

**MINUTES**  
**POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX and**  
**ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**  
**FIRE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

18 December 2020, 1300 to 1500, via Microsoft Teams

**Present:**

Jonathan Swan (JS)	Chair
Julie Parker (JP)	Audit Committee Member
Simon Faraway (SF)	Audit Committee Member
Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer, PFCC's office
Janet Perry (JPe)	Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's office
Jo Turton (JT)	Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Financial Officer
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services
Austin Page (AP)	Finance and Compliance Manager
Anna O'Keeffe (AOK)	Internal Auditor, RSM
Dan Harris (DH)	Internal Auditor, RSM
Carla Bailey (CB)	Minute taker, PFCC's office

**Apologies:**

Paul Grady (PG)	Grant Thornton
Parris Williams (PW)	Grant Thornton
Rick Hylton (RH)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Dave Bill (DB)	Director of Innovation, Risk and Future Development

**1 Introduction and welcome**

- 1.1 JS welcomed everyone to the meeting and accepted apologies from DB, RH, PG and PW.

**2 Minutes from the meeting on 25 September 2020**

- 2.1 There were no amendments to the minutes of the September meeting. The minutes were therefore agreed.
- 2.2 JS asked that the Annual Audit Letter for ECFRS be forwarded to the committee members.

**Action 14/20**

**NC agreed to circulate the Annual Audit Letter.**

### 3 Action Log

- 3.1 Action 30/19 EFA Trading Ltd  
The decision sheet had been drafted and signed. A meeting was set up with the board of directors for the transfer agreement to be signed and the winding up of the company would follow. Remain open.
- 3.2 Action 03/20 Strategic Risk Register report  
These have now been through the risk manager meeting regularly with the risk owners. Close.
- 3.3 Action 11/20 Audit Reports (RSM)  
This related to the procurement audit, and a review was taking place in January 2021. Remain open.
- 3.4 Action 12/20 Audit Recommendation Tracker  
Report coming to this meeting. Close.

### 4 Work Plan

- 4.1 Background Briefings were discussed and it was agreed that training be added to the next agenda.
- 4.2 It was further discussed that new technologies would be another subject for a future briefing.
- 4.3 JS requested that GDPR be added to the workplan for December.

#### **Action 15/20**

**The Background Briefing topic for the March 2021 meeting will be training.**

### 5 Strategic Risk Register Report

- 5.1 KE took members through the report and highlighted that there were 16 risks being reports and four of these had changed in the last quarter.
- 5.2 KE comments that in respect of the working time directive, the service was compliant however there needed to be more assurance around recording, monitoring and reporting. Systems were being looked at to record working hours, at present it was managed at a local level.
- 5.3 KE detailed that three of the four risks that had changed had reduced.
- 5.4 In respect of data protection, a comprehensive training package had been rolled out which allowed the risk to reduce.
- 5.5 In response to a question from JP, KE confirmed that there was an error on SRR150018 as this was an internal audit item, not one for Grant Thornton. Bureau Veritas had been commissioned to review the control measures from an external perspective and these findings would be reported back to RSM.
- 5.6 JS commented that the spreadsheet was not easily readable due to the small font sizes and it was therefore agreed that it would be provided in Excel format in the future.

## **Action 16/20**

### **The Fire Risk Register to be provided in Excel format for all future Audit Committee meetings.**

#### 6 Audit Reports (RSM)

- 6.1 AOK went through the report and in particular the key findings outlined within the document.
- 6.2 KE commented that the report was a fair analysis of where the service recognised itself to be. Approximately 18 months ago it was a different scenario, for example Windows 10 had not yet been implemented. Nearly all staff have been moved over to Office 365 and by the end of the financial year all will be on Windows 10. KE further added that one round of disaster recovery planning had been completed and will be run for a second time at the latter part of Quarter Four.
- 6.3 JS commented that he was very pleased with the progress and thanked all those involved in making these significant improvements.

#### 7 Review of Internal Audit Progress Report

- 7.1 DH explained that the dates and scopes for the remaining reviews had been agreed and the January reviews can be reported to the March Audit Committee, and any follow up in the June 2021 meeting.
- 7.2 SF said well done to the team with regards to the KPI results, particularly highlighting the three-day turnaround.

