

## **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, 31 January 2019.**

**Members Present:** Councillors Galley (Chairman), Lambert, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn and Taylor.

**Also Present:** M O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (Assistant Director Planning and Improvement), H Scott-Youlton (Assistant Director Training & Assurance), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), W Tricker (Finance Manager), L Stevenson (Risk and Insurance Officer), H Thompson (Ernst & Young LLP) and Z Downton (Democratic Services Officer).

### **197      DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

- 197.1      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.

### **198      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 198.1      An apology for absence had been received from Councillor J Sheppard.

### **199      URGENT ITEMS AND CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

- 199.1      There were none.

### **200      NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 1 NOVEMBER 2018**

- 200.1      **RESOLVED** – That the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on 1 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (*Copy in Minute Book*)

### **201      CALLOVER**

- 201.1      Members reserved the following items for debate:

202      2018/19 Third Quarter Corporate Risk Register Review

203      Performance Report for Quarter 3 2018/19

204      Safety Events Statistics Report – Quarter 3, 2018-19

205      External Audit Plan 2018/19

206      2017/18 Statement of Operational Assurance

207      Joint Funded Sprinkler Projects Progress Report

- 208 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Audit Committee Guidance
- 209 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Progress towards inspection update briefing
- 210 Human Resources Absence Management Report – Quarters 1 & 2, 2018-19

## **202     2018/19 THIRD QUARTER RISK REGISTER REVIEW**

- 202.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) which provided Members with the latest quarterly review (Quarter 3, 2018/19) of Corporate Risk. (*Copy in Minute Book*)
- 202.2 The Panel queried what measures were being taken to address the recruitment issues (under risk 11 on page 15 of the agenda) and training up of current staff in project management skills in the longer term. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that progress had been made and in the long term the Programme Officer Manager was looking at the overall approach, such as apprenticeships, consideration of market supplements and improving training and understanding within the current workforce. The Assistant Director Training & Assurance advised she would take forward and develop a plan in terms of building internal talent as part of the talent management succession process. Members suggested that 'talent management' be included as a topic of discussion at a future Members' Seminar.
- 202.3 Under the new risk of '*Uncertainty about the UK's exit from the EU and its short term impacts*', the Panel queried whether the threat and risk assessment could be shared with Members in confidence. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) would arrange for the information to be circulated to Members on a confidential basis when available.
- 202.4 The Panel also welcomed the inclusion a risk in respect of Collaboration, as had been previously requested by Members.
- 202.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel considered and approved the latest Corporate Risk Register.

## **203     PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 3, 2018/19**

- 203.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Planning & Improvement (ADP&I) which provided Members with a summary of service performance information for the third quarter of 2018/19. (*Copy in Minute Book*)
- 203.2 The report contained information against 21 of the 22 indicator set. Additional information on sickness and road traffic collision data was also included, as requested by Members at previous meetings. The ADP&I highlighted that attendance reporting was included for the first time and was above target.
- 203.3 The Panel commented that it was disappointing that the number of Home Safety Visits (HSVs) would not meet the target and hoped that it would not prevent a stretched target for the next year. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave assurance that HSVs were a key prevention activity for reducing fire risk and the target for

next year would remain at 12,000, with a long term strategy to increase that number. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed to Members that HSV data was being collated and recorded by officers.

203.4 The Panel questioned whether the Service anticipated an increase in sickness absences due to stress and doubt over future arrangements at the Sussex Control Centre (SCC). The Assistant Director Training & Assurance confirmed that there had been increases in sickness absences when fundamental decisions about SCC had been made. She explained that the Quarter 3 2018/19 sickness figures were more reassuring, in part as a result of the strong leadership and clear communications at SCC.

203.5 Members requested that the presentation of diagrams and charts be clearer in future reporting; in particular the use of more distinct colours and larger font size.

203.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

1. Considered the performance results and progress towards achieving the Service's purpose and commitments as contained in Appendix A of the report; and
2. Considered the performance results and remedial actions that had been taken to address areas of underperformance in the Fire Authority's priority areas.

## **204      SAFETY EVENTS STATISTICS REPORT – QUARTER 3, 2018-19**

204.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Training & Assurance (ADT&A) which provided Members with a summary of safety events data and hazard reports, as received by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team, for the third quarter of 2018/19, and which also included the Quarter 3 report for the shared 3F Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). (*Copy in Minute Book*)

204.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i) Considered the Quarter 3 health and safety statistics for 2018/19 as set out in the report;
- ii) Continued to monitor and scrutinise performance over the forthcoming year; and
- iii) Had not identified any areas where Members required further assurance.

## **205      EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2018/19**

205.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) which informed Members of the content of the External Audit Plan for 2018/19.

205.2 Helen Thompson (Ernst & Young LLP) introduced herself to those present at this, her first meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel. She took Members through the salient points of the External Audit Plan 2018/19 and highlighted the key risks identified (as set out on pages 51 & 52 of the agenda).

