

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 March 2022

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

Councillor Briggs and Councillor Green attended as observers.

Chris Blacksell - Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Phil Shillito - Deputy Chief Fire Officer/Executive Director of Corporate Services, Matthew Sutcliffe - Temporary Director of Service Improvement, Steve Topham - Director of Emergency Response, Martyn Ransom - Head of Finance, Simon Rhodes - Head of Corporate Assurance, Jason Kirby - Emergency Response Special Project Lead, Lisa Nicholson - Monitoring Officer/Secretary, and Sam Campbell - Committee Manager were also present. Andy McCulloch - Internal Audit (TIAA) and Ross Woodley (Mazars) attended remotely.

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

PROCEDURAL

15/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Apologies for absence were received from Mrs P Jackson.

16/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - There were no declarations of interest.

17/22 MINUTES - *Resolved* - That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

18/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA - There were no matters arising from the minutes.

GOVERNANCE

19/22 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY - The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting of 11 February 2022.

Resolved - That the update be received.

Audit

20/22 DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - Andy McCulloch (TIAA) presented the draft Internal Audit Plan 2022/23.

The internal audit process in 2022/23 would involve a mixed approach, with some work undertaken in-person and other aspects undertaken remotely. The Plan incorporated some purposeful gaps in order that it could be amended to account for the outcomes of the Service's recent inspection by HMICFRS when the resulting report was published in summer 2022.

Resolved - That the draft Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 be received.

21/22 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE - Ross Woodley (Mazars) presented a report updating the Committee on progress in relation to the external audit process.

The delays in external audit processes nationally, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and chronic staffing issues in the sector, had continued and were likely to continue into the following financial year. As a result, the deadline for the publication of final audited accounts for the 2021/22 financial year had been set for 30 November 2022. CIPFA had also recommended that external audit firms temporarily simplify the accounts in order that more might be published in line with the revised deadlines. In terms of performance, the Service had successfully reduced the number of fires in the Humberside area at a rate higher than the national average, and it had continued to perform well in relation to its response times.

Resolved - That the update be received.

22/22 EXTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY MEMORANDUM - Ross Woodley (Mazars) presented the External Audit Strategy Memorandum for the year ending 31 March 2022.

The Audit Strategy Memorandum had not significantly changed compared to those of previous years. Most of the associated work was planned for June and July 2022 and the Service was likely to sign off its accounts earlier than many other organisations. The Memorandum focussed on the same three key risks as it had in the previous year, all of which were standard risks for fire and rescue services. Mazars had expressed no concerns around value for money and the audit process would take into account the outcomes of the Service's recent inspection by HMICFRS when the report was published in summer 2022. Mazars expected no changes to the currently agreed fees, and no changes to the Service's materiality.

Resolved - That the External Audit Strategy Memorandum be received.

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

23/22 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND CAPITAL EXPENDITURE STRATEGY 2022/23 - The Head of Finance presented a report summarising the Service's Treasury Management and Capital Expenditure Strategy 2022/23.

Changes to relevant regulations meant that the Committee would begin to receive quarterly updates in relation to treasury management. Geopolitical circumstances had changed significantly between the Strategy being written and the current meeting. Equity markets, gas, oil, and economic growth in general had all been significantly negatively affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The report presented the planned capital expenditures for the following five years. The Service was currently under-borrowed in relation to its policies, having taken out £3m in long-term borrowing to take advantage of low rates.

Resolved - That the report be received.

24/22 HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE - The Temporary 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).

HMICFRS had conducted more than 100 staff interviews during the inspection process, alongside staff forums at all levels within the organisation. The Service was yet to receive a draft of the Inspectorate's report, but the initial impressions received through the debrief at the end of the inspection were positive. It was likely that the Service would receive the draft report in May 2022.

- Resolved -** (a) That the update be received, and
- (b) that the Service's workforce be congratulated on its effort and good work ahead of the recent inspection by HMICFRS.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

25/22 WORKFORCE MONITORING AND PLANNING (REVISION OF WORKFORCE PLAN) - The Emergency Response Special Project Lead submitted a report in response to the scope within the Committee's Scrutiny Programme for 2021/22.

