

# Public Document Pack



## Members of the Cheshire Fire Authority

Dear Member

Please find enclosed documents:

**1I**                    **Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee**                    (Pages 3 - 12)

These minutes contain recommendations concerned with:

Item 2 - Statement of Assurance 2023-24

The draft Statement of Assurance 2023-24 was not amended by the Committee; **the version in the Agenda Pack is recommended for approval.**

Item 3 – Member Champions Arrangements

**It is recommended that the current Member Champion arrangements from 2023-24 be carried forward into 2024-25 (see attached Report and Table in Appendix 1 – page 11 of this supplemental pack).**

Note: The other recommendations, e.g. related to the Constitution, Financial Regulation and Members' Code of Conduct will all be taken forward to the Fire Authority meeting in June.

**1J**                    **Minutes of Audit Committee**                    (Pages 13 - 18)

To receive, for information, the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Donna Linton

Governance and Corporate Planning Manager

This page is intentionally left blank



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 17 April 2024 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Rob Polhill (Chair), Brian Gallagher, Peter Walker, Peter Wheeler and independent (non-elected) member Derek Barnett

**1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**A Recording of Meeting**

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

**B Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sherin Akhtar, Rachel Bailey and David Brown.

**C Declarations of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

**D Minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee**

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.**

**2 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2023-24**

The Director of Governance introduced the report which provided Members with an opportunity to review the draft Statement of Assurance for 2023-24. He explained that the document was produced annually as one of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. It was noted that some information needed to be added once it had been finalised, e.g. the auditors' opinions.

**RECOMMENDED: That**

**[1] the draft Statement of Assurance be approved by the Fire Authority.**

**3 REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPION ARRANGEMENTS**

The Director of Governance introduced the report which allowed Members to consider the Member Champions arrangements and make a recommendation to the Fire Authority. It was noted that progress had been made since the last time the

Member Champions arrangements had been considered. However, some roles still needed further work.

A Member commented that they found the information provided at the Member Planning Day on Member Champion activity to be useful. It was hoped that the reporting could be standardised across the roles.

**RECOMMENDED: That**

**[1] the Fire Authority continue with the existing arrangements for the Member Champions in 2024-25 with a view to further develop some roles.**

**4 FIRE AUTHORITY CONSTITUTION - REVIEW (PART THREE)**

The Director of Governance introduced the report which enabled Members to consider changes to the Fire Authority's Constitution for recommendation to the Fire Authority. The report considered Section 4, Procedural Matters and Section 11, Scheme of Delegation (Powers of Officers).

He highlighted Appendix 1 which contained the revised version of the Procedural Matters section. The revisions included clarification of some areas and updates to allow actions by electronic means. Significant changes were highlighted in yellow.

Members were also drawn to Appendix 2 which contained the revised version of the Scheme of Delegation. The changes included the realignment of some responsibilities and the combination of some activities which now sat with the full time Treasurer position. The Director of Governance advised that officers would be observing the progression of the White Paper on Fire Reform to determine whether further changes would be needed, e.g. to the responsibilities of the Fire Authority given the debate about the Chief Fire Officer operational independence.

Members noted that transparency between both appendices and thanked officers for their clarity.

**RECOMMENDED: That**

**[1] Sections 4 and 11 of the Constitution, as appended to the report, be approved by the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (along with the rest of the Constitution).**

**5 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

The Treasurer introduced the report which notified Members that the Financial Regulations had been reviewed by officers. He advised that there were no changes to the document attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

**RECOMMENDED: That**

- [1] the Financial Regulations be adopted by the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (along with the rest of the Constitution).**

**6 ANNUAL REVIEW OF MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Director of Governance introduced the report which allowed Members to consider whether there should be any changes to the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code). He advised there had been no updates to the national code produced by the Local Government Association. Therefore, he did not propose any changes to the Code.

