

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL held at East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, 20 Upperton Road, Eastbourne at 10:00 hours on Thursday 2 February 2017.

Members Present: Councillors Buchanan, Galley, Lambert, Peltzer Dunn, Penn and Taylor.

Councillor Howson also attended the meeting.

Also present:

Ms. D. Whittaker (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Mr. M. Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Ms. E. Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Mr. D. Savage (Assistant Director Resources / Treasurer), Mrs. L. Ridley (Assistant Director Planning & Improvement), Mrs. V. Chart (Assistant Director – Human Resources & Organisational Development), Ms. M. Gilbert-King (Assistant Director – Safer Communities), Mr. P. King and Mr. K. McGrath (Ernst & Young Auditors) and Mrs. A. Bryen (Clerk).

064. **DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

064.1 It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, no participating Member had any disclosable pecuniary interest under Section 30 of the Localism Act 2011.

065. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

065.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wincott and Mr. G. Walsh (Chief Fire Officer).

066. **NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT / CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

066.1 Paul King and Kris McGrath (Ernst & Young Auditors) were welcomed to the meeting.

067. **NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 3rd NOVEMBER 2016**

067.1 **RESOLVED** – That the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on 3rd November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. (Copy in Minute Book).

068. **CALLOVER**

068.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

- 069. Appointment of External Auditors
- 070. External Audit Update
- 071. 2016/17 3rd Quarter Performance Results
- 072. Corporate Projects Progress

068.2 **RESOLVED** – That all other reports be resolved in accordance with the recommendations as detailed below.

069. **APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

069.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director Resources / Treasurer that asked them to consider three options for the appointment of external auditors with effect from 1 April 2018, and to make a recommendation to the Fire Authority. (Copy in Minute Book).

069.2 Following the abolition of the Audit Commission, the Government had appointed Auditors for each local authority by means of a national procurement exercise. The Auditors were appointed from the financial year 2013/2014 on a three-year contract, with an optional extension for a further two years. The parties had agreed to extend the contract which now expired at the completion of the 2017/18 audit.

069.3 With effect from the financial year 2018/19, public bodies had to appoint their own auditors following a competition process. Members considered the requirements to comply with the appointment legislation and the recommended course of action, that the future appointment of External Auditors be managed through Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA). The PSAA had formally invited the Authority to opt-in to the national scheme for external audit appointments. The Assistant Director/Treasurer recommended this option for the Panel to consider.

069.4 Members also noted that the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015 required the Fire Authority meeting as a whole to make the decision to 'opt-into' the appointing person arrangement, and that the decision could not, therefore, be taken by this Panel.

069.5 The Panel placed on record their appreciation of the good service the Authority had received from the current external auditors, Ernst & Young LLP.

069.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel recommends the Fire Authority to accept the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) invitation to opt-in to the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors from 1 April 2018.

070. **EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

070.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director Resources / Treasurer that informed them of the content of the External Audit Plan 2016/17, the primary aim of which was to provide a value for money conclusion and an audit opinion. (Copy in Minute Book).

070.2 The external audit plan set out the work that the Authority's external auditors, Ernst & Young LLP (EY), intended to carry out in order to audit the Authority's 2016/17 accounts and form their judgement on the Authority's value for money arrangements. Mr. King confirmed that EY had not identified any specific risks relating to the Authority's accounts. He also advised the Panel that the new audit requirements meant that the accounts would need to be presented in a different format with the consequent re-statement of the previous years' figures, but he did not foresee this as a significant risk.

070.3 The fee for the 2016/17 audit was confirmed as £30,766 which was in line with the nationally set fee scales and was unchanged from the previous year. It was noted that this was dependent on a number of factors, including the quality and timeliness of the accounts and their associated working papers, and the ability of the external auditors to rely on the work carried out by internal audit.

070.4 **RESOLVED** – That the External Audit Plan for 2016/17 be approved.

071. **2016/17 3rd QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT**

071.1 Members considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) that presented the third quarter performance results for 2016/17 and provided a summary of Service performance information. Members noted that, in comparison to last year, overall performance for the third quarter of 2016/17 had declined, particularly in fires, and ten indicators were reporting a decline in performance compared against the third quarter for 2015/16. (Copy in Minute Book).

071.2 The DCFO explained that due to the timing of when the data is collated for the report shortly after the Christmas break, Quarter 3 data had not been verified by the usual validation processes, although the trends identified were unlikely to be skewed by any minor discrepancies in the data. She assured the Panel that the negative trends had already been seen in the Quarter 2 data and actions put in place to address this, but these actions had not yet been in place for sufficient time to show positive results. Some areas remained of concern and required further consideration and action to redress the negative trends.

071.3 The Panel received a presentation that set ESFRS's performance against the national position, and provided explanations for the downward trends in some areas. Members were informed that Borough Commanders regularly meet and analyse detailed performance monitoring data in order to identify trends and to consider where to focus prevention activity. An Accidental Fires Working Group had been set up to consider in detail what could be done to reduce these fires across the Service, but particularly in the City where the numbers were highest. The existing Accidental Dwelling Fires Strategy was no longer having a positive impact on reducing accidental dwelling fires, particularly those started in kitchens, and it would be reviewed to develop a more targeted approach.

071.4 The Assistant Director - Safer Communities (AD-SC) said that whilst the projected outcome for the number of home safety visits (HSVs) at year end was 8,913, she hoped to be able to achieve 10,000 targeted visits aimed at making a positive impact on driving down the number of accidental dwelling fires. Members asked for details of HSVs by Borough. The DCFO confirmed that the data gathered would be used in a more informed way to help address the negative trends or plateaux in performance, and details could be provide to Members by Boroughs.

