MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

7 JUNE 2018

MINUTES

Present: **Cllr James Roberts (Chair)** Councillors Joe De'Asha and Lesley Rennie

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllrs Sharon Connor, Pat Ireland and Anthony Boyle

1. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Prior to the start of the meeting, information regarding general housekeeping was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair confirmed to all present that the proceedings of the meeting would not be filmed.

The meeting was declared open.

2. Preliminary matters

Members considered the identification of declarations of interest, any urgent additional items, and any business that may require the exclusion of the press and public.

Resolved that:

a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda

b) no additional items of business to be considered as matters of urgency were determined by the Chair; and

c) no items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

3. Minutes of Previous meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Audit & Scrutiny Sub-Committee, held on 8th February 2018, where approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. 2017/18 ANNUAL YEAR-END INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Members considered report CFO/036/18 of the Treasurer, concerning the Annual Year End Internal Audit report for 2017/18.

Members were informed that the Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that it maintains an adequate and effective system of Internal Audit.
They were also advised that on the basis of the audit plan previously approved, Internal Audit (supplied by Liverpool City Council) have concluded that the system of internal control accords with proper practice; and there is a substantial level of compliance in relation to the fundamental systems.

A question was raised about the procurement audit review that had identified a past tenderer decision to award a £650,000 contract that was not supported by a documented approved Authority decision, and was therefore contrary to Contract Standing Orders 13.1. Members were assured that this contract has been withdrawn.

Members were informed that the Firefighters Pensioners Payroll audit review has not yet been undertaken, but it was agreed that the audit would be carried forward to the 2018/19 audit plan.

It was asked when the four outstanding audit recommendations in respect of Procurement Tender Evaluation were to be implemented and Members were told that this will be picked up in 2018/19.

Members resolved that:

the contents of the report, be noted.

5. THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2017/2018

Members considered report CFO/028/18 of the Treasurer, concerning the Authority's Annual Governance Statement.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) recognises, records and publishes the Authority's governance arrangements and explains how they enable the Authority to carry out its functions effectively. It also fulfils the statutory requirement to prepare an annual statement that outlines and reviews the internal control process that existed in the year.
Members were advised that the Annual Governance Statement for 2017/18 was attached to the report at Appendix A.

Members were informed that the system of internal control is a significant element and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to

identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

Members were informed that the AGS identified no significant weaknesses in the existing internal control systems or processes.

Members resolved that:

the 2017/2018 Annual Governance Statement, be approved.

6. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

Members considered report CFO/033/18 of the Treasurer, concerning the activities of the Treasury Management operation and actual performance against the agreed Prudential Indicators in 2017/18.

Members were advised that the treasury management activity has been carried out in-line with the approved Treasury Management Strategy.

Members sought clarity on the interest rates achieved by the different options of investments including the benefits of Local Authorities interest rates; and they were advised that investment decisions are based on criteria including the achievement of security of the investment, the ability to liquidate funds and finally yield as per the approved treasury management strategy. Therefore, all options are reviewed, whether it be investments with Local Authorities or otherwise with the most appropriate investment being identified based on this criteria.

Members resolved that:

The Treasury Management Annual Report 2017/18, be noted.

7. 2018/19 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

Members considered report CFO/026/18 of the Treasurer, concerning the proposed Internal Audit plan for 2018/2019.

Members were advised that each year, Internal Audit submit a work plan following consultation with the Strategic Management Group, Treasurer, Head of Finance and other key officers. This plan is set based upon an assessment of risks, previous findings and the relationship with External Audit work.
They were informed that the two main strategic areas of work are:

1) A review of fundamental financial systems and processes, and
2) Specific project reviews requested by the Service.

Members were asked if they had any proposals for inclusion within the Strategic Audit Plan.

A question was raised by Members asking if the Audit Plan differs each year, and it was confirmed that although the format does not, the content of the Plan will alter to reflect the specific projects and challenges.

Members resolved that:

The 2018/19 Internal Audit Plan, be approved.

8. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER DEC - MARCH 2017-18

Members considered report CFO/034/18 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the current risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register, the status of the risks and associated control measures, including any updates for the period December 2017 to March 2018.

Members were informed that it is good practice for the Authoirt6y to regularly review the internal and external risks to the on-going delivery of service.

