



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Minutes of the Meeting of the OVERVIEW AND AUDIT COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held on WEDNESDAY 21 JULY 2021 at 10.00 AM.

**Present:** Councillors Bagge (part), Carroll, Chapple OBE, Darlington (part), Exon, Rankine, Stuchbury and Waite

**Officers:** G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Remotely: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets) S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), F Mansfield (HR Advisory and Development Manager), A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), M Hussey (Principal Accountant), C Bell (Head of Protection, Assurance and Development), S Tuffley (Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response), S Harlock (Internal Audit Manager, Buckinghamshire Council), N Harris (External Auditor Ernst & Young), A Kennett (Assistant Manager Ernst & Young), F Pearson (Communications Manager), G Porter (Communication Officer)

**Apologies:** Councillor Hussain

Live webcast broadcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

The Director of Legal and Governance confirmed the webcast was live.

The Director of Legal and Governance welcomed Members to the July Meeting of the Overview and Audit Committee of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority and confirmed that the meeting was being live streamed on the Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service YouTube channel. Following the meeting, a recording would continue to be available on this channel and it was also being recorded, should there be any technical difficulties.

## **OA01 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

(Director of Legal and Governance in the Chair)

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Carroll be elected Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Carroll be elected as Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

(Councillor Carroll in the Chair)

**OA02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Hussain be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor Hussain be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for 2021/22.

**OA03 MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Audit Committee held on Wednesday 24 March 2021, be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**OA04 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Director of Legal and Governance advised that at the last meeting, a member expressed concern that the use of council emails did not create any vulnerabilities to the Authority's system. The ICT Manager had liaised with his counterparts at Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Councils and confirmed there were no issues regarding emails. Also, once the WAN/LAN project was in place the Authority would share some of the same fire wall technology as Buckinghamshire Council.

**OA05 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Chapple declared he was in receipt of a firefighter's pension from London Fire Brigade.

**OA06 RIPA POLICY (MINUTE OA39 – 090316)**

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the Authority was the enforcing authority under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and as an enforcing authority, it had powers to undertake covert surveillance on individuals if necessary. It therefore had to comply with RIPA – the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. The RIPA statutory guidance recommends that elected members be regularly appraised of any instances of covert surveillance.

In answer to a Member's question, the Director of Legal and Governance advised that the National Fire Chiefs Council had requested the Home Office for fire and rescue authorities be taken out of scope of the RIPA regime as it was felt that they could enforce adequately without ever needing to use covert surveillance and therefore compliance with RIPA requirements was unnecessarily burdensome.

RESOLVED –

To note that there had been no covert surveillance conducted by officers since the last meeting of the Committee.

**OA07**

**INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT – ANNUAL AUDIT REPORT 2020/21**

The Internal Audit Manager firstly thanked officers for their support during the year as most of the audits had been undertaken remotely and required officers to provide information through emails and more meetings than normal. All enquiries were responded to promptly which enabled the work to be completed in good time.

The Internal Audit Manager advised Members that this report outlined the internal audit work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service for the year ending 31 March 2021 and provided the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion on the adequacy of the control environment. In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations, the Authority must maintain an adequate and effective internal audit service in accordance with proper internal audit practices. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIA's) sets out proper practice for internal audit and requires the Chief Internal Auditor to provide an annual report to those charged with governance which should include an opinion on the overall adequacies of the internal control environment.

It should be noted that internal audit was not responsible for the control system, it was management's responsibility to develop and maintain the internal control framework and to ensure compliance. It was the responsibility of Internal Audit to form an independent opinion on the adequacy of the system of internal control based on the work undertaken.

For the year 20/21 the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion was of reasonable assurance. This was based on the work undertaken and that no material weaknesses in the overall control framework were found. The Authority had continued to demonstrate a robust and effective internal control and risk management environment. It should be further noted that the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion does not imply that internal audit had reviewed all risks relating to the Authority. The opinion that was given was based on the work undertaken this year which was summarised in Appendices 1 and 2.

