



DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee held at 10:00 hours on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Salisbury

Members present:

Cllr Kevin Small (Chair)	Cllr Paul Hilliard (Vice Chair)
Cllr Laura Beddow	Cllr Matt Bragg
Cllr Paul Oatway	Cllr Byron Quayle
Cllr Duncan Sowry-House	Cllr Clare Weight

Officer attendance:

Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Andy Cole
Deputy Assistant Chief Officer (DACO), Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Corporate Services and Clerk to the Authority, Vikki Shearing
Monitoring Officer, Lisa Kirkman
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Safety and Compliance, Dave Waters
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Response, Darren Langdown
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of Service Support, Jill McCrae
Democratic Services Officer, David Shaw

Guests:

Dan Newens – South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) Internal Audit Services

25/30 Welcome

25/30.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

25/31 Apologies

25/31.1 No apologies were received and all Members were present.

25/32 Code of Conduct, Declarations of Interest and notifications of any other business

- 25/32.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.
- 25/33 Public Questions**
- 25/33.1 No public questions were received in advance of the meeting.
- 25/34 Review and approve Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting on 23 July 2025**
- 25/34.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the last meeting.
- 25/34.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes be confirmed without amendment and signed by the Chair as a correct record.**
- 25/35 External Audit Progress Report 2024-25**
- 25/35.1 Deputy Assistant Chief Officer (DACO) Financial Services & Treasurer, Ryan Maslen presented the report. It was noted that together with the Chair and Vice Chair, DACO Maslen had met with the new Key Audit Partner from Bishop Fleming earlier that week, which had been a positive meeting. Bishop Fleming were not present at the meeting as there had been minimal activity on the audit since the update provided at the end of July 2025. The 2024-25 audit process was progressing as scheduled and was still on target to be completed and presented to the December meeting of the Committee. This was dependent though on the external auditors of the Wiltshire Pension Fund providing the required assurance.
- 25/35.2 Cllr Byron Quayle referred to a recent case at Dorset Council involving financial irregularities relating to financial controls and sought assurance that such a situation was not repeated at the Authority. DACO Maslen replied that he had been in contact with Dorset Council to help understand the situation and after undertaking tests on financial systems and authorisation processes, he was satisfied at this stage that the situation was not being replicated.
- 25/35.3 RESOLVED: That the update provided be noted.**
- 25/36 Internal Audit Quarterly report - Quarter 2**
- 25/36.1 Dan Newens, South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) presented the report. Members' attention was drawn to the two completed audits in the quarter: People Development (reasonable assurance awarded) Treasury Management (substantial assurance awarded). The summary of actions and the management responses were explained to the Committee.

- 25/36.2 Cllr Quayle again referred to a recent case at Dorset Council involving financial irregularities and Dan Newens outlined the internal actions that were taken at SWAP when such a situation was raised to ensure that lessons were learnt and actions shared with its auditors to ensure that improvement took place. DACO Maslen commented that consideration would be given to SWAP undertaking an additional audit to provide assurance to Members.
- 25/36.3 In reply to a question from Cllr Paul Hilliard, Dan Newens stated that SWAP was comfortable that the management response to finding number 3 - Follow-up of Succession Planning Actions, would be delivered by January 2026. Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) - Director of People Services, Jenny Long added that the implementation of the management actions would be assisted by the new HR system which was being introduced to replace legacy systems.
- 25/36.5 RESOLVED: That the findings of the audits be noted and the management responses be approved.**
- 25/37 Internal Audit Progress report – Quarter 2**
- 25/37.1 ACO McCrae introduced the Report.
- 25/37.2 The Chair commented that the Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority would be reviewing the Members' Handbook to ensure any changes required to the Financial Regulations were captured.
- 25/37.3 RESOLVED: That the progress made in Audit Improvement Plan Activities be noted.**
- 25/38 Financial Monitoring report - Quarter 1 2025-26**
- 25/38.1 DACO Maslen, presented the report and provided an analysis of the current financial position reflecting spending to 30 June 2025. DACO Maslen highlighted that the revenue budget showed a negative position of £480k at the current time and this did not include the costs incurred for the recent heathland fires. It was explained that government assistance under the Bellwin Scheme was being sought for this exceptional event, for which support from the National Coordination Advisory Framework had been utilised.
- 25/38.2 DACO Maslen answered a question from Cllr Matt Bragg regarding the Authority's current investment in BlackRock explaining that the Authority worked with its Treasury Management Advisors to make investments in a variety of products, considering security and liquidity.
- 25/38.3 Cllr Paul Oatway enforced the need for the Authority to receive additional government financial support. CFO Cole stated that Members would be copied into correspondence with local Members of Parliament (MPs)

regarding funding to increase the communications profile and inform Members in their contacts with MPs. Cllr Bragg asked if there was a contingency plan to make financial savings if required and DACO Maslen stated that the financial situation would be kept under review and that, if required, reserves were available as a last resort.

25/38.3 RESOLVED: That the current financial position as at 30 June 2025 be noted.

25/39 Performance Report Quarter 1

25/39.1 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.

25/39.2 ACO McCrae reported on KLOE 6 sub diagnostic – *To what extent do we understand and manage our impact upon the environment?*

25/39.3 In reply to a question from Cllr Oatway, ACO McCrae reported that solar photovoltaic panels were currently installed at eight stations. Their success was being reviewed with a view to wider implementation.

