

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Monday, 17th October, 2022 at 6.30 pm

Lynda Kenton Suite, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court,
Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

Members:
(*present)

Councillor Christine Bateson	*	Councillor Mike Smith
* Councillor Tricia Brown	*	Councillor Morag Malvern
* Councillor Haqeeq Dar	*	Councillor Sandra Malik
* Councillor Biyi Oloko		Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
* Councillor Tony Linden		

In Attendance: Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Wayne Bowcock, (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
Andrew Brittain (EY, External Auditor)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Doug Buchanan (Area Manager, Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Becca Chapman (Data and Performance Manager, D&P Manager)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)
Francesca Keates (EY, External Auditor)
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Jim Powell (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P)
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DcHEX)
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)
Tregear Thomas (Area Manager, Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, Councillor Linden declared an interest as a representative of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Action

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

18. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JULY 2022

RESOLVED that subject to a typo on page 6, which was corrected to Becci Jefferies (instead of Becca), the Minutes of the meeting held and recorded actions on 28 July 2022, be confirmed, as a correct recorded and signed by the Chair.

19. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

There were no matters properly referred to this Committee for decision.

20. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P), stated he had hoped to have brought the 20/21 Statement of Accounts to this Committee, however there had been additional delays. He introduced the External Auditors, Andrew Brittain and Francesca Keates from EY.

Andrew Britten reported EY were still waiting for an insurance letter from Deloitte. The audit from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead was also delayed, however he stated, he remained hopeful that it would be resolved in the near future. He explained the 20/21 evaluation work had a knock on effect on the 21/22 Statement of Accounts. He went through the report and made the following highlights:

- Page 23 of the report, Andrew reported there was no change from the previous year in two amber risks identified in the 21/22 audit.
- Page 24 - the pension liability risk had been downgraded to inherent.
- Page 25, Materiality, he stated it was a requirement to report Audit differences over £62,000.
- Page 36 – Value for Money (VFM) – He stated EY have yet to conclude VFM planning and will update the Committee at its next meeting.
- Page 48 – sets out the timetable of audit and deliverables. The plan include the delays in the 20/21 Audit.
- Page 54 – Fees – set by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA). There is a proposed increase to the scale fee, subject to agreement by PSAA.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith on the reason for the proposed fee increase, Andrew referred to the notes on page 54 which listed the reasons for the proposed fee increase. In response to Councillor Malvern, Andrew explained there had been a number of changes since the agreement of the original scope in 2017, in some cases, resulting in

specialist knowledge.

In referring back to page 25, the Chair asked the reason why performance materiality had been set at 75%? Andrew reported it related to the overall financial statement levels.

The Chair drew attention to an error on page 59, which should be read as 2023, instead of 2022.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

21. DISCIPLINARY POLICY

Becci Jefferies, Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D), reported Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference require Members of the Committee to approve the Disciplinary Policy. She stated the policy had been reviewed to include staff who were neuro diverse.

In response to Councillors Linden and Smith, Becci explained the policy covered elements of ways of working and behaviours. The policy was reviewed by the Service's internal Disability Awareness Forum. In terms of gross misconduct, she stated there were a number of policies which covered other areas.

The Chair queried page 78, Disciplinary Process Flowchart. She had identified stages 1 and 2 of the process were exactly the same and asked whether the stages could be combined? Becci confirmed that she would review this.

The Chair also queried page 79, Appeals Process Flowchart, and asked whether the 7 day period for the appeal to be submitted was sufficient and asked whether there were extraordinary circumstances where this deadline could be extended? Becci reported that extraordinary circumstances would be considered.

RESOLVED that the Disciplinary Policy (Appendix A), subject to a review on stage 1 and 2 of the Disciplinary Process Flowchart, be approved.

22. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 - QUARTER ONE (APRIL - JUNE 2022)

Becca Chapman, Data, Performance and Risk Manager (DP&R), stated the Quarter One Performance report covered data from across the Service.

Quadrant One - Service Provision

Tregear Thomas, Area Manager Prevention and Protection (AM P&P), reported there were 0 fire deaths. He stated he was pleased the number of non-fatal fire casualties had remained the same, as previous year. The number of deliberate primary fires had increased and explained this may be due to hot-spots in the county where there had been issues with anti-social behaviour. He reported he

HHR&L&D

had informed Thames Valley Police (TVP).

Tregear reported there was also an increase in secondary deliberate fires and the target was to reduce these. He added the cause was not all around malice and in some cases was due to camp fires. There was an increase in the number of referrals for Safe and Well visits received from our partners and highlighted the Service had exceeded its target with an increase of 28.7% in quarter one.

The Service had maintained its target of 100% of the percentage of Safe and Well referrals, where there had been a threat or incident of arson, completed within 48 hours.

The Service did not meet its target of 90% in the percentage of very high and high risk Safe and Well Referrals. The percentage for the quarter was 42.4%. Tregear provided examples of the reason the target had not been met. E.g. visit required joint agencies. He added that the measure was a target the Service will continue to focus on.

The percentage of Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) calls where RBFRS did not attend had increased. Tregear stated the increase could be linked to more office buildings being occupied compared to one year ago. Jim Powell, Area Manager Collaboration and Policy (AM C&P), reported a recent consultation was held on how the Service respond to AFAs and explained a new target had been set to 30%. He stated, he believed the possible increase could be more to do with the culture towards the change in policy and assured Members that work will continue with Control staff to embed the policy. An evaluation will be held in June 2023 to determine whether the policy has decreased the number of AFAs.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith on above (measure 14), Jim explained AFAs were not serious fire incidents, and reiterated an evaluation will be held next year.

