



**Wednesday,
27 April 2022
10.30 am**

**Meeting of
Cheshire Fire Authority
Sadler Road
Winsford
CW7 2FQ**

Contact Officer:
Donna Linton
Democratic Services

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Cheshire Fire Authority

Notes for Members of the Public

Attendance at Meetings

The Cheshire Fire Authority welcomes and encourages members of the public to be at its meetings and Committees. You are requested to remain quiet whilst the meeting is taking place and to enter and leave the meeting room as quickly and quietly as possible.

All meetings of the Authority are held at the Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford. If you plan to attend please report first to the Reception Desk where you will be asked to sign in and will be given a visitors pass. You should return your pass to the Reception Desk when you leave the building. There are some car parking spaces available on site for visitors at the front of the building. Please do not park in spaces reserved for Fire Service personnel.

If you feel there might be particular problems with access to the building or car parking please contact the Reception Desk at Sadler Road Winsford Tel (01606) 868700.

Questions by Electors

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Access to Information

Copies of the Agenda will be available at the meeting. A copy can also be obtained from the contact officer named on the front of the Agenda. Alternatively, the Agenda and individual reports are available on the Authority's website (www.cheshirefire.gov.uk)

The Agenda is usually divided into two parts. Most business is dealt with in the first part which is open to the public. On some occasions some business may need to be considered in the second part of the agenda, in private session. There are limited reasons which allow this to take place, e.g. as confidential information is being considered about an individual, or commercial information is being discussed.

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MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

WEDNESDAY, 27 APRIL 2022

Time : 10.30 am

Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ

AGENDA

PART 1 - BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1A Recording of Meeting

Members are reminded that this meeting will be audio-recorded.

1B Apologies for Absence

1C Chair's Announcements

To receive any announcements that the Chair wishes to make prior to the commencement of the formal business of the meeting.

1D Declaration of Members' Interests

Members are reminded to disclose any interests that are relevant to any item on the Agenda.

1E Questions from Members of the Public

To receive any questions submitted, in accordance with procedure rules 4.47 to 4.54 by members of the public within the area covered by the Fire Authority.

1F Minutes of Fire Authority

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting held on 9th February 2022.

(Pages 5 - 10)

1G Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee

To receive, for information, the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee meeting held on 2nd March 2022.

(Pages 11 - 16)

1H Minutes of Staffing Committee

To receive, for information, the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 21st March 2022.

(Pages 17 - 20)

1I Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee

To receive, for information, the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee meeting held on 30th March 2022.

(Pages 21 - 24)

- 1J Notes of the Risk Management Board** (Pages 25 - 32)
To receive, for information, the notes of the Risk Management Board meeting held on 15th March 2022.
- 1K Notes of the Member Training and Development Group** (Pages 33 - 36)
To receive, for information, the notes of the Member Training and Development Group meeting held on 5th April 2022.
- 1L Urgent Business to be determined between Fire Authority Meetings** (Pages 37 - 38)

Donation of vehicles and equipment to support firefighters in the Ukraine

An item of business was considered to be sufficiently urgent that it could not wait until this meeting. It was determined using the 'urgency procedure' contained in paragraphs 4.87 – 4.89 of the Constitution. The form that was produced is attached to the Agenda Sheet. The Chair and Group Spokespersons all supported the action.

ITEMS REQUIRING DISCUSSION / DECISION

- 2 People Strategy 2022-2025** (Pages 39 - 66)
- 3 External Audit Plan for 2021-22** (Pages 67 - 122)
- 4 Internal Audit Plan 2022-23** (Pages 123 - 132)
- 5 Creation of an Audit Committee** (Pages 133 - 142)
- 6 Statement of Assurance 2021-22** (Pages 143 - 164)
- 7 Review of Member Champion Arrangements** (Pages 165 - 168)

PART 2 - BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

NONE



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 9th February 2022 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors Bob Rudd (Chair), Stef Nelson, Rachel Bailey, Michael Beanland, Mike Biggin, David Brown, Razia Daniels, Martyn Delaney, Phil Eastty, Brian Gallagher, Phil Harris, Jill Houlbrook, Marilyn Houston, Gina Lewis, Nick Mannion, Rob Moreton, Karen Mundry, James Nicholas, Stuart Parker, Rob Polhill, Peter Wheeler and Norman Wright

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 Jonathan Parry.

C Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included activities carried out by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service during the Coronavirus pandemic and details of Authority achievements and events Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chair advised that on 21st January 2022 he and Councillor Rachel Bailey (Cheshire East Sprinkler Champion) had attended a media event with Onward Housing to celebrate the newly completed sprinkler installations at three high-rise blocks of flats in Handforth, Cheshire East.

Members had a detailed discussion on promoting the installation of sprinkler systems in public buildings (specifically schools) and new build residential and commercial properties. Members agreed that the four unitary authorities needed to work together to promote the implementation of sprinkler systems and that the Fire Authority would put together a cross-party Motion to submit to each of the unitary authorities.

The Chair confirmed that he would also write a joint letter with the Member Champion for Sprinklers and Members of the Sprinkler Group to the four unitary authorities and local MPs promoting the installation of sprinkler systems and advising how the technology had changed.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive advised that further information on the national work taking place on sprinkler systems and the proposed wording for a Motion would be discussed in further detail at the next Member Planning Day in April 2022.

D Declaration of Members' Interests

The Chair stated that he understood that Members were like him likely to have a disclosable pecuniary interest in Item 5 – Draft Budget 2022-23: Council Tax Precept; Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-27. All Members indicated that they did. A dispensation had been granted to Members to allow them to take part in the debate and vote on the item.

E Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions submitted.

F Minutes of Fire Authority

The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that the issues mentioned in Minute 8 – Ethical Procurement Strategy and Social Value Policy were discussed with Members at the Planning Day on 14th January 2022. As a result of the discussion a number of deletions/additions were proposed for the Ethical Procurement Strategy as detailed on the agenda front sheet.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 8th December 2021 be approved as a correct record;**
- [2] the Ethical Procurement Strategy including the deletions/additions as detailed on the agenda front sheet be approved; and**

Note: No changes to the Social Value Policy were proposed.

G Minutes of Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 11th January 2022 be noted.

H Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee held on 24th January 2022 be noted.

I **Minutes of Estates and Property Committee**

The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that the Estates and Property Committee had made a recommendation to the Fire Authority that was to be considered at this meeting about the proposal to transition operations at Wilmslow Fire Station from the current nucleus duty system to a day crewed duty system.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the minutes of the Estates and Property Committee held on 24th January 2022 be noted; and

[2] delegated authority be given to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer to purchase nine properties in Wilmslow for day crewed housing subject to them consulting with the Chair of the Fire Authority.

Note: Decision [2] was made at the end of the meeting after the 2022-23 Annual Action Plan had been approved.

J **Notes of the Member Training and Development Group**

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Member Training and Development Group held on 18th January 2022 be noted.

2 **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022-23**

The Director of Transformation presented the report which sought approval to publish the Pay Policy Statement for 2022-23, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Members were advised that, under the Localism Act 2011, all local authorities were required to publish a pay policy statement on an annual basis. The document set out the Authority's policies for the financial year relating to the remuneration of its Chief Officers, the remuneration of its lowest paid employees, and the relationship between the pay of Chief Officers and that of other employees. The requirement was intended to increase transparency and accountability, and to give local people access to information to allow them to determine whether pay was appropriate.

Paragraphs 10-15 of the report provided an overview of changes to the Pay Policy Statement since last year. Changes included: increase in the employer contribution rates for the Firefighter Pension Scheme; the Living Wage being reviewed and adjusted every October; the publication of the fourth Gender Pay Gap Report; and reference to the public sector exit cap being removed.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Pay Policy Statement 2022-23, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and**
- [2] the Director of Transformation, in conjunction with the Director of Governance and Commissioning, be authorised to make any necessary in-year changes to the pay Policy Statement as necessitated by new legislation or guidance.**

3 2022-2023 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

The Engagement and Public Affairs Manager presented a report which detailed feedback received as a result of the consultation activity concerned with the draft 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan and sought approval of the 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The draft Plan was developed to serve as a mid-point review of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that was approved by the Authority in July 2020.

Members were reminded that the Authority was required to consult on its precept for the forthcoming financial year. A 1.99% increase in the Authority's precept for 2022-23 had been consulted upon.

Members had a discussion on the outcomes of the consultation feedback and commented that the majority of respondents owned their own home with a small number living in social rented/private rented properties. In response, the Engagement and Public Affairs Manager advised that due to the Covid restrictions the consultation had been conducted through online methods and it was the intention that for the next consultation process there would be more face-to-face interaction to engage more effectively. Further work would also be undertaken with the local resident groups and registered housing providers.

Members discussed water safety and how this could be improved across Cheshire by providing water safety advice to young people, improving signage and providing swimming lessons to children from deprived families. Officers advised that this would be explored further outside the meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- [1] the report be noted;**
- [2] the 2022-23 Annual Action Plan be approved; and**
- [3] the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive be authorised to make any final changes to the 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan prior to publication.**

4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-23

The Head of Finance presented a report that sought approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-23 (the Strategy). This was a requirement of guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the CIPFA Prudential Code. It also assisted the Authority in showing its compliance with requirements contained in the Local Government Act 2003.

The Strategy comprised of four main elements, namely:-

- Capital Expenditure Plans and Prudential Indicators
- Borrowing Strategy and Prudential Limits
- Annual Investment Strategy
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

The Head of Finance referred Members to Table 7, the operational boundary and Table 8, the authorised limit for external debt. These were the two key prudential indicators that set the maximum limit for external debt based on the capital programme and the current borrowing requirements. The authorised limit in Table 8 could not be exceeded.

A Member asked the Head of Finance whether borrowing arrangements involved organisations with ethical policies. In response, the Head of Finance confirmed that for any banking organisation the Authority utilised, security was the first and major concern, i.e the ability to get all funds back when required. However, the Authority currently invested in UK based organisations only and all major banks in the UK had some form of ethical, social and environmental policy

RESOLVED: That:

- [1] the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-23 be approved; and**
- [2] the Authority's Prudential Indicators including the Authorised Limit (paragraph 5.2.7 of the Strategy) be approved.**

5 DRAFT 2022-23 BUDGET; COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT; AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022-27

The Head of Finance presented a report that sought Members' approval for the Authority's budget for 2022-23, the Authority's precept, as required by law, for 2022-23 and its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022-27.

The Authority was required to approve its budget and set the council tax precept for the financial year commencing 1st April 2022. The Authority was required to take into account Government funding, precept regulations and organisational demands. This requirement was supported by the production of a MTFP with the annual budget forming the first year of the MTFP. The creation and maintenance of the MTFP was fundamental in promoting good financial planning and delivery of value for money.

The MTFP was Appendix 1 to the report.

Members had considered the Authority's financial position at their Planning Day on 14th January 2022 where they had the opportunity to challenge the assumptions and proposals being put forward by officers as part of the draft budget and MTFP.

The Head of Finance indicated that the report followed a similar format to those that had been presented in previous years.

The 2022-23 budget proposals were based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement as published on 16th December 2021. The Settlement included the Government's Funding Assessment and grant allocations for 2022-23 together with the Council Tax Referendum Principles that allowed for an increase in council tax of up to 2% without triggering a local referendum. An increase of 1.99% in the council tax was assumed; this would generate additional funding of £1,169k compared to 2021-22, based on the tax bases of Band D equivalent properties. When all elements of funding were included such as revenue support grant and business rate income the overall net revenue budget would increase by £384k compared to the previous year, including a 2022-23 one off Service Grant of £653k.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Medium Term Financial Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved;**
- [2] the Budget Requirement of £46.587m as set out in Table 1, paragraph 10 at the report be agreed, noting the adjustments for inflation, growth, one off items and savings as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report;**
- [3] the proposed council tax increase of 1.99% be approved and Band D council tax precept of £82.48 be set for 2022-23;**
- [4] the levels of council tax precept as set out in Table 2 paragraph 23 of the report be agreed;**
- [5] the proposed capital programme for 2022-23 set out in Table 3 paragraph 24 of the report together with its associated financing be approved;**
- [6] the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 3 of the report be approved;**
- [7] the Reserves Strategy set out in Appendix 4 of the report be approved;**
- [8] the Statement of Robustness of Estimates set out in Appendix 5 of the report be noted; and**
- [9] the Financial Health Targets as set out in paragraph 27 of the report be adopted.**



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 2nd March 2022 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am.

PRESENT: Councillors Phil Harris (Chair), Razia Daniels, Phil Eastty, Gina Lewis, James Nicholas, Peter Wheeler, Norman Wright 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 Jonathan Parry.

C Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations.

D Minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on Wednesday 24th November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 FINANCE REPORT - QUARTER 3, 2021-22

The Head of Finance introduced the report, which provided Members with a review of the Service's forecast financial outturn and reported on progress against 2021-22 capital projects. She drew Members attention to the underspend of £130k in Quarter 3, taking the cumulative underspend for 2021-22 to £147k.

She summarised elements of the report and referred Members to the Grey Book pay award of 1.5% and the newly agreed pay award for Green Book staff of 1.75% backdated to July 2021, payable from March 2022; and confirmed that good progress had been achieved with the capital programme.

A Member questioned if the Service had any financial exposure due to the war in Ukraine and the sanctions involving Russia. The Head of Finance confirmed that the Service did not.

A Member queried the cost to obtain scrap cars. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the cost was considered fair: the scrap cars had to be prepared before delivery e.g. drained of all liquids then transported to site and ultimately disposed of once the Service had finished with them.

RESOLVED: That Members

[1] note the forecast outturn position; and

[2] approved the movement in reserves set out in Appendix 2.

3 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 3, 2021-22

The Business Support Manager introduced the report, which provided an update on the Service's Quarter 3, 2021-22 performance for each of the Service's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

She drew Members attention to the Corporate Performance Scorecard and gave a more detailed description on: the Number of Deaths in Primary Fires; the Number of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) in Non-Domestic Premises; and the Thematic Inspections Completed by Operational Crews.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer talked through the On-call Availability section of the report, which detailed the cumulative availability of 60% against the target figure of 85%. He explained that the availability had been impacted by the loss of Crew and Watch Managers, whose skills took time to replace. An on-call performance meeting was taking place monthly chaired by AM Neil Griffiths, to actively manage the on-call availability with a view to improving performance.

A Member questioned the overall impact of the reduced on-call availability across the County and if the Fire Authority should be concerned. The Chief Fire Officer commented that in reality the on-call stations were used as resilience fire engines at incidents and were not generally the primary fire engine at the scene. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer added that there was a review being carried out looking at the entire on-call system and that this was a nationwide issue, not one restricted to Cheshire.

A Member requested the Covid sickness and isolation figures were split from non-Covid cases to gain a true picture. The Business Support Manager advised that the data could be split for the Quarter 4 report.

A Member requested information on the two fatalities that had occurred e.g. if there was any previous contact with the deceased and if so what was the outcome and if there was any external scrutiny in a Fatal Fire Review. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Fatal Fire Review was an internal investigation to try to understand the cause of the fire and determine any lessons to be learned for the Service. A Serious Case Review could be initiated if there were any issues found. This was an external investigation. The findings of fire investigations were not reported to the Fire Authority but it was agreed that a summary Fatal Fire Reviews could be included in

future reports.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Performance Report – Quarter 3 2021-22 be noted.

PROGRAMME REPORT - QUARTER 3, 2021-22

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive provided Members with an update on the Service's programmes and projects (including those contained within the Authority's annual IRMP action plan). He highlighted the following:

- The Crewe Fire Station project will imminently move into the delivery phase, Work on site will begin in the next few months;
- A plan for the drone project was being produced with the latest information. Drone technology had improved and the costs had reduced. It was acknowledged that the Service requires the capability;
- The M365 project was behind schedule due to several technical issues found in the testing. Lessons from the technical pilot would inform the full roll-out;
- A closedown report would be issued for the project that saw the creation of an in-house Communication and Engagement Department. Thanks were expressed to the key people in successfully completing the project;
- The High Reach Fire Engine was now operational and was used to great effect at two incidents within the last week;
- The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), was a national project that was experiencing major delays. The red status would not change until there was progress made on a national level; and
- The project to create a Road Safety Strategy Plan for Cheshire was on amber status due to delays engaging partners. The Service would continue to work with partners to progress this project.

A Member commented that the Sprinkler Campaign was paying dividends with an occupant in a flat being saved last week by sprinklers going off when a fire was started by a faulty e-bike charger.

A Member questioned if the Service was continuing to support the vaccination programme and if the associated costs had been recouped. The Chief Fire Officer commented that the vaccination campaign was still being supported, however, the work was tailing off. He advised that the costs were recovered from the NHS. He thanked SM Andy Gray for coordinating the work.

A Member noted the rise in social isolation, especially in the older generation. The Chief Fire Officer commented that it was the role of the advocates to visit community centres and groups to engage with individuals and refer them for further support. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer added that pre-Covid community groups were invited onto the fire stations and that this activity would be restarted.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Programme Report – Quarter 3 2021-22 be noted.

5 INTERNAL AUDIT - QUARTER 3, 2021-22 PROGRESS REPORT

Anne-Marie Harrop (the Auditor), a representative from Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) was in attendance to present the Internal Audit Quarter 3 Progress Report.

She provided Members with a brief overview of the progress made on:

- Financial Systems was given Substantial Assurance. One medium level risk recommendation was agreed in respect of budget setting;
- Health and Wellbeing was given Substantial Assurance;
- National Fraud Initiative led to a position statement that was issued in Dec 2021 following evaluation of the potential data matches; and
- Reviews into Cyber and Working Time Arrangements were ongoing.

The Audit Plan was on track and no concerns were brought to Members' attention.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Internal Audit - Quarter 3, 2021-22 Progress Report be noted.

6 ANNUAL BONFIRE REPORT 2021

The Deliberate Fire Reduction and Road Safety Manager introduced the report, which summarised the preventative and operational activities of the Service and partners during the bonfire period (24th October 2020 to 7th November 2021).

He advised that the Service attended 55 Small Deliberate Fires during the 2021 bonfire period, in comparison to 41 Small Deliberate Fires during the 2020 bonfire period (which occurred when Covid-19 restrictions were in place).

The Deliberate Fire Reduction and Road Safety Manager outlined how the Service had actively promoted safety messages about bonfire safety across Cheshire. He noted that two cases of missiles thrown at fire crews had occurred and that a direct link with Cheshire Police enabled swift assistance to the fire crews.

A Member questioned if the Service visits non-organised bonfires. The Deliberate Fire Reduction and Road Safety Manager confirmed that crews may visit informal resident's bonfires and the incident commander makes a risk assessment on-site and takes appropriate action if required.

A Member questioned why the figures for Cheshire East were different to the rest of the county. The Deliberate Fire Reduction and Road Safety Manager confirmed that this had been historically the case. It was presumed that this was because Cheshire East was a more rural part of the county.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Bonfire Report 2021 including the recommendations be noted.

7 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION SIX-MONTH UPDATE, MARCH 2022

The Equality and Inclusion Officer introduced the report, which provided an update about the key areas of focus and accomplishments as well as priorities for the next 6 months. He highlighted the following:

- Cheshire ranks fourth out of 45 services for gender equality in operational roles;
- Staff networks had played key roles in promoting positive action within the Service. The Race Equality and Cultural Heritage (REACH) network would play a significant role in organising AFSA's Winter Conference in November. The Limitless women's network had progressed work on buddying, maternity, menopause and appearance. The Firepride LGBT+ network hosted the third 'Proud to Provide' conference which was delivered virtually to great success;
- Equality Impact Assessment training workshops had been delivered to more than 100 staff over the past six months; and
- The Service had been ranked 2nd in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. Whilst this was a great achievement the feedback from the submission had been reviewed and an action plan developed with the intention of progressing areas of improvement that had been highlighted.

A Member questioned how the percentage of BAME recruits compared with the ethnic percentage for Cheshire. The Equality and Inclusion Officer advised that the Service was above the county average. However, this was not a reason for complacency because staff were recruited from throughout the UK.

A Member questioned if the Service had any staff who were transitioning and if so how they were supported. The Equality and Inclusion Officer advised that the Service do have staff who identified as trans and they were supported by their managers and HR. All employees also undertake a Trans Awareness course.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Six-Month Update, March 2022 Report be noted.

8 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT

The Environment and Sustainability Lead introduced the report, which provided an update on the progress that was being made by the Service concerning the environment and climate change agenda.

He advised that the Service was well ahead of expectation for the reduction in carbon emissions. He highlighted the following:

- The building modernisation programme had enabled green technologies to ensure buildings were energy efficient;
- The biomass boiler at the Training Centre was carbon neutral, saving carbon emissions with a fuel cost (certified UK wood pellets) of £20,000;
- Electric vehicles were being added into the fleet helping to reduce emissions; and
- Carbon literacy training was being rolled out to staff and Environmental Impact Assessments were to become embedded within policies and proposals.

A Member questioned if there was space for a solar field on any of the Services sites. The Lead advised that a solar field would need to generate 1 megawatt of energy and the Service did not have a large enough site. There was also a restriction on the amount of energy that could be sold back to the grid. It was, therefore, more realistic for the Service to concentrate on energy that could be produced, stored in batteries and used on site.

A Member questioned if carbon sequestration was an option rather than carbon removal. The Lead advised that it was possible to use a carbon offset organisation, but, this was seen as 'Green Washing' and was a reputational danger. There were other ways such as adding biodiversity and tree planting, and this was being looked at by an environment sub-group.

A Member questioned if hydrogen-powered vehicles were considered for the larger fleet appliances. The Lead advised that they may be in the future, however, the infrastructure needs to be in place first.

RESOLVED: THAT

[1] the Environment and Climate Change Report be noted.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The table included those items that had been identified/agreed to date.

Members requested that an Environment and Climate Change update be presented every 6 months.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Forward Work Programme be noted.



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE held on Monday, 21 March 2022 at Fire Conference Room - Fire Service HQ, Clemonds Hey, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 2UA at 12.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Bob Rudd (Chair), Michael Beanland, Stuart Parker and Peter Wheeler

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that this meeting would be audio recorded.

B Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mike Biggin, Stef Nelson and Karen Mundry.

C Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

D Minutes of the Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 11th January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 PEOPLE STRATEGY 2022-2025

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Transformation that presented the draft People Strategy 2022-2025. The intention was to present the final draft of the Strategy to the Fire Authority on 27th April 2022 for consideration and approval.

The previous People Strategy was structured around the service's established "Steps Framework" and assigned priorities and objectives into three key stages of employment: Step In, Step Forward and Step Up. The new People Strategy had maintained a similar approach but the Steps Framework had been updated and extended to include a fourth stage "Step Away" which recognised the challenges and ongoing work associated with an ageing workforce. The Strategy had also been updated to reflect the new core values and referenced both the internal and external drivers that shape the organisation's people priorities.

RECOMMENDED: That

[1] the People Strategy 2022-2025 be approved by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 27th April 2022.

3 2021 STAFF SURVEY ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Transformation that provided an update on progress with the development of an action plan following the 2021 staff survey.

Members were advised that the 2021 survey was the seventh exercise that had taken place and had been undertaken by an independent provider 'People Insight'. The online survey ran for six weeks between 18th October and 26th November 2021 and had received an overall response rate of 59%.

The survey was used to gauge the Service's engagement score and the overall score for the Service this time was 85%. This was the highest engagement score that the Service had achieved in a staff survey and demonstrated a 7% improvement on the previous survey. The 2021 survey showed results improving across each of the themes, however, there was a slight decline in the scores compared to the 2019 survey for Immediate Managers and Wellbeing. It was reported that there were a range of perceptions regarding wellbeing, with a significant difference in scoring between various roles and departments within the organisation.

Corporate Staff Survey Action Plans and the Departmental Staff Survey Action Plans were currently being developed and would be provided for staff to view once they were finalised. Progress against the plans would be monitored and a further update would be provided to Members in due course.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be noted.

