



**ethics, transparency
& audit panel**
Building public trust in policing and fire and rescue



Draft V02

Item 1

MINUTES OF THE ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT PANEL (ETAP) FIRE & RESCUE MEETING held on Thursday 26 September 2024
Location: Conference Room 1, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue, Pirehill, Stone, Staffordshire ST15 0BS.

Present:

ETAP members	Officers
Bob Simpson (BS) Chair	Glynn Luznyj - Deputy Fire Officer (GL)
Craig Brown (CB)	David Greensmith - FARS Director of Finance (DG)
Chris Key (CK)	Corrina Bradley - FARS Assistant Director of Finance (CBr)
Emma Christmas (EC)	Louise Clayton - SCO Chief Executive (LC)
Jane King (JK)	Victoria Jones - SCO Director of Governance & Assurance (VJ)
John Wheatley (JW)	Jean Cass - SCO Governance Manager (JC)
Louisa Harrison (LH)	
Hifsa Haroon - Iqbal (HI)	External Officers in attendance
Paul Atkins (PA)	Paul Grady - Azets Auditors (PG)
John Wheatley (JW)	Azola Dudula - Azets Auditors (AD)
Byron Preece (BP)	Angela Ward - Associate Director RSM Internal Audit (AW)
Gurpreet Singh Kallar (GK)	
SCO - Staffordshire Commissioner's Office	
Force - Staffordshire Police Force	
FARS - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services	

There are no members of the public in attendance today.

Prior to the meeting today, ETAP members held their pre-meeting 10.00 – 10.30

1. Declaration of interests, apologies, minutes and actions.

Declarations of Interest: None

Apologies: ETAP member Chris Gill and Sue Westacott, Chief Fire Officer, Rob Barber and Dan Harris RSM.

Minutes & Actions of the meeting on the 19 June 2024

There are no outstanding actions.

AGREED - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 19 June 2024, are confirmed as an accurate and true record.

2. Questions from the Public

The question relates to the "ETAP Annual Report 2024" which was presented at both the 31 May 2024 ETAP police public meeting and at the 19 June 2024 ETAP Fire public meeting, responses are shown in GREEN

1. How long has the current Chair served as a) an ETAP member and b) in the role of ETAP Chair? a) Start date 2 March 2016 8 years 6 months b) appointment to Chair in April 2017 for an interim period, this was formally ratified at the ETAP meeting on the 28 June 2017. 7 years 3 months.

2. Is it correct that the current Chair's permitted ETAP tenure remains set at 9 years? Yes, when does his current tenure end? May 2025 (extension given for succession planning for a new chair)

3. Will the current Chair be permitted to continue either in the role of Chair or as an ETAP member beyond his current tenure? No

3. Update from Deputy Chief Fire Officer (GL)

Key highlights included:

HMICFRS – outcome formally shared and published this month. Overall reflection is that staff are happy with this report.

Operational demand – now in a stable position, weather does play a part and demands have been managed.

Strong performance areas were noted – these are shared through the public performance meetings and details can be found on the SCO website.

Challenges dealt with recently in light of some of the disturbances and working alongside Force colleagues. Also, with the storms last weekend, they dealt with lightning strikes in two separate areas of the County.

The Service has received a Silver Award in recognition of their work with the Armed Forces, and are working with serving and retired veterans.

Grenfell 2 report – ETAP members supported with the Phase 1 report, and will get a chance to review Fire's response to Phase 2 recommendations at a later date.

There is a current consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan which is a statutory requirement. This headlines three priorities – Our Communities, Our Environment and Our People. There has been a good response to date, with 1200 replies and this concludes in November, and the Plan will be published in December. Need to be aware of AI as possibly 200 responses were through AI or a BOT. There is a real push to increase community engagement.

The Commissioner is also consulting on his priorities and details can be found on the ¹SCO website.

There are currently shared functions and shared sites at 3 on-call stations. There are future plans for Chase Terrace and Kinver Stations in October 2024. Larger sites at Stone and Uttoxeter are coming shortly, then later this year Kidsgrove. There is a shared rent and organic collaboration between the services at the shared sites.

The Well-being agenda has a very active sports section. Staffordshire sent three swimming competitors to the Fire Fighters games in Denmark, claiming medals with a firefighter from Cannock achieving Gold and Silver medals.

BS thanked GL for his report

4. Deputy Chair's Feedback

i. Chair of the Finance Panel – Emma Christmas (EC)

No formal update as the Finance as the panel have not met since the last ETAP meeting.

BS thanked EC for her update.

ii. Chair of the Ethics and Review Panel – Craig Brown (CB)

CB attended his first meeting today as Chair of the ERP.

ERP met 4th September with an update and discussion on Ethics Channel, prior to a full update at November meeting.

Reviewed and signed off ERP Terms of Reference.

Findings of CISP – follow up due to complete November.

Potential current and future reviews: Cultural and Ethical differences of shared sites – is there equalization of the ethics with Force and Fire working together now on shared site.

Grenfell 2 – ETAP members may review the implementation of recommendations at a later date.

BS thanked CB for his update.

