



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

**Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee held at 10:00 hours on Wednesday 6
December 2023 at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters,
Salisbury**

Members present:

Cllr Kevin Small (Chair) Cllr Pete Barrow
Cllr Byron Quayle

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell
Clerk & Monitoring Officer, Jonathan Mair
Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter
Designate Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Derek James
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae
Head of Corporate Support, Vikki Shearing
Corporate Communications & Engagement Manager, Emily Cheeseman
Democratic Services Officer, David Shaw

Guests:

Michelle Hopton - Deloitte LLP
Dan Newans - South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Internal Audit Services

23/43 Welcome

23/43.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

23/44 Apologies

23/44.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Paul Hilliard, Cllr Rebecca Knox (who was attending the Local Government Association Fire Services Management Committee on the Authority's behalf), Cllr Kelvin Nash and Cllr Pip Ridout.

23/45 Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interests

23/45.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.

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23/46 Public Questions

23/46.1 No questions were received from members of the public.

23/47 Review and approve Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 13 September 2023

23/47.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

23/47.2 RESOLVED: Members approved the minutes and they were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

23/48 External Audit Report (ISA 260) 2022-23

23/48.1 Michelle Hopton, Deloitte LLP, introduced the report. It was confirmed that no significant issues had been found in the audit work for 2022-23 and that the control findings detailed on page 22 of the report had been corrected by management.

23/48.2 Michelle Hopton provided an update on the signing of the financial statements for 2021-22, which had been subject to delay. The delay had arisen as Wiltshire Pension Fund's information on membership data was awaited. The data had been requested and chased by both Deloitte LLP and the Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter.

23/48.3 The Chair asked for the reasons for the delay. Michelle Hopton explained that the Wiltshire Pension Fund was undertaking a financial transformation, which was taking priority.

23/48.4 Members expressed their disappointment at the delay, commenting that it questioned the confidence of Wiltshire Pension Fund to manage the fund. It was agreed that the Chair write to Wiltshire Pension Fund on behalf of the Authority to expedite the matter.

23/48.5 RESOLVED:

1. Members received and noted the External Audit Report 2022-23

2. That the Chair write to Wiltshire Pension Fund on behalf of the Authority to expedite the provision of membership data to progress the signing of the financial statements for 2021-22.

23/49 Internal Audit Quarterly Report - Quarter 3

23/49.1 Dan Newens from South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) presented the report.

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23/49.2 In reply to Members' questions, Dan Newens confirmed that it was a positive report. It was the knowledge and experience of the auditors which determined the position of the illustrative dials set out in the report between adequate and substantial in the assurance opinion. There was also the opportunity for the assurance opinion to be discussed with management, for example over consistency in reflecting the assurance definitions.

23/49.3 RESOLVED: Members considered the findings of the audits and approved the management responses.

23/50 Internal Audit Progress Report

23/50.1 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae introduced the report. The Committee was updated that the internal auditor's recommendation regarding the monitoring of secondary contracts would be completed by the end of the year, and the target date on the recommendation on grievance arrangements had been revised to 31 March 2024, to reflect the delivery of the Independent Review into Workplace Culture. The culture dashboard was now complete and live.

23/50.2 In reply to a question from Cllr Pete Barrow in relation to the capacity of Human Resources (HR) to assist in delivering the Culture Action Plan, Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long advised that the need for additional capacity in HR was recognised and was being progressed to allow for both project work and business as usual to be undertaken.

23/50.3 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the progress of work against the outstanding internal audit recommendations.

23/51 Financial Monitoring Report - Quarter 2 2023-24

23/51.1 Ian Cotter presented the report.

23/51.2 In reply to Cllr Byron Quayle's question regarding the positive variance on the revenue budget, partly resulting from current vacancy levels, the officers explained the reasons why vacancies had not been filled and the challenges that were faced in recruiting.

23/51.3 The Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Ben Ansell referred to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), recently published, local government finance policy statement 2024 to 2025, which included a core council tax referendum principle for fire of up to 3%, rather than the £5 precept flexibility which had been sought. This matter was considered further under the Strategic Risk Register agenda item.