4 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT DEPARTMENT UPDATE

The Director of Transformation provided an update on the completion of the project to re-establish an in-house Communications and Engagement department. Members were advised that:-

- the Head of Communications and Engagement had been appointed at the Staffing Committee on 11th January 2022 and was now in post;
- transition of the communications team from Joint Corporate Services to the new in-house Communications and Engagement Department took place on 1st February 2022 – seven posts through the 'expression of interest' process and one by way of TUPE transfer;
- the Engagement and Public Affairs Manager and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor had moved into the Communications and Engagement department;

- the Head of Communications and Engagement had revisited the proposal to recruit a part-time Internal Communications Officer and living wage Communications Apprentice. The plan was to create one full time Level 4 Internal Communications Apprentice role, to be advertised in due course; and
- the Communications and Engagement department had recently had a two day teambuilding and development session which focussed on building the new communications and engagement strategy.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the update be noted.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 30 March 2022 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors Rob Polhill (Chair), Nick Mannion, Rachel Bailey, David Brown 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 Councillors Mike Biggin, Martyn Delaney and Brian Gallagher.

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 10th November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020-21 ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which presented a progress update on the Annual Governance Statement 2020-21 Action Plan.

Members praised all staff for their work throughout the Coronavirus Pandemic.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Governance Statement 2020-21 Action Plan Update be noted.

3 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2021-22

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which provided Members with an opportunity to review the draft Statement of Assurance

for 2021-22. Members commented that the document was clear, concise and accessible to the public.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the draft Statement of Assurance be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval, at the appropriate time.

4 REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPION ARRANGEMENTS

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which allowed Members to consider the conclusion of the Review of the Member Champion Arrangements and make a recommendation to the Fire Authority. He advised that the report summarised the outcome of the Review, taking into consideration the views of Members that were made during the Member Planning Day on 14th January 2022.

Members noted paragraphs 9 to 11 within the report which set out the proposals for the Member Champion arrangements in 2022-23. Members welcomed the proposals and agreed that another report about the effectiveness of the arrangements should be submitted in April 2023.

Members discussed a range of ways that Members could promote the work that they had carried out in their Member Champion roles.

RECOMMENDED: That

[1] the Fire Authority continue with the existing Member Champion arrangements for 2022-23 with the introduction of the requirements outlined in paragraphs 9 – 11 within the report.

5 EXTERNAL AUDITOR RECOMMENDATION - AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Director of Governance and Commissioning introduced the report which allowed Members to consider a suitable response to the External Auditor's recommendation concerned with the creation of an audit committee with an independent member. Members were referred to Appendix 1; the recommendation made by the External Auditor.

Members welcomed the recommendation from the External Auditor. Following discussion a number of decisions were made, which should be recommended to the Fire Authority. These were: that an audit committee be created with the responsibilities set out in paragraph 5 of the report; that the audit committee would have a membership of four elected Members drawn from the Governance and Constitution Committee and one independent audit member; and that the Governance and Constitution Committee would arrange for and make the appointment of the independent audit member.

The Director of Governance and Commissioning explained that the Fire Authority would consider the matter at its next meeting and the feedback from the committee would be included in its report.

RECOMMENDED: That

- [1] the Fire Authority create an audit committee with the responsibilities set out in paragraph 5 of the report;**
- [2] the membership of the audit committee consist of four elected Members drawn from the membership of the Governance and Constitution Committee, together with an independent audit member; and**
- [3] the Governance and Constitution Committee arrange for and make the appointment of the independent audit member.**

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD held on Tuesday, 15 March 2022 at Meeting Room 1 - Fire Service HQ, Winsford, Cheshire at 10.00 am

PRESENT:

Members:

Councillor Stef Nelson

Councillor Stuart Parker

Auditor:

Anne-Marie Harrop, Mersey Internal Audit Agency

Officers:

Alex Waller (Chair), Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Andrew Leadbetter, Director of Governance and Commissioning

Steve Barnes, Head of Operational Policy and Assurance

Lee Shears, Head of Prevention and Protection

Louise Willis, Planning, Performance and Risk Manager

Chris Astall, Planning, Performance and Risk Officer

Joanne Cartledge, Planning, Performance and Risk Officer

Tony McCourt, Station Manager

Emilie Salkeld, Governance Officer

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Wendy Bebbington, Head of Finance

Neil McElroy, Group Manager

Tony O'Dwyer, Group Manager

2 NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes from the previous meeting on 12th October 2021 were presented to the Risk Management Board and the following comments and actions were noted:-

The Chair queried the timescale of retirees as quoted in the previous minutes. The Governance Officer was to clarify the timescales with the Director of Transformation.

The Head of Prevention and Protection provided a brief update on the commitment to install sprinklers by housing providers. He advised that 17 high rise buildings from a total of 21 across Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington have committed to retrofitting sprinklers. One more high rise building in Warrington was in the planning phase for the fitting sprinklers. Members praised the progress that the Protection team had made to secure the commitment by housing

providers to fit sprinklers.

The Chair confirmed that the Heads of Department had revised the wording around risk 2033 – Covid-19 and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer had updated the overarching risk mitigation. A Member queried whether consideration was given to a new variant discovered in China. The Chair explained that the Service's guidance was in line with Government advice and the Service had taken a risk adverse approach throughout.

The Head of Operational Policy and Assurance confirmed that a new risk had been entered on the departmental risk register to reflect the lack of capacity for driver training and assessment.

The Head of Prevention and Protection advised that the number of staff leaving the Protection department had been added to the departmental risk register. The current risk needed to be refined, mitigation documented and include a threshold to ensure there is enough competence within the team.

It was confirmed that risk 1008 – McCloud/Sergeant Judgement – Pension Case, had been given further detail to mitigate each element held within the risk.

3 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Planning, Performance and Risk team introduced the risk register and provided an update for each risk. The following observations were made: -

806 – ESCMP

It was noted that there had not been any confirmation from the Home Office on the detailed costs and funding arrangements for the programme. Therefore, the lack of detail meant that the risk could not be reduced.

The Head of Operational Policy and Assurance advised that the regional post had been removed. This meant that the feedback and communication between the North West and the Home Office was less clear.

376 – Fire in Iconic Heritage Building

The team advised that the risk was previously red and had been reduced to amber but there were no plans to reduce the risk further.

A Member queried whether the Service had considered historic buildings outside of Chester and requested that an update be brought to the next Risk Management Board meeting. The Head of Prevention and Protection advised that the Heritage Officer conducted his work across Cheshire.

The Heritage Officer was working with the Operational Policy and Assurance team on the large-scale operational exercise taking place on 9th May which would test the Service's capabilities if a fire broke out along the Chester Rows. Members were

invited to the event.

ACTION:

- [1] the Head of Prevention and Protection to produce a summary of the work of the Heritage Officer concerned with the heritage buildings across Cheshire be submitted to the next Risk Management Board meeting on 11th October 2022.**

2046 – Funding Uncertainty

The Planning, Performance and Risk Manager advised that the Service Management Team and the Fire Authority were aware of the financial situation.

995 – Fire Pensions – Increase in employers contributions to firefighter pensions and 1008 – McCloud/ Sergeant Judgement – Pension Case

The Board was assured that the all the financial risks relating to the two risks were covered in the strategic risk register.

2035 – Blue Light Collaboration

The Chair explained that following the recommendations from internal audit, the Joint Service Management Board (JSMB) had been established. The JSMB met quarterly to analyse performance against departmental plans. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Constable jointly chaired the JSMB.

The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that outstanding issues would be considered by the Blue Light Executive Board and progressed in the next few months.

2033 – Covid-19

The Planning, Performance and Risk Manager advised that some activities were not operating at full capacity, so the risk score remained at an amber level. The Chair requested that the risk be challenged as most departmental activity was now operating business as it would have pre-Covid.

2051 – External Audit Market

The risk was recommended for closure by the Head of Finance as an agreement had been made through the PSAA and the work was underway.

ACTION: That

- [2] Risk 2051 – External Audit Market be closed from the strategic risk register.**

4 OPERATIONAL AND CORPORATE SERVICES RISK MAP

The Planning, Performance and Risk team introduced the report which presented a high-level overview of the Service's organisational risk profile concentrating on the 'red' risks.

The Head of Prevention and Protection advised that a new risk had been created for the Prevention department to reflect the shortfall of fire protectors which could affect operations. He advised that risk was being mitigated by managing the number of safe and well visits due to be completed daily to catch up on the number of missed appointments due to Covid-19. The Prevention team had considered sourcing smoke detectors from another supplier. However, due to a component shortage, the cost of other smoke protectors was more expensive.

The Planning, Performance and Risk team advised that the HR Business Partner had provided an overview of organisational staffing levels after publication of the Risk Management Board agenda. The Board considered the most effective ways to report staffing levels. The Chair explained that operational staffing is reported quarterly to consider skills gaps and recruitment. The Head of Prevention and Protection explained that the Prevention department was undergoing a review following a shortfall of safety advocates.

The Chair noted the red risks which fell under Transformation. He requested that the Planning, Performance and Risk team rephrase the risk descriptions to accurately reflect the issues associated with the McCloud/Sergeant judgement.

The Planning, Performance and Risk Manager informed the Board that the risk score for Cybersecurity could increase as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Director of Governance and Commissioning advised that he was in regular contact with the IT department to with a view to mitigate the risk wherever possible. An exercise was recently conducted on weak passwords and further consideration was being given to the business continuity plans for working without IT.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Organisational and Corporate Services Risk Map be noted.

ACTION: That

[1] the Planning, Performance and Risk team rephrase the Transformation risk; and

[2] an update on the risks relating to Smoke Detectors and Cyber Security be submitted to the next meeting of the Risk Management Board.

5 RISKS BELOW THE THRESHOLD REPORT

The Planning, Performance and Risk team presented the report which highlighted the corporate risks that fell below the corporate risk threshold but which had the potential to escalate. The following observations were made: -

616 – Failure to maintain up to date operational risk information (SSRI)

The Head of Operational Policy and Assurance clarified the risk related mostly to being unable to attend business premises rather than being a problem with resource availability. He provided an update on the number of outstanding SSRIs completed and the Board agreed that the risk scoring should be reviewed to reflect the small number of outstanding visits.

853 – On Call Availability – Failure to maintain On Call availability

The Chair advised that there had been some issues with retention and significant recruitment activity was still being resolved. He stated that the Integrated Risk Management Plan includes a review of fire cover which would consider the future of the on call arrangements.

2053 – Consistent use of M365 and Risk Management Tools

The Director of Governance and Commissioning explained that the risk related to the way Microsoft 365 was to be deployed. It was hoped that support provided to the Project Manager by Information Compliance colleagues would help to mitigate the risk. He believed the Service was taking the correct measured approach to the implementation of Microsoft 365.

A query was raised about the reporting mechanism for the risk relating to firefighter pensions and whether it sat specifically on the Pension Board risk register. It was agreed that the risks should continue to be considered at the pension board but would sit of the strategic risk register to ensure there is awareness on the matters.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Risks Below the Threshold report be noted.

6 ANNUAL RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Planning, Performance and Risk team introduced the report which demonstrated the responsibilities and activities of the Risk Management Board throughout 2021-22. The report contained information on the Risk Management Process, Deep Dive reporting and Risk Management training. It was intended for submission to the next Performance and Overview Committee meeting.

The Board welcomed the report and the Chair thanked the Planning, Performance and Risk team for its work.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Risk Management Report be submitted to the next Performance and Overview Committee meeting.

7 RISK REGISTER DEEP DIVE: PRINCE'S TRUST

The Head of Prevention and Protection introduced the report which updated the Board on the issue of funding for the Prince's Trust programmes. He explained that the programmes had seen a reduction in income as fewer young people were being recruited and there was an overspend on the budget.

A Member queried whether there were any areas that frequently recruited less the necessary number of team members. The Head of Prevention and Protection advised there was no common geographic pattern of recruitment and that programme retention had been an issue in previous years.

The Head of Prevention and Protection advised that reviews were conducted if a team was run with less than the necessary participants.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Risk Register Deep Dive: Prince's Trust be noted.

8 ANNUAL REVIEW OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Head of Operational Policy and Assurance introduced the report which detailed the revised Crisis Management Plan. He advised that recent amendments included an update on the storage of flash drives and updated contact details.

The Board queried whether the Joint Services Heads of Department had oversight of the Crisis Management Plan. The Station Manager advised that the Joint Services Heads of Department were consulted during the revision and anyone with Resilience Direct had the ability to access the plan. A question was posed about the Joint Services Heads of Department being included during the crisis management exercise.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Annual Review of the Crisis Management Plan be noted.

9 POST COVID-19 REVIEW

The Head of Operational Policy and Assurance informed the Board that a review of the Service's response to the Coronavirus Pandemic was scheduled to take place during Autumn 2021. However, due to the new variant and imposed restrictions, the review was postponed. It was intended that the review would begin at the end of April 2022 focusing on chosen themes. The Board was advised that a report would be available at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That

[1] A report on the Post Covid-19 Review be submitted to the next meeting of the Risk Management Board.

10 TERMS OF REFERENCE - RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD 2022-23

The Terms of Reference for the Risk Management Board 2022-23 were presented to the Board for approval. The Board noted the document and no amendments were required.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Terms of Reference – Risk Management Board 2022-23 be approved.

11 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23

The Board discussed the proposed work programme for 2022-23. It was agreed that the work programme would be amended to include additional items as discussed during the meeting.

RESOLVED: That

[1] subject to the addition of the items highlighted during the meeting, the Work Programme 2022-23 be approved.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on Tuesday, 5 April 2022 at Remote Meeting via Skype at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors Gina Lewis (Chair), Karen Mundry and Stuart Parker and independent (non-elected) member Derek Barnett

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors David Brown and Rob Moreton.

2 NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That

[1] the notes for the meeting on Tuesday 18th January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

3 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2022-24 IMPLEMENTATION - QUARTERLY MONITORING

The Governance Officer presented the report on the Member Development Strategy 2022-24 Implementation - Quarterly Monitoring, updating Members on progress made against the Implementation Plan for the quarter. She provided an update for each of the objectives that were included in the report.

Objective 1 – Identity and prioritise Member training and development needs

It was reported that all actions associated with the Member Personal Development Reviews had been complete.

Objective 3 – Provision of an Annual Member Development Programme

Members were informed that a virtual Sprinkler training session had taken place on 16th February 2022. A tour of the Training Centre would take place as part of the Member Planning Day on 8th April 2022. Further discussion was held during Item 4 – Member Development Programme 2021-22 – Quarterly Monitoring.

Objective 4 – Delivery of a comprehensive and effective Induction process for new Members

Further discussion was held during Item 7 – Discussion Item – Proposals for 2022-23 Member Development and Induction Programme.

Objective 5 – Member Champion

Members were provided with an update on the decision made by the Governance and Constitution Committee following the Review of Member Champion Arrangements. Members noted that the appointment of the new Chief Fire Officer and the local elections due to take place in 2023 could have an impact on the proposed arrangements.

Objective 6 – Continuous Development

Further discussion was held during Item 6 – Discussion Item – Member Satisfaction Survey.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Member Development Strategy 2022-24 Implementation – Quarterly Monitoring be noted.

4 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2021-22 - QUARTERLY MONITORING

The Governance Officer presented a quarterly update on the Member Development Programme 2021-22. She noted that a number of training and development opportunities had taken place throughout the quarter.

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager advised that the Member Planning Day agenda included a tour of the training centre and updates on Sprinkler progress and the apprentice trip to Nepal.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the progress on the delivery of the Member Development Programme 2021-22 be noted.

5 DRAFT REVIEW OF MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT 2021-22

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager introduced a report which considered the draft review of Member development activities throughout 2021-22. The report contained an overview of the progress against the objectives of the Member Development Strategy 2022-24 and feedback from training and development sessions.

Members noted that the delivery of the Member Development Programme was disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions. However, it was hoped that annual training such as the Day in the Life of a Firefighter would take place next year.

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager advised that social media training would take place during the Member Development Programme 2022-23 and would be delivered by the newly established Communications and Engagement Department.

RESOLVED: That

[1] subject to minor amendments, the Review of Member Training and Development 2021-22 be approved for submission to the Fire Authority on Wednesday 23rd June 2022.

6 DISCUSSION ITEM - MEMBER SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Governance Officer introduced the discussion item on the Member Satisfaction Survey for 2021-22. Feedback was requested from the Group surrounding the proposed questions and delivery.

A Member praised the efficiency of hosting the survey electronically. The Group requested that all acronyms be removed from the questions list. The Leadership Development Advisor also suggested that a list of the training and development opportunities received throughout 2021-22 be available within the survey under the relevant questions.

The Group agreed that all Members would be encouraged to respond to the survey to assist Democratic Services in making future Member development arrangements.

RESOLVED: That

[1] subject to minor amendments, the Member Satisfaction Survey be approved for publication.

7 DISCUSSION ITEM - PROPOSALS FOR 2022-23 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND INDUCTION PROGRAMME

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager introduced the discussion item which provided a summary of the proposals for the new Member Development and Induction Programme for 2022-23.

The Group discussed the annual training session held each year. It was agreed that the training session should remain annual to allow all Members the opportunity to refresh themselves. The Group also suggested that additional training sessions relating to the new equipment that the Authority granted funding for, the safety of electric vehicles and safety of alternative heating solutions for domestic properties should be arranged.

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager highlighted the Member Induction Handbook attached as Appendix 2. She advised that the Handbook would be updated for 2022-23. A Member suggested that a glossary of acronyms be included in the next iteration of the Handbook.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Governance and Corporate Planning Manager and Governance Officer take into consideration the discussion held when developing final Proposals for the 2022-23 Member Development and Induction

Programme.

8 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager provided a draft copy of the Member Training and Development Work Programme 2022-23. A Member requested that officer feedback be presented during the Member/Officer Buddy System Review that was due to be submitted at the Member Training and Development Group meeting on 4th October 2022.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the draft Work Programme for the Member Training and Development Group be approved.**



URGENT BUSINESS TO BE DETERMINED BETWEEN FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS

PROCEDURAL MATTERS 4.87 to 4.89

Contact Officer: Andrew Leadbetter, Director of Governance and Commissioning
(07824 529534)

Date: 11th March 2022

MATTER REQUIRING APPROVAL

PROPOSAL TO DONATE VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT TO SUPPORT FIREFIGHTERS IN UKRAINE

COUNCILLORS WHOSE SUPPORT IS SOUGHT

Councillor B Rudd
Councillor S Parker
Councillor M Biggin

COUNCILLORS COPIED IN FOR INFORMATION

Councillor S Nelson

APPROVAL IS SOUGHT BY

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
The Monitoring Officer
The Treasurer

INFORMATION

The Home Office has asked UK fire and rescue services to make donations of vehicles and equipment to support firefighters in Ukraine. The NFCC, working with FireAid, is co-ordinating the response and some donations have already been made. There is the potential for fire and rescue services to be reimbursed for unused equipment that is donated, but this is still being discussed with Government. Older, second-hand items, such as appliances, will not attract any reimbursement.

The following vehicles have been identified (with indicative values):

1	Hydraulic Platform	(£8k)
4	Fire Appliances	(£10.8k)

The following equipment has been identified (with indicative values):

96	Over Trousers	(£22.3k)
23	Tunics	(£7.3k)
8	Helmets	(3k)
40	Pairs Fire Gloves	(2k)

The donation of these vehicles and the equipment will not impact upon service provision, nor compromise the safety of our firefighters. The vehicles are old and not utilised operationally. Their values are very low as they are effectively 'end of life' as far as the Service is concerned. Much of the equipment is held in reserve and has been superseded by a newer version that is in general use.

The Financial Rules require donations over £20k to be approved by the Fire Authority. The above donation has an indicative total value of £53,400. Some of this may be reimbursed, but this is not guaranteed.

REASON FOR URGENCY

This decision cannot wait until a meeting of the Fire Authority is arranged. In any event, initial communication with Members leads us to believe that there will be all party support for the donation.

DECISION

I support the action described above.

Signed	Cllr Bob Rudd	Date	11 th March 2022
Signed	Cllr Stuart Parker	Date	14 th March 2022
Signed	Cllr Mike Biggin	Date	11 th March 2022

ADDENDUM

The Group Spokespersons were further contacted on 4th April 2022 as some additional equipment had been identified for donation. The following paragraphs provide details:

Since the original Urgent Business Form was processed some additional equipment has been identified for donation. This will be co-ordinated with the despatch of the vehicles, which is due to take place in the second week of April.

The additional equipment has a notional value of circa £10k, with the majority of this value attributed to thermal imaging cameras (around £8k). These cameras have been superseded by a much superior product and will never be used by the Service again. It is not clear whether there is a market for them. There are a few new items in the consignment which are valued at £70; all other items are used.

As mentioned previously, the donation will have no impact on the operational effectiveness of the Service, or firefighter safety.

The Group Spokespersons indicated their support for the donation of this additional equipment.

Signed	Cllr Bob Rudd	Date	4 th April 2022
Signed	Cllr Stuart Parker	Date	5 th April 2022
Signed	Cllr Mike Biggin	Date	5 th April 2022

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27 APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: ANDREA HARVEY

SUBJECT: PEOPLE STRATEGY 2022-2025

Purpose of Report

1. This report is to present the People Strategy 2022-25 for approval.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] The People Strategy 2022-2025 be approved.

Background

2. People are our greatest asset and in times of ongoing uncertainty and changing demands, appreciating the value of staff is more important than it has ever been.
3. The Covid-19 Pandemic has put pressure on our Service in many ways, affecting the way we carry out our core duties and the way in which we look after the well-being of our people. Moving forward out of the Pandemic, we must continue to balance our operational responsibilities with the need to safeguard the wellbeing of our people, while remaining responsive to the diverse needs of our communities and embracing new, more modern and efficient ways of working.
4. To remain a high performing organisation and to attract the best people to work for us requires us to consistently provide an excellent experience for our staff and the communities they support. We need to maintain our clear focus on diversity and inclusion, ensure we continue to develop a strong learning culture, and ensure staff are able to enjoy their work in a welcoming and collaborative environment where they know their contributions are recognised and valued. These requirements have helped to frame the Strategy.
5. The Staffing Committee on 21st March 2022 considered the draft People Strategy 2022-2025 and recommended that it should be approved by the Fire Authority at it's meeting on 27th April 2022.

Information

6. The previous People Strategy was structured around the service’s established “Steps Framework” and assigned priorities and objectives into three key stages of employment: Step In, Step Forward and Step Up. The new People Strategy 2022-25, which is attached to this report as Appendix 1, has maintained a similar approach but the Steps Framework has been updated and extended to include a fourth stage “Step Away” which recognises the challenges and ongoing work associated with an ageing workforce.
7. The Strategy has also been updated to reflect the new core values and references both the internal and external drivers that shape our people priorities.
8. A summary of the Steps Framework is outlined below:

Step In	<p>Recruitment and Training</p> <p>This element of the framework covers all aspects of attraction, recruitment and induction training. The aim is to ensure we have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs, at the same time as ensuring we uphold high standards of transparency, objectivity and fairness in the way we select staff. We will also ensure that we provide first class training to equip staff with the required skills, knowledge and experiences they need to perform well in their roles.</p>
Step Forward	<p>Performance and Development</p> <p>This element focuses on the need to have appropriate support and performance management in place to maintain our high performance culture and to ensure that staff are supported, rewarded, developed and well managed. This will require us to listen, understand and address issues affecting staff morale and in turn, performance, through meaningful engagement with the workforce.</p>
Step Up	<p>Progression and Leadership</p> <p>This element revolves around strengthening organisational leadership and ensuring staff have the appropriate experience, knowledge and practical skills to progress and fulfil both individual career aspirations and organisational needs. Focus will be put on both vertical and lateral progression, widening opportunities for non operational staff whilst ensuring that all of our promotion processes remain fair and transparent and enable the selection of the most appropriate people for leadership roles.</p>

Step Away

This new element focuses on the need to maximise workforce capacity and futureproof the organisation through strategic workforce and succession planning. It acknowledges the challenge of an ageing workforce and the current pensions landscape and covers how we will proactively manage a range of issues and risks relating to staff turnover and loss of skills and corporate memory.

9. The Strategy outlines governance arrangements and summarises the key priorities and how these will be monitored, e.g. at Staffing Committee. Responsibility for delivery of the Strategy, management of the priorities and reporting on progress will rest with the Head of People Services.

Financial Implications

10. There are no direct financial implications from approving the Strategy itself. However, there are likely to be costs associated with delivery of elements of it. It is expected that much of this will be covered using existing budgets.