#### 8 Audit Recommendation Tracker

- 8.1 AP outlined the tracker, which he explained had been put into a new format based on previous recommendations. Six recommendations this period had been completed, four are not yet due and there were five that were overdue and outstanding.
- 8.2 AP added that the overdue recommendations mainly relate to procurement and it had already been mentioned that a review of the procurement process was being undertaken. The final overdue recommendation related to HR processing payroll and the up to date user list. It was expected that this would be produced by Civica however there were some issues so this was being revisited.
- 8.3 In response to a question raised around signing off of actions, AOK confirmed that this worked in the same way as it did for the Police audits, the auditors do not sign off each individual action but do follow up where required. DH added that they carry out a yearly audit and prioritise the high and medium priorities, therefore not all actions are reviewed independently.
- 8.4 JT responded to a question from JP regarding training, confirming that there was a new competency management system which had replaced Task. This enabled the service to measure the achievement of training.

## 9 Single Tender Actions

- 9.1 NC confirmed that there had been seven Single Tender Actions (STAs) which were:
- Rapid water training supplier
  - RTC extraction equipment
  - Thermal imaging camera
  - Annual licence for integrated ICT system x 2
  - Oxygen sensor
  - HR – additional scope of work for existing project
- 9.2 NC confirmed that the renewal of annual licences items were budgeted, however as it was specific to that provider then was not applicable to go out to tender. JPe asked whether each of these STAs were really necessary and whether we should question the need for STAs more rigorously.
- 9.3 RH commented that he felt the item relating to the thermal imaging camera could be challenged as there were other suppliers of this available. NC agreed that this was an area where more discipline was required and the need for STAs would form part of the procurement improvements required

## 10 Health and Safety Report update

- 10.1 KE outlined the report provided which focused on the review of the Service's approach to workplace health and safety such as policies and procedures, training, workplace induction, risk assessments, issue reporting and RIDDOR reporting. It did not relate to operational health and safety.
- 10.2 KE confirmed that all high and medium priority actions had now been completed and reviewed, with the only outstanding item action being low-level and related to the new system being rolled out on 1 April 2021. Once this had taken place then those points would be closed off.
- 10.3 JS commented that this was excellent progress.

## 11 Background Briefing – Control

- 11.1 KE presented the briefing on service control and highlighted the following areas:
- Service Control received all 999 calls and non-urgent enquiry calls from multiple sources such as the public, partner agencies, utility companies, alarm receiving centres, internal calls from other stations and colleagues.
  - It provides a 24/7 service, 365 days of the year.
  - There are four 'Watch's' which are led by a Watch Manager (WM). Each of these managers are supported by two Crew Managers (CM) per Watch. Each Watch included five Firefighters (Control) operators and each Control is led by a Group Manager (GM).
  - There is also a Station Manager (SM) who supports the GM and provides operational training to staff.

- Also supporting the above are dedicated Operational System Data Officers and a Control System and Data Administrator.
- When a request is made on a 999 call for the fire service this is connected to the Control Room at Kelvedon Park, using specific wording.
- The Control Room handles approximately 30,000 calls a year which result in around 15,000 incidents per year.
- ECFRS currently use the Remsdaq 4i Mobilising System & the Frequentis ICCS (the comms hub which allows them to receive and make both telephone and radio calls).
- Control staff are also trained in Advanced Call Handling (ACH) techniques which are used for any other complex incidents not relating to FSG situations. This could be multiple vehicle RTC's, chemical incidents, planes or train crashes etc.
- ECFRS also maintain a Secondary Control room at Ongar Fire Station with a further 5 positions available at that site.

11.2 In response to a question raised, KE confirmed that it was not possible for Control Room staff to work from home as the role requires them to be in the same room together for communication purposes.

11.3 JS raised a question around whether the Fire Service adopt a similar approach as the Police in terms of procurement. KE confirmed that they did collaborate where possible, with JT adding that this was an area of improvement for ECFRS.

## 12 Any Other Business

12.1 JS raised the matter of the accounts being re-opened following their sign off earlier in the year and requested an explanation as to why this happened.

12.2 NC clarified that this was to do with transfers between the general and earmarked reserves. A conversation had taken place with Internal Management and Grant Thornton so they were aware of this. Although this was not material NC believed it did enable further transparency in the accounts.

12.3 A debate ensued and JS remarked that lessons should be learnt from this situation and in the future we should not deal with the accounts in this way.

12.4 JP then raised a new matter which was that she was unable to make the meeting on 24 September 2021. It was agreed that the date would be looked at with a view to re-arranging.

### **Action: 17/20**

**Date for the September 2021 Fire Audit Committee to be re-arranged.**

12.5 JT gave thanks to everyone at the meeting and those involved for their hard work and commitment. JS echoed these thanks.

12.6 There being no further items of business the meeting closed at 14.41pm.