual 2020/21 Treasury management Policy Statement and agreed a range of prudential indicators which aimed to ensure effective treasury management and the affordability of the Service's capital plans. The report indicated that the Service had abided by the Statement and complied with recommended best practice outlined in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

As of 30 September 2020, the Service's temporary investments totalled £13m and investment outcomes were summarised as follows:

Interest Earned April to September 2020	Rate of return April to September 2020	Benchmark return at 30 September 2020*	Difference (Favourable) April to September 2020
£14k	0.16%	-0.06%	(0.22%)

The Service's long-term borrowing was £13.6m, meaning that it was under the limit. While interest rates were unusually low, the Service would consider taking on more long-term borrowing. If approved by the HFA at its meeting due to be held on 7 December 2020, the Service would adopt the annuity method for calculating its minimum revenue provision (MRP). This method was widely used as it accounted for the time-value of money.

A Member requested, and it was agreed, that the Service facilitate a session for the Committee on long-term treasury management issues.

- Resolved -** (a) That the report be received, and
- (b) that the Service facilitate a session for the Committee on long-term treasury management issues.

92/20 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS - PERIOD ENDING 30 SEPTEMBER 2020 - The Head of Finance submitted the Management Accounts for the period ending 30 September 2020.

The Service continued to predict an underspend (further to Minute 73/20) as other savings in the Revenue Budget had materialised as a result of Covid-19 (such as reduced fuel consumption). There were however other pressures including ill-health pension contributions and the settlement of historic mesothelioma claims. The scheduled capital expenditure on new personal protection equipment for firefighters had been delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and would feature in 2020/21's programme. The Service's reserves were £11.3m as a result of underspending.

A Member noted the underspend resulting from the fact that the Service had not recruited new firefighters during the financial year. The Workforce Plan ensured that the Service would not get into a difficult situation with regard to staffing. Firefighters were usually recruited in groups of 20 and the next round of recruitment was not likely to commence until after March 2021.

- Resolved -** That the Management Accounts be received.

93/20 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 Service had undergone its thematic Covid-19 inspection (Minute 76/20 refers) and was awaiting formal feedback. Members would be informed of the initial feedback during a Member Day due to be held on 27 November 2020. HMICFRS was due to resume its planned programme of inspections in 2021, meaning that the Service expected its second inspection to be undertaken late in 2021.

Resolved - That the update be received.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

94/20 DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY PLANS TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF STAFF- The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report in response to the Committee's scope relating to the development and delivery of plans to support the health and wellbeing of staff.

Since the report had been published, the Service had developed plans to trial a restructure which would involve the Occupational Health team moving into the Service Improvement Directorate. Occupational Health had worked closely with Health and Safety throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report addressed the Committee's scope point-by-point:

- **How have matters improved since the Service's previous HMICFRS inspection?** The Head of Occupational Health and Wellbeing had been appointed in October 2019 and, since then the team's membership had stabilised and was fully established with substantive staff. A new post, Assistant Fitness Manager, had also been added. New policies had been written and subjected to appropriate consultations. These related to: menopause, health surveillance, critical incident stress management, and physical fitness. The Service had expanded its work with the mental health charity, MIND, which was supporting the delivery of 'emergency services resilience training' for Control Room staff. The Service had contracted with a new physiotherapy provider which aimed to refer employees within 48 hours. This would directly alleviate some of the Service's most common reasons for staff absence.
- **What support has the Service put in place for staff in the light of the significant challenges posed by Covid-19?** The Head of Occupational Health and Wellbeing had played a key role in organisational communications and support for staff during the first wave of Covid-19. The Service had produced a series of videos and podcasts to keep staff up-to-date on guidance and on how to access help and support. The Service had also established an internal track and trace system, allowing it to take immediate action in the event of a confirmed Covid-19 case. This had meant that the number of infections remained low. Clinical supervision had been put in place for senior decision-makers in the organisation; this was standard practice in other sectors such as health. Clinical psychologists had been commissioned to help the Service to develop a Covid Wellbeing Toolkit for staff and to provide supervision for Occupational Health staff.
- **What has the Service learned from the health and wellbeing initiatives in other areas?** The Occupational Health and Wellbeing team was a member of the Yorkshire and Humber regional Health & Safety and Occupational Health Committee and staff regularly met with their counterparts from other fire and rescue services. The Service also played a key role in the Local Resilience Forum, working with numerous other

agencies. Work was also being undertaken in partnership with Yorkshire Ambulance Service to explore the possibility of establishing a joint support service for psychological wellbeing.

- **What have been the main challenges to supporting the health and wellbeing of staff?** The geographical diversity of the Service's area had provided a significant challenge; the relatively small Occupational Health and Wellbeing team worked with many members of staff across 31 locations within four local authority areas. In addition to this, on-call staff would typically only be at one of these locations for a couple of hours in any given week. The Occupational Health and Wellbeing team was still developing as none of the members of staff had been in the team for longer than two years. Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic had proven to be the biggest challenge for the team.

A Member asked how the Service monitored staff morale. Morale was difficult to measure outside of staff surveys. The Occupational Health and Wellbeing team often discussed morale with employees during their sessions, asking whether staff felt they had been supported adequately and whether they had found accessing services easy. Feedback had indicated that 98 percent of staff members who had interacted with Occupational Health had felt well supported.

A Member asked about the uptake of the Service's new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). While the Programme had only been implemented in October 2020, early feedback had been positive and demand was expected to increase as employees became aware of the offer. Three nurses worked within the Occupational Health and Wellbeing team; two with a focus on physical health and one with a focus on mental health.

The Committee was reassured by the range of improvements made by the Service in response to the previous HMICFRS inspection report and in relation to the Service Improvement Plan. However, the Committee was conscious that many of the initiatives were at an early stage in their implementation and agreed to monitor their progress.

Resolved - (a) That Head of Occupational Health and Wellbeing be commended on the quality of her work during the previous year, and

(b) that a verbal update be provided to the Committee in around three months.

95/20 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2020/21 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2020/21.

In accordance with the Committee's recommendation at its meeting of 11 November 2019 (Minute 65/19 refers), the Director of Service Delivery provided an update in relation to the Emergency Medical Response Cost Recovery Model. At the Committee's previous meeting it was reported that the review of the cost recovery model relating to East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) had not been undertaken as planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Minute 78/20 refers). Since then, the Service had agreed with East Midlands Ambulance Service that the cost recovery for the Emergency Medical Response service would be aligned with the arrangements already in place with Yorkshire Ambulance Service.

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

(b) that the matter of the Emergency Medical Response Cost Recovery Model be considered resolved.

96/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - CORRESPONDENCE - The Committee had received two items of correspondence which would be discussed with the Chairperson of the Fire Authority. One related to concerns around pension abatement and another to alleged conflicts of interest within the Service.