

SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL held at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1UE at 10.00 am on Thursday, 20 July 2023.

Present: Councillors Scott (Chair), Azad, Evans, Geary, Lambert, Theobald and West

Also present: D Norris (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Matthews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), H Scott-Youlton (Assistant Director Operational Support & Resilience), M Lloyd (Assistant Director Safer Communities), J King (Assistant Director People Services), S Milner (Planning & Intelligence Manager), P Fielding (ESCC), H Thomson (EY), L Jackson (EY), A Blanshard (Democratic Services Manager), R Smith (Democratic Services Officer)

47 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

48 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillor Osborne. Councillor Lambert had been appointed to attend as substitute for this meeting.

49 Notification of items which the Chair considers urgent and proposes to take at the end of the agenda/Chair's business items

The Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) welcomed Helen Thompson and Liz Jackson of EY LLP to the meeting. The Panel were informed that Liz Jackson would be taking over as Helen's replacement following her retirement later in the year.

The ADR/T thanked Helen, on behalf of the Authority and the Finance team, for her work and support in completing previous audits, and stated that he and the team were looking forward to working with Liz in the future.

The Chair passed on their thanks to Helen, and welcomed Liz, on behalf of the Scrutiny and Audit Panel.

50 Non-Confidential Minutes of the last Scrutiny & Audit Panel meeting held on 27 April 2023

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2023 be approved and signed by the Chair.

51 Callover

Members reserved the following agenda items for debate:

52. Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

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

- 53. Corporate Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2023-24
- 54. Integrated Risk Management Plan progress update
- 55. Performance Report for Quarter 4 2022/23
- 57. Joint Fire Control Out-turn Report

52 Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) which provided an opinion on East Sussex Fire Authority's internal control environment and reported on the work of Internal Audit for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It was highlighted that no reports had received a partial or minimal assurance opinion, before the ADR/T introduced Paul Fielding, Principal Auditor, to the Panel.

Paul Fielding informed Members that he was pleased to be able to give an opinion of reasonable assurance. It was highlighted that due to pressures within the Fire Authority there had been an overall reduction in audit days delivered, which had led to a number of items from the audit plan being postponed for future years. The Panel were also informed that Orbis Internal Audit were externally assessed at approximately 6 yearly intervals and had received the highest level in a recent assessment against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Members queried why 18% of invoices had failed to be paid by the Fire Authority within their agreed payment terms during the 2022/23 financial year, as reported in the Internal Audit Report. The ADR/T said that it was disappointing that not all invoices had been paid within 30 days, and the Service was looking to improve performance in the future, including working with East Sussex County Council on the implementation of MBOS which would streamline and digitise the purchase to pay process. The ADR/T also explained that it was occasionally necessary to challenge invoices, which could also lead to unavoidable delays in payment. The Panel asked whether there were any consequences due to the delays in payment and were informed that suppliers could charge interest on the amount owed, however the ADR/T advised that he was not aware of any instances where this had been imposed.

The Panel discussed the ill-health retirement (IHR) arrangements and raised concern that reviews of employees retired on ill-health or injury grounds had not been taking place. The Assistant Director People Services (ADPS) advised that IHR was a rare occurrence, acknowledging that processes had not always been followed correctly. The Panel were informed that further training had now been provided to the Human Resources team and that a

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review period had now been specified and added into the ill-health and injury retirement processes.

RESOLVED – That the Panel:

- i. noted the Head of Internal Audit's opinion on the Fire Authority's internal control environment for 2022/23;
- ii. requested that a verbal update on the completion of the review of HR / Payroll is provided at the next Panel meeting;
- iii. considered whether the Fire Authority's system for internal audit had proved effective during 2022/23.

53 Corporate Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2023-24

The Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) introduced a report which discussed the first quarter position for 2023-24, and detailed the corporate risks identified and how they had or were being mitigated. It was highlighted to the Panel that, following approval by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), CR16 - Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry had been removed from the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). SLT had also approved the removal of CR6 - Failure to manage the effects of a major loss of staff event, including through industrial action, however Members were informed that this risk would continue to be monitored as the 2023/24 Green Book pay offer had been rejected. The ADR/T also advised that following feedback from the Scrutiny and Audit Panel, an additional risk, CR18 - Workforce Planning, had been included in the CRR.