5. (i) Gifts and Hospitality Report

CB presented this report on behalf of the Fire service, an annual report on activity ending 31 March 2024.

Expenses were small for Senior leaders and overall expenses/spends in the report are typical to previous years.

Gifts and Hospitality, there are four registers across the service, monitored by departments in Fire. Appendix 1 shows all registered - 22 offered gifts, all of which were accepted. Increase

¹ [Have Your Say - Staffordshire Commissioner \(staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk\)](https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk)

in last year driven by activities such as - Fire Open Days, Raffle Prizes donated by local businesses, and an internal project - well-being for staff, resulting in local garden center donations in the west of the County.

Q: GK, There is a drop for Assistant Chief Fire Officer is there any reason for this drop?

A: DG, This is due to a relocation of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer from another area.

Q: CB, Question on process – it is good to see transparency. Policy wise is everything recorded so nothing slips through net?

A: CBR, there is a limit of £10, so small quantity items such as biscuits are not recorded. Sharing of a large number of desserts for example, over the value of £10, was recorded as was becoming regular. Staff are advised if they are not sure then to record it, and a decision can be made as to relevance.

Q: GK, are Fire policies updated on an annual basis?

A: CBR, this policy is due for a refresh and this will be updated with the individuals who administer the policy on annual basis. Generally, policies are refreshed every 2-3 years, this is dependent upon the policy or any changes in either legislation or regulation.

ACTION 1: CB to add a review of the Fire's Gifts and Hospitality Register when updated, to the work of ERP (Ethics and Review Panel)

5. (ii) Going Concern Assessment

DG presented Fire's Going Concern Assessment with the conclusion that the Fire Services will be able to continue in the near future. Key features are around transparency which is reviewed on a monthly basis. More detailed scrutiny through the ETAP Finance Panel is done on a Quarterly basis. There is a positive Cash Flow position over the next 2 years.

Capital Financing over the next 3 years – section 3 of the report shows this. The Overall Reserves are in section 4 of the report, within this are general fund reserves and other reserves. Anticipating there may be some financial challenges ahead, awaiting first budget from new Chancellor.

Q: BP, Reserves, is this 12% of Revenue, 6/7 weeks of cash? And what would happen if the services had no cash?

A: DG, yes, if the Chancellor gave the fire service significant lower funding, the service would need options and may utilise their reserves over interim period, and would review how they do business generally.

Q: PA, the PFI contract, what is the end date?

A: DG, there is a concessionary window of time, but 25 years, 2033/34. Window of further 2-3 years, when all PFI 1 stations will come back. Then further 6-7 years before PFI 2 stations would start to come back, so not before 2040.

Q: PA, is there provision within the capital expenditure to look at environmental updates?

A: DG, there is provision within the environmental strategy and there are a number of initiatives. Looking at Solar Panel inserts at different sites. Some funding left within PFI reserve to invest back in to estates.

Q: JW, how many PFIs station in total?

A, DG, there a total of 21 PFI stations, 10 PFI Stage 1 and 11 PFI stage 2. Will be a team dedicated to bringing services back and they are ensuring due diligence is done in the meantime.

CBR, advised that the lifecycle of the PFIs is built into the contracts. There is a team that manage these contracts robustly.

Q: JW any bonds attached to the PFIs contracts?

A: DG, yes there are bonds in place, the funders cannot walk away – but they could sell it on if they choose to do this.

Q: PA, do utilities sit within the PFI arrangements or sit with ourselves?

A: DG, utilities were originally within the contracts, but these are now taken out of both PF1 and PFI 2 contracts, so we are in control of all the utilities costs.

Q: CB, at what point do you decide to take out more borrowing?

A: DG, there is a 'sweet' spot on borrowings. If getting a better return on cash then would not borrow, will only borrow if necessary. The service is achieving 5% returns on investments. Average debt is on a fixed rate.

Q, BS, have you reviewed the Going Concern statement?

A:PG, this statement has not been reviewed, but the statement for 23/24 has been reviewed.

6. Governance Report

GL presented this report today as behalf of the Chief Fire Officer RB

Key highlights of the report include

HMICFRS Inspection – Number of recommendations and reports that the service has been considering fully. Firstly, around a Thematic Inspection, this resulted in number of disturbing national themes regarding unacceptable behaviors. Staffordshire was one of ten services that took part in this and there was reassurance for Staffordshire that nothing was flagged immediately.

15 recommendations were made – working through all of these. Taken some quick initiatives around training and policy. Promoting a positive culture to call out poor behavior. Policy changes around discipline, grievance and whistle blowing.

HMICFRS – now introduced a 5-tier system. Considerable demand for new inspection, took place between February and May. Results due to be published this month. Staffordshire received Outstanding for response to multi-agency major incidents. 6 good grades, 4 adequate gradings and none requiring improvement or inadequate gradings. Still some areas to look at and have identified 5 areas for improvement, detailed in the report.

Integrated Care work – Two initiatives, one is a funded Fall Service which has been running for 21 months, running at around 3 – 3.5 calls per day. Second is Home from Hospital service, proving equally effective out of Newcastle Fire station. It provides a discharge service to get patients home safely, averaging 4.5 discharges a day.

