

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

8th December 2023, 13:00pm to 15:00pm

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

Members

Kevin Barwick (KB)	Audit Committee Member (Chair)
Simon Faraway (SF)	Audit Committee Member
Kashyap Pandya (KP)	Audit Committee Member
Julie Parker (JP)	Audit Committee Member

Attendees

Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer, PFCC's office
Janet Perry (JPe)	Chief Financial Officer and Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's office
Jeremy White (JW)	Finance Manager, PFCC's office
Rick Hylton (RHyl)	Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
Moira Bruin (MB)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Financial Officer
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services
Austin Page (AP)	Finance and Compliance Manager
Parris Williams (PW)	Grant Thornton
Dan Harris (DH)	Partner, RSM
Brooke Knight (BK)	Minutes, PFCC's office

Apologies

Sonya Edwards (SE)	Audit Committee Member
Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Joanne Brown (JB)	Grant Thornton

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 The apologies were noted as above. The Chair welcomed all to his first meeting and noted his appreciation of the numerous induction Teams calls attended with many of those present.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.1 KB confirmed his past association with RSM.

3 Minutes of the last meetings and matters arising

3.1 There were three minor corrections to the minutes which were then agreed. There were no matters arising.

3.2 Part B - There were no amendments to the minutes of they were therefore agreed. There were no matters arising.

4 Action Log

05/22 Review of the use of personal email accounts
Teams channel invites have been issued to all committee members. There are two issues that need solving before email distributions can cease – one is adding external users without having to request them from IT and second is making private notes on the reports. Training of users may be required.
Remains open.

14/23 Work Plan
Work plan amended.
Closed.

15/23 Work Plan
Work plan amended.
Closed.

16/23 External Audit
Grant Thornton are represented at this meeting.
Closed.

17/23 External Audit
NC sent email to PFCC on 03/10/2023.
Closed.

18/23 Oversight of the Scheme of Governance
Amended scheme has been distributed.
Closed.

19/23 External Audit contract commencing Statement of Accounts Year Ending 31/03/24
Panel meeting taking place this afternoon.
Closed.

20/23 Background Briefing
JW sent list to members and the new chair.
Closed.

5 Work Plan

- 5.1 JW presented the Work Plan. The Self-assessment meeting will need to be delayed. KB noted that it is useful to have an External Audit Plan in place before year end. There were no other changes to the Work Plan for 2023.

Action 21/23: JPe, NC and JW to prepare and send out the self-assessment survey questionnaire and then confirm date for the Self-Assessment Survey meeting to take place in 2024.

Action 22/23: NC, AP, KE to liaise with the new External Auditors with a view to bringing forward the agreed External Audit Plan.

6 Internal and External Audit Report and Tracker

- 6.1 AP updated on Internal Audits for 2023. 25 actions are being tracked, which has increased from 5 since the previous period.
- 6.2 The Culture and Behaviors and The Finance Implementation Audits have completed within the period, providing reasonable assurance.
- 6.3 3 recommendations have closed in the period and 12 are currently outstanding with 6 overdue.
- 6.4 AP noted the Information Governance Audit which has received adequate assurance from a 3rd Party provider. Three actions have been completed in the period.
- 6.5 AP noted the 3 completed RSM recommendations in the period relating to the Manchester Arena review, on call payments process and GDPR training.
- 6.6 AP noted the 6 outstanding recommendations that are not overdue.
- 6.7 AP noted the 6 overdue recommendations. AP noted action owners are working hard to achieve the revised deadlines.
- 6.8 AP updated on the External Audits for 2023 and confirmed no changes from the previous period update but these actions are being continuously tracked.

Action 23/23: AP to work with action owners to ensure realistic timeframes are provided for completion of actions.

7 Internal Audit Reports

- 7.1 DH noted the two final reports with reasonable assurance that have been issued in the period.
- 7.2 DH confirmed 4 out of the 7 audits have been completed in the year to date, in line with the timeline and follow ups start next week. DH noted another review is taking place in January 2024. RSM to determine the scope of Part 2 of the Finance System Pre-Implementation Review.
- 7.3 DH presented the Culture and Behaviours Review providing reasonable assurance with 2 medium priority actions.

- 7.4 Discussion took place on progress in this area. DH said the processes are more measured in terms of years rather than months and is not uncommon for the process to take 5-6 years to embed change.
- 7.5 DH presented the Finance System Pre-Implementation Review (Part 1) report providing reasonable assurance.
- 7.6 NC confirmed go live is 1st of April 2024. Although there are some challenges, implementation is on course.
- 7.7 DH presented the Benchmarking Report. Essex compares well across the board.
- 7.8 JP raised whether Cyber Security is receiving sufficient attention in the Audit Plan. DH noted that Cyber Security risk is dealt with by different procedures due to specific sector requirements.

Action 24/23 – DH to discuss with ECFRS if Cyber Security is an appropriate area to include in next year’s work plan.

- 7.9 SF noted the report gives the Committee an excellent idea where things can be compared.

8 External Audit

- 8.1 PW gave a verbal update and informed the Committee that the progress with the ECFRS External Audit is greater than with Essex Police. The vast majority of the substantive work will be completed this side of Christmas.
- 8.2 PW noted that due to a Grant Thornton team member resigning, the PPE work will now not finish until the beginning of 2024.
- 8.3 PW said Grant Thornton are confident of finalizing the ECFRS Financial Statements audit findings ahead of the 22nd March 2024 Audit Committee. There are no issues identified that need bringing to this Committee.
- 8.4 PW noted there were no changes to the Progress and Sector Update report that was issued in September.
- 8.5 PW noted he expects a draft report of the Annual Auditors Report on Value for Money in December 2023.

9 Update on the Statement of Accounts for year ending 31/03/23 (including Annual Governance Statement)

- 9.1 NC confirmed that there are no changes to the Statement of Accounts for year ending 31/03/23.
- 9.2 NC confirmed that any changes to the Statement of Accounts will be reported when presented to the Committee pre-publication.

10 Changes to accounting policies for the year ending 31/03/24

- 10.1 NC confirmed no changes to accounting policies for March 2024 yet.

10.2 NC noted from 1st April 2024, there will be a change due to the implementation of IFRS16 Lease Accounting. The effect is immaterial to the accounts at present.

10.3 NC noted that data will not be migrated from the current system. The finance team are looking at a way of extracting the data as the current system will be accessible but not supported.

11 Update on External Audit contract commencing Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31/03/24

11.1 Discussion moved to Part B.

12 Risk Reports

12.1 KE presented the report. 14 Strategic risks, none of which are red. 8 amber and 6 yellow risks. 2 changes in risk assessment: Data Breaches has improved from red to amber following mitigations and controls; and Culture improved from amber to yellow.

12.2 KE noted all other risks remain as they were previously.

13 Cultural Change Update

13.1 This was covered in DH's presentation.

14 Update if appropriate on Fraud and Debtor write offs

14.1 There were no Fraud and Debtor write offs to note.

15 Update on Legal and regulatory matters

15.1 There were no Update on Legal and regulatory matters to note.

16 Single Tender Actions

16.1 There were no Single Tender Actions to note.

17 Background Briefing

17.1 There was no Background Briefing to present.

17.2 Discussion regarding on an induction process for new committee members.

Action 25/23: KE to arrange with KB visits to a fire station and the control room for in March 2024.

18 Approval of papers for publication

18.1 It was agreed that all papers should be published as per the agenda.

19 Any Other Business

18.1 Next meeting date: 22nd March 2024 at 13:00pm

There being no further matters arising, the meeting closed at 14:33pm