In discussing Response Measures, Doug Buchanan, Area Manager Response and Resilience (AM R&R), explained there was some volatility in Wholetime Appliance Availability, due to staff transfers, retirees and sickness absence levels. In quarter one, via a recruitment campaign, transferees and new Firefighters had been recruited to balance establishment level pressures. On-Call Appliance Availability pressures related to key qualifications and establishment numbers. He reported recent On-Call recruitment would take time to have an impact on availability, however, a new policy had been introduced to allow the flexibility of On-Call staff moving to another Station to provide specific qualifications. In addition, the policy enabled Wholetime staff to support On-Call Stations.

Doug stated, the Service remained above its target on the percentage of occasions where the first fire engine arrives at an emergency incident within 10 minutes from time the emergency call was answered, and he advised caution that the Response Standard was affected during the summer months, due to the impact of the Heatwave.

In referring to measure 18 (% of visits to Very High, High and Medium Operational Risk sites completed in timescale) and in response to Councillor Smith, Doug stated that the data reporting was still in development.

In response to a question from Councillor Linden, Becci Jefferies (HHR&L&D), reported sickness levels had decreased, although the level was higher compared to the same quarter last year. Sickness Working Group looks at key areas of sickness absence e.g. musculoskeletal. The Service had increased its awareness in mental health and sign post staff to Blue Light Champions, Disability Awareness Groups, fitness testing and has reviewed policies to provide additional guidance for staff.

Councillor Smith asked a question in relation to measure 18 and whether the Service had seen any improvements in the construction industry from the introduction of the Building Safety Act? Tregear reported the Building Safety Act will not be enforced until January 2023 and that it applied to multi-occupied residential buildings. The Service was working with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) on communication messages to educate the business community.

Councillor Oloko queried the layout of Quarter One Performance Report. Becca explained the data was laid out providing two comparisons for each measure, a comparison against target and assessment against last year's end date. In answer to a supplementary question from Councillor Oloko, Becca suggested that in future years, the quarter one report could include performance from Q4 of the previous year to allow further comparisons.

Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), suggested whether greater detail provided in the summary pages may further assist with Member scrutiny?

Quadrant Two - Corporate Health

Becci reported there was a deliberate delay in the completion of Performance Development Review (PDR's) to allow for His Majesty's Inspectorate and Constabulary Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) inspection process. The deadline for completion of PDRs had been moved to quarter two. In response to a question on the reduction of female Firefighters this quarter, Becci reported one individual had moved to a Green Book position.

In answer to a number of questions from Councillor Smith on station staff budgets, Conor listed the budget pressures the Service was facing. He reported a Task and Finish Group had been established to monitor overspend of the overtime budget, and stated, CRMP will be looking at whether the establishment levels were too lean.

Councillor Oloko asked the reason there was no data behind the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives? Becci reported the EDI Objectives were recently approved by the Fire Authority. The Strategic Performance Board (SPB) will look at activities and analyse how the Service is performing against the Action Plan e.g. the introduction of the Chairman's Internship. In some measures data is used to inform performance e.g. recruitment.

In response to a question from Councillor Malvern, Doug explained that at On-Call Stations located west of the County, expenditure was below budget due to lower establishment levels / availability which meant a lower spend. In terms of Grey Book Pay Award, Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), reported the Employers Side made an increase offer of 5%. The Fire Bridge Union (FBU) were going into consultation / ballot with its members on whether they were willing to accept the offer. He added, the FBU were advising to reject the offer. The outcome will not be known until the outcome of the ballot.

Quadrant Three – Priority Programmes

The amber RAG status was highlighted in Prevention activities in support of children and young people. Members were reminded quarter one was the tail-end of the academic year.

In response to a question from Councillor Oloko on the layout of the Performance Report, in particular Quadrant Three, Nikki Richards, Deputy Chief Executive (DChEx) explained these were project plans against the priority programmes listed and that it was a dashboard. She stated the text was progress against the project plans.

In response to Councillor Linden's question on objective five, Nikki reported it related to the Service's approach on equality of access, which was currently part of the CRMP process. The red RAG status was due to the CRMP being currently in the process of development.

Councillor Smith queried the reason why Cyber Security was not listed within the ICT element of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF). Nikki reported, the SAIF listed plans and expenditure on hardware, and that the Corporate Risk Register detailed the measures it took, as it identified Cyber Security as a risk. She added, the ICT Strategy provided greater detail and stated the Service had not bought an asset to support Cyber Security.

Wayne reported Cyber Security was identified as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register, however the Service will need to look at Cyber Security within its performance.

Quadrant Four – Corporate Risk

Doug reported the risk for the Wholetime crewing model remained high (red RAG status) work had been underway with Workforce planning to understand staff profile.

Nikki explained the cost of living risk. She stated the Service had recognised Cost of living rise as an impact to staff and had introduced a number of mitigations from hardship support (loan) to different ways of working, as well as signposting staff to other services.

Councillor Linden asked whether the Service received cost of living funding from the government and advised West Berkshire Council had received funding in terms of hardship fund and foodbanks. He suggested Fire Stations could be

used as storage facilities for food banks or find other ways they could get involved.

Katie reported the Service was working locally with Crowthorne Warm Spaces Initiative and were having those conversations. Tregear stated Safe and Well Technicians and Crews were public facing and were signposting people to partners.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith, Wayne reported the Service was losing both Grey and Green Book staff to other Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and stated pay market supplements were competitive. In terms of the Fire Transformation (risk ID 737), Wayne confirmed he had written to the Fire Minister about the flow of funding into the Fire Sector. He was also in the process of arranging briefing sessions with Berkshire MPs. Risk 737 was constantly reviewed and will be brought back to this Committee for an update.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2022-23, be noted;
- 2) The progress made on the four priority programmes, be noted;
- 3) The position of corporate risk, be noted.

23. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday, 23 January 2023, at 6.30pm, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 8.28pm)