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- 23/51.4 RESOLVED: Members noted the current financial position as at 30 September 2023.**
- 23/52 Performance Report – Quarter 2**
- 23/52.1 The report set out the key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) that were reported to the Committee. Each of the KLOEs was reported to Members with appropriate officers providing an overview.
- 23/52.2 ACO McCrae introduced the report and in conjunction with the Head of Corporate Support, Vikki Shearing, reported on Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) 6 – How well do we use resources to manage risks?
- 23/52.3 In answer to Cllr Barrow’s question, the officers explained the use of the vehicle telematics system to monitor the usage of the white fleet. An objective was to be more effective in the use of the white fleet and to consider the advantages of using electric vehicles.
- 23/52.4 Vikki Shearing reported on KLOE 13 – Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place?
- 23/52.5 In answer to Cllr Barrow’s question, Vikki Shearing explained that there were no trends to the 13 complaints received in quarter 2. The complaints ranged from property damage, driving related cases, to staff conduct, which in certain cases led to disciplinary action. In the quarter, 77% of all complaint cases were not upheld.
- 23/52.6 Vikki Shearing and ACO Long reported on KLOE 10 – How well do we ensure fairness and diversity?
- 23/52.7 In reply to a question from the Chair, ACO Long stated that following the Independent Culture Review there was no necessity to retile KLOE 10, but the sub-diagnostic descriptions would in future be fuller and contain additional data.
- 23/52.8 ACO Long reported on KLOE 11 – How well do we develop leadership and capability?
- 23/52.9 In reply to a question from the Cllr Barrow, ACO Long gave details as to how the re-organisation of operational staff and the establishment of an Area Leadership Team, would achieve a better delineation of work and additional capacity for Station Mangers to be more available for audits and to be involved in the performance management of the stations, amongst other tasks. The capacity of HR to be involved in the time-consuming disciplinary investigations was also recognised and a review of structures to create additional capacity was being implemented.
- 23/52.10 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and approved the Quarter 2 2023-24 Performance, as detailed in Appendix A of the Report.**

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23/53 Strategic Risk Register

23/53.1 ACO McCrae introduced the report. Risk 0006 relating to the inability to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service provision was highlighted. CFO Ansell referred again to the recently published DLUHC local government finance policy statement 2024 to 2025, which included a core council tax referendum principle of up to 3% for all standalone fire and rescue authorities. In addition, the government revenue support grant would be increased in line with the September 2023 consumer price index; however, government grant only accounted for 25% of the Authority's funding, with 75% coming from council tax. There was also an increased pension strain to take into consideration as a result of an increase in employer contribution rates from April 2024. It was not yet known how much the increase would be or the details of how it would be funded. Issues arising would be given consideration at the finance seminar for Members to be held on the 12 December 2023 and in January 2024, prior to setting the budget in February 2024.

23/53.2 In answer to Members' questions, the officers stated that they were considering the provision of resources, including a fire cover review, and a prudent approach would be taken with focus on the financial situation in April 2025. The medium-term financial plan, including future training provision and mobilising system, was well placed and the Authority was effective and well run, but challenges remained. The outcome of the Government's White Paper was also awaited and would need to be considered.

23/53.3 ACO McCrae additionally referred to the direction of risk arrows in the report, on page 3 relating to cyber threat and attacks, and on page 4 relating to the sustainability of operational training provision, where the arrows should, in both cases, point to the right in a horizontal direction.

23/53.4 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the strategic risks and mitigations, as set out in Appendix A of the Report.

23/54 Date of Next Meeting

23/54.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Finance & Audit Committee meeting as 7 March 2024.

23/55 To consider passing the following resolution:

In accordance with Section 100A (2, 3 & 4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the press and public for the business specified below because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

23/55.1 RESOLVED: To close the meeting to the press and public.

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PART 2

23/56 Future Training Provision

23/56.1 The Committee considered an exempt report that detailed the project costs and progress on the provision of future training facilities, as detailed in the Not for Publication report.

23/56.2 RESOLVED:

- 1. That the progress of the project, as detailed within Appendix A be noted.**
- 2. That approval be sought from the Authority, with a delegation, to award contracts for works following the procurement process, subject to the overall project cost not exceeding the upper cost range detailed in the Financial Implications section of the Not for Publication Report.**

Meeting ended at 12:25 hours.

Signed: _____

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