A Member asked if there were areas that Internal Audit could not address because of Covid-19 and if so, would they revisit them in future and was advised by the Internal Audit Manager, that Covid-19 had not impacted the audit work undertaken.

A Member asked if in future there would be an audit for environmental management and was advised by the Internal Audit Manager that as part of the internal audit planning process, along with the Director of

Finance and Assets, they would look at key risks being faced by the Authority. If Internal Audit was concerned about the environment, this would be factored in.

The Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that it was a very real concern and climate change and sustainability were obviously something the Authority had a vested interest in especially regarding responding to flooding and wildfires. As a key action, he would be putting together an environmental strategy which would pull together all the work the Authority was currently doing, all the work it wanted to do in the future, and how it could influence its communities to improve sustainability.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised Members that there were two aspects to the environmental work. One was an environmental strategy which would be brought to this Committee, and secondly, the response to environmental emergencies which was fully captured in the Authority's Public Safety Plan. The Service was very well prepared from an operational perspective.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the Annual Audit Report be reviewed and noted by Members.

**OA08**

**ERNST & YOUNG AUDIT PLAN 2020/21**

The External Audit Manager advised Members that this report was the audit planning document setting out the External Auditor's approach to the audit of the Authority's financial statements for the financial year ended 31 March 2021, and the work they were required to undertake under the National Audit Office's Code of Audit Practice, to examine the Authority's arrangements for economy, efficiency and effectiveness and its use of resources.

The External Auditor advised Members that what was not in this audit plan (and a final version would be circulated to Members), were the mandatory procedures External Audit were required to undertake on the management override of controls, and those related to the inquiries of Management and members as those charged with governance. Also, External Audit looked at unusual transactions that had taken place in the year, management bias on any particular transactions, judgements and mandatory procedures, looking at journal entry testing throughout the year and at year end. The commentary would be added to the relevant sections of the audit plan and recirculated. It wouldn't substantially change what was already in the document.

The External Auditor advised Members that the work undertaken this year responded to changes in the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice. This encouraged auditors to ensure they had a consistent

understanding of the arrangements for financial sustainability, governance and other wider areas of procurement and contract management, to determine if there were any areas that represented a risk of significant weakness.

RESOLVED –

That the Audit Plan 2020/21 (Annex A) be noted.

**OA09**

### **TREASURY MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE 2020/21**

The Principal Accountant advised Members that for the financial year 2020/2021, the accrued interest earned was £113k, which was £37k lower than the budget set for the same period. The Authority was unable to meet the budget requirement set for 2020/2021 (£150k), this was due to the direct impact of Covid-19. The Authority, however, was still able to achieve 75% of the income budget set for 2020/2021 due to several deals made pre-Covid-19 resulting in a better rate of interest.

The Principal Accountant advised Members that at the Authority meeting held on 17 February 2021, as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the investment income budget was reduced from £150k to £30k to reflect the anticipated continuation of low interest rates into 2021/2022. Early indications were that the £30k budget set for 2021/2022 would be a challenge to achieve following the unanimous vote (8-1) at the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in June 2021 to keep the interest base rate at the record low figure of 0.1%.

Officers continued to monitor the cashflow position daily to ensure the Authority could meet its short-term expenditure requirements and to maintain adequate liquidity. To support this, the investments currently in place, were with a number of counterparties and maturing on a frequent basis.

A Member asked how the Authority's investment portfolio compared to other fire and rescue authorities and was advised that the Authority received a monthly report on its own investments, and a quarterly benchmarking report against other local authorities. The Authority had a mixed blend of working with banks and building societies and in the Treasury Management Strategy it stated that the Authority does not invest more than 30% of its portfolio in any one specific bank or building society.

A Member asked whether the lower than budget accrued interest was due to the turbulent year this year or was there a fundamental change that would see this being sustained for a longer period, and was advised by the Principal Accountant that the financial year 2020/2021 was the first year the Authority had not met its budget requirements in terms of interest and the main reason was Covid-19 and low interest

rates. If the interest rates do pick up, the Authority would increase its budget requirements.