For the majority of the 2021/22 financial year, the Service had continued to work in accordance with its existing Workforce Plan, which it was also in the process of revising. However, with the recent appointment of a permanent Executive Director of People and Development, the Service paused its work on the revision of the Plan and focussed on some of the underlying work.

The Service's recruitment and talent pipeline processes (Minute 84/21 refers) had continued to work effectively and workforce planning was reported regularly to the Strategic Leadership Team. The Service was in the process of reviewing its retirement profile and planning its future recruitment and promotion activity. HMICFRS's initial feedback following its recent inspection was that the Service had in place effective workforce planning processes, and a related internal audit of workforce planning the previous year had yielded a judgement of 'reasonable assurance'.

In relation to the impact of the Service's Positive Action work, it was broadly in line with the average workforce profile nationally. The Service had a slightly higher proportion of women in its workforce than the national average, but a slightly lower proportion of ethnic minority groups. The effects of the Service's efforts in Positive Action would take years to manifest fully, but the most recent round of recruitment had yielded encouraging results. Targeted Positive Action initiatives included Rookie Reds, which looked to encourage people from a variety of backgrounds to work with the Service by helping them to develop the skills and knowledge they would need to succeed during the recruitment process. The Service had addressed the Committee's recommendations resulting from its consideration of diversity and recruitment at its meeting of 12 April 2021 (Minute 39/21 refers), many of which represented ongoing workstreams.

Members raised the following points:

- Exit Interviews - The Service continued to offer exit interviews to both leavers retirees, with the outcomes monitored and any highlighted issues followed up by HR Partners. The Service had taken action in relation to three or four points raised through 14 exit interviews in the most recent period.
- Protected Characteristics - The Service monitored the protected characteristics of those leaving the workforce as well as those joining it to identify whether it was losing any representation in the workforce disproportionately. The Service had adopted a similar approach to its recruitment processes to identify whether any stages of recruitment were eliminating applicants disproportionately, and it was prepared to adapt its processes to ensure that they were fair and appropriate.
- Partnership Working - The Service worked with a variety of organisations alongside the National Fire Chiefs Council, including Women in the Fire Service and the Asian Fire Service Association. Both groups focussed on supporting members and helping people to become part of the workforce nationally.

- Career Development - The Service offered a number of initiatives to develop individual staff members' careers, including secondment opportunities with organisations such as Humberside Police. This work was undertaken on an individual basis through the Service's personal development review process and numerous opportunities had been considered at a variety of organisations in recent years. The Service was considering the development of a scheme for high-potential individuals as part of its revision of the Workforce Plan.

Resolved - (a) That the Service's ongoing progress in diversifying its workforce be praised, and

(b) that the Committee take assurance from the work undertaken by the Service to improve its approach to workforce monitoring and planning.

26/22 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2021/22 - The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2021/22.

Resolved - That the Programme be received.

27/22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - ENDS OF TERMS OF OFFICE - The Chairperson reminded those present that the current meeting would be the last for three Members whose terms of office would expire prior to the meeting due to be held on 11 April 2022: Mr D Chapman, Mr A Smith and Mrs M Thomlinson. Alongside Mr M Allingham and Mr C Vertigans (whose terms of office had expired on 31 March 2021), Mr D Chapman, Mr A Smith and Mrs M Thomlinson had been present at the Committee's inaugural meeting on 12 October 2012. The Chairperson thanked Members for their dedicated service and thanked officers and internal and external auditors for their support to the Committee.

Resolved - That the Committee thank Mr M Allingham, Mr D Chapman, Mr A Smith, Mrs M Thomlinson and Mr C Vertigans for their years of dedicated service and hard work.

Following the meeting, the Chairperson of Humberside Fire Authority offered the Authority's thanks to Mr D Chapman, Mr A Smith and Mrs M Thomlinson for their work and service spanning the decade since the Committee's inaugural meeting and presented them with plaques alongside the Chief Fire Officer.