



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee held at 10:00 hours on Wednesday 13 September 2023 at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Salisbury

Members present:

Cllr Kevin Small (Chair)	Cllr Pete Barrow
Cllr Paul Hilliard	Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Pip Ridout	

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
Emily Hobbins - South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Internal Audit Services (via MS Teams)

23/31 Welcome

- 23/31.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees, including the designate Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen, who had recently commenced employment with the Service.

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23/32 Apologies

- 23/32.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Richard Biggs, Cllr Rebecca Knox and Cllr Byron Quayle (Vice Chair). Cllr Biggs listened virtually to the meeting via MS Teams and did not speak or vote on the items under consideration.

23/33 Code of Conduct and Declarations of Interests

- 23/33.1 The Chair asked the Members for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.

23/34 Public Questions

- 23/34.1 No public questions were received in advance of the meeting.

23/35 Review and approve Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 26 July 2023

- 23/35.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.

23/35.2 RESOLVED: Members approved the minutes and were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

23/36 External Audit Update Report – Verbal Update

- 23/36.1 Michelle Hopton (Deloitte LLP) stated that the 2021/22 audit had not yet been signed off due to a national pension issue regarding the data used in valuation. The external auditors were dependent on information provided by the pension auditors, which was expected by mid-September. In reply to a question from Cllr Pete Barrow, Michelle Hopton explained the reasons for the delay, including capacity issues in public sector audits, and the action being taken to expedite the information. When the information was received from the pension auditors, it would not present a significant amount of work to complete the audit. Cllr Pip Ridout enquired if the information to be provided would be financially significant and Michelle Hopton clarified that the external auditors were not anticipating any material changes.

- 23/36.2 Michelle Hopton continued that the 2022/23 audit had commenced with the objective for it to be completed by the end of the calendar year. Deloitte LLP had provided capacity for its completion, and it had been prioritised.

23/36.3 RESOLVED: Members noted the verbal update.

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23/37 Internal Audit Quarterly Report - Quarter 2

- 23/37.1 Emily Hobbins from South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) presented the report via MS Teams.
- 23/37.2 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long, stated that there was the potential for slippage regarding the management actions for grievance arrangements as it would be beneficial to include recommendations arising from the Independent Review, which was awaited. The Committee noted the potential slippage in the timescale.
- 23/37.3 ACO Long answered Cllr Barrow's queries regarding the possible reluctance of staff to raise grievances, stating that the actions to be implemented should result in improvements to build confidence for staff to raise concerns, including improved support, access to information and leadership development. Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Ben Ansell added that the recommendations of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service's (HMICFRS) thematic inspection on the handling of misconduct would also be aligned to the management actions.
- 23/37.4 In reply to a question from Cllr Paul Hilliard, ACO Long explained that the actions from the Independent Review recommendations would be used to create a single culture action plan (alongside the HMICFRS Spotlight report recommendations and the internal culture review observations). The action plan would be overseen by the cultural development committee with quarterly progress reported to the Finance and Audit Committee. With regards to the methodology that internal audit had employed in choosing the 12 employees to speak with as part of the audit of grievance arrangements would be clarified for the Member. POST MEETING NOTE: The employees who were spoken to as part of the grievance audit were discussed with the relevant officers who assisted with the selection to ensure coverage of different geographical regions and different rank of staff.
- 23/37.5 RESOLVED: Members considered the findings of the audits and approved the management responses.**

23/38 Internal Audit Progress Report

- 23/38.1 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae introduced the Report.
- 23/38.2 The Committee was updated that the management action relating to cyber security (data backup) was now completed.
- 23/38.3 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the progress of work against the outstanding internal audit recommendations.**

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23/39 Financial Monitoring Report - Quarter 1 2023-24

- 23/39.1 Head of Financial Services & Treasurer, Ian Cotter, presented the Report and provided an analysis of the current financial position reflecting spending to 30 June 2023.
- 23/39.2 The officers answered a question from Cllr Kelvin Nash on earmarked reserves and unused grants referred to in Appendix B, and questions from Cllr Hilliard on the nature of the Local Resilience Forum Funding Pilot and the sale of Service vehicles at the end of their life.
- 23/39.3 RESOLVED: Members noted the current financial position as of 30 June 2023.**