Legal Implications

11. The Strategy refers to a range of elements that will help the Service to fulfil its legal obligations. Actions taken will accord with employment-related legislation and guidance.

Equality and Diversity Implications

12. Promotion of equality and diversity and “being inclusive” is a core value of the organisation and although there is particular emphasis and focus on equality and diversity within the “Step In” element, the commitment to equality, diversity, transparency and fairness prevails in all aspects of delivery of the Strategy.

Environmental Implications

13. None.

APPENDIX 1 – PEOPLE STRATEGY 2022-2025

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS: PEOPLE STRATEGY 2019-22 APPROVED BY THE
FIRE AUTHORITY ON 13TH FEBRUARY 2019**

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Foreword



Mark Cashin
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive

Our People

Changing lives, protecting lives and saving lives every day

Our vision is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies. In order to achieve this, our people must feel proud and motivated to work for an organisation that is connected closely to its communities and be committed to changing, protecting and saving lives.

People are our greatest asset and in times of changing demands, appreciating the value of staff and embracing a changing workforce and working environment is more important than ever before.



**Councillor
Bob Rudd**
Chairman, Cheshire
Fire Authority

The pace of technological, social and environmental change and the Covid-19 pandemic has put pressure on our Service in many ways, affecting the way we carry out our core duties and how we look after the well-being of our people. Moving forward, out of the pandemic, we must continue to balance our operational responsibilities with the need to safeguard the well-being of our people, while remaining responsive to the diverse needs of our communities and embracing new, more modern and efficient ways of working.

Attracting the best people to work for us is key to enabling us to deliver our strategic people aims and ensuring we consistently provide an excellent experience for them and the communities they support. We remain committed to maintaining our clear focus on diversity and inclusion, to strengthen our reputation as a compassionate and inclusive workplace. Everyone within our Service is and will continue to be treated fairly, and able to enjoy their work in a welcoming and collaborative environment where they know their contributions are recognised and valued.

Through this strategy and the associated delivery plan, we will deliver on our commitment to supporting, developing and enabling our staff to provide the best possible fire and rescue service to our communities.

Introduction and context

According to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS):

“A well-led fire and rescue service develops and maintains a workforce that is supported, professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse. The service's leaders should be positive role models, and this should be reflected in the behaviour of staff at all levels. All staff should feel supported and be given opportunities to develop. Equality, diversity and inclusion should also be embedded in everything that is done with a wide understanding amongst staff of their role in promoting it.”

Set against this backdrop, we were encouraged that the inspection recognised our well-defined values, inclusive culture and the progress made as a result of the previous People Strategy in its first two inspections. We know, however, there is more work to do in the years ahead, with significant challenges to overcome.

The environment and the way that the fire and rescue service operates has changed in the past 15 years, with an overall reduction of fires, greater collaborative working with partner agencies and an increased emphasis on national resilience. All this is set against a backdrop of uncertainty and shrinking budgets.

Over the next three years we will need to navigate ever-more complex internal and external influences and drivers for change that will inevitably impact and shape the way we operate.



National picture

There are a number of external drivers for change that we need to consider in the delivery of our people strategy. These include the following:

- **Economy:** The UK faces a long road to recovery from Covid-19. There is likely to be significant pressure on public funds with challenging decisions about how to best deliver services while continuing to look after our people. We will need to be transparent about the budgetary pressures we face and involve staff in designing service improvements and new ways of working.
- **Technology:** There is a major push towards a digital approach to service delivery and self-service. We now need to build on what we have learnt during the pandemic to explore how technology can better and more efficiently support our staff and customers.
- **Environmental sustainability:** We must continue to work hard to reduce our carbon footprint by modernising working practices. Agile working and further investment in communications technology could have a significant impact on our need to drive to work.
- **Social divisions:** These are exacerbating through rising unemployment, an ageing population, the digital divide and issues with community cohesion. We need to be conscious of these differences when delivering our services. The nature of work itself and its balance with life are being tested by changing aspirations of new generations. Covid-19 has shown that we can work differently.
- **Mental health and well-being:** Well-being issues are becoming more complex in our fast paced and challenging world. Access to healthcare will be difficult over the next few years so we need to continue to invest in well-being and plan for bridging that gap
- **Pensions and retirement:** An increasingly older workforce, coupled with the ongoing changes in pensions legislation, will directly impact the number of people we employ. This may result in a loss of expertise over a short period and require greater investment in recruitment and succession planning.
- **Major incidents and events:** The Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena attack will drive changes to legislation that mean fire and rescue services have to re-evaluate skills, resilience and ways of working. This will have a significant impact on service delivery and reinforce the need for effective training, well-being and safety of our people.
- **Workforce transformation and fire reform:** As highlighted by HMICFRS, the Thomas Review and the Local Government Association (LGA) Fire Vision 2024, workforce transformation is the biggest challenge for our sector. HMICFRS's 2020 State of Fire and Rescue report cites "a woeful lack of race and gender diversity" with only five per cent of fire and rescue staff from an ethnic minority background. We must strengthen our commitment to build a diverse, inclusive and truly representative workforce and build greater trust and understanding of our communities.

The Government's White Paper on Fire Reform will be published during the lifespan of this strategy. It is expected the paper will set the future direction for English fire and rescue services, ensuring we put the public first and become more agile in respect of societal changes. It is also likely to have a significant impact on how we operate, engage with our communities and continue to foster a culture where staff are valued and feel able to give of their best.

Local picture

Some of the areas we need to address include:

- **Representation:** Although progress has been made, we still have too few women and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) firefighters. Progression is slow and our current recruitment policy does not include a plan to target underrepresented groups to middle and senior management level roles.
- **Succession planning:** We have an ageing workforce and during the life of this strategy the majority of the Service Management Team could retire. There are limited opportunities for middle and senior leaders, particularly in non-operational roles. More needs to be done to support non-operational staff looking for career progression, especially into leadership roles.
- **Reliance on the on-call duty system:** The risk profile and needs of our communities justify an approach to service delivery predicated on on-call firefighters. However, there are significant challenges in recruiting and retaining people to these roles.
- **Local action plans:** Our HMICFRS report and staff survey findings have generated clear priorities for us to work to that will impact ways of working, organisational culture, pensions and professionalism.
- **Blue Light Collaboration:** We are committed to working with our emergency services partners where collaboration provides extra efficiency and effectiveness and where it is appropriate in order to provide a first class service to our people and our communities.



Our proudest achievements

As a result of our 2018-22 People Strategy, we have:

- maintained a top 5 place in the **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index**, reaching 4th in 2018, 3rd in 2019 and 2020 and 2nd in 2022. We have been ranked the most LGBT+ inclusive emergency service in the UK for the past seven years and are currently the top UK public sector organisation
- regularly achieved some of the **lowest sickness absence rates** in the country for our operational workforce and improved our absence management processes through the provision of additional guidance and support for staff
- created clear **core values** in consultation with staff that are widely understood and reflective of the behaviours that are shown at all levels across the Service
- achieved **positive cultural improvements** and improved **staff engagement** as evidenced by the 2021 staff survey with increased visibility of, and accessibility to, senior managers
- developed a **state-of-the-art training facility** to promote high performance, firefighter safety and a culture of continuous improvement and learning
- introduced a **Staff Engagement Forum** that actively progresses and resolves issues that are important to staff with direct sponsorship and support from the Chief Fire Officer
- enhanced our **mental health and well-being** provision, employing a dedicated advisor and creating a steering group and staff-led well-being community group
- made measurable progress in the **recruitment of female and LGBT+ staff** and have acted positively and proactively to improve diversity within recruitment





- achieved **Living Wage Employer accreditation** from the Living Wage Foundation
- launched a world-class **Maternity and Adoption Policy** and doubled the provision for paternity leave
- introduced a new **'Step into Leadership'** programme for new and aspiring supervisors and relaunched our high potential development scheme for future leaders
- led on the development of a **national recruitment hub** and contributed to a range of **national people-related projects** with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
- extended the range of **apprenticeship opportunities** for both fire staff and operational staff, including the launch of a **higher apprenticeship degree programme** to support the development of current and future leaders
- introduced more robust processes to ensure the **health and well-being** of our workforce including the implementation of improved arrangements for monitoring adherence to working time regulations and the delivery of fatigue management training



Our Core Values



At the heart of this strategy are our Core Values, which guide our internal culture as well as our relationships with our communities, stakeholders and partners. The Core Values were developed with colleagues during 2019 and launched in 2020.

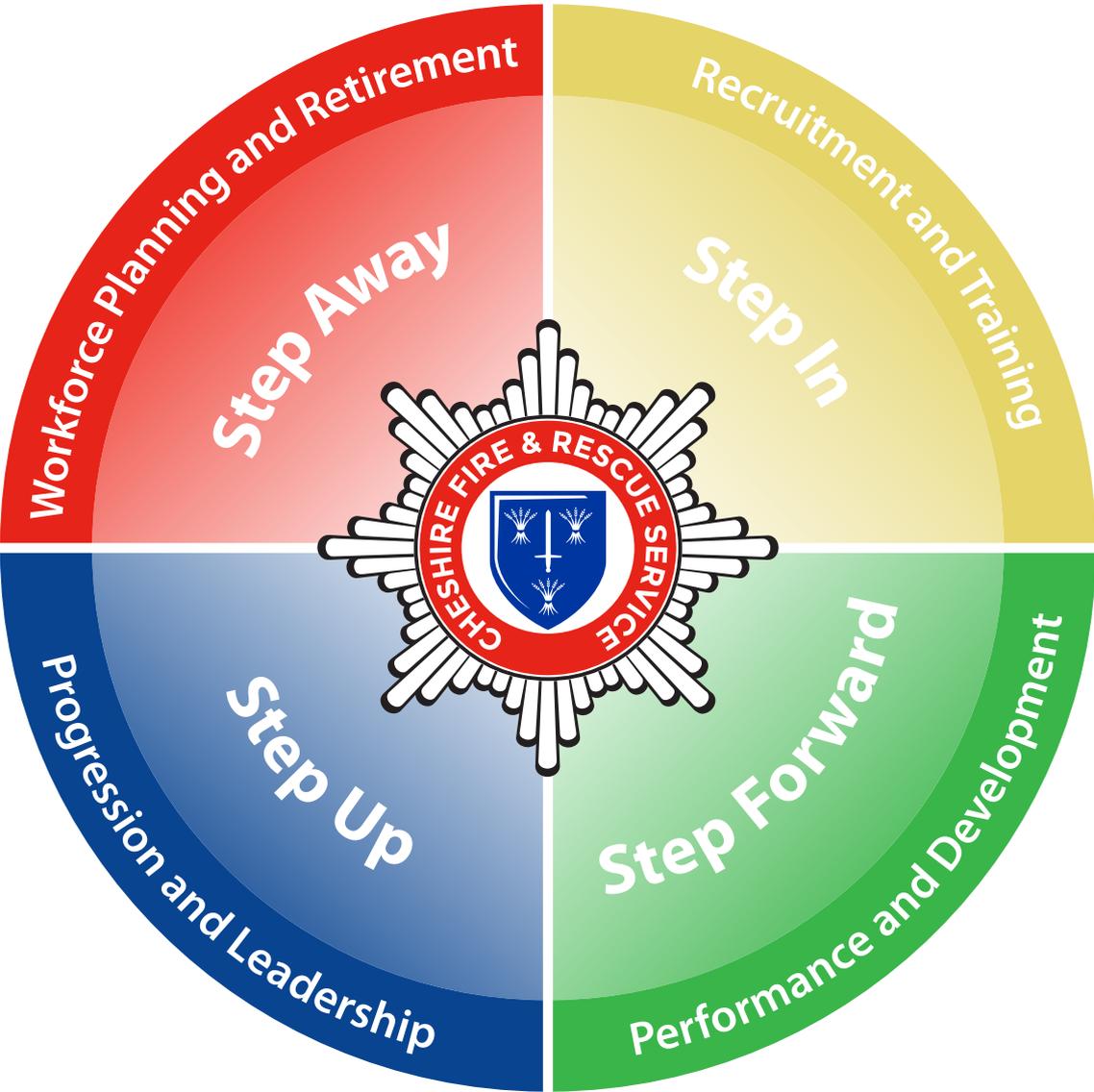
In addition to our own Core Values, we fully support the NFCC Core Code of Ethics which sets out five principles to improve cultures and promote inclusion in the sector:

- Putting our communities first
- Integrity
- Dignity and Respect
- Leadership
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Our Strategy

2022 - 2025

We have developed a framework that encompasses and structures the Service’s strategic people priorities and objectives. This is referred to as the ‘Steps’ Framework and aligns the aims and activities to the employee lifecycle under four key stages.



Step In



Recruitment and Training

We aim to employ the right people with the right skills in the right jobs, while upholding high standards of transparency, objectivity and fairness in the way we select staff and acting positively to improve diversity within recruitment. We will ensure that we provide first class training to equip staff with the required skills, knowledge and experiences they need to perform well in their roles. This will be underpinned by a culture of continuous improvement where staff are encouraged to learn and develop new skills throughout their careers.

We will achieve this by:

- Attracting the best people through a modern, forward-thinking approach to recruitment incorporating wider use of social media, creative campaigns and positive action.
- Recruiting people using rigorous, fair and professional selection methods that showcase us as an employer of choice and a family-friendly and inclusive organisation.
- Ensuring there are no barriers in our recruitment processes to improve opportunities for our diverse communities.
- Exploring opportunities to maximise the benefits of the apprenticeship levy through the broadening of apprenticeship opportunities across the service.
- Engaging with young people and under-represented communities to raise awareness of fire and rescue service careers and to break down any negative perceptions and stereotyping of working in our sector.
- Creating different points of entry into our Service to widen opportunities and to improve representation of non-operational staff, females and BAME staff in middle and senior management roles.
- Reviewing recruitment methods for the on-call duty system to improve the candidate journey, develop ways to achieve greater involvement with primary employers and recognise commitment to support retention.
- Providing structured induction and initial training of staff at all levels to ensure they receive the information, guidance and support they need to get the best possible start and to perform their role in line with Service culture.

Step Forward



Performance and Development

We aim to have appropriate support and performance management arrangements in place to maintain our high performance culture and to ensure that staff are supported, rewarded, developed and managed appropriately. This will require us to listen, understand and address the issues affecting staff morale and, in turn, performance through more effective and meaningful engagement with the workforce.

We will achieve this by:

- Creating a shared sense of endeavour and creating a culture of trust and engagement through listening, seeking to understand and acting on feedback that influences staff morale, well-being and performance.
- Strengthening the employee voice and ability to share issues and shape solutions via the Staff Engagement Forum, the Ignite suggestion scheme, staff surveys, exit interviews and through regular dialogue with representative bodies.
- Maintaining an appreciative eye for success, performance and excellence and providing meaningful, timely and memorable reward and recognition.
- Ensuring we have a system of performance management and appraisal that is fit for purpose and consistently applied, and one that encourages ownership and ongoing dialogue to help people achieve their full potential.
- Providing development opportunities for staff at all levels both for role-related skills and for personal development.
- Developing a culture of coaching, mentoring, debriefing and other forms of continuous feedback to achieve a more agile learning environment.
- Equipping and enabling managers to have informed and effective performance management conversations, supported by transparent performance information and regular two-way feedback.
- Ensuring the quality of our HR policies and processes to support, develop and maintain high performance and the delivery of improvements.
- Ensuring our senior leaders and managers maintain visibility, are accessible and consistently model and maintain our core values.
- Identifying opportunities to achieve improvements and to reinforce an environment conducive to change through the commissioning of a series of Service Improvement Reviews.

Step Up



Progression and Leadership

We aim to strengthen organisational leadership and ensure our staff have the best opportunity, experience, knowledge and practical skills to progress in their roles to fulfil both individual career aspirations and organisational requirements. This will require us to ensure we offer both vertical and lateral progression opportunities for all staff in preparation for future opportunities, with specific emphasis on extending development opportunities for non-operational staff. Underpinning progression into leadership roles will be fair and transparent promotion processes that enable the selection of the most appropriate people for leadership roles.

We will achieve this by:

- Widening leadership development and 'on the job' shadowing opportunities for staff to expand their skills beyond existing areas of expertise and knowledge.
- Undertaking a review of promotion processes to ensure they are fair, transparent, understood and communicated effectively.
- Ensuring equal access to leadership development opportunities through the development and promotion of career pathways and progression opportunities for non-operational staff.
- Continuing to transform and develop new leadership programmes and interventions to meet future needs by adopting blended learning approaches and the effective use of technology.
- Seeking opportunities to enable staff to broaden their professional and personal development both within and outside the fire and rescue sector.
- Ensuring we have sufficient accredited workplace assessors, coaches and mentors to support, develop and measure the professional and personal development of staff.
- Developing a bespoke high potential development scheme for non-operational staff to encourage both lateral and vertical progression and to support the retention of key talent.
- Developing organisational and governance skills for leaders and building business acumen.
- Enabling leaders to manage and develop remote teams.

Step Away



Workforce Planning and Retirement

We aim to maximise the capacity of our workforce and futureproof the Service through strategic workforce planning and succession planning. This will take into consideration the challenges of our ageing workforce against a backdrop of an uncertain pensions landscape and the inevitable loss of key skills, knowledge and experience as people retire. It is important we ensure that lost experience will not threaten longer-term performance and we will continue to use workforce and succession planning intelligence to expose: emerging gaps in our leadership; skills; experience and knowledge; and potential future risks. At the same time we are committed to ensuring a well-managed exit for retiring staff with appropriate support provided to assist with future plans, while celebrating long and valuable service.

We will achieve this by:

- Continuing to undertake monthly analysis of establishments to understand and facilitate decision making around recruitment and promotion processes.
- Identifying and understanding where there are key risk/business critical posts and ensuring they are regularly reviewed with plans in place to backfill vacancies as soon as they are vacated.
- Encouraging early discussions about retirement plans to enable both individuals and us to consider implications and put appropriate planning in place for business continuity.
- Reducing the uncertainty and anxiety associated with retirement through the provision of support and independent advice relating to lifestyle and financial planning.
- Developing a suite of 'Step Away' workshops and/or products to prepare staff for retirement and future plans.
- Minimising the loss of investment and retaining valuable skills and experience through the promotion of volunteering opportunities and/or consideration of re-engagement where appropriate.
- Ensuring the effective transfer of critical knowledge and skills prior to retirement through coaching and reverse mentoring.
- Retaining staff through the promotion of options such as changes to working hours, agile working or flexible retirement in order to facilitate a more gradual process of knowledge and skill transfer and better succession planning.
- Ensuring all retiring staff are given appropriate recognition and leave the service with dignity and a sense of achievement.

Supporting strategies



This Strategy is supported by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which ensures inclusivity and delivery of fair and accessible workplaces and services. It is also supported by the Mental Health Strategy which outlines our commitment to supporting the positive mental health and well-being of our staff.

Both are fundamental to attracting the best people to work for us and support, develop and enable them to provide the best possible fire and rescue service to our communities.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2021-2024

The Strategy explains how we have invested significant effort and resource to support EDI and to foster everybody's right to be different, to be valued as individuals and to be afforded dignity in the workplace. It is underpinned by a detailed action plan with progress monitored by our Equality Steering Group, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer.

At the centre of the Strategy is our Core Value ambition to **'be inclusive'** and be recognised as the most inclusive employer in our sector. To do this we will focus on four key themes: Our Organisation, Our People, Our Partners and Our Communities.



In respect of **'Our Organisation'** we aim to ensure that being inclusive comes as second nature, regardless of the role being fulfilled or the service being provided. All of our senior leaders, Fire Authority members and managers are required to lead by example, encouraging colleagues across the service and beyond to be role models in their own right and champion EDI issues.

In respect of **'Our People'** we intend to attract, recruit and retain the very best talent to firefighting and fire staff roles. The aspiration is that our workforce will reflect the full spectrum of our diverse communities and will feel safe, valued and able to bring their whole selves to work. We want them to feel supported to reach their full potential, regardless of their background or any challenges they have experienced.

We also want to ensure that our HR policies reflect our commitment to being a family friendly and inclusive organisation. Through our Equality Steering Group and in conjunction with HR colleagues we will continue to seek and develop ways to be more agile and supportive in the development of policies, practices and terms and conditions that will attract and secure the recruitment of staff with increasingly diverse needs and preferences.

Our aspiration relating to **'Our Communities'** relates to our desire to ensure that every person we interact with feels they have received the very best service and that we understand their needs. Our frontline staff will understand how EDI impacts on their work and they will carry out their duties in a respectful, empathetic and compassionate manner.

In respect of **'Our Partners'**, we aim to continue developing a broad network of active and meaningful partnerships across all sectors and sections of the community. This will help us to better engage with marginalised groups, understand their needs, develop our EDI expertise and extend our reach.

Our three staff and volunteer EDI networks will play an integral role in the achievement of this aim. They are led by employees, supported by allies and have a seat on the Equality Steering Group.



Mental Health and Well-being Strategy 2021-2024

As a Service and employer we know that the increasingly complex and fast-paced world we live in puts pressures on people and this can have an impact on their health and well-being. We also recognise that the nature of our work is such that firefighters and fire staff may be exposed to traumatic and challenging situations.

By creating a supportive and compassionate environment and culture that enables people to flourish, and work responsibly and safely, we will be able to do right by our people and improve our service to the communities we serve.

To this end in 2021 we published our first Mental Health Strategy. It describes how we will support the mental health and well-being of our staff and how we will encourage the enjoyment of work and life and provides tools and support to cope with life's stresses and occasional sadness. It also outlines how we intend to raise awareness of mental health issues through our work.

Cheshire Fire Authority also approved the appointment of a Mental Health Advisor who works closely with our Fitness Advisor and Health and Safety Advisor. Our Mental Health Steering Group, comprising of a cross-section of people from across our Service, meets quarterly to provide leadership, advice and co-ordination of the work intended to help us become a beacon of excellence for physical and mental well-being.

Our ambition for health and well-being is simple; it is to ensure the experience of working for our Service is positive and that we treat mental health and physical health problems with equal levels of commitment, passion and drive.

Our Mental Health Strategy comprises of four key elements:

1	Leadership and Responsibility	We believe that positive health and well-being is everyone's responsibility and requires a visible commitment from all staff, regardless of role or pay grade.
2	Communication and Education	We believe that the key to maintaining good mental health and well-being is a systematic programme of engagement, promotion and education.

3	Support and Intervention	<p>We will continue to support and intervene to improve mental and physical health and are committed to increasing organisational confidence, skills and capability to address risks and deal with well-being issues.</p>
4	Culture and Compassion	<p>We believe an open and compassionate culture around mental health is essential to eliminating stigma and promoting a positive environment that reduces the exacerbation of existing mental health problems and concerns. The parity we afford to both physical and mental health is also directly in line with our Core Values</p>



Key benefits

The delivery of our People Strategy will result in:

- all staff having a clear understanding of the knowledge, skills, experience, abilities and attitudes required and expected of them in line with our Core Values.
- us making tangible progress in the diversification of our workforce through the recruitment, development and retention of women, BAME and other underrepresented groups and through the broadening of our apprenticeships
- having a wider range of development opportunities for non-operational staff and an increase in women and BAME staff seeking to progress into middle and senior management level roles
- a resilient, physically healthy and emotionally balanced workforce and a reduction in sickness levels and accidents in the workplace
- staff being able to seek development for role-related support and professional development and having regular and honest feedback through regular performance and career conversations





- leaders having the skills and versatility to sustain change, improvement and excellence
- staff having a voice and the opportunity to be heard through involvement in decision making, problem solving and shaping the future of our Service
- revised promotion and appraisal processes being introduced that are fair, transparent and fit for purpose and support the progression and development of staff
- retiring staff feeling valued and supported, with options available to support them as they transition out of the Service





Making it happen

This People Strategy provides a high level framework for the three years spanning 2022-2025. Primarily it will be delivered through a detailed annual action plan, progress against which will be performance managed.

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy will be undertaken by the Staffing Committee, which will receive an annual report from the Head of People Services, in their role as strategic lead for people.

We will also ask for feedback from our staff to inform us of our progress on elements within the People Strategy. This will be done through the Staff Engagement Forum, a range of leadership forums and through meetings with representative bodies. Their opinions and suggestions will be used to influence progress.

