

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

16 December 2022, 13:00 – 15:00

via Microsoft Teams and in person at Kelvedon Park (GF01)

**Present:**

Jonathan Swan (JS)	Audit Committee Member (Chair)
Julie Parker (JP)	Audit Committee Member
Kashyap Pandya (KP)	Audit Committee Member
Sonya Edwards (SE)	Audit Committee Member
Simon Faraway (SF)	Audit Committee Member
Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Darren Horsman (DHo)	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, PFCC
Janet Perry (JPe)	Chief Financial Officer and Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC
Rick Hylton (RH <sub>y</sub> )	Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Austin Page (AP)	Finance and Compliance Manager, ECFRS
Georgie Morris (GM)	Deputy Finance Director, ECFRS
Zoe Hibbert (ZH)	Manager, RSM
Helen McGrath (HM)	Scrutiny Officer, PFCC (Minutes)

**Apologies:**

Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Financial Officer, ECFRS
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer, PFCC
Dan Harris (DH)	Partner and Head of Internal Audit, RSM
Paul Grady (PG)	Grant Thornton
Parris Williams (PW)	Grant Thornton

**1. Introduction and welcome**

- 1.1 JS welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions took place. It was noted that the meeting was taking place both in person and via Microsoft Teams.
- 1.2 JS clarified the correct terminology to be used going forward, to avoid any confusion, with regards to the different groups. ECFRS Audit Committee should be used when relating to this meeting. The Audit Panel is a separate body, that convenes to discuss matters separate to the ECFRS Audit Committee. Depending on the items to be discussed by the Audit Panel, JP may or may not partake dependent on her work for the LGA.
- 1.3 Apologies were noted, as listed above.

## 2. Minutes from the previous meeting and matters arising

### 2.1 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022 – Part A Minutes

2.1.1 Page 2, Item 1.4: JP requested the wording be changed to 'JP declared that she undertakes work for the LGA, who in turn own the PSAA who appoint external auditors for much of the sector'.

2.1.2 Page 6, Item 9.7: GM clarified that the proposed date for transition from the old accounts system is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, not 2023.

2.1.3 The above amendments were accepted, and minutes were approved.

### 2.2 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022 – Part B Minutes

2.2.1 Item 18: External Audit Tender falls under the remit of the Audit Panel and therefore should not be referred to in this committee. Item to be removed from minutes.

## 3. Action Log

**23/21 Scheme of Governance wording** - DHo to discuss with PBI and update, as necessary.  
Remain open.

**24/21 Motorola Implementation Plan** – update provided within the RSM Pre Delivery – Control Room (New Mobilising System) report.  
Close.

**03/22 Self-assessment survey questions** – questions were agreed, survey was circulated, and a meeting will be setup in January 2023 to discuss the outcome of the survey.  
Close.

**04/22 Obtain bid files for the outstanding property sales illustrated in the MTFs report** – this action has been completed and the requested information was sent to the Audit Committee in June 2022.  
Close.

**05/22 Review of personal email accounts** – JS reiterated the need to setup a more secure system for the sharing of documentation with external members. SF suggested online platforms that could be used and ZH mentioned using MS Teams for this purpose. DHo to discuss further with JS and colleagues to progress.  
Remain open.

Actions 07/22, 08/22, 09/22 and 10/22 omitted from the circulated action log. HM to update action log and circulate with draft minutes.

## 4. 2023 Work Plan

4.1 Updated work plan for 2023 circulated with agenda and agreed.

## 5. Audit Recommendation Tracker & Internal Audit Report

5.1 Audit Report  
Report circulated with agenda and summarised by AP.

- 5.1.1 In relation to page 3, section 2 of the report, JP highlighted the Cyber Essentials audit being classified as 'no assurance provided'. AP clarified this is an advisory report hence the assurance classification but accepted this could be misleading and agreed to update.

