



**Draft V02**

**Item 1 (i)**

**MINUTES OF THE ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT PANEL (ETAP) FIRE & RESCUE MEETING held on Tuesday 26 July 2022**  
**Conference Room 1, Block 7, Police HQ**

**Present:**

<b>ETAP members</b>	<b>Officers</b>
Bob Simpson (BS) Chair	David Greensmith - FARS Director of Finance (DG)
Ben Thompson (BT)	Rob Barber - Chief Fire Officer (RB)
Jane Barr (JB)	Victoria Farrar - SCO Head of Governance and Assurance (VF)
Jane King (JK)	Louis Clayton - SCO Chief Executive (LC)
Terry Stock (TS)	Jean Cass - SCO Governance Lead (JC)
Martyn Rochelle (MR)	<b>Also, in attendance</b>
Sue Westacott (SW)	Angela Ward - Senior Manager RSM Auditors (AW)
John Wheatley (JW)	

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

Prior to the Police meeting this morning, ETAP members held a private meeting with the Staffordshire Commissioner.

BS thanked DG for inviting ETAP members to the Financial Challenge Days and also to RB for inviting members to Governance Day at Fire HQ on the 1<sup>st</sup> July.

BS also welcomed LC to her first ETAP Public meeting.

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

Declarations of Interest: - no declarations of interest were received.

Apologies: ETAP members Chris Gill (CG), Craig Brown CB), Emma Christmas (EC), Sue Finney (SF). Daniel Harris, RSM Internal Auditors (DH). Mark Stocks, Partner Grant Thornton (MS) and Sarah Jassal Audit Manager Grant Thornton (SJ).

- (i) Minutes & actions of the meeting held on the 25 May 2022

Minutes of Previous Meeting

**AGREED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 25 May 2022 were confirmed as an accurate and true record.

## **Actions**

### Updates to actions from previous meetings

Item 1 - ETAP summary page for the website – carried forward

Item 2 - 5 complete.

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

### **i. Finance Panel**

BS, on behalf of EC, advised that there is no feedback today Finance Panel in May was cancelled.

EC will be chairing the next Finance Panel meeting in September. In preparation for the meeting BS asked if he and EC could meet with the Section 151 Officers (JB and DG). (Action noted in the Police meeting)

### **ii. Review update - Jane King (JK)**

JK presented her report which covered the following areas: -

ETAP members attended Financial Challenge Roadshow's at various Fire locations in June 2022.

ETAP members also attended a Governance overview session with Senior Officers from Fire and the SCO at Fire HQ on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022. ETAP members were presented with a briefing on the revised staff structure, governance model and White Paper for Fire. Members were also given a tour of the buildings on the Fire HQ site.

Michelle Hickmott joined the ERP meeting and gave update on the implementation of the National Core Code of Ethics and how this has been embedded at FARS.

Reviews have been concluded in Gifts and Hospitality and this report will be published shortly on the SCO website.

JB asked that CBR, bring FARS's report on Expenses, Gifts and Hospitality to the next ETAP meeting in October.

<b>ACTION:</b> CBR to supply a report on the Expenses, Gifts and Expenses, for the period ending 31 March 2022 to the next ETAP meeting on the 31 October.
--

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

BS thanked JK for her update and report.

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

EC is attended the last PFCP meeting on the 27 June, as an observer on behalf of ETAP members. BS updated the meeting today on behalf of EC.

Items at the last meeting included the Commissioner's annual report and his plans for the next two years.

RB advised that the Commissioner's next review of performance will be tomorrow at Fire Strategy Board meeting.

RB thanked ETAP members for their comments as part of the national consultation on the White Paper. The consolidated responses have now been submitted as part of the consultation process.

4.

**i. Unaudited Draft SCO Fire and Rescue Authority Accounts 2021.22 including AGS statement**

DG presented the Stat. Accounts for the period ending 31 March 2022 and confirmed: -

The unaudited accounts have been published at the beginning of June 2022. The audit is commencing in June, however due to pressures, the external auditors Grant Thornton, have advised of a month's delay in this audit being finalised. The final accounts will now be presented at the ETAP meeting on the 31 October 2022.