**RECOMMENDED: That**

- [1] the Members' Code of Conduct be approved by the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 (along with the rest of the Constitution).**

This page is intentionally left blank

# CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

**MEETING OF:** GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE  
**DATE:** 17<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2024  
**REPORT OF:** DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE  
**AUTHOR:** ANDREW LEADBETTER

---

**SUBJECT:** MEMBER CHAMPIONS ARRANGEMENTS

---

## Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to consider the Member Champions arrangements and make a recommendation to the Fire Authority.

## Recommended: That

- [1] the Member Champions arrangements for 2024-25 include the roles that are contained in the Table in Appendix 1 to the report.

## Background

2. The Governance and Constitution Committee completed a review of the Member Champion roles during 2021-22, following the observations of the Independent Reviewer during her review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.
3. During the initial review of the Member Champion arrangements the Committee came to the following conclusions:
  - Not clear why there are so many Member Champion roles
  - Need to clarify expectations
  - Must be quantifiable benefit or the roles can be removed
  - Requirement for some kind of annual report
4. The Committee decided at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 to recommend to the Fire Authority that it continue with the existing Member Champion arrangements and introduce a requirement for a role profile that would include the following information:
  - An overview of each role;
  - Lead officer contact details;
  - Activities associated with the role such as meeting and event attendance;

- Training and development opportunities; and
  - How the activities of the champion will be communicated.
5. The Committee considered the new arrangements in April 2023 after 12 months of operation and agreed that the current arrangements would continue with the addition of a requirement for the Member Champions to report annually about their activities.

## Information

6. The Member Champions arrangements have continued during 2023-24. The arrangements were further considered by Members at their Planning Day last month. A table summarising the activities associated with the Member Champion roles was provided to Members at the Planning Day. It had been created from information supplied by the Member Champions.

7. It is fair to say that the submissions from the Member Champions about their respective roles varied significantly in length and detail, with a broad range of levels of engagement and activity. The Director of Governance did, however, make the point that overall the Member Champions arrangements added value and did so at minimal cost. He also felt that progress had been made in developing some of the roles that required it during 2023-24, with just a few that needed further work.

8. The following paragraphs summarise the comments made during the discussion at the Member Planning Day.

Some Member Champion roles are aligned to other roles, e.g. chair of a committee/board. Arguably, the Member Champion designation adds little and could be removed.

Significantly less than half of the Member Champions are paid any allowance for fulfilling the role (because they already receive another special responsibility allowance that is greater than the allowance attributed to the Member Champion role).

There seemed to be justification for the Member Champions arrangements to continue in 2024-25, acknowledging the need to continue to develop some of the roles.

9. The Member Champion roles which are intended to be appointed to for 2024-25 are listed in the Table in Appendix 1 to this report.
10. The Member Training and Development Group also discussed the Member Champions arrangements during its meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024. It was suggested that a template be produced by officers for Member Champions to complete in order to standardise the content of the submissions that they are expected to prepare and submit.



## **Financial Implications**

11. There are currently 18 Members appointed to a Member Champion role. Member Champions receive a special responsibility allowance which currently stands at £606.84. The funding for Member Champion roles is met through the existing budget for members' allowances.
12. It should be noted that many Member Champions do not receive this allowance, because they already receive another special responsibility allowance, which is higher than the Member Champion allowance and only the higher allowance is paid. Only seven of the 18 Member Champions were paid an allowance during 2023-24. The total cost in 2023-24 is around £4,500.

## **Legal Implications**

13. There is no legal requirement to appoint Member Champions.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

14. There are no equality and diversity implications associated with this report.

## **Environmental Implications**

15. There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING  
MANAGER**

**TEL [01606] 868804**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE**

This page is intentionally left blank

**MEMBER CHAMPION ROLES 2023-24**

<b>Equality and Diversity (2 Members)</b> Sits on Equality Steering Group
<b>Health and Safety</b> Sits on Health and Safety Committee
<b>Information and ICT</b>
<b>Environment</b>
<b>Procurement</b>
<b>Finance (2 Members)</b>
<b>Older People</b>
<b>Young People</b>
<b>Performance Management</b>
<b>Commercial/Business Risk Reduction</b>
<b>Industrial Relations (JCC Chair)</b>
<b>Road Safety</b>
<b>Pensions (Local Pension Board Chair)</b>
<b>Sprinklers</b>
<b>Rural</b>
<b>Mental Health</b>

