



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Barmston Mere on
Friday 29 July 2022 at
10.30am.

Present:

Mr G N Cook in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Flynn and Keegan together with Miss G Goodwill.

In Attendance:

Joanne Greener (Mazars)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Ord together with Mr Knowles .

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 27 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2021/2022

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report providing

the Committee with an overview of the compliments and complaints received by the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

DCFO Heath presented the report and in doing so clarified that during 2021/2022, 86 compliments had been received rather than 41 as stated in the printed report. There had been 27 complaints during the period and the volume of both complaints and compliments was minor in comparison with the 63,848 official interactions recorded with the public in this period.

DCFO Heath highlighted that every complaint was an opportunity to learn and to improve the quality of service provided and staff had been positively promoting feedback in all forms. Staff awareness of the reporting process had been increased through internal promotional activities and over 50 managers and the Executive Leadership Team had attended effective complaint handling training provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

There had been a 48% increase in compliments, rising from 41 in 2020/2021 to 86 in 2021/2022 and there was an analysis of these within the body of the report. All complaints were taken very seriously and of the 27 received, 35% were upheld following investigation which was a reduction of 13% on 2020/2021.

Miss Goodwill commented that it was impressive that the Service received compliments even in relation to situations where someone had sadly lost their life. Councillor Keegan reflected that, not only did staff fulfil their core role, but also became social workers when looking at the range of things which the Service had been complimented for. The Chair also noted that the number of complaints were very small in comparison to what the Service did.

Councillor Bell referred to the Complaints and Compliments procedure and asked if staff were actively encouraged to pass all of them on as some would be verbal and others may be sent to individual stations.

DCFO Heath explained that the Service had appointed someone to coordinate this area and there was a campaign to encourage all staff to pass on complaints and compliments and to ensure that feedback was captured. In relation to verbal feedback, it was very difficult to capture the evidence of this so that it could be reported to the Committee and the public.

Councillor Flynn commented that one of the upheld complaints regarding a fire appliance and another vehicle coming together and he would have expected that a vehicle would back away to allow the appliance access. DCFO Heath provided some more detail on the incident and the reasons for upholding the complaint and stated that generally the Fire and Rescue Service was very well supported by the public.

Having considered the report it was: -

2. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the contents of the report be endorsed; and
- (ii) further reports be received as appropriate.

Statement of Accounts 2021/2022 (Subject to Audit)

The Finance Director submitted a report providing Members with an opportunity to review and question the draft Authority Statement of Accounts for 2021/2022 (Subject to Audit), along with the Finance Officer's Narrative Statement and the Annual Governance Statement which were required to be published separately to the Accounts in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and as amended in 2021.

The Finance Director tabled some amendments to the Narrative Statement which updated the sections on Firefighter Pension 'Immediate Detriment' and the HMICFRS inspection outcome. DCFO Heath advised that he had provided a verbal update at the recent Fire Authority meeting and the full HMICFRS report was now available for all Members. The bar had been raised for this inspection and the Service had risen to the challenge with improvements being noted for every metric. For Tyne and Wear to achieve three 'Goods' was significant and a testament to the hard work and dedication of all staff.

The Finance Director highlighted that the Statement of Accounts were at Appendix B to the report and had been prepared in accordance with regulations and statutory timescales and would be passed to Mazars and published on the website later in the day. Appendix A explained the process and revised timescales for the Accounts which had to be completed by 31 July and audited by 30 September, however Mazars had already indicated that many audits would be pushed back and the revised completion date would be 30 November. This was beyond the control of the Fire and Rescue Service and was recognised by the Government and furthermore that they were aware of Government's intention to make 30 November the revised statutory date for completion of the audited accounts. This has since been confirmed.

The Narrative Statement within the Statement of Accounts provided a summary of the financial year and also of the Authority's status as a going concern. This showed a negative net worth for the Authority but this related to the need to disclose the pension deficiency.

Members were also provided with the Letters of Assurance which were required by the external auditor and would be asked to approve the content of the Letter from those charged with Governance and to note the Letter from those charged with discharging management processes and responsibilities. The public rights inspection period would begin on 29 July and end on 19 September.

Councillor Bell commended the report and the huge amount of work which went into it and complimented all who were involved. The Finance Director said that he would pass that on to the staff as it was very much a team effort.

Upon consideration of the report it was: -

3. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the draft and unsigned Statement of Accounts 2021/2022 (subject to audit) and the separate Statements set out in Appendices B to D be noted;
- (ii) the contents of the Letter of Assurance from those charged with Governance (Appendix F) be approved; and
- (iii) the Letter of Assurance from those charged with discharging management processes and responsibilities (Appendix G) be noted.

Statement of Assurance 2021/2022

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority) and the Finance Director submitted a joint report presenting the Statement of Assurance 2021/2022 to the Committee for consideration, endorsement and progression to the full Fire Authority for agreement to publish.

The Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority was required to prepare an annual Statement of Assurance in accordance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018. The Statement of Assurance was attached at Appendix A to the report and set out how the Authority met the requirements of the National Framework and detailed evidence which supported this compliance.

The Statement of Assurance was used by the Secretary of State in their biennial report to Parliament and provided information to the communities of Tyne and Wear, the Government, local authorities and partners which would allow them to make a valid assessment of the Authority's performance during 2021/2022.

DCFO Heath highlighted that section 2 of the Statement referred to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the commitment to this work was very much at the forefront of the document.

Accordingly the Committee: -

4. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the contents of the Statement of Assurance be noted;
- (ii) the Committee agree that they are satisfied that the Statement of Assurance properly and accurately reflects the risk environment and that good governance arrangements for the fire and rescue service are in place; and
- (iii) the Statement of Assurance be progressed to the full Fire Authority for their approval in its current form.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

5. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information). (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 3).

(Signed) G N COOK
Chair