071.5 In considering the staff sickness figures for Quarter 3, Councillor Penn asked what strategies were in place to support staff. The AD – HR & OD said that a revised Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy, (which would be considered by the Fire Authority on 14th February), comprised two key sections – health & safety and well-being, and provided a framework for managing this across the Service. Reducing work related injury and ill-health, as well as contributing to the future health and mental well-being of all employees, were two of the key elements in the Strategy. Councillor Penn was concerned that Managers may not receive the same level of support as other employees. She also asked if candidates for employment were screened for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder before being offered employment. The AD – HR&OD said that under current employment legislation, the Service was not allowed to take into account health issues when appointing staff, but the Service would support all employees to address any health issues. She advised Members that the number of days lost in staff sickness was high due to a few long term sickness absences. Members noted that the Health & Safety Executive now required work related stress to be recorded as a work related incident. Councillor Lambert noted that the level of staff sickness in whole-time firefighters had improved and, therefore, she would not have expected sickness to be a factor in the number of HSVs carried out.

071.6 Councillor Galley said that whilst the Authority should not be complacent about its performance data, declines in performance were often as a result of outside events over which the Service had no control. The AD – SC said that the next Borough Commanders quarterly meeting would be held in April and, as Lead Member for this area of work, Councillor Galley accepted an invitation to attend.

071.7 Members were informed that the national benchmarking data on performance would be brought to this Panel in April. Also, the Service's performance data would be considered more in depth at the Members Seminar on 1st March, although any formal decisions would need to be taken by either the Fire Authority or one of its Panels. It was agreed that the Seminar should start at 10 a.m. at a station in Hastings (venue to be confirmed).

071.8 **RESOLVED** – That

- (i) the 2016/17 performance results for Quarter 3, as set out in the report and complementary separate Appendix A to the report, be noted; and
- (ii) the Panel welcomes further in depth work being undertaken and agrees that performance, including health and well-being, and consideration of a potential way forward, will be the main focus at the Members' Seminar on 1 March 2017.

072. **CORPORATE PROJECTS PROGRESS REPORT**

072.1 Members considered a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer that updated them on current progress with nine projects. These included the Sussex Control Centre (SCC), Information Management Department Transformation, Service HQ Relocation, Bridging the Savings Gap, Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme, Respiratory Protective Equipment, Firewatch, Customer Relationship Management for Community Safety and Procurement Cards. (Copy in Minute Book).

- 072.2 Members noted that the IRMP work areas consisted of some items that would become projects, and some that would be reviews. Early work was progressing in at least one area, and the new Programme Manager was providing assistance in preparatory work for the HQ move.
- 072.3 In response to a question from Councillor Galley, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the SCC project was at Factory Acceptance Test (FAT) stage. There would be a closing meeting with Remsdaq on 10th February. Training front line staff and the technical team would be progressed to ensure a smooth transition to the replacement 4i system. Councillor Penn asked if those areas of non-critical development that were not met in the timeframe and which had been moved to post Go-Live would be at an extra cost to the Authority. ACFO said it was anticipated that these would be completed by December 2017, and there would be no additional costs to the Authority.
- 072.4 The AD - R/T informed the Panel that in relation to the IMD Transformation Programme, IT service delivery had been transferred from ESFRS to telent on the milestone date of 18 November 2016 as planned. However, some elements of Milestones 0 and 1 which were due to be delivered on the same date had been delayed and ESFRS was working with telent to ensure that this was addressed.
- 072.5 In relation to the HQ relocation, the AD - R/T confirmed that the target date for the decommissioning of the data centre at the current HQ site was 18 May 2017 and the IMD Transformation Board had confirmed that this was on target to be achieved. Work was continuing to Eastbourne Fire station, on schedule, to accommodate Business Fire Safety and Community Fire Safety, and consideration was being given to the time needed to maintain the existing secondary control centre there.
- 072.6 DCFO informed Members that there was an intensive workload on staff currently, particularly on Estates staff managing the work required at different venues across ESFRS estate to ensure that the HQ relocation to Lewes could be achieved and in HR because all the changes involve people. Additional support was being provided to ensure that all aspects of relocation projection were dealt with.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

073. **2016/17 3rd QUARTER CORPORATE RISK REGISTER REVIEW**

- 073.1 Members received a report of the Assistant Director Resources / Treasurer on the latest quarterly review of Corporate Risk that sought their agreement of the outcomes. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 073.2 Two new Risks had been approved by Corporate Management Team (CMT) for inclusion in the Corporate Risk Register: Risk 11 – Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme; and Risk 12 – Pensions Administration. Risk 10 – Operation Tin – had been approved for removal from the risk register.
- 073.3 It had also been agreed by CMT that from Quarter 4, under the heading Key Actions, where an action was not complete a target date would be added. Directorate / functional risks which scored 9 or above would be reported to CMT from the fourth quarter report and shown within a separate appendix. Assistant Directors were currently progressing plans within their respective directorates.

073.4 All project plans had been reviewed to ensure the pre-scoring and post-scores were appropriate. Some post-scores were expected to reduce during the next quarter as mitigations implemented started to impact on risks identified.

073.5 **RESOLVED** – That the latest Corporate Risk Register be approved.

074. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

074.1 There were no items that, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, would result in disclosure of exempt information, and which required the exclusion of the press and public.

The meeting concluded at 11:35 hours

Signed

Chair

Dated this day of 2017