This page is intentionally left blank



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 17 April 2024 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am**

**PRESENT:**

**Members:**

Councillor Brian Gallagher,  
Councillor Peter Wheeler  
Suzanne Horrill, Independent Audit Committee Member

**Internal Auditor:**

Charles Black, Merseyside Internal Audit Agency (MIAA)

**Officers:**

Andrew Leadbetter, Director of Governance  
James Cunningham, Treasurer  
Chris Astall, Project and Risk Officer  
Emilie Salkeld, Governance Officer

**1a RECORDING OF MEETING**

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio recorded.

**1b APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sherin Akhtar and Rachel Bailey.

**1c DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

**1d MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

The Treasurer confirmed that MIAA had now been appointed as the internal auditor.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Audit Committee held on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.**

**1e ACTION TRACKER OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

The Director of Governance and the Treasurer provided brief additional updates.

It was noted that the following actions could be closed:

**24<sup>th</sup> January 2024:**

**Item 3 – Annual Governance Statement – Progress Against Areas for Action 2023-24 (and 2022-23)**

**Item 10 – Any Other Business**

## **2 APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

The Treasurer introduced the report which provided an update to Members on the appointment of the external auditor. He advised that the Service had engaged Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) to secure its external auditor.

In August 2023, the PSAA had initially appointed Mazars as the external auditor for the Service for the following three statutory accounting years. However, the PSAA asked in February 2024 whether they could appoint a different auditor and proposed that Bishop Fleming be appointed.

The Treasurer pointed out that in light of the late appointment the usual preparatory work by the auditor had not taken place. It was highly likely that this would have an impact on the timing of the rest of the audit. Members raised concerns with regards; to the delay to the audit; the location of the new external auditor and their experience of working with a fire and rescue authority. It was suggested that officers explore alternative procurement options for the appointment of an external auditor in the future given the risk that the current landscape of public sector auditors does not improve.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the report be noted and risk to the timely delivery of the audit work be acknowledged;**
- [2] officers to explore alternative procurement options for the future of the external auditor.**

## **3 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT**

The Internal Auditor introduced the report which provided an update on progress against the 2023-24 Internal Audit Plan. It was reported that the Risk Management Core Controls and Key Financial Transactions Processing Controls reviews were finalised and included within the agenda pack. However, the IT Asset Management Review was still in draft form as the auditor was awaiting the management response. The delay in finalising the audit review had been discussed by the auditor and management.

**RESOLVED: That**

- [1] the Internal Audit – Progress Report 2023-24 be noted.**

#### **4 RISK MANAGEMENT - CORE CONTROLS REVIEW ASSIGNMENT REPORT**

The Internal Auditor presented the Risk Management – Core Controls Review report. It was noted that there was only one low risk recommendation; the Service to consider producing a risk appetite as per best practice within the sector.

Members held a discussion on the term ‘risk appetite’ and whether it was applicable to the Service given that the organisation typically faces a lot of risks in a variety of settings. It was concluded that risk appetite was part of various organisational processes, but the Project and Risk Officer was asked to consider further the point raised on defining an organisational risk appetite.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Risk Management – Core Controls Review Assignment report be noted.**

#### **5 KEY FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONAL PROCESSING CONTROLS REVIEW ASSIGNMENT REPORT**

The Internal Auditor presented the Key Financial Transactional Processing Controls Review Assignment report. He advised that substantial assurance had been given with two medium risk recommendations and two low risk recommendations.

A Member raised concerns with the recommendation relating to the aged debt policy and queried whether the Service should consider a further review into the HR leavers arrangements. The Treasurer assured Members that the debt incurred was very small and that most cases were captured, with few debts written off. However, further work would be done to minimise staff related debts when the financial system was replaced.

