

HUMBERSIDE FIRE AUTHORITY
GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT: Independent Co-opted Members James Doyle (Chair) Chris Brown, Pam Jackson, and Gerry Wareham.

Matthew Sutcliffe – Assistance Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director of Corporate Services, Christine Cooper – Executive Director of People and Development, Jon Henderson – Director of Prevention and Protection, Sam O'Connor – Head of Organisational Development, Steve Duffield – Area Manager Service Improvement, Martyn Ransom – Joint Deputy Chief Finance Officer & Deputy S.151 Officer, Simon Rhodes - Director of Service Improvement and Corporate Planning, Lisa Nicholson – Monitoring Officer/Secretary, and Rob Close – Committee Manager were also present. Andrew McCulloch – Director of Internal Audit (TiAA) and David Robinson – Audit Manager (TiAA). Ross Woodley – Audit Manager (Mazars).

Councillor Green was also present.

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

PROCEDURAL

82/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – Apologies for absence were received from Kathryn Lavery.

83/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – No declarations of interest were made with respect to any items on the agenda.

84/22 MINUTES – *Resolved* – That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

85/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES, OTHER THAN ON THE AGENDA – There were no matters arising.

GOVERNANCE

86/22 UPDATE: MATTERS ARISING/FEEDBACK FROM FIRE AUTHORITY – The Monitoring Officer/Secretary provided feedback on items considered by the Fire Authority at its meetings on 2 December 2022.

Resolved - That the update be received.

AUDIT

87/22 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS – The Committee received a report of the internal auditors, TIAA. The Committee was given an overview of the key findings from the audit reviews into collaboration activity, ICT GDPR, and secondary contracts. While both ICT GDPR and secondary contracts received reasonable assurance, collaboration activity was assessed at limited assurance with eight important action points identified.

It was clarified that the majority of the recommendations' deadlines for the ICT GDPR audit concluded in June 2023 therefore allowing time for the development of a new assurance framework to integrate effective evaluation.

Since the end of 2022 deadline for GDPR e-learning, the completion sat at 85 per cent of current staff. The outstanding e learning courses were constantly monitored and those who had not completed training, were implored to as soon as reasonably practicable.

In relation to recommendation two of the secondary contracts audit, the letter to be drafted to HFR Solutions was dependant on the completion of policy framework revision. It was further clarified that the conditions limiting secondary employment sought only to mitigate conflicts of interest or manage total hours. There were not many factors that would ultimately preclude secondary contracts. Additionally, there was a minimum service obligation within the contracts of operational fire fighters expecting them to be available for their primary roles as a priority.

Resolved – That the Internal Audit Report be noted.

88/22 EXTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT AND FOLLOW UP LETTER TO AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT FROM 2021/22 AUDIT – The Committee received a report of the external auditors, Mazars. The Committee was advised that the follow up letter to the audit completion report was issued in November 2022. The delay in assurance resulted from asset valuations from the pension fund auditors producing a sample valuation error. That error, however, was immaterial.

Resolved – That the External Audit Annual Report and Follow Up Letter to Audit Completion Report From 2021/22 Audit be noted.

89/22 EXTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT– The Committee received a report of the external auditors, Mazars. The Committee was advised that the audit opinion for the 2020/21 Whole of Government Accounts was issued but could not be certificated as there was still outstanding sample work. The assurance statement had however been issued to the National Audit Office on 19 December 2022. An unqualified opinion was issued on the 2021/22 accounts, including Humber Fire and Rescue Service within just 11 per cent of local authorities to receive their opinion within the deadline. The Value For Money review, conducted in December 2022, identified no weaknesses relevant to report. The only outstanding work for the 2021/22 Audit was the Whole of Government Accounts which were expected to be significantly delayed due to outstanding instruction from the National Audit Office.

It was acknowledged that the use of earmarked reserves to mitigate against inflationary pressures proved prudent over the 2022/23 financial year.

Resolved - That the Internal Audit Report be noted.

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

90/22 REVIEW OF ANTI-FRAUD RELATED POLICIES – The Committee received a verbal report of the Head of Corporate Assurance. The Committee received an overview of the anti-bribery policy, anti-fraud and corruption policy, anti-money laundering policy and the whistleblowing policy. It was noted that there would be the necessity for two members of the GAS Committee to be nominated to contribute to anti-fraud related polices following the recruitment of new members.

It was clarified that standard induction process for new employees was to progress through e-learning packages which provided an overview of key policies relating to their roles.

Resolved – (a) That the Review of Anti-Fraud Related Policies report be received;

(b) That the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee nominate two members to contribute to the review of anti-fraud related policies.

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME

91/22 SCRUTINY ITEM – EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION – EQUALITY IMPACT ANALYSIS – The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of People & Development. The Committee was advised that, in 2020, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) commissioned McKenzie's LLP to deliver Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) awareness training to services throughout the country. The NFCC subsequently launched a template, process and supporting toolkit to embed standardised EIA across the sector. The Service also adopted an EIA Policy in July 2021 following consultation with staff. An internal audit into the assurance of EIA, conducted in August 2022, and the HMICFRS Inspection findings identified that the EIA process was not embedded across the service and some policies lacked any supporting analysis. EIA Policy, its effectiveness and associated training remained a constant factor of review in the Service Improvement Plan. The Committee were given an

Members raised the following points:

Consultation – Both staff and community groups were consulted with to develop the EIA Policy and any EIAs used in respect of other policies and decisions. While direct networking was often preferred, on occasion, published data and reports from community groups were also used to inform EIAs. That regular use of EIAs created a continuously updating system that responded to changes in equality and diversity landscape.

Impact on Challenge – The inclusion of EIAs within the Service created an additional level of assurance which could be relied upon if challenges to decisions were made. Often, the health and safety arising from policies and decisions was the ultimate factor.

Resolved - That the Committee endorse the report.

92/22 GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2022/23 – The Committee Manager submitted a report summarising the Committee's Scrutiny Programme 2022/23.

Resolved - That the Programme be received.

93/22 ANY OTHER BUSINESS – The Committee was advised by the Assistance Chief Fire Officer & Executive Director of Corporate Services that in January 2023 the State of the fire and Rescue Services report 2022 was published identifying six recommendations to be addressed including identifying and determining risk, spending review deficit, precise determination of roles, pay and negotiations machinery, investing in chief fire officers through operational independence, and codes of ethics. A report was to be received at a Member day for the Humberside Fire Authority for an in-depth update.

Additionally, a review of the London Fire Brigade's culture identified serious areas of discrimination and prejudice that, while not reflected at Humberside Fire and Rescue, were used to inform service improvement going forward.

Resolved – That the update be noted.