A Member asked who Close Brothers were and was advised by the Principal Accountant that they were a Merchant Bank and dealt with a lot of local authorities.

RESOLVED –

That the Treasury Management Performance 2020/21 report be noted.

## **OA10**

### **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the Accounts and Audit Regulations required the Annual Governance Statement to be approved in advance of the adoption of the Statement of Accounts. Once approved, it would be submitted to the Chief Fire Officer and the Chairman of the Authority for signature.

The Annual Governance Statement had been set out to reflect the seven principles of Good Governance as contained in the guidance issued in 2016 jointly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). In addition, CIPFA issued a bulletin in February 2021 recommending that an Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 should include: adaptations to reflect new ways of working and emergency arrangements; changes to 'business as usual' activities, including cessation or reduced frequency or scale of activities; and longer-term changes to priorities, programmes, strategies and plans as a result of the impact of the pandemic on the organisation and the local area.

As a result, Members were advised that the Annual Governance Statement set out how the Authority and its officers adapted to the challenges and practicalities of decision making at Member and officer level; and how certain aspects of work were deferred; how the service did things differently, and also how the service extended beyond its statutory duties to give greater support to the ambulance service; and creating new partnerships with health and social care providers.

Members were advised that the Annual Governance Statement included a link to a letter from Her Majesty's Inspector Matt Parr praising the work of the service's employees for undertaking additional roles to protect its communities; and that it reproduced the Chief Internal Auditor's Opinion and the acknowledgement of the Chief Internal Auditor of the service's response to Covid-19 both internally and externally in providing additional support to the public.

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that Appendix A presented an update on progress against the governance issues intended to be addressed in 2020/21. One area completed in the year was a review of its internal governance board arrangements to

complement the establishment of a Project Management Office function. Three other areas had been reprioritised and given new completion dates and there were four additional areas to be addressed in 2021/22.

A Member asked about the review of the statutory Data Protection Officer (DPO) function and the Director of Legal and Governance advised that the decision was taken corporately that when a position becomes vacant, it was not automatically filled. As Members were aware, the Authority was under financial pressures and if there was a way of reviewing how a role was delivered more effectively and economically, that was something that would be explored. It was a statutory post, but the Authority was looking at how it could be delivered differently on a service contract, or in a partnership with another local authority.

A Member praised the format and content of the Annual Governance Statement when compared to others that he had seen in other authorities.

A Member asked what things had been done differently through the pandemic and was advised by the Director of Legal and Governance that the Authority had adapted in many ways, one being in terms of holding remote Authority, Committee, and Internal Board meetings, leveraging that technology to allow for more remote working, and remote reporting into those bodies. One of the benefits was reducing the carbon footprint.

A Member asked around 'Core Principle B - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.' Due to Covid-19 access to fire stations had been restricted, how could the Service use this opportunity with new technology to engage with the public in different ways, were there any plans, on how this could be done differently in the future.

The Director of Legal and Governance advised Members that the Protection Team had given some very successful online seminars to business owners and employers regarding their responsibility under the Regularity Reform Fire Safety Order.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Authority was managing four vaccination centres across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and had been very successful engaging with health authorities and local authorities, supporting them to vaccinate people across the communities. The Authority was also using this as an opportunity to engage with vulnerable members of the community to give advice on fire safety and fire prevention.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 be approved.

2. That the progress on the implementation of recommendations of the previous Annual Governance Statement (Appendix A to the Annual Governance Statement) be noted.
3. That the priorities for 2021/22 (Appendix B to the Annual Governance Statement) be agreed.

## **OA11 CORPORATE RISK UPDATE**

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that this was a regular report on the status of Corporate Risks presented to every meeting of this Committee. Since the Committee met in March 2021, the risk register has been subject to regular review by officers at the Performance Monitoring and Strategic Management Boards and by Lead Members where individual risks fall within their areas of reference. As Members could see, there had been no new risks since the last report or changes to the risk scores or RAG status.

