

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL held at County Hall, St.Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex at 10:00 hours on Thursday, 14 September 2017.

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

Councillor Barnes attended the meeting in place of Councillor Sheppard, having been nominated by the Group Leader and approved by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Also Present: Ms. D. Whittaker (Interim Chief Fire Officer), Mr. M. Andrews (Interim Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Mr. M. O'Brien (Interim Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Ms. E. Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Mr. D. Savage (Assistant Director – Resources/Treasurer), Mrs. L. Ridley (Assistant Director – Planning and Improvement), Mr. D. Drummond (Interim IT Manager), Mr. G. O'Reilly (Operations Manager), Mrs. S. Milner (Performance Analyst), Mr. P. King (Ernst & Young), Ms. H. Lill, (Ernst & Young), Mr. R. Sutton (East Sussex County Council), Ms. J. Knightley (East Sussex County Council), Mrs. K. Ward (Clerk to the Fire Authority).

104. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

104.1 It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, no participating Member had any interest disclosable in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.

105. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

105.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sheppard.

106. **NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT / CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

106.1 There were none.

107. **NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 24 JULY 2017.**

107.1 **RESOLVED** – That the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on 24 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (Copy in Minute Book).

108. **CALLOVER**

108.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

110. External Auditor's Audit Results Report (ISA 260) and Statement of Accounts 2016/17.

111. 2017/18 1st Quarter Performance Results.

112. 2017/18 1st Quarter Corporate Projects Progress Report

114. Fatal Accident Fires Report 2016/17

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

109. **APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

109.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director – Resources / Treasurer which consulted the Panel on Public Services Audit Appointments Limited's (PSAA) proposal to appoint Ernst & Young (EY) LLP as the Service's external auditors from 1 April 2018. (Copy in Minute Book).

109.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel accept Public Sector Audit Appointment Limited's (PSAA) proposal to appoint EY LLP as the Authority's external auditors from 1 April 2018.

110. **EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S AUDIT RESULTS REPORT (ISA 260) AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2016/17**

110.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director – Resources / Treasurer which presented the results of the External Auditor's Results Reports (ISA 260) and to report an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2016/17 Statement of Accounts. (Copy in Minute Book).

110.2 Members were introduced to Hannah Lill, Engagement Officer with Ernst & Young, who would be taking over from Kris McGrath. It was acknowledged that whilst the report was lengthy, it was standard and the Panel were asked to consider the accounts and authorise the signing of the letter.

110.3 Ernst & Young were expected to issue an unqualified opinion. No material issues had been identified and there were no recommendations for improvement nor specific issues that would require a response within the Letter of Representation.

110.4 The Treasurer was pleased with the report and highlighted that it was a good reflection of the staff involved in its production, particularly given the loss of some staff when headquarters moved.

110.5 Councillor Galley raised a query with the figures contained on Page 25 of the report and asked Officers to elaborate. Both he and councillor Barnes felt the report wasn't worded in a way that a lay person would be able to understand and they requested Officers revise the wording for the published version.

110.6 **RESOLVED** – that the Panel:
i) authorise the Chairman of the Panel and the Assistant Director - Resources / Treasurer to sign the formal letter of representation to the External Auditor; and
ii) approve the 2016/17 Statement of Accounts for publication.

111. **2017/18 1ST QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT**

111.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director – Planning & Improvement which presented the 1st quarter performance results for 2017/18. (Copy in Minute Book).