A Member queried how a member of staff was able to process a journal entry above their maximum approval limit. The Treasurer had advised that the member of staff had detected an incorrect figure and promptly rectified the error with an appropriate journal entry. The member of staff had effectively been acting up in role but the change in authority level had not been correctly recorded. However, a new financial system is being considered and prevent controls on approval and authority levels will be included.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Key Financial Transactional Processing Controls Review report be noted.**

#### **6 DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT AND HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT OPINION 2023-24**

The Internal Auditor introduced the report which summarised the internal audit activity and outputs during 2023-24 and provided the Head of Internal Audit Opinion. It was noted that Substantial Assurance was given. However, the Head of Internal

Audit Opinion was still in draft form until the IT Asset Management audit report could be finalised. It was not expected to impact upon the assurance level.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the draft Internal Audit Annual Report and Head of Internal Audit Opinion 2023-24 be noted.**

## **7 INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER**

The Internal Auditor briefly introduced the Internal Audit Charter. The Committee was asked to note the Charter.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Internal Audit Charter be noted.**

## **8 DRAFT INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024-25**

The Internal Auditor introduced the report which asked Members to consider the draft Internal Audit Annual Plan 2024-25 (the Plan). The Plan was created in consultation with the Treasurer and linked to the Service's priorities and risks.

A Member queried whether the third party assurance from the Pension provider was included in the Plan. It was confirmed that the review of HR, Payroll and Pensions was scheduled for 2026-27. However, the Treasurer discussed the issue with pensions was related to funding as opposed to calculation of employer contributions.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Internal Audit Annual Plan 2024-25 be approved.**

## **9 ANNUAL RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT 2023-24**

The Project and Risk Officer introduced the report which provided Members with a summary of risk management activity during 2023-24. She reminded Members that scrutiny of risk was now undertaken by the Risk Management Group which met quarterly and was chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

Members noted that the report was transparent and clear to read. A Member queried what horizon scanning process the Service implemented. The Project and Risk Officer advised that a PESTLEO analysis is conducted annually and reported to Members. Horizon scanning is also discussed at the Risk Management Group.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Annual Risk Management Report 2023-24 be noted.**



## **10 REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

The Treasurer introduced the document which summarised the Authority's Strategic Risk Register. He provided an update on each risk included within the table which had previously been reported to the Risk Management Group for consideration at its meeting on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

Members noted the risks relating to the station modernisation programme and queried how the Service intended to fund the programme. The Treasurer advised that the Service would continue funding the programme by a mix of capital reserves, the sale of assets and Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) debt. Members were reassured that the fire stations covered in the programme would maintain response coverage and be fully operational during the construction works.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Review of the Strategic Risk Register be noted.**

## **11 AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Director of Governance introduced the report which allowed the Committee to agree the format of the Annual Report; provide officers with instructions about the content of the Annual Report; and determined how the Annual Report would be presented to the Fire Authority.

He drew Members' attention to Appendix 2 within the report which provided a self-assessment to assist Members when considering the effectiveness of the Audit Committee. Members had copies of the self-assessment form.

Members felt that within its first year of operation, the Audit Committee had achieved a substantial compliance level against the good practice questions posed in Appendix 2. The Committee was content with the format of the Annual Report and would leave it to the officers to develop the content.

The independent audit member suggested that the post-meeting opportunity for Members to discuss matters in private with the auditors should be documented. To this end, in future, the Governance Officer would be asked to remain when the other officers had left the meeting room.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the format of the Audit Committee Annual Report be written as suggested within the report;**

**[2] the content of the Audit Committee Annual Report be written as suggested within the report; and**

**[3] the Chair of the Audit Committee presented the Audit Committee Annual Report to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June**

**2024.**

**12 DRAFT AUDIT COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN 2024-25**

Members noted the table which included items which had been identified/ agreed to date.

**RESOLVED: That**

**[1] the Audit Committee Forward Plan 2024-25 be approved.**