

**MINUTES OF THE ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT PANEL (ETAP) FIRE & RESCUE MEETING held on Wednesday 9 December 2020  
(Virtual meeting held on MS Teams due to Covid19)**

**Present:**

<b>ETAP members</b>	<b>Officers</b>
Alan Edwards (AE)	Glynn Dixon - SCO Chief Executive (GD)
Bob Simpson (BS) Chair	Jean Cass - SCO Governance Lead (JC)
Craig Brown (CB)	Victoria Farrar - SCO Head of Governance and Assurance (VF)
David Davies (DD)	<b>Fire Officers</b>
Emma Christmas (EC)	Becci Bryant - Chief Fire Officer (BB)
Jane Barr (JB)	David Greensmith - FARS Director of Finance (DG)
Jane King (JK)	<b>Also in attendance:</b>
John Wheatley (JW)	Mark Stocks - Partner Grant Thornton (MS)
Sue Finney (SF)	
Sue Westacott (SW)	
Tony Wilmott (TW)	

<b>SCO - Staffordshire Commissioner's Office</b>
<b>Force - Staffordshire Police Force</b>
<b>FARS - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service</b>

**1. Declaration of interests and apologies.**

Declarations of Interest: - No Declarations of Interest were received.

Apologies: Corrina Bradley FARS Financial Services Manager (CBR), Angela Ward, RSM Audit Manager (AW)

Minutes & actions of the meeting held on the 28 October 2020

Minutes of Previous Meeting

**AGREED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 28 October 2020 to be confirmed as an accurate and true record.

**Actions**

## Updates to actions from previous meetings

- Item 1 Penetration testing, (carried forward CBR to action)

CBR was not at today's meeting but has sent an update on this action for the minutes.

This has been discussed with RSM who have offered a couple of contacts who can provide this service. However, in the meantime FAR's Information Security Officer has a supplier they have used for other penetration testing and now be arranging for this testing in due course. FARS are currently obtaining quotes.

BS commented that he was concerned that this items had outstanding for a considerable time and would like to see a satisfactory resolution by the ETAP meeting in May 2021

- Item 2 To revisit the AGS document in early spring 2021 (carried forward)
- Item 3 To check the wording on the sickness reporting in the Absence Management Report and report back at the next ETAP meeting in December 2020 - complete

DH confirmed that this testing on the audit of Absent Management does include both short and long term sickness.

## **2. Deputy Chair's Feedback**

### **i. Chair of the Finance Panel - Alan Edwards (AE)**

AE's report covered two main areas, monthly financial monitoring and the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts.

AE advised, in the last financial update covering period 7, FAR's financial position was stable at £0.5m below budget, this was mainly due to the pay award being slightly lower than anticipated.

The Statutory Accounts for 2019/20 have now been signed off and have been published.

AE also advised of an emerging big area risk. At their last monthly meeting, the Panel received a verbal update in relation to the firefighters claim for a review of their role, the consequential pay aspirations and the potential long term financial implications.

BB added a couple of comments on the future position and comprehensive spending review.

Following the revaluation of Pension Scheme in 2015, FARS were in receipt of 90%, as part of the Section 31 Grant, to cover the difference of in terms of the employer's contribution which was approx. £1.7m. FARS then funded the final of 10% themselves. FARS have been advised that this will now be included in the Settlement funding, this funding does reduce each year and therefore as a result FARS will be expected to pay more towards employers contribution.

BB, advised that a pay freeze was announced for Public Sector workers as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. However it is the National Joint Council (NJC) that agree

for Fire Fighters the pay awards. It hoped that we will know the NJC position on the Chancellor's guidance, in the next few weeks.

Q: BS, when is the next triannual pension review?

A: DG, the review has just happened and we know where we are with LGPS pensions.

## **ii. Deputy Chair of Thematic Reviews – Jane King (JK)**

JK gave a verbal update on the current work of members.