With regard to the pandemic risk which had been receiving even more attention than usual in the media following the Government's decision to relax most of the legally enforceable restrictions, although many remained on an advisory basis to be left to the discretion of employers, public service providers, businesses and the wider public. The Authority's Pandemic Management Group had reviewed the potential impact of the changes and decided to remain at Stage 3 of the Pandemic Recovery Strategy. This meant that all staff should continue working to the pre-existing Covid-19 arrangements following the lifting of the legally enforceable national restrictions to help minimise the impact on staff and the communities it serves. Measures such as social distancing, enhanced hygiene regimes and the use of appropriate PPE would continue in all workplaces and when out and about in the community. These arrangements would remain in place until 16 August 2021 after which they would be subject to further review.

Regarding the EU transition risk which had been reduced to Green RAG status in January 2021, following the conclusion of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU, Members would have noted the positive adequacy decision in relation to GDPR which was one of the final transitional milestones. Considering this, and the absence of any foreseeable disruption to the Authority's services from any residual level of risk, officers would welcome a view from the Committee as to whether Members would like to keep this risk on the Corporate Risk Register or de-escalate it for monitoring to the relevant directorate risk register.

A Member asked, as the Authority had a lot of equipment, if there had been any delays or price increases as a consequence of the UK/EU deal and was advised by the Director of Finance and Assets that it was hard to distinguish between the impact of Brexit and the potential impacts of Covid-19 on prices. For example, the supply of lumber and building



supplies could be just as much due to Covid-19 where rather than going on holiday, people were using the money to renovate their homes and there had been some price pressures on renovations on some of the Authority's buildings.

The Corporate Planning Manager advised that he was asking Members as to whether they wished to continue to scrutinize the EU transition risk at this level at this Committee, or to de-escalate it to sit on a directorate risk register, which would be subject to ongoing monitoring by officers. If there was anything significant to arise, it would of course be re-elevated for Member scrutiny.

A Member asked about quantifying the risk of the Court of Appeal ruling on the McCloud Sargeant case. The Director of Finance and Assets advised that he was working at national level with the Local Government Association, National Fire Chiefs Council and the Home Office around the Authority's submission for the upcoming spending review which would need to be submitted to the Treasury by the end of August. Within it was a discussion around precept flexibility and funding for both pensions administration and potentially increased employers costs of pensions. The Authority was looking to do what it could to secure a sustainable funding settlement going forward.

A Member asked if future recruitment and retention would be an issue and also what was the Recruitment Oversight Board. The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised Members that he chaired the Recruitment Oversight Board and representatives on the Board covered all areas and all departments within the organisation. The Board met to look at where the vacancies were and what the impact was likely to be. A project had been commenced to look at how the Authority recruits in the future.

A Member asked if crews were being affected by the 'pingdemic' and was advised by the Chief Fire Officer that he received Covid-19 updates on a daily basis and he continued to monitor the issues in terms of isolation. It had presented some issues for staffing and would continue to in the near future. The Chief Fire Officer had been lobbying the National Fire Chiefs Council to put pressure on the Home Office to consider exemptions for firefighters in terms of testing etc. Staffing nationally across the fire service was tight.

It being proposed and seconded the 'Risk of physical disruption to Service operations due to no, or insufficiently comprehensive agreement covering future UK relations with the EU' be removed from the Corporate Risk register.

RESOLVED –

1. That the status on identified corporate risks at Annex C be reviewed and approved.

2. That comments be provided to officers for consideration and attention in future updates/reports.

It being proposed and seconded it was:

RESOLVED -

3. That the risk of physical disruption to service operations due to no, or insufficiently comprehensive agreement covering future UK relations with the EU be removed from the Corporate Risk Register.

