

# Public Document Pack

## SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL

**Minutes of the meeting of the SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL held via Webex on Thursday, 12 November 2020.**

Present: Councillors Barnes (Chairman), Taylor, Smith, Evans, Lambert and Osborne

Also present: D Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer), M O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), M Matthews (Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (Assistant Director Planning & Improvement), J King (Assistant Director Safer Communities), H Scott-Youldon (Assistant Director People Services), N Cusack (Assistant Director Operational Support & Resilience), D Luxford (Information Security & Data Protection Officer), C George (Procurement Manager), K Ring (PO Support), C Porter (ITG Project Co-ordinator) and E Simpkin (Democratic Services Officer).

### **15        Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

### **16        Apologies for Absence**

There were none.

### **17        Notification of items which the Chairman considers urgent and proposes to take at the end of the agenda/Chairman's business items**

The Panel recorded their thanks and congratulations to Assistant Chief Fire Officer Mark Andrews on his departure from East Sussex Fire & Rescue to take up his position as Deputy Chief Fire Officer at West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service.

### **18        Minutes of the last Scrutiny & Audit Panel meeting held on 23 July 2020**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on the 23 July 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **19        Callover**

Members reserved the following items for debate:

20.    Internal Audit Report – ESFRS Procurement Cards
21.    Redmond Review
24.    Service Delivery Review

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

- 25. ESFRS Preparedness and Response to Covid 19 Pandemic
- 29. Information Security Strategy - Update

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

### **20 Internal Audit Report - ESFRS Procurement Cards**

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) which provided an update on the findings and assurance opinion of the Internal Audit Report on the processes and policies which supported the Procurement Card (PCard) capability within ESFRS. The audit was conducted in line with the agreed audit plan for 2019/20.

The Panel raised concerns over the partial assurance and sought confirmation that recommendations were being addressed. The ADR/T agreed with Members that it had been a protracted project and added that the audit report had been timely and helpful, however, the fieldwork had been carried out 12 months ago and progress had been made since the report had been finalised. Analysis of months 1-5 of the last financial year compared to the current financial year showed a 45% reduction in purchase orders, a 48% reduction in purchase orders under £1000, a 37% reduction in invoices and a 43% reduction in invoices under £1000. The Procurement Team was working with suppliers to consolidate low value invoices and agree the use of PCards as a payment method where possible. An internal post implementation review was due to be carried out but had been delayed due to Covid. The Procurement Manager added that the benefit of using PCards in terms of sourcing at point of need had been realised during the pandemic. The Procurement Team would be holding feedback session with card holders to identify improvements which could be made both to internal processes and the external approval interface to make the compliance process as smooth as possible.

Internal Audit would be carrying out a follow-up review which would be reported back to the Panel.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel noted the final audit report, its opinion and recommendations.

### **21 Redmond Review**

The Panel received a report from the ADR/T on the Redmond Review into the Oversight of Local Audit and the Transparency of Local Authority Financial Reporting, a Government commissioned independent review into the effectiveness of local audit and the transparency of local financial reporting by Sir Tony Redmond which was published in September 2020. The Panel was invited to consider and comment on the report's main recommendations.

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

The Chairman invited the Panel to form a working group to consider the proposals in more detail. This was agreed and Councillors Lambert and Evans agreed to join Councillor Barnes on the working group.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to consider and comment upon the recommendations in the Redmond Report and identify any local improvements it wished to make as a result through a Member working group which would track national developments and advise the Panel on its local response to the Redmond Report.

### **22 2nd Quarter Risk Register Review 2020/21**

The ADR/T submitted a report on the latest quarterly review of Corporate Risk which discussed the Second quarter position and detailed the business risks identified and how they were being mitigated. Risk R18 Uncertainty About The UK's Transition From The European Union (EU) And Its Short Term Impacts was being re-established on the Corporate Risk Register and the risks scored against a 4x4 scoring matrix was shown at appendix 1 to the report. The review of corporate risks was an ongoing process and the updated position was shown in appendix 2 to the report. Project Risks were reported through the Programme Management Office and escalated to the Corporate Risk Register when relevant.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel noted the updated Q2 Corporate Risk Register including the re-establishment of Risk R18.

### **23 2nd Quarter Performance Results 2020/21**

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Planning & Improvement (ADP&I) which presented the second quarter and provisional year end service performance results for 2020/21.

It was noted that due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 restrictions ESFRS had to find other ways of doing home safety visits, business safety audits and engagements and standard performance indicators did not reflect this additional work and the direction of travel had not been reported against these areas. Therefore the report included all indicator results, but only showed the previous year comparison against 16 of the total 21. Nine of the 16 indicators that were reported against were showing an improvement in performance against the same quarter in the previous year; two indicators were reporting the same level of performance in both years and five showed a decline. Of those reporting a decline in performance; four indicators were reporting at least a 10% decline in performance against quarter 2 2019/20. These were:

- (i) The number of accidental dwelling fires
- (ii) The number of primary fires
- (iii) The number of industrial and commercial fires
- (iv) The percentage of AFA mobilised calls to properties covered by the RRO that were classified as a primary fire

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel:

1. noted the performance results for quarter 2 as attached at Appendix 1 of the report;
2. considered the performance results and remedial actions that have been taken in the Fire Authority's priority areas; and
3. noted the work had begun to revise the Performance Assurance Framework and a report would be brought back for the Panel's consideration at a later date which will include a refresh of the indicators set.