Our People Strategy is an integral part of the way we work and ownership for its delivery rests across the Service.

Role of the Fire Authority and Service Management Team (SMT)

Both Members of the Fire Authority and SMT are committed to this strategy and believe that it will deliver the Service's vision for the future as an employer. Leading by example, our Members of the Fire Authority and SMT will set the standard for what is expected of all staff.

Role of People Services

People Services, one of the joint corporate services, will have overarching responsibility for monitoring and providing progress updates on the plan and determining how the respective priorities will be resourced and actioned. Responsibility for the identification of priorities will rest with SMT and the Head of People Services.

Role of our staff

This strategy will only be successful if our staff support it, making the vision of what the organisation will look like a reality. Staff will not only assist in the delivery of its actions, but they will also demonstrate their support through their behaviour and attitudes.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Measures of Success

We will develop some Key Performance indicators and measures of success to help monitor and recognise the progress of this strategy. Our two-yearly staff survey will also provide insight into the motivations, attitudes and behaviours of our staff.



Our Core Values



● **Be Inclusive**

By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.



● **Do the Right Thing**

By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.



● **Act with Compassion**

By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.



● **Make a Difference**

By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27TH APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: TREASURER
AUTHOR: PAUL VAUGHAN

SUBJECT: EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN FOR 2021-22

Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to consider the External Audit Plan for 2021-22 and the risks to be considered as part of the audit.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Note the External Audit Plan for 2021-22; and
- [2] Confirm that the processes and controls, including judgements and assumptions in determining key accounting estimates, as set out by management in the document 'Informing the audit risk assessment for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service 2021-22' are consistent with Members' understanding and are considered appropriate.

Background

2. The National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice (the Code) and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK) determine the scope of the audit. Grant Thornton is responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the:

Authority's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Fire Authority); and

Value for Money arrangements in place at the Authority for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

3. The audit must be carried out with a thorough understanding of the Authority's business and is risk based.

Information

4. The External Audit Plan 2021-22 is attached to this report as Appendix 1. This document should be noted by Members.
5. A document entitled, 'Informing the audit risk assessment for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service 2021-22' is attached to this report as Appendix 2. Members

are asked to confirm the processes and controls, including judgements and assumptions in determining key accounting estimates, as set out by management in the document' are consistent with Members' understanding and are considered appropriate.

6. A representative from Grant Thornton will attend the meeting to present the report.

Financial Implications

7. The External Audit Plan 2021-22 states that the proposed fee is currently under consideration. The proposed fee will be discussed with officers over the coming months and will be presented to a future meeting of the Fire Authority for approval.

Legal Implications

8. There are no legal implications as a result of this report. The External Audit Plan has been prepared to help the external auditors and the Fire Authority to meet their respective responsibilities.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. There are no equality and diversity implications as a result of this report.

Environmental Implications

10. There are no environmental implications as a result of this report.

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TEL [01606] 868804**

APPENDIX 1 – EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2021-22

**APPENDIX 2 – INFORMING THE AUDIT RISK ASSESSMENT FOR CHESHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE 2021-22**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS: EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN FOR 2020-21 APPROVED BY
THE FIRE AUTHORITY ON 23RD JUNE 2021**

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service audit plan

Year ending 31 March 2022

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7 April 2022



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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit planning process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect the Authority or all weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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Significant improvements from the Financial Reporting Authority's (FRC) quality inspection

On 29 October, the FRC published its annual report setting out the findings of its review of the work of local auditors. The report summarises the results of the FRC's inspections of twenty audit files for the last financial year. A link to the report is here: [FRC AQR Major Local Audits October 2021](#)

Grant Thornton are one of seven firms which currently delivers local audit work. Of our 330 local government and NHS audits, 87 are currently defined as 'major audits' which fall within the scope of the AQR. This year, the FRC looked at nine of our audits.

Our file review results

The FRC reviewed nine of our audits this year. It graded six files (67%) as 'Good' and requiring no more than limited improvements. No files were graded as requiring significant improvement, representing an impressive year-on-year improvement. The FRC described the improvement in our audit quality as an 'encouraging response by the firm to the quality findings reported in the prior year.' Our Value for Money work continues to be delivered to a high standard, with all of the files reviewed requiring no more than limited improvement. We welcome the FRC findings and conclusions which demonstrate the impressive improvement we have made in audit quality over the past year.

The FRC also identified a number of good practices including effective challenge of management's valuer, use of an auditor's expert to assist with the audit of a highly specialised property valuation, and the extent and timing of involvement by the audit partner on the VFM conclusion.

Our results over the past three years are shown in the table below:

Grade	Number 2018/19	Number 2019/20	Number 2020/21
Good with limited improvements (Grade 1 or 2)	1	1	6
Improvements required (Grade 3)	2	5	3
Significant improvements required (Grade 4)	1	0	0
Total	4	6	9

Our continued commitment to Audit quality and continuous improvement

Our work over the past year has been undertaken during the backdrop of Covid 19, when the public sector has faced the huge challenge of providing essential services and helping safeguard the public during the pandemic. Our NHS bodies in particular have been at the forefront of the public health crisis. As auditors we have had to show compassion to NHS staff deeply affected by the crisis, whilst staying focused on the principles of good governance and financial management, things which are more important than ever. We are very proud of the way we have worked effectively with audited bodies, demonstrating empathy in our work whilst still upholding the highest audit quality.

Significant improvements from the Financial Reporting Authority's (FRC) quality inspection (cont.)

Over the coming year we will make further investments in audit quality including strengthening our quality and technical support functions, and increasing the level of training, support and guidance for our audit teams. We will address the specific improvement recommendations raised by the FRC, including:

- Enhanced training for local auditors on key assumptions within property valuations, and how to demonstrate an increased level of challenge
- Formalising our arrangements for the consideration of complex technical issues by Partner Panels.

As part of our enhanced Value for Money programme, we will focus on identifying the scope for better use of public money, as well as highlighting weaknesses in governance or financial stewardship where we see them.

Conclusion

Local audit plays a critical role in the way public sector audits an society interact, and it depends on the trust and confidence of all those who rely on it. As a firm we're proud to be doing our part to promote good governance, effective stewardship and appropriate use of public funds.

Key matters

Factors

Authority developments

Local Government funding continues to be stretched with increasing cost pressures and demand from residents.

We have continued to hold regular meetings with the senior finance team at the Authority. During these meetings we discuss a range of key issues regarding the Authority's general developments, current and projected financial performance, governance issues and regulatory oversight. The budget for 21/22 was set with a revenue budget of £46.2m and a planned in-year capital expenditure programme of £8.2m. At quarter 3 the Authority is forecasting an overall underspend on revenue of £0.1m. Pay awards have meant that there have been overspends in some areas as they were not anticipated in the original budget. At quarter 3 the capital programme was forecasting an overspend on the overall capital programme of £1.4m, mainly from the new operational training facility in the prior year and the Authority are having to reconsider some of their proposed capital programme in light of rising construction industry costs since the programme was first outlined. Operational performance remains strong with most targets being met although availability of on-call fire engines and employee sickness and injury remains a challenge.

Recovery from Covid 19 pandemic

There are ongoing economic uncertainties brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic, as the public sector continues to operate within the constraints of a one year funding settlement. Precept flexibility remains the key source of growth in funding to the sector, which has been utilised by Fire Authorities nationally. The government has provided a range of financial support packages throughout the pandemic. This has included additional funding to support the deficit on the collection fund, the cost of services or offset other income losses.

The Covid 19 pandemic has been well managed by the Authority and they have adapted working and governance arrangements to maintain their robust processes and our assessment is that the Authority has developed a good understanding of its financial and wider governance risks during the pandemic and, despite future financial uncertainty about medium term government funding, is well placed to address post Covid 19 challenges.

However, Covid 19 continues to impact on the Authority's operations, including the on-call availability and sickness mentioned above. A total of 1,115 days of On Call cover were lost between October and December 2021 due to On Call firefighters either contracting Covid or self isolating as a result of someone in their house testing positive or, having a close contact with a positive case. In quarter 3, 279 days were lost due to staff having Covid 19.

Our response

- As a firm, we are absolutely committed to audit quality and financial reporting in the local government sector. Our proposed work has been discussed and agreed with management.
- We will consider your arrangements for managing and reporting your financial resources as part of our work in completing our Value for Money work.
- We will consider progress against previously agreed recommendations.
- We will continue to provide you with sector updates via our Authority updates.
- We have identified significant risks in regards to management override of control, valuation of land and buildings and valuation of the net pension liability – refer to pages 8 & 9.

Introduction and headlines

Purpose

This document provides an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Cheshire Fire Authority ('the Authority') for those charged with governance.

Respective responsibilities

The National Audit Office ('the NAO') has issued a document entitled Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'). This summarises where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end and what is expected from the audited body. Our respective responsibilities are also set out in the agreed Terms of Appointment and Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), the body responsible for appointing us as auditor. We draw your attention to both of these documents.

Scope of our audit

The scope of our audit is set in accordance with the Code and International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK). We are responsible for forming and expressing an opinion on the Authority's financial statements that have been prepared by management with the oversight of those charged with governance (the Fire Authority); and we consider whether there are sufficient arrangements in place at the Authority for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in your use of resources. Value for money relates to ensuring that resources are used efficiently to maximise the outcomes that can be achieved.

The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or the Authority of your responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Authority to ensure that proper arrangements are in place for the conduct of its business, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. We have considered how the Authority is fulfilling these responsibilities.

Our audit approach is based on a thorough understanding of the Authority's business and is risk based.

Significant risks

Those risks requiring special audit consideration and procedures to address the likelihood of a material financial statement error have been identified as:

- Management override of controls;
- Valuation of Land & Buildings; and
- Valuation of Pension Fund Net Liability

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings (ISA 260) Report.

Materiality

We have determined planning materiality to be £1,114k (PY £1,114k) for the Authority, which equates to 2% of your prior year gross expenditure for the year. We are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. Clearly trivial has been set at £56k (PY £56k).

Value for Money arrangements

Our initial risk assessment regarding your arrangements to secure value for money has not identified any risks of significant weakness. We will continue our review of your arrangements, including reviewing your Annual Governance Statement, before we issue our auditor's annual report.

Audit logistics

Our interim visit took place in March and April 2022 and our final visit will take place in July -September. Our key deliverables are this Audit Plan, our Audit Findings Report and Auditor's Annual Report.

Our anticipated fee for the audit is yet to be confirmed (PY: £37,742). The proposed fee will be based on the Authority delivering a good set of financial statements and working papers.

We have complied with the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard (revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements..

Significant risks identified

Significant risks are defined by ISAs (UK) as risks that, in the judgement of the auditor, require special audit consideration. In identifying risks, audit teams consider the nature of the risk, the potential magnitude of misstatement, and its likelihood. Significant risks are those risks that have a higher risk of material misstatement.

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
International Standard of Auditing (ISA) 240 and Practice Note (PN) 10 revenue/expenditure risk	Under ISA 240 (UK) and PN 10 there is a rebuttable presumed risk that revenue and expenditure may be misstated due to the improper recognition of revenue and expenditure. The presumption can be rebutted if the auditor concludes that there is no risk of material misstatement due to fraud relating to revenue and expenditure recognition.	<p>Having considered the risk factors set out in ISA 240, PN 10, and the nature of the revenue and expenditure streams at the Authority, we have determined that the risk of Fraud arising from revenue and expenditure recognition can be rebutted, because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is little incentive to manipulate revenue and expenditure recognition. • opportunities to manipulate revenue and expenditure recognition are very limited as approximately 94% of the Authority's gross income is from taxation or government grants, and a significant proportion of expenditure is easily verifiable. • the culture and ethical frameworks of local authorities, including Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, mean that all forms of fraud are seen as unacceptable. <p>Therefore we do not consider this to be a significant risk for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.</p> <p>We will continue to review and test, on a sample basis, material revenue and expenditure transactions, ensuring that it remains appropriate to rebut the presumed risk of revenue and expenditure recognition.</p>

Significant risks identified (continued)

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Management override of controls	<p>Under ISA 240 (UK) there is a non-rebuttable presumed risk that the risk of management override of controls is present in all entities. The Authority faces external scrutiny of its spending and this could potentially place management under undue pressure in terms of how they report performance.</p> <p>We therefore identified management override of control, in particular journals, management estimates and transactions outside the course of business as a significant risk, which was one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the design effectiveness of management controls over journals. • analyse the journals listing and determine the criteria for selecting high risk unusual journals. • test unusual journals recorded during the year and after the draft accounts stage for appropriateness and corroboration. • gain an understanding of the accounting estimates and critical judgements applied made by management and consider their reasonableness with regard to corroborative evidence. • evaluate the rationale for any changes in accounting policies, estimates or significant unusual transactions.
Valuation of land and buildings	<p>The Authority revalues its land and buildings on a five-yearly basis. In the intervening years, to ensure the carrying value in the Authority financial statements is not materially different from the current or fair value at the financial statements date, the Authority requests a desktop valuation from its valuation expert to ensure that there is no material difference. This valuation represents a significant estimate by management in the financial statements due to the size of the numbers involved and the sensitivity of this estimate to changes in key assumptions.</p> <p>We therefore identified valuation of land and buildings as a significant risk, in particular any large or unusual assets or where there have been movements in valuations outside our expectations, as well as testing a sample of those within our expectations. This is one of the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement, and a key audit matter.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate management's processes and assumptions for the calculation of the estimate, the instructions issued to valuation experts and the scope of their work. • evaluate the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the valuation expert. • write to the valuer to confirm the basis on which the valuation was carried out to ensure that the requirements of the Code are met. • discuss with the valuer the basis on which the valuations were carried out. • challenge the information and assumptions used by the valuer to assess completeness and consistency with our understanding. • Test, on a sample basis, revaluations made during the year to ensure they have been input correctly into the Authority's asset register. • Evaluate the assumptions made by management for any assets not revalued during the year and how management has satisfied themselves that these are not materially different to current value.

Significant risks identified (continued)

Risk	Reason for risk identification	Key aspects of our proposed response to the risk
Valuation of the pension fund net liability	<p>The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) pension net liability as reflected in the balance sheet, and asset and liability information disclosed in the notes to the accounts, represent a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>The Firefighters Pension scheme's pension fund liability as reflected in the balance sheet and notes to the accounts also represents a significant estimate in the financial statements.</p> <p>These estimates by their nature are subject to significant estimation uncertainty being sensitive to small adjustments in the key assumptions used.</p> <p>The actuarial assumptions used are the responsibility of the entity but should be set on the advice given by the actuary. A small change in the key assumptions (discount rate, inflation rate, salary increase and life expectancy) can have a significant impact on the estimated IAS 19 liability. In particular the discount and inflation rates, where our consulting actuary has indicated that a 0.1% change in these two assumptions would have approximately 2% effect on the liability. We have therefore concluded that there is a significant risk of material misstatement in the IAS 19 estimate due to the assumptions used in their calculation. With regard to these assumptions we have therefore identified valuation of the Authority's pension fund net liability as a significant risk.</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • update our understanding of the processes and controls put in place by management to ensure that the Authority's pension fund net liability is not materially misstated and evaluate the design of the associated controls; • evaluate the instructions issued by management to their management expert (an actuary) for this estimate and the scope of the actuary's work; • assess the competence, capabilities and objectivity of the actuary who carried out the Authority's pension fund valuation; • assess the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by the Authority to the actuary to estimate the liability; • test the consistency of the pension fund asset and liability and disclosures in the notes to the core financial statements with the actuarial report from the actuary; • undertake procedures to confirm the reasonableness of the actuarial assumptions made by reviewing the report of the consulting actuary (as the auditor's expert) and performing any additional procedures suggested within the report; • agree the advance payment made to the pension fund during the year to the expected accounting treatment and relevant financial disclosures; and • obtain assurances from the auditor of Cheshire Pension Fund as to the controls surrounding the validity and accuracy of membership data; contributions data and benefits data sent to the actuary by the pension fund and the fund assets valuation in the Cheshire Pension Fund financial statements. • test the data provided to the actuary of the Fire Fighter Pension Fund.

We will communicate significant findings on these areas as well as any other significant matters arising from the audit to you in our Audit Findings Report.

Accounting estimates and related disclosures

The Financial Reporting Authority issued an updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): *Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures* which includes significant enhancements in respect of the audit risk assessment process for accounting estimates. We identified one recommendation in our 2020/21 audit in relation to the Authority's estimation process for the valuation of land and buildings.

Introduction

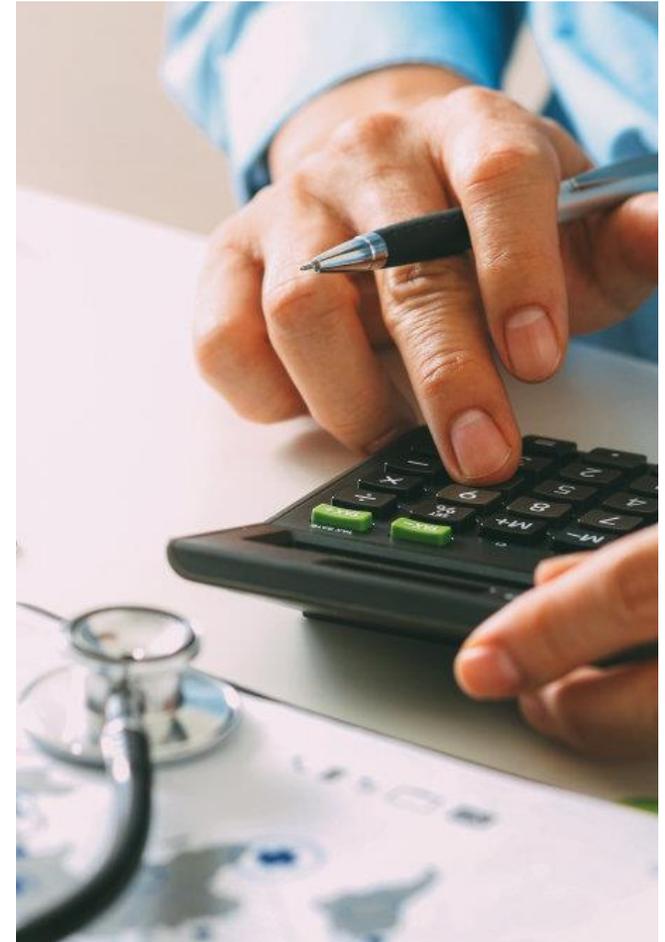
Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) auditors are required to understand and assess an entity's internal controls over accounting estimates, including:

- The nature and extent of oversight and governance over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates;
- How management identifies the need for and applies specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates;
- How the entity's risk management process identifies and addresses risks relating to accounting estimates;
- The entity's information system as it relates to accounting estimates;
- The entity's control activities in relation to accounting estimates; and
- How management reviews the outcomes of previous accounting estimates.

As part of this process auditors also need to obtain an understanding of the role of those charged with governance, which is particularly important where the estimates have high estimation uncertainty, or require significant judgement.

Specifically do Authority members:

- Understand the characteristics of the methods and models used to make the accounting estimates and the risks related to them;
- Oversee management's process for making accounting estimates, including the use of models, and the monitoring activities undertaken by management; and
- Evaluate how management made the accounting estimates?



Accounting estimates and related disclosures

Additional information that will be required

To ensure our compliance with this revised auditing standard, we will be requesting further information from management and those charged with governance during our audit for the year ended 31 March 2022.

Based on our knowledge of the Authority we have identified the following material accounting estimates for which this is likely to apply:

- Valuations of land and buildings
- Depreciation
- Year end provisions and accruals
- Valuation of defined benefit net pension fund liabilities
- Fair value estimates

The Authority's Information systems

In respect of the Authority's information systems we are required to consider how management identifies the methods, assumptions and source data used for each material accounting estimate and the need for any changes to these. This includes how management selects, or designs, the methods, assumptions and data to be used and applies the methods used in the valuations.

When the models used include increased complexity or subjectivity, as is the case for many valuation models, auditors need to understand and assess the controls in place over the models and the data included therein. Where adequate controls are not in place we may need to report this as a significant control deficiency and this could affect the amount of detailed substantive testing required during the audit.

If management has changed the method for making an accounting estimate we will need to fully understand management's rationale for this change. Any unexpected changes are likely to raise the audit risk profile of this accounting estimate and may result in the need for additional audit procedures.

We are aware that the Authority uses management experts in deriving some of its more complex estimates, e.g. asset valuations and pensions liabilities. However, it is important to note that the use of management experts does not diminish the responsibilities of management and those charged with governance to ensure that:

- All accounting estimates and related disclosures included in the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the financial reporting framework, and are materially accurate;
- There are adequate controls in place at the Authority (and where applicable its service provider or management expert) over the models, assumptions and source data used in the preparation of accounting estimates.



Estimation uncertainty

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Under ISA (UK) 540 we are required to consider the following:

- How management understands the degree of estimation uncertainty related to each accounting estimate; and
- How management address this estimation uncertainty when selecting their point estimate.

For example, how management identified and considered alternative, methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the point estimate used.

The revised standard includes increased emphasis on the importance of the financial statement disclosures. Under ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018), auditors are required to assess whether both the accounting estimates themselves and the related disclosures are reasonable.

Where there is a material uncertainty, that is where there is a significant risk of a material change to the estimated carrying value of an asset or liability within the next year, there needs to be additional disclosures. Note that not all material estimates will have a material uncertainty and it is also possible that an estimate that is not material could have a risk of material uncertainty.

Where there is material estimation uncertainty, we would expect the financial statement disclosures to detail:

- What the assumptions and uncertainties are;
- How sensitive the assets and liabilities are to those assumptions, and why;
- The expected resolution of the uncertainty and the range of reasonably possible outcomes for the next financial year; and
- An explanation of any changes made to past assumptions if the uncertainty is unresolved.

Planning enquiries

As part of our planning risk assessment procedures we have made enquiries of management through our Informing the Audit Risk Assessment document as a separate exercise. This document will also be presented to the Authority meeting to confirm that the Authority, as Those Charged with Governance, considers the responses to be consistent with their understanding.

Further information

Further details on the requirements of ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) can be found in the auditing standard on the Financial Reporting Authority's website:

[https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-\(UK\)-540_Revised-December-2018_final.pdf](https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/0fa69c03-49ec-49ae-a8c9-cc7a2b65382a/ISA-(UK)-540_Revised-December-2018_final.pdf)

Other matters

Other work

In addition to our responsibilities under the Code of Practice, we have a number of other audit responsibilities, as follows:

- We read your Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement and any other information published alongside your financial statements to check that they are consistent with the financial statements on which we give an opinion and our knowledge of the Authority.

We carry out work to satisfy ourselves that disclosures made in your Annual Governance Statement are in line with requirements set by CIPFA.

We carry out work on your consolidation schedules for the Whole of Government Accounts process in accordance with NAO group audit instructions.

We consider our other duties under legislation and the Code, as and when required, including:

- giving electors the opportunity to raise questions about your 2021/22 financial statements, consider and decide upon any objections received in relation to the 2021/22 financial statements;
- issuing a report in the public interest or written recommendations to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (the Act);
- application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under section 28 or a judicial review under section 31 of the Act; and
- issuing an advisory notice under section 29 of the Act
- We certify completion of our audit.

Other material balances and transactions

Under International Standards on Auditing, "irrespective of the assessed risks of material misstatement, the auditor shall design and perform substantive procedures for each material class of transactions, account balance and disclosure". All other material balances and transaction streams will therefore be audited. However, the procedures will not be as extensive as the procedures adopted for the risks identified in this report.

Materiality

The concept of materiality

Materiality is fundamental to the preparation of the financial statements and the audit process and applies not only to the monetary misstatements but also to disclosure requirements and adherence to acceptable accounting practice and applicable law. Misstatements, including omissions, are considered to be material if they, individually or in the aggregate, could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements.

Materiality for planning purposes

We have determined financial statement materiality based on a proportion of the gross expenditure of the Authority for the financial year. In the prior year we used the same benchmark. Materiality at the planning stage of our audit is £1,114k (PY £1,114k) for the Authority, which equates to 2% of your prior year gross expenditure. We design our procedures to detect errors in specific accounts at a lower level of precision which we have determined to be £16k for senior officer remuneration.

