

**MINUTES OF AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE  
INFORMAL MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 10.00AM**

Present: Councillors C Atkins (Chair), P Duckett, R Berry, J Gambold, and I Shingler  
Councillor J Chatterley was present as an observer  
Mr J Atkinson, ACO G Chambers, ACFO A Kibblewhite, Ms R Barker and Mr P Hughes  
Ms L Davies, RSM  
Ms J Kriek, Ernst & Young

Please note: any decisions made by the Committee at this meeting need to be ratified by the Fire and Rescue Authority to take effect as the meeting was held informally.

21-22/ASC/17 Apologies

- 17.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Burnett.
- 17.2 Mr N Harris from Ernst & Young was unable to attend the meeting. Ernst & Young was represented at the meeting by Ms J Kriek.
- 17.3 Ms S Rowlett from RSM was unable to attend the meeting. RSM was represented at by the meeting by Ms L Davies.

21-22/ASC/18 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

21-22/ASC/19 Communications

- 19.1 The Committee received the Emergency Services News Briefing from RSM for August 2021.

19.2 The Assistant Chief Officer reported on the launch of the Community Risk Management Planning Fire Standard, which sought to ensure a consistent approach to the development and use of Community Risk Management Plans (CRMPs) across the fire sector. The Service's adherence to the Standard would be demonstrated over the next few months as the CRMP was updated.

**RESOLVED:**

That the communication be received.

21-22/ASC/20 Minutes

**RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 be confirmed as a true record.

21-22/ASC/21 Public Participation

21.1 There were no members of the public present.

21-22/ASC/22 Internal Audit Progress Report (RSM)

22.1 Ms L Davies of RSM introduced the report on progress made against the internal audit plan for 2021/22. There was currently one audit being undertaken and the results of this would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

22.2 In response to a question from Councillor Duckett, Ms Davies confirmed that the audit plan was flexible so could respond to any changes in legislation or other major issues that arose during the year as necessary.

22.3 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that the Service also had its own internal assurance process through which developments, such as actions arising from the Grenfell Inquiry, were considered.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be received.

21-22/ASC/23 Statement of Assurance

23.1 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the 2020-21 Statement of Assurance to the Committee for approval. The Statement of Assurance reported on performance in regard to financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements.

- 23.2 The Committee was advised that some of the performance information had been included in the Annual Report that had been presented to the last meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority, and that in future, consideration would be given to the consolidation of reports for ease of access.
- 23.3 The format of the document had been revised, with hyperlinks included to other documents and the inclusion of more infographics and less text.
- 23.4 In response to questions about national resilience, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service was a Category 1 responder and could be called to provide equipment or personnel in the event of regional and/or national emergencies. The Service held a number of assets, such as the mass contamination unit, that were classified as national resilience assets, or specialist personnel, such as the line rescue team, that could be called upon in emergencies. In addition to this, the Chief Fire Officer was now the Chair of the Local Resilience Forum, and this would be reported in the Statement of Assurance for 2022-23.
- 23.5 The Service's support for partner organisations during the COVID pandemic, especially in relation to the East of England Ambulance Service, had been highlighted as an area of notable practice. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that details of the above could be included in the final version of the report.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the contents of the Statement of Assurance for 2020-2021 be acknowledged.
2. That the Statement of Assurance for 2020-2021 be recommended for approval by the Fire and Rescue Authority.

21-22/ASC/24 Audit and Governance Action Plan Monitoring - Exception Report and Summary Analysis

- 24.1 The Assistant Chief Officer introduced the report which provided a summary statistical analysis of actions arising from internal audit reports over the last three financial years to date and from the Fire and Rescue Authority's current Annual Governance Statement; together with any exception report on those actions currently in progress, progress to date on current action plans and proposals to extend the original timing for completion.
- 24.2 The Committee was advised that extension requests were being sought for actions arising from the audit of Human Resources – Wellbeing. These related to the revision of the Service's current Wellbeing Policy and a benchmarking exercise against the Oscar Kilo portal for self-assessment and benchmarking. The original completion dates for these actions was August 2021.
- 24.3 Ms R Barker reported on progress made regarding the revision of the current Wellbeing Policy. This had been submitted to the Service Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering Group, which consisted of representatives across the Service. The view had been expressed that the document was too lengthy and required further review and, as such, a Working Group had been formed and a report back was expected later in the year. The results of the HMICFRS inspection were also awaited and the Committee was

advised that it would be prudent to wait for the outcomes of this before the Policy was updated and recirculated to staff. Therefore an extension was being sought to the end of March 2022

- 24.4 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer expressed the view that the Oscar Kilo portal may not be the most appropriate form of benchmarking as it related primarily to risks associated with the Police service. It may be more appropriate to benchmark against Fire and Rescue Services with strong performance in this area. A meeting with HR and Occupational Health would also be required and a discussion with RSM to revisit this action and completion date was being proposed.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That progress made to date against action plans be acknowledged.
2. That the extension requests for the outstanding actions arising from the audit of Human Resources - Wellbeing be approved.