- 111.2 Officers informed Members that in Quarter 1 of 2017/18 there had been an increase of 24 accidental dwelling fires, 90 in total, which could not be directly attributed to the increase in incidents experienced since the Grenfell Towers Fire. An Accidental Dwelling Fire Working Group has been established to develop behaviour change campaigns and to find ways to target and engage with people.
- 111.3 In the first quarter, officers reported a slight decline from 94.5% to 91% in performance when responding quickly to a fire to stop it spreading from the room it started in comparison to the previous year, whilst 91.4% of home safety visits to vulnerable people within the community was delivered.
- 111.4 Sickness absence declined slightly with 2.5 shifts lost as opposed to 2.3 with long term sickness being the biggest contributor. A reviewed focus in this area has seen a package of groups and support mechanisms to proactively deal with sickness. An internal audit will be taking place to assess the adequacy of policy and procedure, and compliance with this, in relation to the management of sickness absence with East Sussex Fire Authority, including phased return to work/effective use of light duties and the accrual of annual leave through sickness.
- 111.5 Councillor Pelzer-Dunn requested that it would be helpful if sickness reporting could distinguish between short term absence and long term as the figures appeared disproportionate. Councillors also suggested that the figures could be further broken down by distinguishing between support staff and fire fighters and whether the absence was due to physical or mental issues.
- 111.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:
- i) has considered the 2017/18 performance results for Quarter 1 as set out in Appendix A and the exceptions report as set out in Appendix B; and
 - ii) agree the prioritisation of work in seven areas. Two additional areas to the five priority areas that the Fire Authority has already identified as areas of significance.

112. **2017/18 1ST QUARTER CORPORATE PROJECTS PROGRESS REPORT**

- 112.1 Members considered a report of the Interim Assistant Chief Fire Officer which set out the progress made in the first quarter 2017/18 in relation to the Fire Authority's corporate projects and to seek the Panels views on which key projects it would like to receive more detailed briefings on at a future meeting. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 112.2 An update on the Sussex Control (SCC); Information Management Department (IMD) Transformation; Service HQ (SHQ) Relocation; Bridging the Savings Gap; Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP); Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE); Firewatch; and Procurement Cards was provided.
- 112.3 Members discussed whether reports were still required and whether a few lines in the form of an update would be more relevant. Members agreed that they would continue to receive reports until the project had been reported as complete.
- 112.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i) note the progress made in the first quarter 2017/18 in relation to the Fire Authority's corporate projects; and
- ii) receive more detailed briefings on the projects noted with the report.

113. **2017/18 1ST QUARTER HEALTH, SAFETY & WELL-BEING PERFORMANCE REPORT**

113.1 Members considered a report of the Interim Assistant Chief Fire Officer which presented the Quarter 1 Health & Safety statistics. (Copy in Minute Book).

113.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i) considered the 1st quarter health & safety statistics set out within the report; and
- ii) continue to monitor and scrutinise performance over the year.

114. **FATAL FIRE REVIEW REPORT FOR 2016/17**

114.1 Members considered a report of the Interim Deputy Chief Fire Officer which outlined the circumstances and outcomes of fatal accidental dwelling fires during 2016/17 and introduce a revised fatal fire review process. (Copy in Minute Book).

114.2 There were three fatal accidental dwelling fires during the performance year 2016/17. Officers had examined the circumstances leading up to each incident and for two of the incidents, there appear to have been no obvious opportunities to intervene, whilst the third provided a review of information sharing and improved collaboration between agencies.

114.3 The Service was proposing a Fatal and Serious Incident Review Manual Note which would provide a mechanism for greater analysis of incidents to ensure greater sharing of information to reduce risk.

114.4 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that it was difficult to identify trends, but that Community Safety were involved to see if any lessons could be learnt.

114.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i) note the report; and
- ii) approve the principles of the revised fatal and serious fire review policy outlined within Section3 (paragraph 3.5) of the report.

115. **2016/17 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ESFRS LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION BOARD**

115.1 Members considered a report of the Assistant Director – Human Resources & Organisational Development which informed Members of the matters considered by the Pension Board during 2016/17. (Copy in Minute Book).

115.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

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

116.1 **RESOLVED** – That items 117, 118, 119 be exempt under paragraph 3 and 7 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 and, accordingly, is not open for public inspection on the grounds that it includes information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information) and that it includes information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

The meeting concluded at 11:38 hours

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

2017

ABRAHAM GHEBRE-GHIORGHIS
Monitoring Officer
East Sussex Fire Authority
c/o Brighton & Hove City Council