DH paid his thanks to CBR for her work completing the accounts to a good standard prior to their audit.

Performance in the last financial year: -

Another strong performance in the year, with earmarked savings increasing from £7.5m to £8.3m.

The Capital financing requirement has reduced by £10m since March 2013.

The net liability has slightly improved from £457m to £444m this year.

The accounts include a full narrative to the financial position, a narrative from the Staffordshire Commissioner and the Annual Governance Statement.

Q: JB, are there any plans to separate the Annual Governance Statement and complete this using the same methodology as the SCO and the Force?

A: VF, the Fire legislation for the AGS for is slightly different for Fire and this does need to sit within the accounts and not as a separate document. However, FARS AGS format can be amended to align with that of the SCO and the Force using CIPFA guidance and officers will look to complete this for next year's submission.

Q: JB, Safeguarding is not mentioned in the Fire AGS, is this something that is on Fire's agenda?

A: VF, yes, Safeguarding is massive on the Fire Agenda. It is contained within the Risk agenda and refreshed in the training programme. This will be looked at to include in next year's AGS.

Q: JK, contingency liability, page, pending insurance claims of £25K, what sort of cases does this relate to?

A: DG, in terms of the notes, this relates to the outstanding insurance claims and the excess.

RB added that there are 7 different claims that are progressing and the £25k is the total excess that FARS would need to pay if the claims were made against them.

Q: TS, could the Public Sector Equality Duty be reflected in the AGS?

A: RB, yes, we are looking to add Equality Impact Assessments on all decisions.

DG added that he would be working with VF to add the Public Sector Equality Duty in the future statements.

## **ii. Going Concern Assessment 2021.22**

DG presented the Going Concern Assessment for 2021.22

DG confirmed that this paper is primarily written for the auditors to give them the reassurance, that FARS, a public body, has prepared their accounts on a going concern basis.

Q:BS, looking at the pay increase that has been asked for by fire fighters – may this lead to strike action?

A: RB, I can confirm that the pay offer of 2% has been rejected by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The worst-case scenario is industrial action and the FBU have recalled conference around this issue which is a 'mark' in the sand and FARS await the outcome of this action.

Q: TS, do fire fighters have the right to strike?

A: RB, yes fire fighters do have the right to strike. There are however, there are some members of staff and fire fighters who are not members of the FBU.

Q: BS, can you give an update on the Fire/Force finance IT system please?

A: CB, the Fire Integra is being upgraded, this means that the Force can join the platform, with a view to going live on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022. The purchase order for the Police has been signed and foundations are in place to start over next few months.

DG confirmed that the contracts have been signed and FARS are working through the resource implications.

Q: BT, looking at the Grenfell inquiry, was there an action to share the high-risk buildings plans digitally with fire services by the middle of next year. Is this something FARS is capable to receive?

A: RB, there are couple of aspects to this that are dependent upon the number of stakeholders. This includes the building owners being capable of keeping details of the building up to date. RB is working with the Lead for the National Chief's Fire Council (NFCC) (protection and prevention arm) and a company who have created a product which may help with digitalisation of performance data for properties. This is one of the actions that FARS are currently focusing on.

BS thanked DG and CBR for their updates

## **5. Internal Auditors**

AW confirmed that the report covers the progress for the Internal Audit for 2022/23. A number of audits have been scoped and are in plan to take place in August.

Q: JK, the Immediate Detriment Framework, what does this mean please?

A: DG, this audit will look at the decision making and governance of the Immediate Detriment the pension scheme. This scheme has allowed 9 members of the fire fighters to retire under this legacy pension scheme, which is not based upon the current legislation. The Home Office, HMICFRS, NFCC, NPCC, and HMT have all advised that this scheme should not be being used.

A paper has been sent to the Staffordshire Commissioner on the 3 May, pausing the scheme until FARS have received reassurance on the process from Internal Audit.

## **6. AOB**

Bob added that ETAP members have recently completed their annual self- assessment following the CIPFA regulations.

The date and time of next meeting is the 31 October 10.30 -12.00