### **Fire Protect Programme**

JK advised that members have concluded the Fire Protect Report and she paid her thanks to SW and JW for their work on the report. The final report has presented to the Strategic Governance Board (SGB) meeting in November and the report is published on the SCO website.

<https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/ETAP-Fire-Protect-Thematic-Report-Final-Dec.pdf>

A copy of all ETAP thematic reviews published to date can be found on the SCO website <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/transparency/etap>

### **Impact of Covid19**

ETAP members are starting the review on the impact of Covid19. Members are waiting for the publication of national findings from Covid reports from HMICFRS for both the Force and FARS which will feed into their report.

### **Other areas**

JK advised that that members have been discussed how member can place more emphasis on the 'E' side (ethics) of their work and members will be bring forward ideas to future meetings.

## **iii. Fire Protect Programme**

BB expressed her appreciation for the work that went into the report that was taken to SGB, together with FARS responses and recommendations.

JW thanked BB and her Team's for their information and their involvement with the report. It was unfortunate that Covid19 hinders member's plans to complete the report

JW in light in the way the report was progressed JW asked that the FARS pick up the recommendations in a timely manner.

Q: BS, asked how the recommendations in the report are being fed back to members?

A: VF, FARS Officers are preparing an update for the next ETAP meeting.

ACTION: BB to provide details on a tracking procedure for audit/ETAP/Inspection recommendations.
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BS thanked JK for her update

### **3. Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) (verbal feedback)**

SF advised that the panel has not met since the last meeting of ETAP.

### **4. Internal Auditors - RSM**

#### **i. Progress update Report**

DH updated on the Internal Audit Programme and any update on the annual opinion from the work that they have carried out.

Five review have been carried out and two reviews are outstanding.

DH has been working on a finalising a Risk Register analysis looking at 15 other national Fire Services Risk registers and this will be issued in due course.

#### **ii. Key Financial Controls**

The audit found that a well-designed and established control framework with good governance was in place. Twenty one areas were reviewed including Income, Creditors and Debtors, Cash and Treasury Management. There was one area of exception that was a medium recommendation, this was around bank accounts checks. This was impacted by the current remote working of staff.

#### **iii. Risk Management**

The review confirmed that a Risk Management Structure was in place, with a manual providing guidance. Five medium recommendations were made, but overall these were building upon a well-controlled process.

Q: DD, looking at how audits were carried out during lockdown, will you consider continuing audits remotely when lockdown eases in the future?

A: DH, looking at both internal and external audits how this will look going forward, 90% - 95% of our work has been remotely. We do check that clients have Covid secure measures in place before we attend sites. We have had all of the technology in place for a number of years so that a number of audit could take place remotely.

Q: SF, considering the point looking at the 'quality of the minutes', was this a surprise to you?

A: DG, the Strategic Risk register is reviewed through the Governance process. The lessons learned will include how the minutes are taken to capture these reviews.

DG added his thanked DH and his team at RSM for this work and advised that they have already started looking into these recommendations.

## **5. AOB**

### **i. Ext Auditor Grant Thornton (MS)**

MS commented that this year's the audit has been harder with the serious impacts of Covid. He advised that he felt that the Finance Team were stretched this year, with teams covering both the Force and FARS finances. He added that this was an area that needed looking at for future years.

Following comments made by MS, BS asked that consideration is given, prior to next year's audit, to increase the support to FAR's finance function following the full integration of the Force and FARS Finance Teams.

The Chair thanked MS for his comments and for the fact despite the issues and pressures of different ways of working that, the audit of the FARS Accounts had been completed within the revised timeframe and asked for his appreciation to be passed to all involved.

### **ii. Thanks to David Davies (ETAP member)**

BS paid his thanks to DD who has served on the Panel for the past six years and today is attending his last Fire Panel meeting. BS thanked DD for his personal support and for in particular for his positive attitude in his Deputy Chair role on his Thematic Work.

### **iii. Date and time of next meeting Wednesday 10 February at 14.00**