**Action 12/22**

**'Advisory report' to be added to the assurance description for Cyber Essentials Audit Report, for clarity, by AP.**

- 5.1.2 With reference to the GDPR data breaches recommendation on page 7, JP asked whether the level of risk was appropriate given that the original due date was 31/08/2020 but estimated date for completion is 31/01/2023. KE explained that this recommendation was not borne out of a full audit and did not offer opinion but instead provided some actions. Subsequently, ECFRS appointed an independent external auditor which did offer an opinion and comprehensive actions, which were shared with this committee at the last audit meeting. The original recommendations have been consolidated with the external auditor findings hence the revised completion date. KE continued that ECFRS is due to be reaudited on this area in 2023, at which point outcomes will be shared with this committee.

- 5.2 Audit Tracker  
Report circulated with agenda.

- 5.3 Information Governance Audit Report

Report circulated with agenda and summarised by KE with key points below:

- 5.3.1 A number of high-level recommendations have already been addressed and on track to deliver all actions by the end of this financial year.
- 5.3.2 A key element of this audit is the Surveillance Policy which relates to the different streams of information received by ECFRS and sets out how this information is used, stored, shared etc. KE commented that advice and guidance has been sought from Essex Police, due to their level of knowledge in this area.
- 5.3.3 Due to be reaudited in April 2023 and continue to work closely with the auditors to ensure positive outcomes. JS pleased to hear ECFRS are utilising the expertise of Essex Police for this area of work.

6. Review of Internal Audit Progress Reports

- 6.1 Control Project  
Report circulated with agenda and summarised by ZH.

- 6.2 Follow up  
Report on Emergency Response Driving circulated with agenda and summarised by ZH.

*13:27 KP joined the meeting.*

- 6.3 Cybersecurity  
ZH advised that this report is currently in the process of being finalised and will therefore be provided for the next meeting in March 2023.

## **Action 13/22**

### **RSM to provide report to March committee meeting on Cybersecurity.**

#### 7. ECFRS Risk Update

##### 7.1 Risk Report

Report circulated with agenda and summarised by KE with key points below:

- 7.1.1 With regards to the red risk of finances, KE explained that it has been a challenging and uncertain period of late however recent information received suggest an improved position going forward and therefore hope to reduce this risk to amber. RH enquired whether an amber level of risk was appropriate given the level of inflation, risk of industrial action and proposed pay award next year. KE concurred with RH's comments and assured the committee that this risk will continue to be monitored in line with the current financial climate.

RHy commented that ECFRS is certainly in a better position financially, than when this report was prepared, so risk level has changed but accepts the need for caution. In terms of industrial action planning, RHy happy to offer further insight into this for committee meeting. JS agreed and, although industrial action may already be planned/taken place before the next committee meeting, an update at the March meeting would be beneficial.

## **Action 14/22**

### **RHy to provide industrial action planning update to committee members at the next audit committee meeting.**

- 7.1.2 In reference to the recent NHS ballot, JP enquired as to whether the Fire and Rescue Service ballot would be nationally or made up of individual organisations. RH clarified this would be a national ballot.
- 7.1.3 In relation to this risk, JPe asked whether it considers elements other than funding e.g. staff wellbeing and retention as this still poses a challenge with increasing inflation rates. NE clarified that this risk specifically relates to the ECFRS financial commitment. GM added that ECFRS are already modelling and actively managing pay solutions for 2023/24.
- 7.1.4 JS asked if there was any local flexibility in avoiding strike action. RHy advised there is some flexibility locally however the scale of this action would dramatically affect the ECFRS financial situation, and an Essex allowance would not be viable without confirmation of the NJC position. RH clarified that a ballot on a 5% pay increase has already taken place and been rejected so the next ballot would be on whether or not to take industrial action therefore any local intervention would not be feasible. RHy assured the committee that extensive work has been undertaken in preparation for the threat of industrial action.
- 7.1.5 KE highlighted the second red risk, relating to lack of hot fire training facilities. Planned surveys are proposed with results due February/March 2023. Increased risk relates to the ECFRS business continuity arrangements, however these are currently being reviewed. JS enquired whether options had been costed. KE responded that an indicative cost of £10m-£12m has been benchmarked against other fire and rescue services who have embarked on similar training facilities. Proposed date for build is 2025. JP asked whether the option of ECFRS leasing the land for an external provider as a private venture had been considered. KE responded that ECFRS are open to all options at the moment.

##### 7.2 Risk Register

Risk Register circulated with agenda.