Members asked for further information regarding the mitigations being put in place to address risk CR2 – Future Financial Viability. The ADR/T advised that Officers were active in monitoring the situation and continued to work with partners across the sector and the Government to secure grants and funding. The Panel then asked about the vacancy management process and were informed that every vacancy was subject to review by the Workforce Planning Group. The Assistant Director People Services (ADPS) provided more detail on this, advising that each vacant post was challenged to investigate whether there were alternatives to replacing the post on a like for like basis, for example whether the workload could be managed differently on a temporary basis whilst the structural review was being undertaken.

The Panel enquired as to whether there was a risk that addressed climate change. The ADR/T advised that this was not currently included in the CRR, however this could be considered. Members agreed that this was an important issue at the current time and would be grateful if this could be given consideration for inclusion in the future.

RESOLVED – That the Panel:

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- a) agreed the Q1 Corporate Risk Register including changes made since Q4 2022/23;
- b) did not identify any further information or assurance required from Risk Owners.

54 Integrated Risk Management Plan progress update

The Panel considered the report from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) which provided an update on the latest position in terms of delivery of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the associated revenue and capital savings.

Panel Members requested an update on the changes being implemented in Hastings and were informed that the Day-Crew system would be fully implemented by August, and that the report showed that the delivery of the IRMP was on schedule.

Members thanked Officers and expressed that the conclusions presented in the report were positive.

RESOLVED – That the Panel noted:

- a) the status of IRMP delivery;
- b) the latest forecast IRMP saving profile.

55 Performance Report for Quarter 4 2022/23

The Planning & Intelligence Manger introduced a report which presented the results of quarter 4 2022/23 and the year end results for 2022/23 against the previous year's results for the respective periods. Members were informed that there had been a down-turn in the number of home safety visits completed during quarter 4 when compared with the previous year. However, the Panel were informed that overall the year end result was significantly higher than 2021/22 and that performance had been proactively managed throughout the year. This meant that the quarter 4 'spike' seen in previous years had not occurred in 2022/23. It was highlighted that the end of year results showed improvements in that there had been a reduction in accidental dwelling fires, and the number of home safety visits completed had exceeded the Service target of 10,000.

Members queried which performance indicator category wildfires fell into, and whether there should be a category to specifically measure the number of these that occurred in the area. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that the indicators contained within this report were given as high-level headlines, as previously agreed by the Scrutiny and Audit Panel. The Assistant Director Operational Support & Resilience (ADOSR) advised the Panel that the number of wildfires was monitored and reported on to the

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Home Office, explaining that the operational definition of wildfires is often different to that which the public would ordinarily understand and use.

The Panel noted that sickness levels continued to be an issue and requested an update into the introduction of support from Benenden Healthcare. The DCFO advised that the Senior Leadership Team had approved a pilot of the scheme, which was due to begin in the autumn.

RESOLVED – That the Panel:

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

56 2022/23 Annual report of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Services (ESFRS) Local Firefighters' Pension Board

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director People Services (ADRS) which informed them of the matters considered by the Pension Board during 2022/23. These included the Terms of Reference for the Pension Board, policies and guides for the board and the Firefighters Pension Scheme (FPS), and current issues and updates relating to the Authority's FPS.

RESOLVED – That the Panel noted the annual report of the Firefighters' Pension Board for 2022/23.

57 Joint Fire Control Out-turn Report

The Assistant Director Operational Support and Resilience (ADOSR) provided the Panel with the Joint Fire Control (JFC) out-turn report for 2022/23.

Members were informed that the period following the go-live in November 2021 had been challenging, and had included the Covid restrictions and the impact of new ways of working on staffing. The ADOSR also highlighted that there had then been a number of storms during February 2022, followed by the warmest summer on record in July and August 2022, which had a significant operational impact.

It was emphasised that during the initial setting up period the relationship between the three partners had been well established, and that during the operationally challenging year, JFC had maintained a service with no detrimental impact on the Service's emergency calls and statutory duty.

RESOLVED – That the Panel noted the contents of the paper.

58 Member Attendance 2022/23

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The Panel had received a report from the Democratic Service Manager which reported Member attendance at formal Fire Authority meetings, Members Seminars, Open Days and events, for 2022/23.

RESOLVED – That the Panel noted the Member attendance for 2022/23.

The meeting concluded at 11.19 am

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2023