

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 JUNE 2021

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

Councillors Briggs as an observer.

Paul McCourt - Director of Service Delivery, Niall McKiniry - Director of Service Improvement, Martyn Ransom - Head of Finance, Jason Kirby - Temporary Head of People and Development, Jamie Morris - Senior Service Improvement Officer, Mathew Buckley - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, Samm Campbell - Committee Manager and Andy McCulloch - Internal Audit (TIAA) were also present.

The meeting was held at the Humberside Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Kingston upon Hull. Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m.

The Monitoring Officer/Secretary took the chair for Minute 44/21.

PROCEDURAL

44/21 ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE 2019/20 - *Resolved* - That Mr D Chapman be appointed Chairperson of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee until its Annual General Meeting in 2022.

Mr D Chapman took the chair.

45/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Doyle.

46/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

47/21 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 April 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

48/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

49/21 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meetings of 4 June 2021.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

50/21 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Andy McCulloch (TIAA) presented a verbal update on the internal audit process.

Five of the eight audit reviews due to be undertaken in 2021/22 had been scheduled, with the first due to commence in the following weeks. Audit work would continue to be undertaken remotely, with plans for TIAA to begin attending in-person later in the year.

Resolved - That the update be received.

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

51/21 ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2020/21 (UNAUDITED) - The Head of Finance submitted unaudited Annual Statement of Accounts for 2020/21.

The Annual Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 had been produced ahead of the deadline (31 July 2021). The Service's underspend had been used to increase its reserves from £10.9m to £13.8m in the light of the uncertainty regarding future funding models for fire and rescue services. A Member queried the number of staff members referred to in the Accounts compared to the number of staff members (939) quoted in the report on diversity and recruitment received at the Committee's previous meeting (Minute 39/21 refers). It was explained to the Committee that the Accounts referred to the number of contracts rather than the number of employees, many of whom held more than one contract of employment with the Service.

A Member referred to the targets for response standards and the Committee agreed that the targets should be updated, replacing the phrase, 'threshold modelling', in four of the boxes with specific target ranges. A Member asked about the outstanding debts owed by HFR Solutions. HFR Solutions incurred roughly the same amount of debt with the Service each year, meaning that the current debt was not years old. A Member queried the amount spent on the salary of the Director of People and Development post during 2020/21. The amount was larger than it had been in previous years due to the then-substantive post-holder having been on sickness leave while the Service paid temporary replacements.

Resolved - (a) That unaudited Annual Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 be received.

(b) that the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 be updated in response to the Committee's recommended amendments.

52/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21 - The Head of Finance submitted a report summarising the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2020/21.

The rate of return on the Services investments in 2020/21 had been minimal due to its careful investment strategy and the low interest rates of that year. The Service had not taken out any short-term borrowing during the year, but it had used the opportunity presented by the low interest rates to take out £4m of new long-term borrowing. The Service's average level of borrowing for 2020/21 had been £15.2m, in relation to which £546,000 of interest had been paid. By 31 March 2021, the Service's closing level of debt with the PWLB was £16.9m. The maturity of the Service's debt was within the limits of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2009.

The Service had spent £3.2m on capital projects during 2020/21. With some projects having slipped from 2019/20 into 2020/21 due to the emergence of Covid-19, others had then slipped into 2021/22. The pattern in recent years seemed to show that the Service could manage between £3-4m of capital projects in any given year.

Resolved - That the report be received.

53/21 DRAFT ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STATEMENT 2020/21 - The Director of Service Improvement submitted a report summarising the draft Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement for 2020/21.

The Statement summarised the key incidents and issues from the year 2020/21. The Service had four main policies (reviewed annually) in place relating to fraud and corruption: Whistleblowing, Anti-Bribery, Anti-Money-Laundering, and Anti-Fraud and -Corruption. Staff members were periodically reminded of the policies and provided with information on how to report any concerns they might have, with an option to report anonymously to an external organisation. An internal investigation was ongoing and had also been passed to Humberside Police for investigation. The outcomes of both investigations would be reported to the Committee following their conclusions.

Resolved - That the report be received;

54/21 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).

The Service had been preparing for its next inspection, which would take place in September 2021 at the earliest as it was in the second tranche of inspections nationally, the first of which was underway. The Service had been working to establish and keep up-to-date drafts of the self-assessment material which would need to be sent to HMICFRS prior to the next inspection and it had recently submitted one of its biannual data returns. A Member asked whether the Service's staff felt positive in the light of the upcoming inspection. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) was responsible for encouraging a positive culture and it was reported that staff did feel generally positive following the outcomes of the Covid-19 themed inspection. There remained an awareness that there were areas upon which the Service would need to improve, especially those identified in the first inspection undertaken in 2019.

Resolved - That the update be received.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

55/21 DRAFT GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2021/22 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's draft Scrutiny Programme 2021/22.

Resolved - (a) That the Programme be approved subject to the addition of a reference to feedback on promotion processes received through exit-interviews on the scope of the item due to be heard on 6 September 2021, and

(b) that the Committee thank the Fire Authority for providing its shortlist of topics for 2021/22.

56/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS -

57/21 QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS - The Committee offered its congratulations and thanks to two of the Service's watch managers who had been recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours:

- Bernie McKiernan, Watch Manager at Snaith Fire Station, had received a British Empire Medal, and
- Tony Clark, Watch Manager at Howden Fire Station, had received the Queen's Fire Service Medal.

58/21 DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT - The recruitment process for a substantive Director of People and Development was due to commence in June or July 2021 and the Committee would be kept up-to-date on the progress of this process.

59/21 TREASURY MANAGEMENT TRAINING - The Committee had undertaken a training session in relation to treasury management on 20 April 2021.