23/40 Performance Report - Quarter 1

- 23/40.1 ACO McCrae introduced the Report and reported on KLOE 6 – How well do we use resources to manage risks? In answer to Cllr Barrow's question, it was confirmed that the effects of climate change were factored into the work being undertaken on the emerging Community Safety Plan and that environment was key area identified within the new Strategic Assessment of Risk. Through this it has been agreed that there would be an environmental corporate target as part of the new Community Safety Plan 2024-2028. In reply to a question from Cllr Hilliard, the officers explained that the use of electric vehicles (EV) by the Service would at present be more appropriate for smaller non response vehicles, for example those undertaking fire safety visits in urban areas, rather than firefighting appliances. Although work was being undertaken to consider the Service's move to EV vehicles. In reply to a question from the Chair it was clarified that the photovoltaic panels scheduled for installation at the Service's fire stations would not, at this time, have associated battery storage.
- 23/40.2 Ian Cotter reported on KLOE 7 – How well are we securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?
- 23/40.3 In reply to Cllr Ridout's question on the funding position of fire and rescue authorities, CFO Ansell explained that key stakeholders including the fire service employers, the Home Office, and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) worked together on their funding requirements and added that authorities were undertaking evidence-based dialogue with the Government, seeking for all standalone fire and rescue authorities to have the flexibility to be able to increase their Band D council tax precept by up to five pounds.
- 23/40.4 Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), Derek James reported on KLOE 12 – How effective is the Occupational Health and Safety management system in the Service? In reply to Cllr Hilliard's question, DCFO James explained that the impact on work colleagues resulting from those on long term sick or in long term recovery was monitored closely and appropriate support to the individual was provided.

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- 23/40.5 Head of Corporate Support, Vikki Shearing, reported on KLOE 13 – Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place? The Chair commented that the reduction in the response time to Freedom of Information requests compared with the previous quarter was a positive outcome.
- 23/40.6 ACO Long reported on KLOE 8 – How well do we understand the wellbeing needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce wellbeing, and KLOE 9 – How well trained and skilled are staff? ACO Long reported that there was a repetition of reference to musculoskeletal within the report and also that the reference to the five percent annual increase in musculoskeletal absences was a carry forward from the previous quarter's report and should be disregarded. In reply to a question from the Chair, ACO Long explained that due to waiting time delays in the National Health Service (NHS), the Service had paid for a small number of private investigations for musculoskeletal conditions and that the level of this intervention was kept under review by an internal sickness panel.
- 23/40.07 Vikki Shearing and ACO Long reported on KLOE 10 – How well do we ensure fairness and diversity? In reply to a question from Cllr Barrow, Vikki Shearing confirmed that staff that had provided suggestions for financial savings and efficiencies for the Service would be given appropriate feedback, including reasons why a suggestion had not been taken forward.
- 23/40.08 ACO Long reported on KLOE 11 – How well do we develop leadership and capability? In reply to a question from Cllr Hilliard details were given of the two secondments, one with the Home Office and the second with the NFCC.
- 23/40.09 Arising out of consideration of this item, Cllr Barrow enquired about the emerging Community Safety Plan and whether consideration was being given to providing further assistance to the ambulance service. CFO Ansell replied that a national discussion was in progress about strategic collaboration between the NHS and the fire and rescue service, and confirmed that the Service currently worked closely with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, with 13 fire stations currently operating co-responder arrangements.
- 23/40.10 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and approved the Quarter 1 2023-24 Performance, as detailed in Appendix A of the Report.**
- 23/41 Strategic Risk Register**
- 23/41.1 ACO McCrae introduced the Report.
- 23/41.2 Risk 0009 relating to the on-call duty system was highlighted and reference was made to the work of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Andy Cole, in his national role on the NFCC, which was considering this subject.
- 23/41.3 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the strategic risks and mitigations, as set out in Appendix A of the Report.**

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23/42 Date of Next Meeting

23/42.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Finance & Audit Committee meeting as 6 December 2023.

Meeting ended at 11:55 hours.

Signed: _____

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