We reconsider planning materiality if, during the course of our audit engagement, we become aware of facts and circumstances that would have caused us to make a different determination of planning materiality.

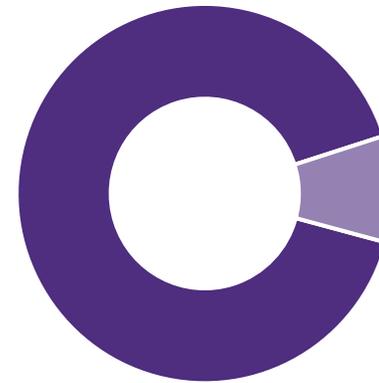
Matters we will report to the Authority

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our opinion on the financial statements as a whole, we nevertheless report to the Authority any unadjusted misstatements of lesser amounts to the extent that these are identified by our audit work. Under ISA 260 (UK) 'Communication with those charged with governance', we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA 260 (UK) defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria. In the context of the Authority, we propose that an individual difference could normally be considered to be clearly trivial if it is less than £56k (PY £56k).

If management have corrected material misstatements identified during the course of the audit, we will consider whether those corrections should be communicated to the Audit Committee to assist it in fulfilling its governance responsibilities.

Prior year gross operating costs

£40.752 Authority
(PY: £40.752M)



- Prior year gross operating costs
- Materiality

Materiality

£1,114k
Authority financial statements materiality
(PY: £1,114k)



£56k
Misstatements reported to the Authority
(PY: £56k)

Value for Money arrangements

Approach to Value for Money work for 2021/22

The National Audit Office (NAO) issued updated guidance for auditors in April 2020. The Code requires auditors to consider whether the body has put in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria. These are as set out below:



Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the body delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.



Financial Sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the body can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3-5 years)



Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the body makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and management, risk management, and ensuring the body makes decisions based on appropriate information

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We have not identified any risks of significant weaknesses from our initial planning work. We will continue our review of your arrangements, including reviewing your Annual Governance Statement, before we issue our auditor's annual report.



Audit logistics and team



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Michael Green, Key Audit Partner

Michael has overall responsibility for the audit and the opinions, for ensuring the quality of our audit work and for ensuring we provide you with the best service possible.



Liz Luddington, Audit Manager

Liz is responsible for the technical and logistical aspects of the audit. She will be the first point of contact for your Treasurer and the finance team.



Chelsey Taylor, Audit Incharge

Chelsey is the day to day contact for finance staff and is responsible for the day to day supervision of the audit team. She will regularly engage with the finance team during our visits to ensure there are no surprises arising from our work.

Audited body responsibilities

Where audited bodies do not deliver to the timetable agreed, we need to ensure that this does not impact on audit quality or absorb a disproportionate amount of time, thereby disadvantaging other audits. Where the elapsed time to complete an audit exceeds that agreed due to a client not meeting its obligations we will not be able to maintain a team on site. Similarly, where additional resources are needed to complete the audit due to a client not meeting their obligations we are not able to guarantee the delivery of the audit to the agreed timescales. In addition, delayed audits will incur additional audit fees.

Our requirements

To minimise the risk of a delayed audit, you need to ensure that you:

- produce draft financial statements of good quality by the agreed timetable you have agreed with us, including all notes, the Narrative Report and the Annual Governance Statement;
- ensure that good quality working papers are available at the start of the audit, in accordance with the working paper requirements schedule that we have shared with you;
- ensure that the agreed data reports are available to us at the start of the audit and are reconciled to the values in the accounts, in order to facilitate our selection of items for testing;
- ensure that all appropriate staff are available on site throughout (or as otherwise agreed) the planned period of the audit; and
- respond promptly and adequately to audit queries.

Audit fees

PSAA awarded a contract of audit for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service with the fee initially agreed in the contract at £22,992. Since that time, there have been a number of developments, particularly in relation to the revised Code and ISA's which are relevant for the 2021/22 audit.

Across all sectors and firms, the FRC has set out its expectation of improved financial reporting from organisations and the need for auditors to demonstrate increased scepticism and challenge and to undertake additional and more robust testing, as detailed on pages 11 and 12 in relation to the updated ISA (UK) 540 (revised): Auditing Accounting Estimates and Related Disclosures.

As a firm, we are absolutely committed to meeting the expectations of the FRC with regard to audit quality and public sector financial reporting. Our proposed work and fee for 2021/22 is currently being considered given ongoing financial reporting and economic developments. We will discuss the proposed fee with management over the coming months and communicate this to Those Charged with Governance within the Audit Findings Report.

Actual Fee 2020/21

Proposed fee 2021/22

Total audit fees (excluding VAT)

£37,742

£TBC

Assumptions

In setting the above fees, we have assumed that the Authority will:

- prepare a good quality set of financial statements, supported by comprehensive and well-presented working papers which are ready at the start of the audit
- provide appropriate analysis, support and evidence to support all critical judgements and significant judgements made during the course of preparing the financial statements
- provide early notice of proposed complex or unusual transactions which could have a material impact on the financial statements.

Relevant professional standards

In preparing our fee estimate, we have had regard to all relevant professional standards, including paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the FRC's [Ethical Standard \(revised 2019\)](#) which stipulate that the Engagement Lead (Key Audit Partner) must set a fee sufficient to enable the resourcing of the audit with partners and staff with appropriate time and skill to deliver an audit to the required professional and Ethical standards.

Independence and non-audit services

Auditor independence

Ethical Standards and ISA (UK) 260 require us to give you timely disclosure of all significant facts and matters that may bear upon the integrity, objectivity and independence of the firm or covered persons, relating to our independence. We encourage you to contact us to discuss these or any other independence issues with us. We will also discuss with you if we make additional significant judgements surrounding independence matters.

We confirm that there are no significant facts or matters that impact on our independence as auditors that we are required or wish to draw to your attention. We have complied with the Financial Reporting Authority's Ethical Standard (Revised 2019) and we as a firm, and each covered person, confirm that we are independent and are able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements. Further, we have complied with the requirements of the National Audit Office's Auditor Guidance Note 01 issued in May 2020 which sets out supplementary guidance on ethical requirements for auditors of local public bodies.

We confirm that we have implemented policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Ethical Standard. For the purposes of our audit we have made enquiries of all Grant Thornton UK LLP teams providing services to the Authority.

Other services

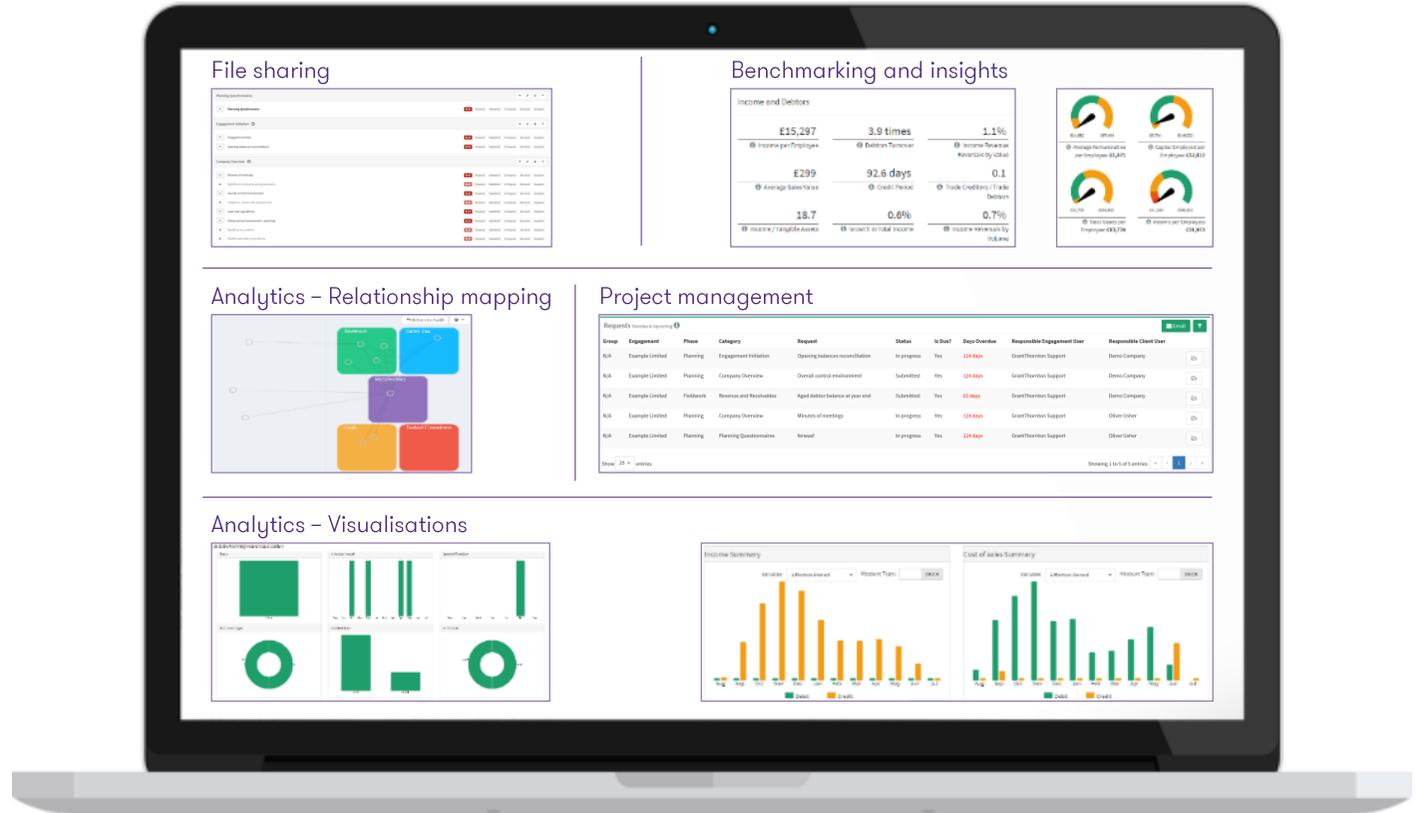
No other services provided by Grant Thornton were identified.

Any changes and full details of all fees charged for audit related and non-audit related services by Grant Thornton UK LLP and by Grant Thornton International Limited network member Firms will be included in our Audit Findings report at the conclusion of the audit.

Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:

Function	Benefits for you
Data extraction	Providing us with your financial information is made easier
File sharing	An easy-to-use, ISO 27001 certified, purpose-built file sharing tool
Project management	Effective management and oversight of requests and responsibilities
Data analytics	Enhanced assurance from access to complete data populations



Grant Thornton's Analytics solution is supported by Inflo Software technology

Our digital audit experience

A key component of our overall audit experience is our comprehensive data analytics tool, which is supported by Inflo Software technology. This tool has a number of key functions within our audit process:



Data extraction

- Real-time access to data
- Easy step-by-step guides to support you upload your data



File sharing

- Task-based ISO 27001 certified file sharing space, ensuring requests for each task are easy to follow
- Ability to communicate in the tool, ensuring all team members have visibility on discussions about your audit, reducing duplication of work



Project management

- Facilitates oversight of requests
- Access to a live request list at all times



Data analytics

- Relationship mapping, allowing understanding of whole cycles to be obtained quickly
- Visualisation of transactions, allowing easy identification of trends and anomalies

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How will analytics add value to your audit?

Analytics will add value to your audit in a number of ways. We see the key benefits of extensive use of data analytics within the audit process to be the following:

Improved fraud procedures using powerful anomaly detection

Being able to analyse every accounting transaction across your business enhances our fraud procedures. We can immediately identify high risk transactions, focusing our work on these to provide greater assurance to you, and other stakeholders.

Examples of anomaly detection include analysis of user activity, which may highlight inappropriate access permissions, and reviewing seldom used accounts, which could identify efficiencies through reducing unnecessary codes and therefore unnecessary internal maintenance.

Another product of this is identification of issues that are not specific to individual postings, such as training requirements being identified for members of staff with high error rates, or who are relying on use of suspense accounts.

More time for you to perform the day job

Providing all this additional value does not require additional input from you or your team. In fact, less of your time is required to prepare information for the audit and to provide supporting information to us.

Complete extracts from your general ledger will be obtained from the data provided to us and requests will therefore be reduced.

We provide transparent project management, allowing us to seamlessly collaborate with each other to complete the audit on time and around other commitments.

We will both have access to a dashboard which provides a real-time overview of audit progress, down to individual information items we need from each other. Tasks can easily be allocated across your team to ensure roles and responsibilities are well defined.

Using filters, you and your team will quickly be able to identify actions required, meaning any delays can be flagged earlier in the process. Accessible through any browser, the audit status is always available on any device providing you with the information to work flexibly around your other commitments.

Appendix 1: Progress against prior year audit recommendations

We identified the following issues in our 2020/21 audit of the Authority's financial statements, which resulted in one recommendations being reported in our 2020/21 Audit Findings Report. As part of our risk assessment we have considered the impact of unadjusted prior period errors and have not identified any impact on the current year audit in respect of that adjustment.

We are pleased to report that management are implementing our recommendation.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
Page 89	<p>Our work on Property Plant & Equipment identified that management were not complying with their accounting policy for application of annual depreciation charges for building assets - <i>'Dwellings and other buildings – straight-line allocation over the useful life of the property as estimated by the valuer'</i>.</p> <p>We identified that the valuer's report does not currently include an estimation of useful life. However management have been complying with the accounting standard requirements of IAS16 and have been reviewing the residual value and the useful life of an asset at least at each financial year-end.</p>	<p>The external valuer has changed for 2022-23 and as part of the new contract, they will include estimation of useful life. This will form part of the asset register's calculations going forward.</p>

Appendix 2: Progress against prior year VfM recommendations

We made three improvement recommendations as part of our Value for Money audit, as presented to the Authority Meeting in our Auditors Annual Report in December.

We are pleased to report that management are looking at the best ways to implement our recommendations, and acknowledge some of them will take a while to implement.

Assessment	Issue and risk previously communicated	Update on actions taken to address the issue
Page 90 In progress	We recommended that the Authority consider establishing a separate Audit Committee and to consider appointing an independent member with a suitable financial background as recommended by the Redmond review.	The Fire Authority will consider a recommendation from Governance and Constitution Committee at its meeting in April 2022 about the creation of an Audit Committee made up of four elected members and one independent audit member (to be appointed during Quarter 1, 2022-23). The Audit Committee is expected to have responsibility for internal audit as well as external audit. The Audit Committee should be in place from the Fire Authority meeting in June 2022.
In progress	We recommended that Cheshire Fire look at integrating financial performance reporting with service delivery performance reporting. One way to achieve this could be to require reports to have a financial input from Finance Business Partners before they can be agreed.	The performance reports that are considered by Performance and Overview Committee will, in future, include an entry concerned with financial aspects. Initially, this will simply show the budget, forecast outturn and whether an underspend or overspend it anticipated. Over time this may be developed further. This will help link performance and finance. The change will apply to reports to Performance and Overview Committee in July 2022.
In progress	We recommended that Cheshire Fire look at reviewing their procurement protocols to be more in line with police as there is a shared procurement department.	Proposed changes to the procurement protocols have been prepared and are currently being discussed with the Head of Finance. They will also be considered by the new Treasurer when he takes up his role in the second half of April 2022. The proposed changes should provide scope for reducing the burden on the strategic procurement department. They should also assist other support services, e.g. estates, where some low cost items involve greater procurement activity than is justified. The changes should now be implemented in Quarter 1, 2022-23.



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Informing the audit risk assessment for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service 2021/22

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The contents of this report relate only to the matters which have come to our attention, which we believe need to be reported to you as part of our audit process. It is not a comprehensive record of all the relevant matters, which may be subject to change, and in particular we cannot be held responsible to you for reporting all of the risks which may affect your business or any weaknesses in your internal controls. This report has been prepared solely for your benefit and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to contribute towards the effective two-way communication between Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service external auditors and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Fire Authority, as 'those charged with governance'. The report covers some important areas of the auditor risk assessment where we are required to make inquiries of the Fire Authority under auditing standards.

Background

Under International Standards on Auditing (UK), (ISA(UK)) auditors have specific responsibilities to communicate with the Fire Authority. ISA(UK) emphasise the importance of two-way communication between the auditor and the Fire Authority and also specify matters that should be communicated.

This two-way communication assists both the auditor and the Fire Authority in understanding matters relating to the audit and developing a constructive working relationship. It also enables the auditor to obtain information relevant to the audit from the Fire Authority and supports the Fire Authority in fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to the financial reporting process.

Communication

As part of our risk assessment procedures we are required to obtain an understanding of management processes and the Fire Authority's oversight of the following areas:

- General Enquiries of Management
- Fraud,
- Laws and Regulations,
- Related Parties,
- Going Concern, and
- Accounting Estimates.

Purpose

This report includes a series of questions on each of these areas and the response we have received from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's management. The Fire Authority should consider whether these responses are consistent with its understanding and whether there are any further comments it wishes to make.

General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
<p>1. What do you regard as the key events or issues that will have a significant impact on the financial statements for 2021/22?</p>	<p>Setting the Authority Budget in alignment with IRMP, and the resulting Council Tax precept .</p> <p>Progress against the capital programme</p> <p>Changes in the valuations of Land and Building Assets – new valuers for 2021-22</p> <p>Changes that affect the pensions liability or the pension funding arrangements.</p> <p>Response to Covid pandemic and associated cost/funding issues, including grants</p>
<p>2. Have you considered the appropriateness of the accounting policies adopted by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service?</p> <p>Have there been any events or transactions that may cause you to change or adopt new accounting policies? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>When preparing the accounts, accounting policies and the application of proper practices under local government legislation are considered; for any individually significant transactions; for changes to budgets or key parts of the budgets, such as the capital programme; and as part of the financial statement preparation.</p> <p>No.</p>
<p>3. Is there any use of financial instruments, including derivatives? If so, please explain</p>	<p>Financial instruments are used in the normal course of funding activities, for example, leases and loans. Generally the authority is risk adverse and the type of financial instrument used is generally the kind that are measured at contract value or at amortised cost. The Authority does not seek to mitigate risk through the use of derivatives; it does so through sound financial planning.</p>
<p>4. Are you aware of any significant transaction outside the normal course of business? If so, what are they?</p>	<p>No, nothing to report</p>

General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
5. Are you aware of any changes in circumstances that would lead to impairment of non-current assets? If so, what are they?	No
6. Are you aware of any guarantee contracts? If so, please provide further details	NWFC is a company limited by Guarantee, the Authority's liability is limited to £1. The Authority has not provided guarantees to any third party.
7. Are you aware of the existence of loss contingencies and/or un-asserted claims that may affect the financial statements? If so, please provide further details	<p>The Authority is aware of two types of contingent liability. The first is the liability under Fire Fighter Injury Scheme - this is included as part of the overall IAS 19 pensions liability.</p> <p>The second is that arising from the insolvency of a former insurer. However, it is not possible to quantify any potential claims.</p>
8. Other than in house solicitors, can you provide details of those solicitors utilised Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service during the year. Please indicate where they are working on open litigation or contingencies from prior years?	

General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
9. Have any of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's service providers reported any items of fraud, non-compliance with laws and regulations or uncorrected misstatements which would affect the financial statements? If so, please provide further details	We are not aware of any such issues.
10. Can you provide details of other advisors consulted during the year and the issue on which they were consulted?	Bruton Knowles re Land and Building values Hymans Robertson re LGPS pension liabilities GAD for the Firefighters Pension Scheme pension liabilities Link Asset Services re investment and loan portfolios
11. Have you considered and identified assets for which expected credit loss provisions may be required under IFRS 9, such as debtors (including loans) and investments? If so, please provide further details	Yes and none to report

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Fraud

Matters in relation to fraud

ISA (UK) 240 covers auditors responsibilities relating to fraud in an audit of financial statements.

The primary responsibility to prevent and detect fraud rests with both the Fire Authority and management. Management, with the oversight of the Fire Authority, needs to ensure a strong emphasis on fraud prevention and deterrence and encourage a culture of honest and ethical behaviour. As part of its oversight, the Fire Authority should consider the potential for override of controls and inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process.

As Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's external auditor, we are responsible for obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement due to fraud or error. We are required to maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit, considering the potential for management override of controls.

As part of our audit risk assessment procedures we are required to consider risks of fraud. This includes considering the arrangements management has put in place with regard to fraud risks including:

- assessment that the financial statements could be materially misstated due to fraud,
- process for identifying and responding to risks of fraud, including any identified specific risks,
- communication with the Fire Authority regarding its processes for identifying and responding to risks of fraud, and
- communication to employees regarding business practices and ethical behaviour.

We need to understand how the Fire Authority oversees the above processes. We are also required to make inquiries of both management and the Fire Authority as to their knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud. These areas have been set out in the fraud risk assessment questions below together with responses from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's management.

Fraud risk assessment

Question	Management response
<p>1. Has Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service assessed the risk of material misstatement in the financial statements due to fraud?</p> <p>How has the process of identifying and responding to the risk of fraud been undertaken and what are the results of this process?</p> <p>How do the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's risk management processes link to financial reporting?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Management has considered the likelihood of control failings that could lead to material misstatement due to misappropriation of assets or suppression of liabilities. Systems have been constructed with checks and balances to ensure that transactions are initiated for proper purposes in line with operating requirements and Authority Plans. Review of internal control of our core systems is part of the Internal Audit Annual Programme and control compliance is considered by officers when preparing the annual review of effectiveness as part of the AGS process. Management has assurance that effective control arrangements are in place.</p> <p>The Authority's risk management processes are designed to ensure the Authority meets its statutory duties and fulfils its corporate objectives. To meet these requirements adequate resources have to be applied to the Authority's operations and in turn these resources need to be approved by the Authority through its budget setting process. Management is held to account for budget management and the financial reporting processes ensure that spending against budget is reconciled to spending as reported under the Code.</p>
<p>2. What have you determined to be the classes of accounts, transactions and disclosures most at risk to fraud?</p>	<p>Non-pay expenditure is at risk of fraud through misappropriation of funds or assets.</p>
<p>3. Are you aware of any instances of actual, suspected or alleged fraud, errors or other irregularities either within Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as a whole, or within specific departments since 1 April 2021? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>None that have been reported</p>

Fraud risk assessment

Question	Management response
4. As a management team, how do you communicate risk issues (including fraud) to those charged with governance?	TCWG (the Fire Authority) are informed as part of regular reporting through the Committee Structure and to the Authority as a whole. The Constitution has identified certain financial matters that are of such significance as to require approval by the whole Authority.
5. Have you identified any specific fraud risks? If so, please provide details Do you have any concerns there are areas that are at risk of fraud? Are there particular locations within Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service where fraud is more likely to occur?	None identified Stores - the value of such fraud is not likely to be material in the context of the financial statements. However, the Authority has a zero tolerance of fraud Stores - as above.
6. What processes do Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have in place to identify and respond to risks of fraud?	The Authority significantly updated its anti-fraud and corruption framework in 2015 and has kept it up to date as legislation and best practise has developed. The framework begins with a statement of intent to promote honesty in service delivery, to seek out fraudulent and corrupt practises and to prosecute to the full extent of the law. Key policies are in place which describe the actions to be taken by Members and officers. The Treasurer, Head of Finance, Director of Governance and Commissioning and Chief Fire Officer must be notified if fraud is suspected. The Authority's Confidential Reporting Policy (Whistleblowing) and Corporate Complaints Policy provide a route for raising concerns with the Authority and detail the safeguards and support available. Investigation into fraud which will normally be carried out by the Internal Audit provider which will liaise with the Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance and Director of Governance and Commissioning and where relevant refer to the Police.

