

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

29 November 2022

Present:

Councillors Brazil (Chair), Hendy, Kerley, Power, Prowse, Randall-Johnson (vice Roome), Sellis and Thomas

Apologies:

Councillor Roome

In attendance (in accordance with Standing Order 39):

Councillors Clayton, Coles and Cook-Woodman

* **AGC/22/9** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022 be signed as a correct record.

* **AGC/22/10** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

An item taken in accordance with Section 100(B)4(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

In view of the point that the Authority had been notified on Friday 25 November 2022 of a change in appointee by Plymouth City Council – taking Councillor Partridge off the Authority (and thus this Committee) - the Chair agreed to take this item as urgent business to ensure the appointment of the new Vice Chair was considered in a timely manner.

RESOLVED that the Authority be **RECOMMENDED** to appoint Councillor David Thomas as Vice Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee (and ex-officio Authority appointee to the Devon Audit Partnership Committee) until the Authority's next annual meeting in 2023.

* **AGC/22/11** **Internal Audit 2022-23 Progress Report**

NB. Jo McCormick representing the Devon Audit Partnership (DAP) was present for this item of business.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (AGC/22/15) on the progress made against the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23 together with an update on the completion of the 2021-22 Plan. The report also included a proposal for a revised Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23.

It was noted that work on delivery of the 2022-23 Plan had been delayed as a result of the late completion of the 2021-22 work. The following audits were in the process of being completed now as part of completion of the 2021-22 Plan:

- Organisational Safeguarding Assurance;
- Information Security – Availability of Systems; and
- Use of Data.

Key Financial Systems had been omitted inadvertently from the previous report to the Committee (CSC/22/10) but this had been completed now with a level of reasonable assurance. The impact of the carry forward of work from the 2021-22 Plan together with the implementation of the Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment (TUPE) requirements to move over internal audit to the Devon Audit Partnership (DAP) had impacted substantially on the ability to deliver against the 2022-23 Plan.

In terms of the 2022-23 Plan, 2 audits had been completed, namely:

- Crewing pool – limited assurance; and
- Application of Learning – limited assurance.

The report also set out the progress made on the actions taken in respect of those audits previously reported to the Committee in July 2022 with limited assurance. These audits were:

- Community Safety – Fire Prevention;
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); and
- Flexi Duty Rota.

At this point, reference was made to the position on the number of Home Fire Safety Visits undertaken and assurance was sought on the Service's confidence level in delivery of the target for 18000 visits in 2022-23. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that the Service was on track to meet this target and he explained that the issue previously reported had been largely to do with the extrapolation of data from the visits. He added that an external consultant had been engaged to work with the Service on this matter and he was confident that the target would be achieved. The Committee noted that performance updates on home fire safety visits were reported in depth to the Community Safety Committee but asked for the updated number of visits achieved to be included as part of this report to the next meeting in January 2023.

Attention was also drawn to the audit of PPE and the issue of contaminants and the point was made that the completion date for the station audits of April 2023 seemed to be quite long given this was a major risk to staff. The question was asked as to whether it would be practicable to have a short video produced for eLearning for staff to plug the gap on this important issue in the meantime. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer referred to a report on contaminants that had been commissioned by the Fire Brigades' Union with the University of Central Lancashire. The Service had already begun implementing changes to procedure on stations to address the issues of contaminated PPE and this matter was discussed as a standing item at the Joint Strategic Safety Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer added that the Service already had key safety videos in place for eLearning and that he would make arrangements for the Committee to be more sighted on this area. He undertook to include additional paragraphs in the next Internal Audit report to provide assurance on the effectiveness of the Service's procedures for ensuring the safety and competence of its staff. This could involve using screen grabs to demonstrate the way in which the Service was mitigating the risks through training and to arrange a presentation at a future Members' Forum for information.

At this point, the Committee received a presentation given by Jo McCormick of the DAP on the way in which it would be undertaking the role of internal audit for the Authority in future. A copy of the presentation slides would be emailed out to the Committee for reference.

RESOLVED

- (a). that the revised 2022-23 internal audit plan be approved;
- (b). that future updates on progress in addressing the findings of audits with a limited assurance rating be submitted to the Committee on at least an annual basis until there is sufficient assurance that appropriate action had been taken; and
- (c). subject to (a) and (b) above, together with the provision of further assurance on the number of Home Fire Safety Visits completed in 2022-23 and on the Service's procedures for ensuring the safety and competence of staff, the report be noted.