### **24 Service Delivery Review**

The Panel considered a report from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) on the outcome of the requested review following the implementation of the Service Delivery Review. The report highlighted the identified performance measures as detailed and agreed by the Scrutiny & Audit Panel at its meeting in June 2018.

The Panel felt that, given the fullness of the report, an internal audit review was not necessary. It was noted that areas such as productivity and sickness would be considered as part of the Operational Response Review and performance measures monitored through directorate plans.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel:

- (i) noted the contents of the report and close down evaluation in light of the forthcoming Operational Response Review (ORR) and associated monitoring that would pick up the ongoing performance measures;
- (ii) supported the fact that further recommendations would be monitored through appropriate directorate plan; and
- (iii) agreed that the planned Internal Audit on the Service Delivery Review was not required.

### **25 ESFRS Preparedness and Response to Covid 19 Pandemic**

The Panel received a report from the ACFO which provided a briefing on ESFRS preparedness and response arrangements to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Panel asked about the tripartite agreement which was in place. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) explained that the National Fire Chiefs Council had negotiated with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) at a national level and reached agreement on additional areas of activity which sat outside of statutory

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

obligations such as the delivery of food parcels and transport to hospital for example. There were in total 14 different activity types which had national risk assessments. ESFRS had undertaken 3 of the 14 additional activities in order to support the local community during the pandemic. Each activity was subject to a local risk assessment in order to determine the local way of working in terms of equipment, staffing and training for example and were agreed with local FBU representatives. The CFO added that national level negotiations with the FBU on extending the agreement to March 2021 had taken place, however, the FBU position was that agreement would only be reached if services adopted all 14 activities. With regard to ESFRS position, the CFO explained that it had been agreed that the Service would accept in principle all 14 activities, however, the additional ways of working and risk assessments would only be carried out for those activities which would be undertaken. This approach had been agreed with the local FBU representatives. The CFO reiterated her assurance that all activities would be carried out with appropriate and effective risk assessments agreed by Health & Safety and the FBU and that all statutory obligations would be fulfilled.

The Panel observed that the Risk Register showed a number of risks as amber which was indicative of the pressure that the service was under. The ACFO agreed that there were a number of risks which demonstrated the extraordinary circumstances and although this emphasised a number of issues, it also highlighted ESFRS's ability to respond and mitigate against risk. All risks had been shared and assessed by the Sussex Resilience Forum and considered by the Emergency Management Team. The ACFO added that he was proud of how officers had responded to the unprecedented circumstances, whilst maintaining statutory responsibilities and supporting the local community.

Members also asked about how the volunteer call scheme aligned with other local volunteer schemes in the area. The ACFO explained that knowing that many Home Safety Visit customers would be vulnerable and shielded, a courtesy call service offering pastoral support had been established. 1900 calls had been made through the vulnerable people scheme which had resulted in 500 referrals for further Home Safety Visit activity, 56 referrals to the relevant local authorities for additional support and 27 referrals to community hubs.

The Panel offered their congratulations on the resilient and adaptive response. The CFO added that letters of thanks had been sent to staff and gave thanks to Fire Authority its support. A full report on the 'lessons learnt' would be brought back to the Panel in due course.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel noted the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service preparedness and response arrangements to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

### **26 ESFRS Preparedness for the End of the EU Transition Period**

The Panel received a briefing report from the ACFO on the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) preparedness in advance of the UK transitioning

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

from the European Union (EU) without a negotiated trade, travel, security or health deals.

The Panel noted that as there remained uncertainty over the end of the EU transition phase and the final trade deals that were being negotiated, preparedness had been escalated by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government to ensure that Local Resilience Forums were focussed on the impact of concurrent major events of Covid 19 and Winter Pressures. Significant work was taking place within ESFRS and the Sussex Resilience Forum to ensure that plans were in place for operational preparedness and public reassurance over the next 3 months and beyond. National and local planning assumptions had been fully evaluated and resources put in place to support a strategic coordinating group to manage any impact or incident that may occur as a result of traffic congestion or public disorder. Internally officers had established a Gold Group to review business continuity and operational plans to ensure ESFRS was as well prepared as possible to support resilience and business continuity for East Sussex over the coming weeks of uncertainty.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel considered and noted the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service preparedness and response arrangements to the impacts of the UK exiting transition with no EU trade deal.

### **27 Fire Authority Governance - Update Report**

The Panel received a report from the Senior Democratic Services Officer which updated Member on the progress and status of the actions arising from the independent review of governance of the Authority.

It was noted that the implementation of a number of the recommendations had already been completed with Democratic Services continuing to progress those that are outstanding, namely that regarding Member Development, Induction and a skills analysis.

**RESOLVED:** That the Panel noted the contents of the report and progress being made on the actions arising from the independent review of governance.

### **28 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

**RESOLVED:** That item 29 be exempt under paragraphs 3 and 7 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 and accordingly not open for public inspection on the grounds that the report contains information relating to the business affairs of the Fire Authority and information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am

**Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel**

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

2021

This page is intentionally left blank