205.3 In relation to the risk of fraud, the Panel queried the progress of the Procurement Card Project re-launch and the timescales for rolling out more widely Procurement Cards. The ADT/R reassured Members that the roll out was imminent. He explained that work had been carried out to resolve software integration issues, internal guidance matters had been clarified and an Internal Audit review of the use of Procurement Cards was planned for 2019/2020. A briefing note on Procurement Cards would be circulated to Members and a report to update Members on counter fraud would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

205.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel approved the External Audit Plan 2018/19, as set out in the appendix to the report.

## **206 2017/18 STATEMENT OF OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE**

206.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) which presented to Members East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service's sixth annual Statement of Operational Assurance for 2017/18. The requirement to publish an annual Statement of Operational Assurance was contained within Section 4 of the Fire & Rescue National Framework for England.

206.2 Members welcomed the development of Safer Living and Safer Care initiatives, the inclusion of a Health Safety section, and noted the progress of the Community Volunteer Scheme and the Service's continued interaction with all ages of the community.

206.3 The ACFO thanked Members for their positive comments and support of the Statement.

206.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i. Approved the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service's Statement of Operational Assurance to be formally signed-off by the Chair of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (on behalf of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive); and
- ii. Noted that future year's Statement of Operational Assurance would be published in the format, and contain the detail, as required by the Home Office once the relevant guidance had been published.

## **207 JOINT FUNDED SPRINKLER PROJECTS PROGRESS REPORT**

207.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) which provided Members with an update on the delivery of the Joint Funded Sprinkler Project.

207.2 Following a number of serious and high profile fires in high rise residential tower blocks, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service had been engaged in a project with key partners to joint fund the retro-fitting of sprinkler systems into those types of buildings where there was a business case to do so.

207.3 The ACFO updated Members on the progress of the delivery of the project; including how the original project aims were being met and the decision to broaden the remit of the project to include other higher-risk premises housing vulnerable people, such as sheltered housing, specialised housing and residential care

premises, following discussions with key partners. Members were informed that some of the remaining project funding of £291,000 would be used to invest and improve current systems, such as Person Protective Sprinkler Systems.

**207.4 RESOLVED** – That the Panel:

- i. Noted the progress made in the delivery of the Joint Funded Sprinkler Project, specifically in achieving behavioural change from key housing providers;
- ii. Endorsed the decision by the Senior Leadership Team to reduce the additional funding proposed in the 2019/20 budget from £300,000 to £150,000; and
- iii. Approved the proposal to use some of the remaining project funding of £291,000 to purchase Personal Protective Sprinkler Systems.

**208 THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC FINANCE AND ACCOUNTANCY (CIPFA) AUDIT COMMITTEE GUIDANCE**

- 208.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) which proposed to Members that the Scrutiny & Audit Panel conduct a self-assessment of its effectiveness against the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) best practice for audit committees in local government.
- 208.2 Following discussion between the Chairman of the Panel and the Assistant Directors Resources/Treasurer and Planning & Improvement, it was felt that a review of the Panel's effectiveness against the new CIPFA guidance would be opportune, and would align with the findings of the recent review of the Authority's Governance Arrangements by the Good Governance Institute.
- 208.3 The ADR/T asked the Panel for its preferred mechanism for the self-assessment. Members responded that they would prefer to make comments in a workshop-style meeting rather than completing a survey. It was suggested that Helen Thompson (Ernst & Young) also be invited to attend the workshop.
- 208.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel approved a self-assessment of its effectiveness against the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) best practice for audit committees in local government.

**209 HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY, FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES (HMICFRS) – PROGRESS TOWARDS INSPECTION UPDATE BRIEFING**

- 209.1 The Panel received the report of the Assistant Director Planning & Improvement (ADP&I) which updated Members on the progress with the Service's preparations for, and engagement with, the inspection process.
- 209.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel noted the contents of the progress report.

**210 HUMAN RESOURCES ABSENCE MANAGEMENT REPORT – Q1 & 2, 2018-19**

- 210.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) which presented to Members the absence management statistics recorded for Quarters 1 and 2 (April – September) 2018/19 in comparison with the same time period in 2017/18. The report showed a decrease against the previous year following the interventions deployed by both local line managers and the Human Resources team.
- 210.2 The Assistant Director Training & Assurance acknowledged that the statistics were an overview and did not go into detail at this stage. She explained that cross-analysis would be undertaken to develop a greater understanding of the data over time, such as how the demographic of the workforce related to accidents. She anticipated that over time the statistics would become more meaningful and present a truer assessment of the impact of absences on business activity. The Panel welcomed this approach.
- 210.3 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel:
- i. Considered the Quarter 1 and 2 absence management statistics for 2018/19 as set out in the report;
  - ii. Continued to monitor and scrutinise performance over the forthcoming year; and
  - iii. Had not identified any areas where Members required further assurance.

**211 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

- 211.1 **RESOLVED** – That item no. 212 be exempt under paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 and accordingly is not open for public inspection on the following grounds: Information relating to an individual.

The meeting concluded at 10.56am

Signed

Chairman

Dated this                      day of    2019

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