*** AGC/22/12 Corporate Risk Register**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (AGC/22/16) that provided an update on the Corporate Risk Register. The Corporate Risk Register captured and described the most significant risks, both internally and externally, facing the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service ("the Service"), with a focus on cross-cutting risks and major projects.

The risk management process included the identification, assessment and recording of risks together with mitigating activities. There were currently 18 risks entered with 3 risks escalated from the local risk register, 3 de-escalated to local and thematic risk and no risks closed. Of the 18 risks, 5 were high risk and 13 were medium. In terms of the risks escalated, these were:

- CR080 – failure to create a diverse and inclusive workforce;
- CR081 – failure to operate appropriate trading company governance; and
- CR055 – failure to thoroughly investigate and learn from safety events and take action to prevent foreseeable recurrence.

Reference was made to CR080 in particular in terms of the failure to create a diverse and effective workforce. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that this matter was also highlighted within the report of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services and an action plan had been implemented to address this. Reference was also made to the recent report issued on the London Fire Brigade Cultural Review and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated he was confident that the actions listed therein were being addressed by this Service. This linked directly to the work of the People Committee which received detailed reports on the progress being made within the Service on Diversity and Inclusion. It was suggested at this point that the report should be annotated against each risk to identify which Committee might be responsible for the actions which the Risk Manager undertook to include in future.

The Director of Governance and Digital Services advised that a review of governance associated with the Authority's trading company, Red One Ltd. (CR081), had been agreed and would be reported to this Committee in due course.

The Committee referred to the position on Industrial Action (CR077) and requested an update on the position on strike action associated with the rejection of the latest pay offer. The Chief Fire Officer replied that the Fire Brigades' Union was balloting for strike action which would run from mid mid-December to the end of January 2023. The Authority would be updated on the implications of this potential strike action in a Members' Forum on the rising of the Authority's meeting on 12 December 2022.

Reference was made at this point to the style and content of the report and it was suggested that it could include additional information such as on direction of travel. It was suggested that the Committee may benefit from some training on risk management to understand fully the monitoring role. The Director of Governance & Digital Services undertook to look at the style and content of the report and the provision of training for the Committee on risk management. The Risk Manager added that the SharpCloud system was utilised to monitor risks daily and this contained a lot of background information which could be presented to the Committee to assist its understanding of the risks faced by the Service and mitigating actions at a future meeting.

At this point, the Chair asked if further information was required by the Committee whereupon Councillor Power **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Sellis):

“that a detailed report on the position on contaminants and its impact on staff safety be submitted to the People Committee”.

Upon a vote, the motion was **CARRIED** unanimously.

RESOLVED

- (a). that a detailed report on the position on contaminants and its impact on staff safety be submitted to the People Committee; and
- (b). Subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

NB. Minutes AGC/22/11 above also refers.

* **AGC/22/13 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Areas for Improvement Action Plan Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire officer (AGC/22/17) setting out the progress that had been made against the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Areas for Improvement as set out in the Action Plan appended to the report.

There were four actions directly related to the work of this Committee together with the progress made to date which were set out below, namely:

- HMI-1.-2-202202 – the Service should make sure its integrated risk management plan included clear outcomes that showed the public how it was currently mitigating risk;
- HMI-1-3-202205 – the Service should make sure that it had an effective quality assurance process so staff carry out audits and fire safety checks to an appropriate standard;
- HMI-2-2-202207a – Prevention and Protection – the Service should be aware of and invest in developments in technology and future innovation to help improve and sustain operational efficiency and effectiveness; and
- HMI – 2.2-202207b – Response – the Service should be aware of and invest in developments in technology and future innovation to help improve and sustain operational efficiency and effectiveness.

It was noted that there were 19 individual actions sitting beneath these of which 7 were in progress and 12 had not been started. The Committee would be apprised of progress at future meetings.

NB. Minute AGC/22/11 above also refers.

* **AGC/22/14 Local Pension Board Annual Report 2021-22**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (AGC/22/18) to which was appended the Local Pension Board annual report for 2021-22. The report provided information on (amongst other things):

- work undertaken by the Board in 2021-22;
- details of any identified risks and Board actions (based on a RAG rating);
- details of statutory breaches (if any); and
- the management of conflicts of interest.

RESOLVED that the Local Pensions Board Annual Report for 2021-22, as appended to report AGC/22/18 be endorsed.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**