Members were advised that Corporate Risk Register has been produced which focusses on the Mission and Aims of the Authority and aligns each risk to a specific aim. They were informed that the risks have been fully reviewed and any new risks that might affect the Authority during 2017/18 have been considered.

Members were informed that there has been increased focus on high rise buildings following the Grenfell Tower fire. This has required a focus on fire safety in high rise buildings, which has had an impact on the resources available to deliver Home Fire Safety Check's (HFSC's).

Members asked about new Fire Stations and were informed that Prescot is up and running and is a joint Police and Fire Station. The Fire Station build site for Saughall Massie has been confirmed and building work starts in June 2018. With regards to St Helens Fire Station, suitable land options are being explored, however the identified site is considered to be in the best location and discussions continue with North West Ambulance Service regarding the potential for a shared facility.

Members enquired about the future of service vehicles with regards to the use of electric, oil or diesel. They were told that service vehicles are reviewed every year in accordance with the asset management plan and any changes are made accordingly. All options are continually reviewed to reflect the current market.

Members resolved that:

the updated Corporate Risk Register for 2017/18 which incorporates the current status of those risks to March 2018, be approved.

9. Equality & Diversity Plan 2017-2020, Progress for Quarter 3 & 4 2017/18

Members considered report CFO/032/18 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the agreed Equality and Diversity (E&D) plan for quarter 3 & 4 together with an update on progress against the actions for the first year; and an update on the Equality Objectives for 2017/18 as at 31st March 2018.

Members were provided with some highlights of the exceptional work undertaken by our staff and volunteers in quarter 3 and quarter 4 to help progress our E&D objectives.

They were informed of activity undertaken during hate crime awareness week 14-21 October 2017. The events held were successful in helping students to gain a greater understanding of what hate crime is, and how it can affect individuals and their lives.
Members were reminded that Fire stations also act as Safe Havens and third party reporting centres, which can be accessed by individuals who feel under threat.

Members were also informed of the success of the second International Women's Day event held on Wednesday 7th March 2018, and this year's pledge "press for progress", which is felt to be more aligned to our organisational values.

Information was provided to Members around our volunteers, of which there are currently 33. It was highlighted that the diversity of our current volunteers is substantial. Some of the work and campaigns that the volunteers have been involved in, were highlighted to Members, such as their involvement in Arson and High rise /Protection campaigns (following Grenfell), and homeless campaigns led by Whitechapel centre.

Members were informed of the extensive work undertaken to deliver the Mental Health First Aid Lite course to over 160 firefighters.

With regards to measuring the diversity of MFRA's workforce, the proportion of females has seen a slight increase since 2015/16. Members were advised that in relation to Control staff, there is a higher proportion of female staff. With regards to Support staff, there is an approximate 50% gender split.

Members were also advised that almost 94% of staff are White British or Irish origin. 4.7% (47) are BAME - which is marginally lower than the Merseyside BAME population Figure at 5.5%.

The Gender Pay Gap analysis as at March 2017 shows that MFRA has a mean gender pay gap across the organisation of -12.1 %, which is lower than average.

Members were advised that HFSC satisfaction surveys are underway and these will be analysed to gather any E&D issues or impacts in relation to service delivery to protected groups.

With regards to work with young people, a total of 116 Princes Trust students have attended courses during 2017/18, with all participants being treated fairly and equitably.

They were informed that there have been a total of 915 Accidental Dwelling fires attended across Merseyside for 2017/18, which is the lowest number on record. During 2017-18, there were a total of 4 accidental dwelling fire fatalities, which is the lowest figure achieved in the history of the service.

There have been a total of 33 disciplinary proceedings during 2017/18. 31 involved male members of staff, 2 were female members of staff. There have also been a total of 19 grievances of which 17 involved male members of staff and 2 involved female.

Members queried the disparity in the figures for the Gender Pay Gap analysis at March 2017 and were advised that this is largely due to MFRA operational staff being predominantly male.

Staff were thanked by Members for great work around equality and diversity and their assistance in helping to raise their awareness of other cultures and religions.

Members raised questions around the sharing of information with the NHS regarding oxygen dependency and it was confirmed that we do receive this information quite quickly from the relevant source, for us to complete Home Fire Safety Checks. We can also refer information to other groups, for example Age Concern, if the occupier gave their permission for us to do so.

Members resolved that:

the content of the Equality and Diversity progress report and Equality Objectives, be noted.

Close

Date of next meeting Date Not Specified