## 8. Updates

- 8.1 Fraud - None to report in this period.
- 8.2 Debtor Write Offs – None to report in this period

## 9. Discussion on Legal and Regulatory matters

- 9.1 None to report in this period

## 10. Single Tender Actions

- 10.1 KE reported one Single Tender action relating to the repair of the Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) within the ECFRS Control Room, following a power outage. A replacement was sourced at short notice, which was difficult to procure due to the challenges with the supply of electrical parts currently and was only available from one supplier due to the specification required who was also able to provide a temporary UPS in the interim. Due diligence was carried out post the repair and of the 3 quotes obtained, it was concluded that the best option was chosen.
- 10.2 In relation to the UPS repair, SF enquired how often this equipment is tested to avoid such repairs. KE advised that a full test programme is now being rolled out to test equipment that may be nearing its shelf life but, interestingly, the UPS in question was in date.

## 11. Report on Review of Effectiveness Self Assessment

- 11.1 Separate meeting to be held in January 2023 to discuss this item.

## 12. AOB

### **12.1 NCSC Annual Review Findings 2022**

Report circulated with agenda and summarised by KE.

- 12.1.1 In partnership with Essex Digital Partnership (EDP), KE provided assurance on the cyber security measures in place for ECFRS. When benchmarked against other public sector organisations, EDP fared extremely well in relation to defences against a cyber attack and has been graded as 'Epic'!
- 12.1.2 JP enquired about the membership of EDP and its purpose. KE explained the group is made up of organisations from the NHS, local authority, police, fire and ambulance services and operates much like a user group with organisations able to share best practice and learn from each other on matters such as procurement, technology infrastructure etc.

### **12.2 Background briefing – Power Outage**

Presentation circulated with papers and summarised by KE.

- 12.2.1 Currently undertaking planning and testing of the ECFRS business continuity arrangements to determine effective operation during a possible week-long power outage (blackout).

- 12.2.2 Operation 'Yarrow' provides guidance on planning for a blackout situation, which ECFRS have mapped out against its own areas.
- 12.2.3 Proposed schedule for level 1 disconnection of load blocks provided (slide 3).
- 12.2.4 Latest information suggests the UK are unlikely to reach level one.
- 12.2.5 Electricity Supply Emergency Code (slide 6) highlighted.
- 12.2.6 ERF Wide Area Power Outage Framework (slide 7) highlighted.
- 12.2.7 ECFRS Power Outage Plan (slide 8) highlighted. Measures currently being tested until 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022.
- 12.2.8 Slide 9 demonstrates the number of generators that would be required across the estate – ECFRS are currently procuring this equipment for each of its stations.
- 12.2.9 JP asked whether ECFRS had considered and planned for how they anticipate and respond to public behaviour of these power outages. KE advised that this element has been tested through the Essex Resilience Forum and Essex Police have the delegated responsibility to setup a control hub in each district for partners to attend and coordinate activities for that specific area. KE further assured the committee that consideration has been given to public notices, supporting the most vulnerable and managing electrically driven medical equipment.

### **12.3 Annual review of terms of reference**

- 12.3.1 Separate meeting to be held in January 2023 to discuss this item.

### **12.4 Confirmation of items for Part A and Part B Minutes**

- 12.4.1 All were in agreement that all items in this meeting should be included in Part A of the Minutes.
- 12.5 RH informed the committee that a meeting was held between the Essex leaders and Chief Executive with regards to the devolution of local government and have provided RH with their draft response to the Secretary of State on this white paper, following input from all local authorities. Essex currently has three tier 1 authorities Essex, Southend and Thurrock. RH continued, the white paper states that if it is a mayoral combined authority with an elected mayor with a police authority then the powers of the PCC would lie with the Mayor, as is operational in London and Greater Manchester however other options are available. RH advised that the next PFCC election will take place in May 2024.
- 12.6 With good governance in mind and following a long tenure as Chair for this committee, JS has submitted his resignation, which RH has accepted. JS confirmed his last meeting as Chair would be March 2023. RH offered his thanks to JS for the huge difference he had made as Chair. The proposal shared with leaders and the Chief Executive was for a single, combined authority with discussions ongoing.

**Meeting ended at 14:15.**

**Next meeting date – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 13:00.**