21-22/ASC/25 Cyber Security Update

- 25.1 Mr P Hughes, the Head of ICT and Programmes, introduced his report which provided an update on cyber security.

- 25.2 In introducing the report, he highlighted the following:

- The threat landscape was constantly changing and the Service had to update its processes and defence mechanisms accordingly.
- The Shared Service had been successful in its Cyber Essentials Plus re-accreditation.
- A Cyber Security course would be offered for all staff to complete via the LearnPro system. The content was being provided by the National Cyber Security Centre.
- A third party review of cyber security defences was being undertaken and would result in a gap analysis report that would enable the Service to strengthen both its reactive and proactive processes.
- An insurance review was being conducted to ascertain the costs of Cyber Security insurance.

- 25.3 The Assistant Chief Officer referred to the infographic in the report which illustrated the number of cyber threats encountered during August 2021. Out of 134,677 inbound messages, 12% had been rejected.

- 25.4 Mr Hughes added that 6 inbound malware had been detected. This demonstrated the constant efforts to defend the service against attack. The Shared Service also conducted an annual system penetration test and this was due in November 2021.

- 25.5 In response to a suggestion from the Chair that the Cyber Security course be made available to Members, Mr Hughes advised that he would be able to signpost Members to the training available via the National Cyber Security Centre.

**RESOLVED:**

That the good progress to date be acknowledged and the thanks of the Committee to the ICT Shared Service for the progress made be recorded.

21-22/ASC/26 Firefighter Pension Schemes Local Pension Board Report 2020/21

- 26.1 The Assistant Chief Officer presented the Annual Report of the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority Local Pension Board (the Board), covering the period from 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2021.
- 26.2 The Board had been established in 2015 and had been chaired by the Assistant Chief Officer since its inception. There had originally been two employer and two employee representatives appointed to the Board. At the last meeting, the Board's terms of reference had been amended to increase representation to three from each side and the current membership was set out in the report for information.
- 26.3 The Board was supported by Sally Green, HR Operations Manager and acting Scheme Manager and Fiona Beck, Assistant HR Operations Manager. Meetings were also attended by Neil Lewins from the Service's Pension Administrators LPP.
- 26.4 The report detailed the governance arrangements, relevant policies and training requirements. The training for Board members was provided by LPP. The Board's work programme, a standard agenda and meeting dates were also included in the report.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be received and the progress made by the Local Pension Board be acknowledged.

21-22/ASC/27 Corporate Risk Register

- 27.1 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented a report which provided an update on the progress of the Service's Corporate Risk Register. As of 30 June 2021, one risk was categorised as very high, two as high and five as moderate. There had been no updates to the overall risk scores and the Committee was provided with specific risk updates.
- 27.2 Corporate Risk 2, failure to meet service delivery legislative prevention and protection requirements: an in-house risk analysis capability was being developed for risk based inspections. Three additional posts had been created for Fire Safety Advisors as previously reported and the Service was on track to deliver its target of 10,000 Safe and Well visits.

- 27.3 Corporate Risk 4, insufficient funds to deliver the Service's Community Risk Management Plan: the main risks were a poor funding settlement from the Government and the impact of pensions and pay awards. The impact of pensions and pay awards was being monitored by the Executive Committee.
- 27.4 Corporate Risk 7, ensure that our data management systems are robust: Information Management & Assurance Board (IMAB) meetings continued and phishing scam reminders were placed in the Blue Bulletin to improve staff awareness.
- 27.5 Corporate Risk 8, the Service fails to effectively record, track and maintain its key assets and business critical equipment: the fleet system had been successfully tested with General Ledger upgrades. The roll out of WiFi would support connectivity of agile working tablets for technicians. It was anticipated that all stations would be transferred to the full system by the end of the fourth quarter 2021/22.

**RESOLVED:**

That the effective development and application of the Corporate Risk Register be acknowledged.

21-22/ASC/28 Review of Work Programme 2021/22

- 28.1 The Committee considered the proposed work programme for 2021/22. The Assistant Chief Officer reported that Members would need to discuss whether to proceed with the Review of Effectiveness of the Committee, which was scheduled for the next meeting of the Committee on 2 December 2021. The Statement of Assurance could be removed from the Work Programme for the next meeting as it had been submitted to this meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee's Work Programme for 2020/21 be received.

The meeting ended at 11.06 am