It being proposed and seconded it was moved:

4. That an environmental impact risk be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

It being put to a recorded vote as set out below, the motion was defeated:

| Councillor  | For | Against | Abstained |
|-------------|-----|---------|-----------|
| Bagge       |     | ✓       |           |
| Carroll     |     | ✓       |           |
| Chapple OBE |     | ✓       |           |
| Darlington  | ✓   |         |           |
| Rankine     |     | ✓       |           |
| Stuchbury   | ✓   |         |           |
| Waite       |     | ✓       |           |

**OA12**

### **EQUAL PAY AUDIT**

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that an Equal Pay Audit was the most effective way of checking the Service was complying with its equal pay obligations, and ensuring it delivered a pay system free from bias. This report confirmed the outcome of the most recent Equal Pay Audit, that the Authority was achieving equitable pay between genders and the other protected characteristics of age and race. Under the Equality Act 2010, it was unlawful for an employer to discriminate between men and women in terms of their pay and conditions, where they were in the same employment and were doing the same or similar work, work related as equivalent or work of equal value.

The HR Advisory and Development Manager advised Members that It was important to note that whilst equal pay and gender pay both deal with the disparity of pay females receive within the workplace, a gender pay gap was different to equal pay, and organisations which

were fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010 could still have a gender pay gap, which this Service had and was taking steps to address.

To comply with legislation, an Equal Pay Audit was required to consider gender. At the outset of this project, it was decided to widen to the scope, and in addition to gender, analysis was also undertaken for additional protected characteristics of age, disability and ethnicity.

The results of extensive data and analysis work within the Equal Pay Audit would not be shared due to detailing personally identifiable information. However, the findings and recommendations made have formed the recommendations for action as detailed within Appendix one, which included six recommendations following the Equal Pay Audit and one additional recommendation regarding flexible working. It was recommended that an Equal Pay Audit was undertaken within the lifetime of each Public Safety Plan.

A Member asked if there had been any claims on the Authority regarding equal pay and was advised that there had been no equal pay claims to date.

A Member asked why the Authority paid out £20k in pay protection and was advised that in 2013, the Authority amended the pay structure. At that point, all roles were re-evaluated, and the spinal pay points changed, resulting in some employees being put on an exempt pay point. A decision was taken by the Executive Committee to protect those pay points for a period, so as individuals moved on within the organisation, retired or left of their own accord, those numbers would diminish through a natural process. As of July 2021, there were 23 employees on the exempt pay point, and this continued to reduce.

Members asked that a report be brought back to the Committee showing progress of the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

1. It be noted the Authority is achieving equitable pay between genders, and the other protected characteristics of age and race.
2. That the action plan and recommendations, as detailed in Appendix one, be noted.

(Councillor Darlington left the meeting)

### **OA13 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME – ANNUAL STATUTORY REPORTING 2020-2021**

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised Members that in July 2015 the Authority approved its apprenticeship programme with its first cohort starting in 2016. The apprenticeship programme continued to support the Authority's strategic aims regarding resourcing. This included effective profiling and forecasting; refreshing the workforce; flexible working; collaboration and supporting equality

and diversity through engagement. To date, the Authority has enrolled 107 new apprentice starts across the organisation including operational firefighters, management and leadership; business administration; vehicle technicians, cyber security technologist; assistant accountants; human resources and information communication technology.

Not only has this enabled new starters to join the organisation, but also enhanced the Authority's strategy for the retention and upskilling of existing staff and to develop future leaders and subject matter experts. The Authority had continued to evolve its apprenticeship proposition, ensuring it was fit for purpose. In 2019 it moved away from its previous Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA) model and now directly employed all apprentices, ensuring the government levy was fully utilised. The Authority was currently reviewing possible options for future apprenticeship recruitment, including forming part of a Thames Valley working group, looking at the possibility of delivering a Thames Valley Firefighter Apprenticeship Programme.