25/39.4 DACO Maslen reported on KLOE 6 sub diagnostic – *To what extent do we show sound financial management of non-pay costs, including estates, fleet and equipment through benchmarking, contract negotiation and procurement?*

25/39.5 In reply to a question from Cllr Clare Weight on the current Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and its appropriateness for fighting wildfires, ACO McCrae stated that workwear would be considered over the next few years as the current PPE contract ended and as budget provision allowed. DACO Maslen referred to the supplier engagement sessions which assisted in assessing the development of the market.

25/39.6 Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) and Clerk to the Authority, Vikki Shearing reported on KLOE 6 sub diagnostic – *To what extent do we demonstrate effective management of Information and Communication technology?*

25/39.7 In reply to a question from Cllr Hilliard, ACO Shearing explained that Body Worn Cameras (BWC) were used in training and learning and development. Contracts were being aligned for them to be used in response environments and there had been work completed to ensure information governance compliance and for other agencies to request footage where this was appropriate. Cllr Bragg commented that BWC were of benefit for learning. ACO Shearing also answered Cllr Bragg's questions on the migration of the legacy Lotus Notes system to a Microsoft cloud-based system which would save costs and was on track to be completed by March 2026.

- 25/39.8 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) - Director of Safety and Compliance, Dave Waters reported on KLOE 12 sub diagnostic: *How well structured and embedded is a Health and Safety policy, practices and culture to ensure a safe and legally compliant service?*
- 25/39.9 ACFO Dave Waters replied to a question from Cllr Weight stating that a decrease in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) to zero was possible has the Service had a rigorous reporting system and sought to reduce this figure. CFO Cole also referred to the fact that the Authority had ISO45001 accreditation.
- 25/39.10 ACO Shearing reported on KLOE 13 sub-diagnostic: - *How effective and efficient are we at managing data?*
- 25/39.11 Cllr Laura Beddow asked if the recent presentation of Priority 1, 2 and 3 data at the Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees by means of a dashboard could be extended to the Finance & Audit Committee performance report. The officers replied that this was not the intention at the present time but this could be reviewed when the new Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) were determined in consultation with His Majesty's Inspectors. CFO Cole commented that it was a small internal development team for the dashboards. A number of Members observed that the presentation of the Performance Report could be more focused, less repetitive and streamlined alongside other agenda items.
- 25/39.12 In reply to a question from Cllr Quayle, ACO Shearing stated that the contract with the third-party supplier would be given further consideration if it transpired the Cyber Essentials could not be applied for due to multi factor authentication not being implemented on their system.
- 25/39.13 ACO Long reported on KLOE 8, *How well do we understand the well-being needs of our workforce and act to improve workforce well-being?*
- 25/39.14 Cllr Hilliard asked if there had been any serious incidents involving staff at the recent heathland wildfires and how such incidents were monitored. ACO Long referred to good hygiene, provision of toilets, monitoring the number of hours worked and standby and replacement arrangements. Health surveillance had been extended to the mechanics supporting the incidents. ACFO Waters added that at the Holt Heath heathland fire there had been seven reported adverse occurrences and that there was a QR code to a 'leaving the incident' form, which included guidance on how to report any injuries/illnesses.
- 25/39.15 ACO Long reported on KLOE 9, *How well do we understand the skills and capabilities of our workforce?*
- 25/39.16 In reply to a question from Cllr Bragg, it was explained that staff returning to work after long term sickness were given a period to bring their skills up to date and that this was kept under review.

- 25/39.17 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and approved the Performance Report for quarter 1 2025-26, as detailed in Appendix A of the report.**
- 25/40 Culture Action Plan – verbal update**
- 25/40.1 CFO Cole reported that good progress was being made with the Culture Action Plan and it was intended to submit a report to the next meeting of the Committee to recommend to the Authority that the action plan be closed.
- 25/40.2 The Chair stated that the Committee acknowledged the positive progress made to date on the Service’s culture journey and in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority, requested that an independent review of progress against the action plan be commissioned by officers. It was the view that this review be conducted by Practice to Progress, the independent company that previously undertook the Independent Review into workplace culture at the Authority. The findings of this review would be reported back to the Authority to support Members in the sign-off of the action plan.
- 25/40.3 In reply to Members’ questions ACO Long stated that the independent review would be a ‘sense check’ and would not be a significant cost, in order to provide assurance.
- 25/40.4 RESOLVED: Members noted the Cultural Action Plan verbal report.**
- 25/41 Strategic Risk Register**
- 25/41.1 ACO McCrae introduced the Report.
- 25/41.2 Risk 0006, the inability to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service provision, was discussed by the Committee. Following debate, it was agreed that any decision to increase the direction of risk be deferred to the 3 December 2025 meeting of the Committee when the outcomes of the Government’s Autumn Budget to be held on 26 November 2025 would be known.
- 25/41.3 In respect of risk 529, sustainability of operational training provision, it was noted that the procurement period had been extended to 1 October 2025 to deal with questions from potential contractors.
- 25/41.5 RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the strategic risks and mitigations, as set out in Appendix A of the report.**
- 25/42 Date of next meeting**
- 25/42.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Finance & Audit Committee meeting as 3 December 2025.

The meeting closed at 12.00.

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