Fraud risk assessment

Question	Management response
<p>7. How do you assess the overall control environment for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the existence of internal controls, including segregation of duties; and the process for reviewing the effectiveness the system of internal control? <p>Internal controls are not in place or not effective where are the risk areas and what mitigating actions have been taken?</p> <p>What other controls are in place to help prevent, deter or detect fraud?</p> <p>Are there any areas where there is a potential for override of controls or inappropriate influence over the financial reporting process (for example because of undue pressure to achieve financial targets)? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>The internal control process is rated as strong.</p> <p>There is an internal audit process designed to provide assurance over the overall system of control it includes annual review of key elements such as financial controls, cyclical reviews, risk based and reactive reviews.</p> <p>Senior officers review the findings of internal audit reviews and these findings inform the authority's assessment.</p> <p>No significant weaknesses have been identified but all recommendations for improvement are accepted and a programme of follow up review is in place.</p> <p>A limited number of people have the access and authorisation rights in Agresso that enable them to amend transaction data. However, there are mitigating controls in place such as an audit trail of actions and restrictions on the basic ability to procure/contract.</p>
<p>8. Are there any areas where there is potential for misreporting? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>Property and pension valuations - these are complex and utilise the work of external experts</p>

Fraud risk assessment

Question	Management response
<p>9. How does Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service communicate and encourage ethical behaviours and business processes of it's staff and contractors?</p> <p>How do you encourage staff to report their concerns about fraud?</p> <p>What concerns are staff expected to report about fraud? Have any significant issues been reported? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>The Authority has a range of policies and procedures in place. New staff, contractors and members have tailored induction programmes, including the Authority's core values.</p> <p>We have reporting channels set out in our policies and procedures which include whistle-blowing arrangements and whistle blower protections.</p> <p>Staff are expected to report anything they suspect may be classed as, fraud, bribery, or corruption including transactions, events and circumstances that may give rise to fraud, bribery or corruption. No issues to report.</p>
<p>10. From a fraud and corruption perspective, what are considered to be high-risk posts?</p> <p>How are the risks relating to these posts identified, assessed and managed?</p>	<p>Procurement posts</p> <p>The Authority has clear procurement procedures – procurement must be in line with the budget proposals – all expenditure is monitored by budget holders and reflected in budget monitoring reports.</p>
<p>11. Are you aware of any related party relationships or transactions that could give rise to instances of fraud? If so, please provide details</p> <p>How do you mitigate the risks associated with fraud related to related party relationships and transactions?</p>	<p>No</p> <p>See above re procurement. The Authority also has in place a comprehensive system of registers of interests, gifts and hospitality that all Members and officers must complete. The registers include guidance on what is acceptable and what must be declined, officers and Members are encouraged to disclose all including those that are acceptable. Declarations of interest are taken at all Authority meetings.</p>

Fraud risk assessment

Question	Management response
<p>12. What arrangements are in place to report fraud issues and risks to the Fire Authority ?</p> <p>How does the Fire Authority exercise oversight over management's processes for identifying and responding to risks of fraud and breaches of internal control?</p> <p>What has been the outcome of these arrangements so far this year?</p>	<p>There is a formal reporting programme to the Authority and its Committees. Briefings on all decisions and significant issues are routinely provided to the Group Leaders and the Independent Members and made available to the full Authority. Officers make themselves available to go into further detail and invite questions and challenge from the Authority.</p> <p>Although relationships with officers are professional and friendly there is a very clear separation of roles and responsibilities and Members avoid being involved in engagements or activities that compromise or could be perceived as compromising that separation.</p> <p>Nothing has arisen during the year.</p>
<p>13. Are you aware of any whistle blowing potential or complaints by potential whistle blowers? If so, what has been your response?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>14. Have any reports been made under the Bribery Act? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>No</p>

Law and regulations

Matters in relation to laws and regulations

ISA (UK) 250 requires us to consider the impact of laws and regulations in an audit of the financial statements.

Management, with the oversight of the Fire Authority, is responsible for ensuring that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's operations are conducted in accordance with laws and regulations, including those that determine amounts in the financial statements.

As auditor, we are responsible for obtaining reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement due to fraud or error, taking into account the appropriate legal and regulatory framework. As part of our risk assessment procedures we are required to make inquiries of management and the Fire Authority as to whether the body is in compliance with laws and regulations. Where we become aware of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance we need to gain an understanding of the non-compliance and the possible effect on the financial statements.

Risk assessment questions have been set out below together with responses from management.

Impact of laws and regulations

Question	Management response
<p>1. How does management gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with?</p> <p>What arrangements does Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have in place to prevent and detect non-compliance with laws and regulations?</p> <p>Are you aware of any changes to the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's regulatory environment that may have a significant impact on the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's financial statements?</p>	<p>Various roles have responsibilities associated with compliance with laws and regulations, e.g. the Head of Operational Policy and Assurance is responsible for health and safety and the Director of Transformation is responsible for pension administration. The Director of Governance and Commissioning is the Authority's Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>Compliance issues are regularly reported to the Service Management Team and to the Fire Authority and its Committees.</p> <p>No</p>
<p>2. How is the Fire Authority provided with assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with?</p>	<p>There is a formal reporting programme to the Authority and its Committees. This includes reporting upon Internal Audit activity and findings.</p>
<p>3. Have there been any instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulation since 1 April 2021 with an on-going impact on the 2021/22 financial statements? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>4. Are there any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements? If so, please provide details</p>	<p>No</p>

Impact of laws and regulations

Question	Management response
5. What arrangements does Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have in place to identify, evaluate and account for litigation or claims?	There is good co-ordination between the Finance Team, Legal Services and Director of Governance and Commissioning who is the Authority's Monitoring Officer,
6. Have there been any reports from other regulatory bodies, such as HM Revenues and Customs, which indicate non-compliance? If so, please provide details	No

Related Parties

Matters in relation to Related Parties

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are required to disclose transactions with bodies/individuals that would be classed as related parties. These may include:

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- bodies that directly, or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, control, or are controlled by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- associates;
- joint ventures;
- a body that has an interest in the authority that gives it significant influence over the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- key management personnel, and close members of the family of key management personnel, and
- post-employment benefit plans (pension fund) for the benefit of employees of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, or of any body that is a related party of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

A disclosure is required if a transaction (or series of transactions) is material on either side, i.e. if a transaction is immaterial from the [type of body]'s perspective but material from a related party viewpoint then the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service must disclose it.

ISA (UK) 550 requires us to review your procedures for identifying related party transactions and obtain an understanding of the controls that you have established to identify such transactions. We will also carry out testing to ensure the related party transaction disclosures you make in the financial statements are complete and accurate.

Related Parties

Question	Management response
<p>1. Have there been any changes in the related parties including those disclosed in Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's 2020/21 financial statements?</p> <p>If so please summarise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the nature of the relationship between these related parties and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service whether Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has entered into or plans to enter into any transactions with these related parties the type and purpose of these transactions 	No
<p>2. What controls does Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have in place to identify, account for and disclose related party transactions and relationships?</p>	The Authority also has in place a comprehensive system of registers of interests, that all Members and officers must complete. This register is reviewed periodically to ensure that all Related Parties are identified and adequately reported in the financial statements.
<p>3. What controls are in place to authorise and approve significant transactions and arrangements with related parties?</p>	All requests over £10k are referred to Strategic Procurement for scrutiny, tender process and contract purposes. Orders are also sampled in Finance through system management. Contracts are signed by Director of Governance and Commissioning, the Monitoring Officer.
<p>4. What controls are in place to authorise and approve significant transactions outside of the normal course of business?</p>	All requests over £10k are referred to Strategic Procurement for scrutiny, tender process and contract purposes. Orders are also sampled in Finance through system management. Contracts are signed by Director of Governance and Commissioning, the Monitoring Officer.

Going Concern

Matters in relation to Going Concern

The audit approach for going concern is based on the requirements of ISA (UK) 570, as interpreted by Practice Note 10: Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom (Revised 2020). It also takes into account the National Audit Office's Supplementary Guidance Note (SGN) 01: Going Concern – Auditors' responsibilities for local public bodies.

Practice Note 10 confirms that in many (but not all) public sector bodies, the use of the going concern basis of accounting is not a matter of significant focus of the auditor's time and resources because the applicable financial reporting frameworks envisage that the going concern basis of accounting will apply where the body's services will continue to be delivered by the public sector. In such cases, a material uncertainty related to going concern is unlikely to exist.

For this reason, a straightforward and standardised approach to compliance with ISA (UK) 570 will often be appropriate for public sector bodies. This will be a proportionate approach to going concern based on the body's circumstances and the applicable financial reporting framework. In line with Practice Note 10, the auditor's assessment of going concern should take account of the statutory nature of the body and the fact that the financial reporting framework for local government / fire service bodies presume going concern in the event of anticipated continuation of provision of the services provided by the body. Therefore, the public sector auditor applies a 'continued provision of service approach', unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. This would also apply even where those services are planned to transfer to another body, as in such circumstances, the underlying services will continue.

For many public sector bodies, the financial sustainability of the body and the services it provides are more likely to be of significant public interest than the application of the going concern basis of accounting. Financial sustainability is a key component of value for money work and it is through such work that it will be considered.

Going Concern

Question	Management response
1. What processes and controls does management have in place to identify events and / or conditions which may indicate that the statutory services being provided by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service will no longer continue?	As fire and rescue services are a statutory requirement under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, whether it be Cheshire Fire Authority or a subsequent reorganised service, there will still be a fire and rescue service that will be funded and operational. We are aware that the Government is due to produce a 'White Paper' on fire governance and this is being monitored at the highest level internally and nationally through the NFCC. Discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioner have indicated there is no wish to change from the Fire Authority.
2. Are management aware of any factors which may mean for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service that either statutory services will no longer be provided or that funding for statutory services will be discontinued? If so, what are they?	None that we are aware of
3. With regard to the statutory services currently provided by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, does Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service expect to continue to deliver them for the foreseeable future, or will they be delivered by related public authorities if there are any plans for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to cease to exist?	Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service expects to continue to deliver its services in its current format for the foreseeable future
4. Are management satisfied that the financial reporting framework permits Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to prepare its financial statements on a going concern basis? Are management satisfied that preparing financial statements on a going concern basis will provide a faithful representation of the items in the financial statements?	We are satisfied that the accounts can be prepared on a 'going concern' basis in terms of both governance and financial sustainability and that the accounts will provide a faithful representation as a result.

Accounting estimates

Matters in relation to accounting estimates

ISA (UK) 540 (Revised December 2018) requires auditors to understand and assess a body's internal controls over accounting estimates, including:

- The nature and extent of oversight and governance over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates;
- How management identifies the need for and applies specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates;
- How the body's risk management process identifies and addresses risks relating to accounting estimates;
- The body's information system as it relates to accounting estimates;
- The body's control activities in relation to accounting estimates; and
- How management reviews the outcomes of previous accounting estimates.

As part of this process auditors also need to obtain an understanding of the role of those charged with governance, which is particularly important where the estimates have high estimation uncertainty, or require significant judgement.

Specifically do Fire Authority members:

- Understand the characteristics of the methods and models used to make the accounting estimates and the risks related to them;
- Oversee management's process for making accounting estimates, including the use of models, and the monitoring activities undertaken by management; and
- Evaluate how management made the accounting estimates?

We would ask the Fire Authority to satisfy itself that the arrangements for accounting estimates are adequate.

Accounting Estimates - General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
1. What are the classes of transactions, events and conditions, that are significant to the financial statements that give rise to the need for, or changes in, accounting estimate and related disclosures?	Property Asset Valuations, Pension Fund/Scheme valuations
2. How does the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's risk management process identify and address risks relating to accounting estimates?	Accounting policies reviewed and amended if appropriate to ensure estimates, risks and valuations are identified. Commissioning of professional advisors to support accounting estimates where necessary. Review of draft accounting figures by the Treasurer (S151 officer).
3. How does management identify the methods, assumptions or source data, and the need for changes in them, in relation to key accounting estimates?	Review of professional guidance. Consultation with appointed experts. Where possible, independent verification or review of assumptions.
4. How do management review the outcomes of previous accounting estimates?	Comparison between current/past estimates and actual figures where possible. Challenge to professional experts around variances and assumptions.
5. Were any changes made to the estimation processes in 2021/22 and, if so, what was the reason for these?	No. Change in property valuers following re-tender but no change to processes.

Accounting Estimates - General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
<p>6. How does management identify the need for and apply specialised skills or knowledge related to accounting estimates?</p>	<p>Review of accounting regulations and changes, regular CIPFA professional and technical updates. S151 officer assesses requirements versus in house skills to determine specialist knowledge/experts to be engaged.</p>
<p>7. How does the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service determine what control activities are needed for significant accounting estimates, including the controls at any service providers or management experts?</p>	<p>Review of draft accounts includes material assumptions and material variance from previous/anticipated estimate figures. Regular dialogue with external professionals to satisfy ourselves that the methods, assumptions and values used are understandable and acceptable</p>
<p>8. How does management monitor the operation of control activities related to accounting estimates, including the key controls at any service providers or management experts?</p>	<p>Review and challenge of assumptions and variance from previous/anticipated estimate figures. Ensure a working understanding of valuation process.</p>
<p>9. What is the nature and extent of oversight and governance over management's financial reporting process relevant to accounting estimates, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management's process for making significant accounting estimates - The methods and models used - The resultant accounting estimates included in the financial statements. 	<p>Review/Challenge by Head of Finance followed by S151 officer review. Review, Scrutiny and Approval by Closure of Accounts Committee (Fire Authority Members).</p>

Accounting Estimates - General Enquiries of Management

Question	Management response
10. Are management aware of any transactions, events, conditions (or changes in these) that may give rise to recognition or disclosure of significant accounting estimates that require significant judgement (other than those in Appendix A)? If so, what are they?	No
11. Why are management satisfied that their arrangements for the accounting estimates, as detailed in Appendix A, are reasonable?	Rigorous tender process ensures that appointed professional experts have sufficient qualification, capacity, knowledge and experience to undertake valuations and provide reasonable estimates as requested. Regular professional updates and seminars for members of the finance team ensure current technical knowledge, robust review and where appropriate challenge of Accounting Estimates provided by experts. Ongoing S151 Officer review of arrangements and estimates to ensure fit for purpose and reasonable.
12. How is the Fire Authority provided with assurance that the arrangements for accounting estimates are adequate ?	<p>Each year the Treasurer/Head of Finance presents an assurance statement to the Authority confirming the robustness of estimates used in the preparation of the annual budgets. This is supplemented by the Treasury Management Strategy that sets out the prudential performance indicators which are affected by the outcome of those budget estimates.</p> <p>For estimates relating to financial reporting, a Closure of Accounts Committee receives the accounts before they are authorised for issue at which the Treasurer and Head of Finance take members through the financial statements highlighting key transactions and balances and any significant points which aid their understanding of how the accounts are made up.</p>

Appendix A Accounting Estimates

Estimate	Method / model used to make the estimate	Controls used to identify estimates	Whether management have used an expert	Underlying assumptions: - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates	Has there been a change in accounting method in year?
Land and buildings valuations Page 118	Current value defined as 'existing use' by Cheshire Fire Authority.	Valuations are performed with sufficient regularity to ensure that the fair value of a revalued asset does not differ materially from its carrying amount. For land and buildings all material assets will be valued in March 2022.	Yes	Degree of uncertainty inherent with any revaluation. We employ professional valuers and rely on expert opinion. This will be via a new valuer for 2021-22	No
Depreciation	Depreciation methods, useful lives and residual values are reviewed each financial year and adjusted if appropriate.	See left	Yes, valuers are consulted where appropriate	Depreciation is calculated on a straight line basis as this reflects consumption of assets and is a reasonable assumption	No

Appendix A Accounting Estimates

Estimate	Method / model used to make the estimate	Controls used to identify estimates	Whether management have used an expert	Underlying assumptions: - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates	Has there been a change in accounting method in year?
Valuation of defined benefit net pension fund liabilities	The actuarial gains and losses figures are calculated by the actuarial expert. These figures are based on making % adjustments to the closing values of assets/liabilities.	The Authority respond to queries raised by the actuaries and verify the assumptions used.	Hymans Robertson (LGPS) & GAD (Firefighters).	The nature of these figures forecasting into the future are based upon the best information held at the current time and are developed by experts in their field.	No.
Level 2 investments	Financial instruments consist of investments and loans and loan arrangements, measured initially at cost and then at amortised cost using the effective interest method.	Knowledge by the Investment team who manages the investment and loan portfolio in assessing the potential risk in credit losses.	No	The portfolio is assessed on an individual borrower for its expected credit losses using: i) Probability of default ii) Loss of given default	No
Level 3 investments	As above				
Fair value estimates	Fair value is assessed by calculating the present values of the cash flows that will take place of the remaining term of the instrument in line with accounting policies	The Authority uses PWLB interest rates where applicable	Yes, Link Asset Services re: FV estimate of Loan Portfolio	For PWLB, interest rates prevailing at 31 March 2022; No early repayment or impairment is recognised; Where an instrument will mature in the next 12 months, the carrying amount is assumed to be an approximate to fair value; and The fair value of trade and other receivables is taken to be the invoiced or billed amount	No

Appendix A Accounting Estimates

Estimate	Method / model used to make the estimate	Controls used to identify estimates	Whether management have used an expert	Underlying assumptions: - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates	Has there been a change in accounting method in year?
Provisions Page 120	Provisions are identified through detailed monthly management accounts which flags any potential issues to management.	Each provision is separately reviewed by financial accounts and a working is put together to support the calculation.	As necessary on an individual basis	Each provision is assessed on an individual basis to ensure that it meets the criteria of a provision per IAS 37. The degree of uncertainty is assessed when determining whether a provision is the correct treatment for an item.	No.
Accruals	We use standard accruals accounting – accruals are based on expenses incurred within the financial year that have not yet been paid.	Monthly management accounts provides rigorous analysis so that any accruals are highlighted and actioned throughout the year.	No	See left	No
Credit loss and impairment allowances	Review of all assets including investments undertaken annually in line with the accounting policy	See left.	Discussion with Link Asset Services and internal asset team as appropriate.	N/A.	No.

Appendix A Accounting Estimates (Continued)

Estimate	Method / model used to make the estimate	Controls used to identify estimates	Whether management have used an expert	Underlying assumptions: - Assessment of degree of uncertainty - Consideration of alternative estimates	Has there been a change in accounting method in year?
Finance lease liabilities Page 121	Property, plant and equipment held under finance leases is recognised on the Balance Sheet at the commencement of the lease at its fair value measured at the lease's inception (or the present value of the minimum lease payments, if lower)	IFRS 16 - Accounting treatment of Leases	No	The Fire Authority has no assets held under a finance lease.	No



CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27TH APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: LOUISE WILLIS/CHRIS ASTALL

SUBJECT: INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2022-23

Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to approve an Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Members approve an Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23.

Background

2. Under the United Kingdom Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), the Authority is required to implement an annual risk-based internal audit plan from which an annual assurance opinion can be derived. The internal audit activity must evaluate and contribute to the improvement of governance, risk management and the control environment using a systematic and disciplined approach, focusing on:
 - Achievement of the organisation's strategic objectives;
 - Reliability and integrity of financial and operational information;
 - Effectiveness and efficiency of operations and programmes;
 - Safeguarding of assets
 - Compliance with laws, regulations, policies, procedures and contracts
3. The Authority's internal audit function is outsourced and the current provider is Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA). The plan has been developed with senior officers after considering the Authority's risk profiles and appetite.

Information

4. The contract for internal audit services includes 70 days of audit activity per annum. The draft Internal Audit Plan 2022-23, (the Plan) attached to this report as Appendix 1, illustrates how these days are intended to be utilised.
5. Findings from internal audits are used by management to take action where control weaknesses are identified and also to provide the evidence upon which MIAA base a professional opinion about the effectiveness of the Authority's governance, risk management and control arrangements.

6. Progress against the Plan is expected to be monitored during 2022-23 by the body that takes on the role of audit committee. Implementation of recommendations is also monitored and tracked by senior officers using the Cheshire Planning System, and any critical weaknesses that are identified are escalated to the Risk Management Board.

Financial Implications

7. Internal audit is an outsourced service funded from base budget. Financial implications arising from internal audit recommendations are assessed individually as part of the management response to final audit reports.

Legal Implications

8. Legal implications are considered when audit reports are presented to senior managers.

Equality and Diversity Implications

9. There are no specific impacts on any particular section of the community arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

10. There are no specific impacts on the environment arising from this report.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, FIRE SERVICE HQ, WINSFORD
TEL [01606] 868804**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

APPENDIX 1 – INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2022-23



Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service Internal Audit Plan (DRAFT) 2022/2023

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Transforming Internal Audit
3. Internal Audit Risk Assessment
4. Internal Audit Plan On A Page
5. Operational Internal Audit Plan 2022/23



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[@MIAANHS](https://twitter.com/MIAANHS)

MIAA Assurance - provision of cost effective assurance (governance, risk and control) Insight (advice and best practice) and foresight (supporting clients on up and coming issues).

These services are delivered in partnership with you to ensure they are personal and responsive, ensuring the best possible customer experience.

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Working in partnership with you

MIAA Assurance, providing cost effective assurance, insight and foresight. These services are delivered in partnership with you to ensure they are personal and responsive, ensuring the best possible customer experience.



Working with you

- ✓ Strong relationships
- ✓ In depth knowledge and understanding of organisation
- ✓ Strong risk assessment
- ✓ Tailored plan focused on your risks
- ✓ Focus on areas for improvement
- ✓ Flexible and responsive
- ✓ Strong service KPIs and delivery
- ✓ Events and Networking
- ✓ Advisory support
- ✓ Fully compliant External Quality Assessment

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1.2 Your Risk Assessment

A strong risk assessment underpins the Internal Audit Plan. This has focused upon your Strategic Risk Register as this represents **Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's** own assessment of the risks to achieving its strategic objectives.

1.3 Your Internal Audit Plan

Your Internal Audit service includes core assurances, a review of national and regional risk areas and strategic risks from your Risk Register. The draft plan is based on an initial risk assessment and provides indicative coverage for the organisation. The plan will remain flexible to allow for responses to emerging challenges that the organisation may face.

We will actively engage across the organisation to ensure we have a full and detailed understanding of your risks and can ensure we focus our work to best effect.

MIAA insights, including briefings and events will be integral to your plan.

Your fees for 2022/23 are £22,700

1.4 Your Internal Audit Team



Louise Cobain
Engagement Lead
07795 564916
Louise.cobain@miaa.nhs.uk



Anne-marie Harrop
Engagement Manager
07920 150313
Anne-marie.harrop@miaa.nhs.uk

2 Transforming Internal Audit

Internal Audit, Assurance and Solution Plans

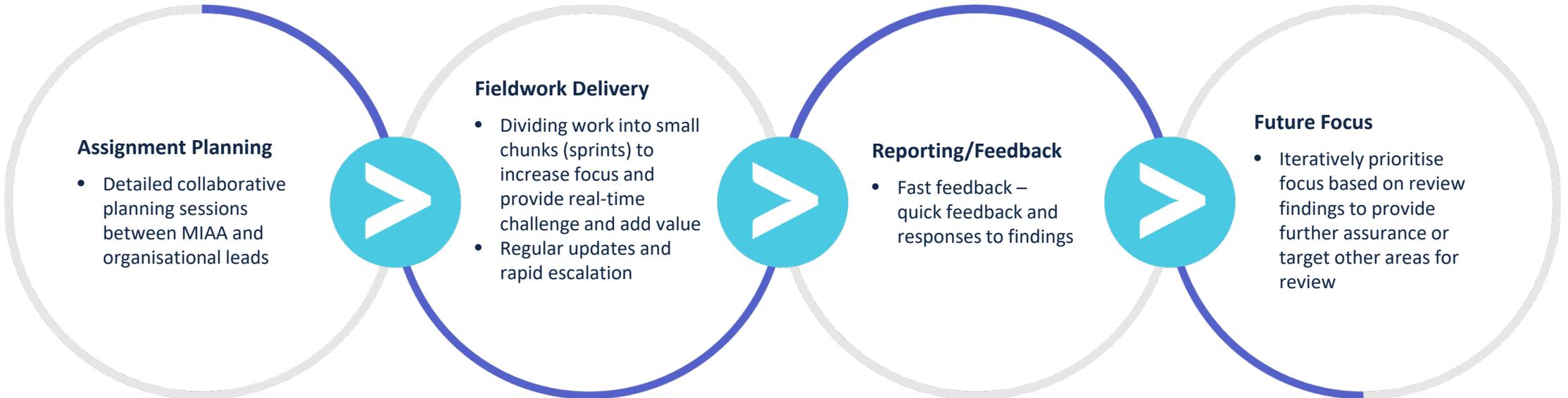
We have always been quick to respond to changes in our clients operating environment and this has been evident in our delivery throughout the Covid19 pandemic which saw our teams work with flexibility and agility to deliver your internal audit service.