The Head of Protection, Assurance and Development advised Members that this report set out the Authority's annual statutory report against the public sector apprenticeship target for the year ending 31 March 2021. As part of the Government's Apprenticeship Reform agenda, a public sector target was introduced in 2017 requiring all organisations to meet a minimum of 2.3% new apprenticeship starts each year. This equated to approximately 11 per year. For this reporting period the Authority had 21 new apprentice starts which exceeds the national target of 2.3%. Based on the reporting period, April 2017 to March 2021, the Authority had averaged 4.5% new apprentice starts per year. With apprenticeships now embedded across the organisation with both support and operational staff, the Authority was proud of its apprenticeship programme, not only as a route to employ new staff but also the upskilling of existing employees and developing future leaders.

A Member asked if there were any partnership agreements being looked at in terms of developing joint apprenticeships at the Blue Light Hub and was advised by the Head of Protection, Assurance and Development that nothing had been agreed as yet, but discussions were already taking place with those partners, as well as other partners within the Thames Valley.

A Members asked if there was good retention of trained apprentices and was advised that retention of apprentices was very good.

RESOLVED –

That the Authority's annual return – attached as Appendix 2 – be endorsed for submission to the Department for Education, and for publication on the Authority's website.

(Councillor Bagge left the meeting)

**HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY AND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES (HMICFRS) – BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (BFRS) IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

The Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response advised Members that the legal framework for the inspection of English fire and rescue services (FRS) was established with the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The Home Office subsequently awarded a contract to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, who consequently changed their name to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to include the remit of fire. HMICFRS developed a framework for inspecting fire and rescue services, based in part on the framework they use for inspecting policing. The inspection framework set out to grade every FRS as either Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate. A grade was awarded for three areas (efficiency, effectiveness and people).

The Authority's first inspection took place during the summer of 2019 and following completion of the first inspection round of all 45 fire and rescue services, the Inspectorate published a report into Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service on 17 December 2019. The Service was judged to require improvement in its Efficiency and its Effectiveness, and the People element was judged as good. The report identified eleven areas for improvement, one cause for concern and two recommendations. In addition to the Inspectorate framework, The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework document required fire and rescue services to give due regard to HMICFRS reports and recommendations. Where recommendations were made, the receiving Service was required to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how such recommendations were actioned.

The Head of Covid-19 Preparedness and Response took Members through the Action Plan. The plan was being progressed through a range of improvement work streams. The main reasons for some of the themes being marked as amber was slow progress due to the pandemic and the ongoing financial position. Progress remained strong, and the Authority would continue to work against these improvement themes.

The Head of Covid-19 and Preparedness advised Members that the second round of inspections had now re-commenced, and the Authority had been inspected again as part of tranche one. The inspection had taken place virtually between the 24 May and 5 July 2021. The inspection framework was very similar to the previous round, and the key focus was on the progress the Service had made since the last full inspection. There was not yet a date when the tranche one inspection reports would be published, but the indication was that it would be in the Winter this year.

The Head of Covid-19 and Preparedness advised Members the Service was inspected in November 2020 with a thematic inspection to look at its Covid-19 preparation. The results of the Covid-19 inspection were published on 22 January 2021 and the inspectorate concluded that the Service responded well during the pandemic and provided additional support to its communities.

A Member asked, as HMICFRS had advised that the Service needed additional funding, had the government provided additional funding and was advised that information had been highlighted within correspondence with the Home Office and to assist the Authority in its lobbying. The Authority had managed through zero based budgeting and through a reallocation of internal budgets to fund those twenty additional firefighters and the other protection and prevention posts; and that details of attributable costs would be provided to Members.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee note current progress against the HMICFRS BFRS Improvement Plan.

**OA15**

**FORWARD PLAN**

The Chairman brought the Forward Plan for future Overview and Audit Committee meetings to the attention of Members. It was noted that the Audited Statement of Accounts may not be ready for the November committee meeting and would be brought to either the Fire Authority meeting in December 2021 or the meeting of the Overview and Audit Committee in March 2022.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

**OA16**

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted that the date of the next Overview and Audit Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 10 November 2021 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 1.03 PM.