

AT A MEETING of the HFRA Standards and Governance Committee held
virtually via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 23rd July, 2020

Chairman:

* Councillor Liz Fairhurst

Vice- Chairman

* Councillor Sharon Mintoff

* Councillor Jonathan Glen

* Councillor Roger Price

* Councillor Geoffrey Hockley

*Present

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:

Councillor Chris Carter – Chairman of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

103. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

All Members were present and no apologies were noted.

104. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful of their duty to disclose at the meeting any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they had in any matter on the agenda for the meeting, where that interest was not already in the Authority's register of interests, and their ability to disclose any other personal interests in any such matter that they might have wished to disclose.

Councillor Roger Price declared an interest as a member on the National Pensions Board and the HFRA Pension Board.

105. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed and agreed.

106. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations for the meeting.

107. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

108. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT 2019/20 AND 2020/21

The Committee received a report from the Chief Internal Auditor (item 6 in the minute book) regarding the Internal Audit Progress report for 2019-20.

It was confirmed that the internal auditors had continued to work remotely on plans and the audit approach had been adapted to complete the work being undertaken during the Covid-19 outbreak. However, as a result, progress had slowed on reviews in quarter 4 of 2019/20 and some of the planned work for quarter 1 of 2020/21 had been delayed. The plan continues to be reviewed in light of the risks arising from Covid-19 and changes to the plan so far were summarised on Page 22 of the pack in the appendix.

RESOLVED

The progress in delivering the internal audit plans for 2019/20 and 2020/21 and the outcomes to date were noted by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority Standards and Governance Committee.

109. ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT AND OPINION 2019/20

The Committee received a report from the Chief Internal Auditor (item 7 in the minute book) regarding the Annual Internal Audit report and Opinion.

In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the annual report provides an opinion on the governance, risk management and control processes put in place by the Authority. The Chief Internal Auditor reported that the overall 'adequate' assurance rating reflected the very positive direction of travel over the year and despite the Covid-19 outbreak, it had been possible to complete planned work with the support of colleagues in the Fire and Rescue Service. Significant work had been completed by the Service to develop and improve governance, risk management and control measures. It was noted however, that much of the work pre-dated the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore reflected findings on the systems operating at the time. Future plans and reviews will take account of the changes arising from the challenges presented by Covid-19.

Members were happy with the progress achieved to date in challenging circumstances with the pandemic.

RESOLVED

The Standards and Governance Committee accepted the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report and opinion statement for 2019/20.

110. INTERNAL AUDIT MANAGEMENT ACTIONS PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a report from the Chief Fire Officer (item 8 in the minute book) regarding the internal Audit Management Actions Progress report, which

provided the latest update on the management actions that have not been completed within their target date and their status.

The officer emphasised that it was an active document and therefore what was shown in the report was subject to change. An HMI Inspection on response to pandemic expected with a further level of assurance and Opinion and the Service continued to work closely with Internal Audit to ensure adequate controls were in place.

The Academy training and procurement process was highlighted in paragraphs 14-15 of the appendix and a further update would follow at the next meeting.

Members queried whether everything being virtual effected the auditing that was accessible, and it was confirmed that all areas of the service were still available, with officers able to signpost whenever necessary.

RESOLVED

The Standards and Governance Committee noted that, despite the impact of COVID-19, significant progress had been made towards the implementation of the internal audit management actions.

111. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2019/20

The Committee received a report from the Chief Fire Officer (item 9 in the minute book) regarding the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The approved AGS will form part of the Annual Statement Accounts 2019/2020, which is a statutory requirement of The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

The officer explained how the AGS was about safeguarding public money and offered a sound system of internal control and that the new Safety Plan was combined with the Isle of Wight.

Paragraph 3.2 was highlighted to Members for implementing best practice and how risk is managed effectively, and 3.5 detailed the scrutiny process and the relationship between Members and officers. The fraud and corruption process had also been declared fit for purpose.

It was agreed that a Risk Assessment Champion should be added, which would be delegated for officers to arrange.

RESOLVED

That the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 as set out in Appendix A is approved by the Standards and Governance Committee:

a) Members acknowledge that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the Framework 2016; and

b) The approved AGS to be included into the Annual Statement of Accounts to meet the Authority's statutory requirement.

112. ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2019/20

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Fire Officer (item 6 in the minute book) regarding the Annual Statement of Assurance, a document required by the National Framework for Fire and Rescue (2018) to provide assurance to local communities and government on financial, governance and operational matters.

The document was reviewed by Committee every year and its aim was to provide to the public an overview of what had been done and how as clearly as possible.

This year it included a prefaced statement around the pandemic and the summary on Page 119 of the pack showed that everything was 'OK' or 'Adequate' with some learning to be taken away around operational incidents.

The Chairman thanked officers for their work on behalf of the Committee.

RESOLVED

The Annual Assurance Statement for 2019/20 was approved by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority Standards and Governance Committee.

113. HMICFRS 2018/19 ACTION PLAN AND 2020 INSPECTION UPDATE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Fire Officer (item 11 in the minute book), which provided an overview of the progress that the Service had made in respect of the Action Plan resulting from the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection Report, which was published in December 2018.

The report had been reviewed several times by Committee and 41 actions had now been closed with 95-100% closure overall and significant progress being made against improvement points.

Benchmarking had taken place against other Fire and Rescue Services, and it was good to compare common themes. Another inspection was anticipated following the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Committee thanked officers for their work with the Action Plan.

RESOLVED

The HFRA Standards and Governance Committee approved the closure of the HFRS HMICFRS Action Plan

114. **FIRE PENSION BOARD ANNUAL REPORT (2019/20)**

The Committee considered a report from the Chief Financial Officer (item 12 in the minute book), which summarised the work of the Board for the 2019/20 financial year in the exercise of its functions.

The officer summarised the history of the Board and the motivation behind it starting in 2015. The Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service had been very fortunate to have an Employment Pension Manager that has managed them across three organisations as a dedicated resource.

The Isle of Wight (IOW) had its own Pension Board, and it was anticipated the IOW would continue to have representation on a Pension Board under the Combined Fire Authority from April 2021. Further work would be done to see what other combined Authorities had done and how this would work best.

There continued to be difficulty in getting staff members to take an interest in pensions with only 29% looking at recently issued information. However, more work was being done than ever before and the Union was also involved to help push out information.

Members queried whether the Board was informed regarding Environmental, Social and Governance principles with investment, but there was no investment of a fund with the HFRA Pension Board. Firefighter Pension Schemes were notoriously complicated with five organisations that administered authorities stopping to look at Fire schemes.

Thanks were passed from the Committee to the Pension Board and to the officer for a complex and detailed report.

RESOLVED

The contents of this report were received and noted by the Standards and Governance Committee

Chairman,