Our vision is for MIAA to continue to be a Trusted Advisor through the retention of personalised, local focus and relationships with the added benefits provided by an at scale provider.

This is about MIAA continuing to build on its shared services capability to create a comprehensive offering, which provides insight and supports transformational change whilst operating efficiently.

MIAA continue to review and re-engineer our audit service and the way we provide assurance to meet your needs in the changing landscape.

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3 Internal Audit Risk Assessment

The internal audit plan is built from a risk assessment which has considered national and local system risks and your local strategic risk assessment, along with our breadth of experience and understanding of the challenges you face.

A key focus of our strategic risk assessment is understanding your vision and ensuring that the internal audit plan contributes to your objectives. This in turn ensures that the assurances provided are built around your risks.

The initial strategic risk assessment and internal audit risk assessment has considered:

- **Organisation intelligence** – including review of your Strategic Risk Register, Integrated Risk Management Plan, HMICFRS inspection outcomes and operational plans and performance.
- **Mandated assurance** – including core systems assurances to provide a Head of Internal Audit Opinion and Public Sector Internal Audit Standards requirements.
- **Previous Internal Audit coverage** – we have reviewed your previous Internal Audit coverage to ensure the proposed plan does not duplicate coverage.
- **Follow Up** – Internal Audit coverage will also include follow up of outstanding internal audit actions.

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4 Your plan on a Page

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Planning Approach

- Risk Assessment of the external environment, system and organisation (including the Strategic Risk Register and Integrated Risk Management Plan).
- Engagement of Senior Management of the OPCC and Constabulary and Audit Advisory Committee to influence the plan Use of MIAA's client risk database to inform planning.
- Coverage of Critical Business Systems to support organisation's objectives through the strategic internal audit plan.
- Provision of sufficient resources and expertise.
- Compliance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Your Plan

The outcome of your risk assessment is summarised below:

Organisational Reviews

Provision of assurances across core and risk based reviews:

- **Financial Systems including Reserves**
- **Blue Light Collaboration**
- **Business Continuity**
- **M365 Rollout / deployment**
- **Risk Management Board**

Follow Up and Contingency

Outcomes

Head of Internal Audit Opinion to inform the AGS

Assignment assurance levels

Recommendations, advice, and guidance to enhance the control environment

Insights through briefings, thought leadership events and benchmarking.

5 Operational Internal Audit Plan 22/23

Review & Scope	Strategic Risk Ref / Rationale	Audit Days	Planned Delivery	Lead
Governance , Risk and Legality				
Risk Management Board: Attendance and contribution to Risk Management Board	Management Request	1	Q1 – Q4	Director of Governance & Commissioning
Finance & Sustainability				
Key Financial Controls including Reserves: Annual evaluation of the key financial controls. We will also undertake additional work on the management and use of reserves/effectiveness of PBB process.	Core Assurance	15	Q3	Treasurer / Head of Finance
Operational Compliance				
Business Continuity: To ensure that CFRS has adequate business continuity plans in place to respond to and recover from a significant incident or loss of service. We will focus on IT loss and include arrangements for NW Fire Control.	Management Request	10	Q1	Head of Operational Policy and Assurance
People and Performance				
Blue Light Collaboration: The audit will focus on the effectiveness of performance management, governance and cost sharing arrangements.	Risk Map	14	Q2	Deputy Chief Fire Officer / Director of Governance & Commissioning
Information and Technology				
Microsoft365 Delivery: Evaluation of the deployment and rollout of M365. This will include consideration of the approach to information management and impact on working practices.	Risk Map	10	Q2	Director of Governance & Commissioning
Follow up & Contingency				
Follow up and Contingency	PSIAS requirement	10	Q1 – Q4	Director of Governance & Commissioning
Planning & Reporting				
Planning, Management, Reporting & Meetings	PSIAS requirement	10	Q1 – Q4	Director of Governance & Commissioning

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

Our work was completed in accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and conforms with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

Limitations

Our work does not provide absolute assurance that material errors, loss or fraud do not exist. Responsibility for a sound system of internal controls and the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities rests with management and work performed by internal audit should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses in internal controls, nor relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud or irregularity. Effective and timely implementation of our recommendations by management is important for the maintenance of a reliable internal control system.

Reports prepared by MIAA are prepared for your sole use and no responsibility is taken by MIAA or the auditors to any director or officer in their individual capacity. No responsibility to any third party is accepted as the report has not been prepared for, and is not intended for, any other purpose and a person who is not a party to the agreement for the provision of Internal Audit and shall not have any rights under the Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Act 1999.

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27TH APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: CREATION OF AN AUDIT COMMITTEE

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the recommendations from Governance and Constitution Committee concerned with the creation of an audit committee.

Recommended: That

- [1] An Audit Committee is created with the responsibilities contained in paragraph 4 of this report.
- [2] The Audit Committee have four elected members (appointed from the membership of Governance and Constitution Committee by that Committee) together with an independent audit member.
- [3] The appointment of the independent audit member be carried out by Governance and Constitution Committee (with the details of the appointment, e.g. remuneration, settled by that Committee).

Background

2. The Governance and Constitution Committee (G&C) considered a report entitled 'External Auditor Recommendation – Audit Committee' (the G&C Report) at its meeting on 30th March 2022. The recommendation made by the external auditor was:

We recommend that the Authority consider establishing a separate Audit Committee and to consider appointing an independent member with a suitable financial background as recommended by the Redmond review.

The G&C Report is attached to this report as Appendix 1 and contains the full recommendation from the External Auditor.

Information

3. The G&C Report was written on the basis that Members would decide to create an audit committee. G&C confirmed that it wished to do so. The G&C Report posed a number of questions aimed at helping officers to finalise the arrangements.

Responsibilities

4. G&C was content with the responsibilities set out below, encompassing both external audit and internal audit.
 - a. To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the external audit of the Authority's services and functions and to:-
 - i. Approve the nature and scope of the external audit of the Authority's services and functions;
 - ii. Consider external audit reports;
 - iii. Monitor the Authority's response to the external auditor's findings and the implementation of external audit recommendations.
 - b. To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal audit arrangements and to: -
 - i. Approve the annual Internal Audit Plan;
 - ii. Monitor progress against the Plan through the receipt of periodic progress reports and an annual Internal Audit Report;
 - iii. Consider any internal audit that provides less than substantial assurance and/or includes any high or critical risk ratings;
 - iv. Monitor the response to Internal Audit Reports and the implementation of recommendations.
5. If these responsibilities are approved by the Fire Authority the existing responsibilities for audit that sit with Performance and Overview Committee (paragraph 3.28 of the Constitution) and G&C (paragraph 3.55 of the Constitution) will be deleted. However, the Fire Authority would retain its responsibility at paragraph 3.20 of the Constitution: Considers External Audit Findings and Value for Money Conclusion report (including approval of Audit Arrangements and Fees).

Structure

6. The G&C Report set out five options for the audit committee. However, CIPFA guidance on audit committees advises that audit committees should be:

Separate - so that their responsibilities are not mixed in with/diluted with others; and

Independent – not part of the executive or scrutiny functions and not a sub-committee; it should have the ability to report directly to the Fire Authority.

7. After a short discussion G&C decided that the audit committee responsibilities appeared to be aligned with those of G&C.
8. With the above points in mind G&C decided that the audit committee should be a stand-alone body, but with members drawn from the membership of G&C.

Membership

9. G&C decided that the membership of the audit committee should be four elected Members, plus an independent audit member.

Independent Audit Member

10. G&C was happy to facilitate the appointment of the independent audit member. It supported an open advertisement, holding in reserve the potential to approach existing independent audit members from local audit committees.

Financial Implications

11. The appointment of an independent audit member will have a relatively small financial impact. The payment associated with such roles in other public bodies does vary, with some paying a flat rate and others paying per meeting attended. The sum of £2,500 per annum appears to be the highest payment made to an independent audit member locally.

Legal Implications

12. The creation of an audit committee is not a legal requirement. However, it is expected to enhance the Authority's governance arrangements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

13. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from the decisions required in this report.

Environmental Implications

14. There may be a small environmental impact if the additional meetings add to the occasions when Members are required to travel to Sadler Road. However, the intention would be to have Audit Committee meetings immediately after G&C meetings, wherever possible.

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

TEL [01606] 868804

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE
DATE: 30TH MARCH 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: EXTERNAL AUDITOR RECOMMENDATION –
AUDIT COMMITTEE

Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to consider a suitable response to the External Auditor's recommendation concerned with the creation of an audit committee with an independent member.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] provide guidance to officers as requested in the report so that a proposal can be put to the Fire Authority.

Background

2. The External Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21, presented to the Fire Authority in December 2021, contained three recommendations, one of which related to the way that the Fire Authority manages external audit activity. The audit-related recommendation is attached to this report as Appendix 1.
3. The recommendation only relates to external audit, but this report considers the potential for an audit committee with responsibility for internal and external audit.

Information

4. Currently, the Authority's Constitution contains a number of references to audit:

- a. Fire Authority

Paragraph 3.20 – Considers External Audit Findings and Value for Money Conclusion report (including approval of Audit Arrangements and Fees).

b. Performance and Overview Committee

Paragraph 3.28 – Monitors progress against the internal audit plan and recommendations from internal audits, making recommendations and offering advice, as appropriate.

c. Governance and Constitution Committee

Paragraph 3.55 – Settles the strategy for audit arrangements and carries out high level monitoring of the effectiveness of those arrangements.

5. The Fire Authority's existing responsibility, paragraph 3.20, appears to be appropriate and should, therefore, not change. The other references to audit could be removed and replaced with broader audit-specific terms of reference. The following appear to be a reasonable starting point to describe the audit responsibilities:

a. To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the external audit of the Authority's services and functions and to:-

- i. Approve the nature and scope of the external audit of the Authority's services and functions;
- ii. Consider external audit reports;
- iii. Monitor the Authority's response to the external auditor's findings and the implementation of external audit recommendations.

b. To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal audit arrangements and to: -

- i. Approve the annual Internal Audit Plan;
- ii. Monitor progress against the Plan through the receipt of periodic progress reports and an annual Internal Audit Report;
- iii. Consider any internal audit that provides less than substantial assurance and/or includes any high or critical risk ratings;
- iv. Monitor the response to Internal Audit Reports and the implementation of recommendations.

Question 1 – Members are asked whether they are satisfied with the above.

6. There are several options as to where these audit responsibilities could sit within the Fire Authority's structure. These are:
 - a. Performance and Overview Committee
 - b. Governance and Constitution Committee
 - c. Sub-committee of Performance and Overview Committee
 - d. Sub-committee of Governance and Constitution Committee
 - e. Stand-alone Audit Committee

7. The sub-committee, or stand-alone committee arrangement offers the opportunity to have a smaller group of Members providing a specific focus on audit activity. However, it would be another meeting to administer. Ideally, the meetings would take place on dates when Members were engaged in Fire Authority business, e.g. a sub-committee could immediately follow the parent committee.

Question 2 – Members are asked to consider what their preference would be.

Question 3 – Members are asked to indicate how many Members should sit on a sub-committee, or stand-alone audit committee.

8. The recommendation refers to the appointment of an independent member with appropriate skills to sit on the audit committee. There are two options:
 - a. Carry out an open 'recruitment' exercise, or
 - b. Secure the support of an individual that already fulfils this role elsewhere, preferably locally.

Question 4 – Members are asked to indicate if they have a preference. The intention would be to follow b. initially.

9. There are a range of considerations to be settled before an independent member can be appointed, e.g. skill/qualifying requirements, term of office and remuneration. Officers will provide further context on these at the meeting to help inform the discussion.

Question 5 – Members are asked to indicate how they wish to engage in the appointment process. Ideally, two or three Members of the committee would assist officers.

Financial Implications

10. The appointment of an independent member will have a relatively small financial impact. The payment associated with such roles in other public bodies does vary, with some paying a flat rate and others per meeting. The sum of £2,500 appears to be representative amount (for five meetings per year).

Legal Implications

11. The creation of an audit committee is not a legal requirement. However, it is acknowledged that the Authority's audit arrangements are likely to be enhanced if the Authority complies with recommendation from the External Auditor.

Equality and Diversity Implications

12. There are no equality and diversity implications.

Environmental Implications

13. There may be a small environmental impact if there are additional meetings, adding to the occasions when Members are required to travel to Sadler Road. This should, ideally, be avoided.

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

TEL [01606] 868804

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

Improvement recommendations

 Governance

4 Recommendation	We recommend that the Authority consider establishing a separate Audit Committee and to consider appointing an independent member with a suitable financial background as recommended by the Redmond review.
Why/impact	Without an effective audit committee there is a risk that members are unable to support effective audit and assurance as well as supporting achievement of the authority's objectives and robust internal control and supporting effective arrangements to manage risks.
Auditor judgement	Although the Authority meeting embeds the Nolan principles and is committed to a series of training for members, effective audit committees usually are made up of members with appropriate skills, with a supported programme of training.
Summary findings	The Authority does not have a dedicated Audit Committee and this function is performed via the full Authority. Whilst we have observed a reasonable level of challenge of financial and audit related matters, we are aware that some members do not feel they have the knowledge or experience to be able to effectively perform this aspect of the role. In addition, the number of members presents a challenge to this forum effectively performing the function of an Audit Committee
Management comment	The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Treasurer will consider this recommendation with a view to presenting options for enhancing Member engagement with external audit activity. Officers will also provide information to Members about the involvement of an independent member. This work should be concluded during Quarter 4 of 2021-22.



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The range of recommendations that external auditors can make is explained in Appendix C.

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CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27TH APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2021-22

Purpose of Report

1. To present Members with the Statement of Assurance 2021-22 for approval.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Approve the Statement of Assurance 2021-22, authorising the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive to make any updates/final changes to the document before it is published.

Background

2. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 (the Framework) requires fire and rescue authorities to publish a Statement of Assurance (the Statement).
3. The Framework says that the Statement should:
“...outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard... to this National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan ... prepared by the authority for that period. The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters.”
4. The guidance on the Statement indicates that existing assessment processes might feed into the Statement in order to avoid duplication and the draft Statement contains a summary of, and links to, various other documents.
5. The Governance and Constitution Committee on 30th March 2022 considered the draft Statement of Assurance 2021-22 and recommended that it should be approved by the Fire Authority.

Information

6. The Statement of Assurance for 2021-22 is attached to this report as Appendix 1. It has been prepared in accordance with national guidance. It includes sections on financial assurance, governance and operational assurance. It also outlines the way in which the Authority has had regard to the Framework. There is also a section on Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire &

Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Finally, a section concerned with the Coronavirus Pandemic is included.

7. The guidance about the preparation of a Statement suggests that where authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible, and user-friendly within existing documents they may wish to include extracts or links to these documents within their Statement. The Statement includes extracts or links to many of the existing key documents and policies such as the Integrated Risk Management Plan, the Annual Governance Statement and the Statement of Accounts.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

9. Under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 the Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework. Paragraph 4.6 of the current Framework requires each fire and rescue authority to produce an annual Statement of Assurance.
10. The Statement will be used as a source of information on which to base the Secretary of State's biennial report under section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.
11. The Statement should be signed off by an elected member of the Fire Authority who is able to take responsibility for its contents. The Chair of the Authority will be asked to sign the Statement, together with the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. They formally declare that they are satisfied that the arrangements are adequate and operating effectively and meet the requirements of the Framework.

Equality and Diversity Implications

12. There are none.

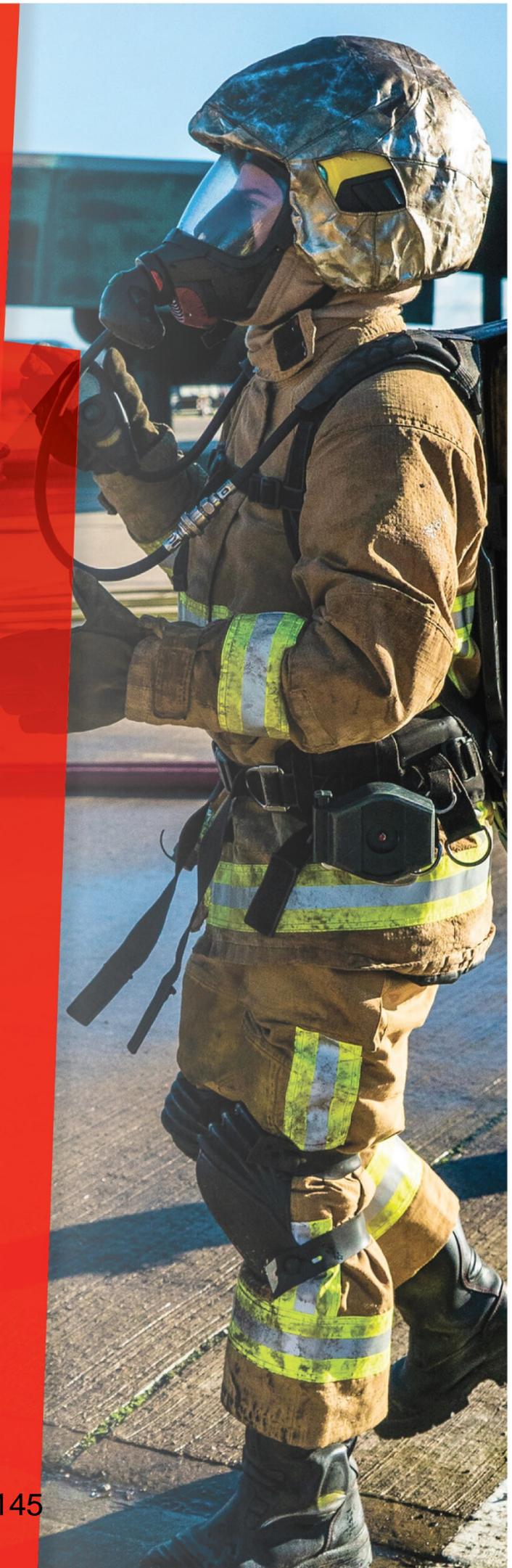
Environmental Implications

13. There are none.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804**

APPENDIX 1 – STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2021-22

**BACKGROUND PAPERS: STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2020-21 APPROVED
BY THE FIRE AUTHORITY ON 29TH SEPTEMBER 2021**



Draft Statement of Assurance 2021-22

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1. Foreword

Cheshire Fire Authority recognises the importance of having good management, effective processes, and appropriate controls in place to deliver services to the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

Fire authorities are accountable for their performance and should be open to evaluation by the communities they serve. By producing this Statement of Assurance, we aim to provide information to communities, government, local authorities and other partners which will allow them to make a valid assessment of our performance

Overall, we are satisfied that the Authority's financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements are adequate and operating effectively and meet the requirements detailed within the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Cllr Bob Rudd
Chair
Cheshire Fire Authority



Mark Cashin
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service



2. Introduction

The Statement of Assurance is published annually to provide an easy and accessible way for communities, government, local authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of the Authority's performance and governance arrangements.

The Authority is required to publish an annual Statement of Assurance as part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Fire and Rescue authorities must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the requirements included in the Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual Statement of Assurance.

The Statement of Assurance may include any potential improvements the Authority has identified across its accounting, governance or operational responsibilities and any plans to achieve the improvements.

National guidance on the content of Statements of Assurance suggests that where authorities have already set out relevant information that is clear, accessible and user friendly within existing documents, they may wish to include extracts or links to these documents within their Statement of Assurance. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents, where relevant.

3. Financial Assurance

The Authority is responsible for ensuring public money is properly accounted for and used efficiently and effectively.

Annual Statement of Accounts

Cheshire Fire Authority provides financial assurance through the publication of the Annual Statement of Accounts. This is a statutory requirement under the [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) and the accounts are prepared following the *CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting*. The financial statements are subject to review by independent auditors as directed by the [Audit Commission Act 1998](#).

The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring the right controls are in place to ensure that financial assets are properly managed, financial reporting is accurate and that the Annual Statement of Accounts is prepared in accordance with statutory requirements.

Annual Governance Statement

The [Annual Governance Statement](#), which is a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations (England) 2015 and which is published as part of the Annual Statement of Accounts, sets out the systems and procedures that are in place to ensure that the Authority's resources are used in accordance with the law and provide best value for the taxpayer.

Transparency

In addition to the statutory requirement to publish annual financial results, the Authority is committed to increasing transparency. The Authority has adopted the best practice guidance set out in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 as far as is practical and publishes key documents and information on the Authority's website regarding how money is being spent. This includes details of payments for goods and services to external bodies and suppliers above £500, details of salaries and allowances paid to staff and Members and tender and procurement information.

[Transparency](#)

[Local Government Transparency Code 2015.](#)

Auditors

Grant Thornton Limited Liability Partnership is the appointed external auditor for Cheshire Fire Authority and is responsible for completion of the following assurance activities:

- Audit of the 2021-22 financial statements
- Opinion on the Authority's accounts
- Value for Money conclusion

The Internal Audit function for 2021-22 was provided by Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA). A number of audits were commissioned in line with the Authority's risk profile which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority's control frameworks.

Key evidence links

- [Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014](#)
- [Statement of Accounts](#)
- [Annual Governance Statement](#)
- [Medium Term Financial Plan](#)
- [Transparency](#)
- [Local Government Transparency Code 2015.](#)

4. Governance

The Authority's governance arrangements and framework aim to ensure that in conducting its business it:

- Operates in a lawful, open, inclusive and honest manner.
- Makes sure public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and spent wisely.
- Has effective arrangements in place to manage risk.
- Meets the needs of the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.
- Secures continuous improvements in the way it operates.

Annual Governance Statement

The Authority is required to produce an “**Annual Governance Statement**” (AGS) which is published as part of the Annual Statement of Accounts. The AGS is an expression of the measures taken by the Authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. It explains how the organisation manages its governance and internal control arrangements and measures the effectiveness of those arrangements.

The [AGS](#) for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 is published on the Authority's website within the Annual Statement of Accounts.

Local Code of Corporate Governance

CIPFA published a new version of the framework ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government’ in 2016. This best practice guidance sets out seven principles of good governance A to G which are illustrated below, and each principle is considered in the AGS:



How the Authority Works

Cheshire Fire Authority

The Authority has responsibility for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and that proper standards are in place.

The Authority was created in 1997 by the Cheshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order. It is made up of twenty-three elected Members appointed by the constituent authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington Borough Councils. There are also two non-elected independent members who act in an advisory role.

In 2017 the Authority enabled the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire (PCC) to attend and speak at its meetings. This was intended to help develop further integration of those services and assets that are the responsibility of the Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner. In March 2020 the Combination Scheme was amended by the Government to allow the PCC to sit as a Member of the Authority with voting rights if he makes a formal request to do so and if the Authority agrees to the request.

In discharging the statutory responsibilities of the Authority, Members and senior officers are responsible for ensuring that proper governance arrangements are in place. These demonstrate good management of the Authority's key risks in accordance with legislation and appropriate standards.

The **Constitution** of the Authority covers:

- An explanation of key documents produced by the Fire Authority
- Members decision making bodies
- Procedural matters
- Outside bodies
- Members roles
- Protocols
- Members Code of Conduct
- Members allowances
- Financial regulations
- Scheme of Delegation

The Authority's committee structures allow Members to consider key policies and to monitor performance. The Authority has an effective strategic and financial planning process which includes rigorous review and challenge by Members.

The Authority operates with the following main Committee structure:

- Performance and Overview Committee
- Governance and Constitution Committee
- Brigade Managers Pay and Performance Committee
- Staffing Committee
- Estates and Property Committee

Terms of Reference for each Committee are subject to regular review.

Member Champions are assigned to a number of thematic areas to provide additional scrutiny and challenge; these include risk, equality, young people, older people, pensions, finance and the environment.

The Service Management Team (SMT) Structure

The operations of the Authority are directed through a clear leadership and management structure with defined roles and responsibilities. The Service Management Team is comprised of:

- Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
- Assistant Chief Fire Officer
- Director of Governance and Commissioning
- Treasurer
- Director of Transformation
- Heads of Department

Monitoring Officer:

During the 2021-22 financial year the Director of Governance and Commissioning fulfilled the statutory role of Monitoring Officer for the Authority, ensuring all actions taken were lawful.

Treasurer/Section 151 Officer:

The Joint Corporate Services Head of Finance has responsibility for day to day financial management in accordance with CIPFA guidance with the Treasurer/Section 151 Officer employed by the Fire Authority responsible for the matters set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

Cheshire Fire Authority has created a plan called the IRMP which assesses local fire and rescue related risks and details how these will be addressed. The IRMP is published on the Authority's website.

In 2020 the Authority decided to produce a four year IRMP covering the period 2020-2024. It produces Annual Action Plans so support the delivery of the IRMP.

Vision and Mission

The Authority's **vision** is defined as

"A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies"

and it's **mission**

"To help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests"

Core Values

The Authority also has a set of values and behaviours to define what is expected of everyone involved with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Following consultation and engagement with staff new Core Values were introduced in March 2020.

These **Core Values** are:

Be Inclusive: By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice

Do the Right Thing: By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do

Act with Compassion: By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness

Make a Difference: By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can

Performance Management: How we performed during 2021 – 2022

As part of the corporate planning process the Authority measures and monitors performance using a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are also used to compare performance against other fire and rescue authorities in England.

Achievements against these indicators are scrutinised quarterly by the Performance and Overview Committee and Performance and Programme Board and annually by the Fire Authority.

Performance relating to the handling of calls by North West Fire Control is also monitored quarterly, in line with agreed standards.

An Annual Report is produced each year setting out how the Authority has performed over the last 12 months.

Performance information can be accessed in the Performance section of the Authority's website.

Auditors

Internal Audit:

The Authority's Internal Audit function for 2021-22 was outsourced to Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA). A risk-based internal audit plan has been delivered by MIAA. A number of audits were commissioned in line with our risk profile and appetite which provided an independent assurance level on the Authority's control frameworks.

The internal audit team completed a number of compliance and assurance audits during 2021-22 aligned to the approved internal audit plan, which have generally resulted in positive opinions with a small number of recommendations made as a result of their findings. Action plans have been put in place to deal with any issues found during the audits.

DATA TO BE INSERTED WHEN IT HAS BEEN FINALISED

Internal Audit Opinion 2021-22:

TO BE INSERTED WHEN AVAILABLE

External Audit:

The Authority has appointed Grant Thornton as external auditors and established protocols are in place for working with External Audit.

External Audit Opinion 2021-22:

TO BE INSERTED WHEN AVAILABLE

Key evidence links

[Delivering Good Governance 2016](#)
[Local Code of Corporate Governance](#)
[Principals A-G](#)
[Annual Governance Statement](#)
[Integrated Risk Management Plan](#)
[CFRS Vision, Mission, Core values](#)
[Constitution](#)
[Annual Report for 2021](#)
[Corporate Scorecard 20/21](#)
[Internal Audit Opinion](#)

5. Operational Assurance

The Fire and Rescue Services National Framework for England outlines the requirement placed upon fire and rescue authorities to provide assurance on operational matters which are determined locally by them.

Statutory Responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Authorities function within a clearly defined statutory and policy framework. The Authority is required to comply with a range of laws, regulations and guidance. Links to some of the key legislation/guidance can be accessed below:

[Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

[Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)

[Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)

[Localism Act 2011](#)

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#)

[Local Government Act 1999](#)

[Health & Safety at Work Act 1974](#)

[Policing and Crime Act 2017](#)

To ensure that the Authority can demonstrate how it complies with this statutory and policy framework a number of detailed assessments are undertaken.

- Progress against the Authority's Health and Safety policy/framework is regularly presented to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.
- The Authority regularly assesses operational capability against risks in the area covered by the Authority to ensure that the right resources, procedures and skills are available to respond to incidents within target response times.
- The Authority undertakes an annual review of operational risk and performance, supplemented by scrutiny at quarterly Member and officer meetings.
- The Risk Management Board monitors and scrutinises strategic risks.

Corporate Planning

There is a robust corporate planning process in place which facilitates the development of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

Fire authorities must produce an IRMP which assesses local fire and rescue related risks and details how these will be addressed. The IRMP takes account of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework and outlines the key risks and influences facing Cheshire and how the Authority is currently structured to address them.

The Authority has outlined its plans for 2020-24 in its Integrated Risk Management Plan "Saving Lives, Changing Lives, Protecting Lives". This was approved by the Authority in July 2020 following a period of public and staff consultation. Annual Action Plans will be agreed by the Fire Authority during the lifetime of the Plan.

Community Risk Management

Through its Community Risk Management (CRM) Model, the Service undertakes risk and performance analysis in order to ensure that strategic, tactical and operational activities are intelligence-led and evaluated. This is achieved by using specialist systems, software, data and skills delivered by the Joint Corporate Service Business Intelligence team located at Clemonds Hey.

Unitary Area Plans

In addition to, and complementing the IRMP, each council area has a Unitary Performance Group (UPG) involving local Fire Authority members in performance management. The UPG meets quarterly to scrutinise data and performance. Unitary Area Plans are developed for each unitary area. Each plan is unique to that area and contains the actions the Unitary teams will take in order to mitigate risk and improve community safety. These plans are informed by the Community Risk Management Model which brings together historic incident data, demographic, commercial and external risk factors.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Authority is committed to involving all of its stakeholders in the development of its strategies and plans. It encourages this by carrying out a consultation programmes in relation to the draft IRMP and emerging Annual Action Plans. Local communities, partners, staff, representative bodies and other stakeholders are invited to comment to ensure that before any decision is taken a broad range of views are taken into account. To enable active and informed participation, data and information relevant to the plan is made available to the public on the Service's website and via social media, in consultation packs, which are distributed at community roadshow events held across Cheshire, and also at key local stakeholder forums and meetings.

Fire Prevention (Community Safety)

The Authority has a risk based approach to prevention. This risk profile is developed through Community Risk Management Model using a range of tools including Exeter data from health partners. It's Safe and Well programme was developed in conjunction with NHS and local health partners. Safe and Well visits provide advice to householders on fire safety in the home but also address health priorities such as the prevention of slips, trips and falls, smoking cessation and alcohol reduction, bowel cancer screening and tests for atrial fibrillation.

The Service also works with partner agencies to deliver road safety initiatives targeted at vulnerable users such as young drivers and motorcyclists.

The Authority is commissioned to provide early intervention programmes such as RESPECT and is a delivery partner for the Prince's Trust programme.

It has also had a significant commitment to raising awareness and prevention through its safety and life skills centre, Safety Central.

Fire Protection

The Authority operates a risk based intelligence-led inspection programme of non-domestic premises. If a business is audited, the audit will be carried out by a qualified fire-safety officer who will follow a set procedure which is designed to establish compliance with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The Authority always aims to help businesses comply with fire safety legislation; however, at times it has to enforce the

law by implementing a formal enforcement procedure and will on occasion prosecute. This is always a last resort and the Authority will endeavour to avoid this course of action by working with business owners/managers via a range of key interventions:

- A dedicated team of non-enforcing officers who proactively deliver interventions and offer advice tailored to the different sectors of the business community.
- Protection staff offer support to businesses to assist in complying with legislation.
- Information provided digitally to support businesses.
- Proactively working with partners and key stakeholders to raise awareness of the fire safety benefits of sprinkler systems.

The Government's Primary Authority Scheme is a means for a business to receive assured and tailored advice on meeting environmental health, trading standards or fire safety regulations through a single point of contact. This enables the business to invest with confidence in products, practices and procedures, knowing that the resources they devote to compliance are well spent. The Authority supports the Primary Authority Scheme and will consider entering into partnerships with a business or organisation to provide assured and tailored fire safety advice. The approach it adopts creates a more consistent and co-ordinated regulatory environment.

Fire investigation is an integral part of the Service's Prevention and Protection activities. The main purpose of fire investigation is to determine the origin, cause and development of a fire and to contribute to organisational learning.

All fires attended will be investigated to establish the cause of fire. Where a fire has occurred, investigators have the power of entry under Section 45 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which allows an authorised employee to gain entry to premises in order to investigate the cause and progression of the fire that has occurred there.

Investigation outcomes will steer future prevention and protection activities and may assist in the prevention and detection of crime. They may also lead to inspections focused on certain risks or themes.

Emergency Response

The Authority responds to a range of emergency incidents with 35 fire engines operating from 28 fire stations across Cheshire. Stations are crewed by operational staff who work different shift patterns depending upon local risk:

- Wholetime: firefighters operate on stations 24 hours per day, working 12 hour shifts.
- Day Crewing: during the daytime the station is crewed by wholetime firefighters who also live next to the station to provide emergency cover overnight
- Nucleus: stations are crewed by wholetime firefighters during day time hours and by on-call firefighters overnight
- On-Call: firefighters live or work in the local community near to the station and respond to emergency calls via an alerter

The Authority has in place a Cheshire Standard to respond to life-risk incidents (e.g. house fires and road traffic collisions) within ten minutes on 80% of occasions.

Pre-determined attendance requirements are developed through the analysis of risk information from sources such as incident data and site specific risk information. Through the Authority's review of emergency response, specialist assets have been placed in strategic locations to improve response to incidents across Cheshire and respond to local risks, such as road traffic collisions on motorways.

The Authority's debrief policy outlines processes for evaluating operational learning and improvement.

Incident command is embedded within the internal assessment procedures, with incident commanders assessed regularly through live and simulated exercises arranged locally and centrally.

Organisational performance, including the Service's emergency response and call handling performance of North West Fire Control (NWFC), is scrutinised through structures such as Performance and Programme Board, Unitary Performance Groups, the Fire Authority's Performance and Overview Committee and by Directors of the NWFC Board.

The Authority conducts Site Specific Risk Inspections (SSRIs) for high risk premises in Cheshire. The procedure has recently been internally audited, receiving an outcome of 'significant assurance'. A dedicated SSRI training officer is in post alongside an SSRI portfolio holder for on-call stations.

Cheshire has 28 Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH) sites and employs a high-risk training officer. Both on-site and off-site incident plans are managed by the Cheshire Resilience Forum and tested through multi-agency exercises.

The Authority influences the development of operational response, training and occupational standards at a regional level through membership of a number of regional fire and rescue services and multi-agency groups and forums.

Business Continuity – Civil Contingencies Act 2004

Business Continuity is an important part of the Authority's strategy and a robust programme is well established to ensure responsibilities align to best practice standards, e.g. BS25999-2. Departmental plans which support the Authority's Crisis Management Plan are maintained and tested regularly. The Crisis Management Plan is owned by the Risk Management Board and reviewed and approved annually.

Interoperability, Resilience and Safety

A comprehensive range of risk intelligence data and information is taken into account as part of the risk identification and analysis process underpinning the IRMP. This includes Cheshire's Community Risk Register, with the Authority having a leading role in the Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) which focuses on interoperability and joint planning and training exercises with other emergency services using the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Additional joint training and planning has taken place following the Manchester Arena terrorist attack to ensure the effectiveness of the Authority's response to a similar event within Cheshire.

CRF structures, policies and practices are regularly reviewed to better reflect the changing make up of partner agencies. Governance is managed through a monthly meeting cycle of the Management Group which reports twice yearly to the CRF Executive Group.

The Authority is represented on the Cheshire CONTEST group, which has developed plans for notification of, and response to, a multi-agency marauding terrorist firearms attack (MTFA). Cheshire's National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers (NILOs) have received MTFA response training via regional NILO groups.

Over the Border Mutual Aid Arrangements

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 allow mutual arrangements to be agreed with neighbouring fire and rescue services to improve resilience and capacity in border areas. Cheshire Fire Authority has in place contractual agreements with the following bordering Fire Authorities for response to life risk incidents:

- Merseyside
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire
- Derbyshire
- Greater Manchester
- North Wales

Health and Safety

The Authority seeks to comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and relevant legislation in managing its health and safety (H&S) duties.

The Authority has an H&S management system based on Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance. There are clearly defined management responsibilities; as far as reasonably practicable the Authority assesses and manages the risks arising from its activities, consults its employees on matters affecting H&S, and provides training and information to employees.

The Authority has an Occupational Health Unit to support the health and wellbeing of staff. The Authority has signed up to the MIND Blue Light campaign to support mental health and wellbeing in the workforce and provided training to mental health champions and is looking to introduce more widely a Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) process. The Authority has a Mental Health Advisor, Mental Health Strategy and Mental Health Steering Group. It intends to give mental health parity of esteem.

The Authority has introduced an electronic system to support the reporting and investigation of all accidents and near misses that occur and to track the investigations conducted with the intention of preventing a recurrence.

As part of the H&S Management System there is a programme of audits and inspections. The audits are based on the Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents Quality Safety Audit system and its performance indicators. These audits and inspections inform the annual review of H&S Policy and performance. They also contribute towards an Annual Health and Safety report submitted to the Authority's Performance and Overview Committee.

Firefighter Fitness

The Authority has had a policy to ensure the fitness of its operational staff for some time. In December 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued an addendum to the National Framework for England in relation to firefighter fitness. In 2015 the Authority proposed amendments to its then current fitness policy to align it to the National Framework requirements and the national fitness standards.

The Authority recruited a full-time Fitness Advisor to lead on supporting the firefighters to attain and maintain the fitness standards required, and to undertake fitness testing. Fitness testing for all operational staff takes place annually. Performance is monitored at the Service Health Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

An audit of compliance with the National Framework requirements on management of firefighter fitness concluded that the Authority complied.

Operational Training

The Service has an Operational Training Strategy which outlines its approach to ensuring that its operational staff are trained and competent in order to fulfil the various operational demands placed upon them.

All new firefighters attend basic training which is broken down into modules and each module is assessed.

All front line operational staff, inclusive of new starters, attend regular station planned training as detailed within their Station Training Forecast in order to maintain their operational abilities and competence. They also attend centrally planned refresher training in order to support this maintenance programme.

Breathing apparatus refresher training takes place in dedicated 'hot fire' conditions annually and the Authority aims to ensure that 100% of all eligible staff attend. An electronic course management system aids the monitoring of training.

Compartment fire behaviour training capability is refreshed every two years and the Authority aims to ensure 100% of all eligible staff attend.

Road traffic extrication techniques, trauma care, dealing with hazardous materials, and working safely at height skills are refreshed over a three-year period and each year the Service aims to refresh the skills, knowledge and understanding of one third of its operational workforce with the intention to achieve 100% of all eligible staff attendance after three years. The swift water rescue capability of the Service's key water incident fire stations is validated by the staff attending two days of assessment every year.

The Service delivers in-house Large Goods Vehicle training on a one to one basis for its front line firefighters. Once they are designated as an appliance emergency response driver they then go on to attend a one-day emergency response driving refresher within a five-year period.

The Operational Training Group (OTG) also manages the Authority's Accredited Centre; currently Edexcel and Skills for Justice are the awarding bodies. Visits by external standards verifiers annually assess and confirm that the Authority operates to and maintains the awarding standards and this assists OTG in quality assuring its planning, delivery and review of training and assessment.

Managers are all trained and assessed for their skills, knowledge and understanding in Incident Command. A dedicated Command Training Group (CTG) of vocationally qualified officers plan, deliver and assess these training programmes. The quality of the Incident Command Training within the Service has attracted business from several other fire and rescue services and other emergency services as well as private and public organisations including several high risk industries.

The Authority has a modern operational training centre, based at its site in Sadler Road, Winsford. While the success of our prevention work has led to a long term reduction in fires, this does mean that firefighters are more reliant on training and simulation to develop their learning experience instead of gaining experience during operational firefighting. The training centre provides firefighters with realistic and immersive training to safely and effectively deal with a wide range of incidents that may occur across Cheshire.

[Integrated Risk Management Plan](#)
[CRM Model](#)
[Unitary Performance Area Profiles](#)
[Safe and Well](#)
[Safety Central](#)
[Fire Safety advice for Businesses](#)
[JESIP](#)
[Annual Health and Safety Report](#)
[Firefighter Fitness Addendum](#)
[Firefighter Fitness Policy](#)
[Operational Training Strategy](#)

6. Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 the Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework which sets out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities and contains guidance in connection with the discharge of any of their functions.

Every fire and rescue authority **must** have regard to the Framework in carrying out their functions.

In May 2018 a new National Framework was published. There is an emphasis in this latest Framework upon the national programme of reform within the sector and a number of requirements which fire authorities **must** comply with in the areas of:

- **Delivery of functions:** a need to identify and assess risk, prevent fire and promote fire safety, respond effectively to incidents and a statutory duty to consider collaboration
- **National Resilience:** identify and address any gaps in capability and prepare to respond to terrorist attacks
- **Governance:** to produce an IRMP, Annual Statement of Assurance and financial plans
- **Achieving Value for money:** having a policy on reserves, commercial transformation and trading
- **Workforce:** the need for a People Strategy and implementation of the new Professional Standards when published.
- **Inspection, Intervention and Accountability:** co-operation with the new inspection regime and compliance with the Local Authority Transparency Code.

A review was undertaken of the mandatory requirements under the Framework and evidence gathered to demonstrate compliance.

Key evidence links

[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#)
[Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 - Compliance Report \(Performance and Overview Committee 04.09.2019\)](#)

7. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS): Inspection Outcomes 2021

HMICFRS carried out its second round inspection of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service in early 2021. The inspection was initially due to take place during March and April 2020 but due to the coronavirus pandemic it had been postponed. All tranche 1 fire and rescue services were inspected during 2021.

The inspection process focused on three key themes:

- a. How effective is CFRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- b. How efficient is CFRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- c. How well does CFRS look after its people?

The report summary said:

Overall, the service is effective and efficient at keeping people safe and secure from fire. And, on balance, it looks after its people well. It has made an impressive investment to promote culture and values, and equality, inclusion and diversity throughout its organisation.

It goes on to say:

We are pleased to see the service working on the areas for improvement identified in our 2018 inspection. There has been good progress, for example, to increase protection resource and capability. We watch the restructure of its protection team with interest, as it is yet unfinished.

We know from the service's progress since our last inspection that it is capable of focused work to make improvements. We look forward to seeing it develop further, especially in relation to its people, who make the service what it is"

The inspection report graded the Service as 'good' in all three of its inspection criteria. The findings represent an improvement on the last inspection in 2018, which suggested the Service needed to do more to promote a positive workplace culture and ensure the wellbeing of staff.

The report contained some Areas for Improvement. An action plan will help the Service to address each of these. A report was presented to the Performance and Overview Committee on 24th November 2021 together with the HMICFRS Inspection 2021 Action Plan, both of which are published on the website.

Key evidence links

[HMICFRS Inspection Report 2021](#)
[HMICFRS Inspection 2021 Action Plan](#)

8. Coronavirus Pandemic

The Coronavirus Pandemic continued throughout the period covered by this document. It has had an impact on Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, but this has been managed.

Cheshire Fire Authority has operated effectively during the pandemic. It has adopted rules and procedures which have enabled it to conduct remote meetings so that it can transact all the business that was necessary.

The Service Management Team has met regularly throughout the Pandemic to: ensure that it fully understands Government guidance; maintains and enhances its communication to staff, analyses risk and delivers safe systems of work; and decides how best to protect staff and maintain as many aspects of the services it delivers as possible in the prevailing circumstances.

The Service Management Team prioritised the Service's ability to deliver its core statutory functions, i.e. emergency response. However, it also enabled as many staff as possible to work from home in order to continue to do their jobs effectively. There was some impact upon the achievement of departmental objectives and targets, e.g., the number of Safe and Well visits conducted was heavily impacted because it was not possible to go into homes.

The Service did ensure that its strategic aims were met by utilising its resources and adapting operations to support the communities within Cheshire. This involved the Service liaising with the partner agencies through the Local Resilience Forum and establishing a Covid-19 Community Support Management Team to co-ordinate partnership work. Additional activities that were conducted included checking on those shielding; assisting hospitals with Covid-19 testing of patients at home before scheduled operations; supporting food bank collections and deliveries; distributing personal protective equipment to nursing home, schools and community groups; delivering free school meals, education packs and laptops to eligible households; and vaccinating a significant number of people at various sites around Cheshire.

The HMICFRS were commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England were responding to the Pandemic in August 2020. The Service was inspected between 21st September and 2nd October 2020.

The Service received positive feedback with HMICFRS stating "the service has effectively carried out its statutory functions during the pandemic". HMICFRS was impressed by how the service looked after the welfare of its staff, and the additional support it gave to the community during the first phase of the pandemic.

The Service is starting to operate according to the Government's adage, 'living with Covid', but is continuing to be cautious in its approach as it has stood it in good stead throughout the Pandemic – keeping staff and the community as safe as possible in the prevailing circumstances.

Key evidence links

[HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection Report](#)

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 27TH APRIL 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND COMMISSIONING
AUTHOR: ANDREW LEADBETTER

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPION
ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose of Report

1. To allow Members to consider the recommendation from Governance and Constitution Committee about the review of the Member Champion arrangements.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] Consider the recommendation from Governance and Constitution Committee: *to continue with the existing Member Champions for municipal year 2022-23 with the introduction of the requirements outlined in paragraph 9 to 11 of this report.*

Note:

The rest of this report is identical to the report that was considered by Governance and Constitution Committee. See Minute 4 page 22.

Background

2. The Fire Authority decided, at its meeting on 10th February 2021, that the Governance and Constitution Committee should complete a review of the Member Champion roles, following the observations of the Independent Reviewer made as a result of that review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.
3. Members of the committee had an informal discussion, prior to approving the process and indicative timeline of the Member Champion review on 10th November 2021. The following observations were noted:
 - 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
 - Impact of Covid-19 should not be ignored.

4. All Members received an update on progress with the review at the Members' Planning Day on 14th January 2022.

Information

Findings

5. Research was conducted to analyse how member champion roles within Cheshire compared with member champion roles in other fire and rescue authorities within the family audit group. It was found the Cheshire had significantly more champion roles than others. Other fire authorities placed certain requirements on their member champions, e.g. the production of a quarterly report on their work presented to the fire authority.
6. All Members and lead officers were invited to complete a questionnaire to establish their expectations of the review, their understanding of each role and whether any improvements could be made. It was anticipated that the review would better inform Members about the various roles and allow the opportunity for the roles to be developed. It became clear that not all Members felt they had a good understanding of the champion roles. It was also noted that some roles were clearly active, with others requiring invigoration.
7. The information provided by Members and lead officers was considered and several actions identified that could be expected to improve the member champion arrangements. These are summarised below:
 - Further develop role descriptions.
 - Establish a dedicated officer for each role
 - Create a plan of activities and training and development opportunities associated with each role.
 - Introduce a reporting mechanism to communicate role activities.
 - The allocation of member champion roles should as far as possible ensure that the Fire Authority is making the best use of Members' experience and interest.
8. When Members discussed this issue at the Planning Day in January 2022, they appeared to be supportive of the actions described above: continuing with the existing Member Champion roles for the 2022-23 municipal year; with a view to a further evaluation of the impact of the various roles prior to settling the arrangements for the 2023-24 municipal year.

Member Champion Arrangements 2022-23

9. It is intended that in addition to the Member Champion role description which is set out in paragraphs 6.32 to 6.34 of the Constitution, a specific role profile

will be created for each member champion role. The member champion role profiles will provide:

- 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.
10. Democratic Services will create a template role profile for lead officers and Member Champions to complete early in the municipal year 2022-23.
11. The intention would be to submit a report to the Governance and Constitution Committee in April 2023 to consider progress and determine whether any further improvements could be made to the Member Champion arrangements. At that point the Committee could make further recommendations to the Fire Authority in relation to Member Champions for 2023-24.

Financial Implications

12. There are currently 18 Members appointed to a Member Champion role. Member Champions receive a special responsibility allowance which currently stands at £540.96. The funding for Member Champion roles is met through existing budgets. It should be noted that many Member Champions do not receive this allowance, because they already receive another special responsibility allowance, which is higher and only the higher allowance is paid.

Legal Implications

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

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. All Members and relevant officers had the opportunity to take part in the review.

Environmental Implications

15. There are no environmental implications associated with the review.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804**

**BACKGROUND PAPERS: REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPION ARRANGEMENTS
CONSIDERED BY THE GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE ON
30TH MARCH 2022**