Grenfell Fire Phase 2 report – report is being digested and examined, reviewing 58 recommendations. Highlights a lack of strategy around evacuations and there is more learning to be taken from this.

Staffordshire has completed all of the Values and Culture recommendations from the HMICFRS report.

Manchester Arena enquiry is ongoing work. Local impact of this allowed to relaunch Jessop, partners working together on incidents with shared objectives.

Strategic Risk Register reviewed quarterly. Last review published May 2024. 9 strategic risks reviewed, the list of risks is contained within the report. Loss of key staff is a prominent risk, issues around industrial action and pandemics. Culture remains on the risk register, despite positive reports this is due to the national issues. Environmental is also maintained on risks register.

Q: PA, Cyber Risks, are these being actively thought through as part of civil contingency risk?

A:GL, Yes - significant investments have been made in IT with purchases in both software and hardware. Some of it is internal to ensure systems and functions are protected.

Q: BP, visits from the fire station to a local school lifts profile. Read there is a widespread lack of confidence in misconduct processes. Women in particular afraid of broaching issues - is it possible to involve external sources to support with this?

A: GL, school visits have been reinvigorated, service has struggled to meet the demand. Regarding confidence in misconduct process - improvements are being made and have utilised external bodies, but recognise the complexity around these issues. Looking at how Police handle their issues through a professional standards team. Independent bodies do take a part in the process, as well at the anonymous reporting lines. Have asked for support from SCO regarding the appeals process.

Q: BP, floods, are they part of the remit? Will be more work going forwards, will the service get additional funding?

A: GL, FARS is not statutory obliged to respond to floods, unless a rescue is involved. However, do take on flood services, and there is an ongoing debate with government to take on this service and how that might look.

Q: JK, response on Manchester Arena Enquiry, ETAP to arrange with the relevant manager to have an updated conversation with an updated are report back to ERP. Learning on joint

work with agencies around vulnerabilities. Regarding inspection and around vulnerable persons – this is still an area within the Force to address, although different focus - is there an opportunity for joint learning?

A: GL, the Fire Service does work closely with the Force on this agenda but also with various agencies, safeguarding boards. Rigorous systems are in place and have sought more detail from inspectors re improvements needed.

Q: JK, Aware of GDPR but is there any cross sharing of information?

A: GL, yes there is. Domiciliary care visits are undertaken to identify risks and then they refer back to Fire Service about any real risks.

Q: CK, do work collaboratively with Police on developing procedures. Ethics are key to the group but concerned re the amount of work identified in the report - Is this deliverable, do you have capacity and governance to put all of this in place?

A: GL, agree it is extremely challenging and resource intensive but the service has no choice. Need to demonstrate to inspectors that working as hard as we can. Already ahead of the curve on a number of thematics, so not starting from scratch, and the service has been working on the challenges over a number of years. HR is a shared service with Police, although do have a dedicated arm for Fire. But it is helpful to discuss with different officers and provides real value.

Q:BS, understand that there is an open recruitment scheme, is that going well?

A: GL, yes it is ongoing and closes 30 September.

Q: BS, are you looking at project management appointment post?

A: GL, this has not happened yet but DG will be supporting this position. DG added there was more work to be done, with the job evaluation process in place.

Q: PA, regarding Project Manager is the service thinking longer term re having a PMO in place to build internal capacity?

A: GL, yes and this will involve working together with department heads to build knowledge and work with the department.

7. Internal Auditors

AW presented the following reports to the Panel today

i. Progress

Two final reports are presented to the meeting today from the 2023/24 plan.

Nothing more to bring to the panels attention at this time.

BS confirmed that the plan is on track.

Q: Is transformation part of this work?

A: AW, this is a feature of the 2024/25 plan.

Q: Are there any early thoughts on this? Have you got Terms of Reference for this?

A: AW, it will be very interesting, and there will be a lot of change and it will add some value.

ii. Procurement

Presented yesterday as joint report with the Force and FARS – positive and has Substantial Assurance. There are a couple of actions, one medium and one low.

BS confirmed that ETAP had received a presentation on Procurement from HH after the Police Public Meeting yesterday.

iii. Protection Activity

Was requested as part of the 2024/25 plan due to some changes in February this year. Relates to the inspection of high-risk premises. Report reflects work to date and improvements that have been made.

Q: CK, Formal management response in reports – management response is noted but there is no evidence of a formal sign off. Can you give assurance relating to this?

A: AW, this can be included, it's an agreed commentary to the identified risks.

BS confirmed that all reports are now only sent through once they have been finalised, and this is part of the new process.

BS thanked AW for her update

8. External Auditors

PG discussed how the report sets out key overarching priorities. The Audit Plan set out significant risks and report shows the work that has been done. Overall the audit has gone really well, engagement with the team has been excellent.

In terms of audit, figures presented were accurate. Work is nearly at conclusion, going through a final detailed review. Completions outstanding on pensions and building valuations.

Part of the report is based on Value For Money and can conclude they have not identified any significant weaknesses. Will be reflected in the audit annual report, in terms of progress in place and any risks.

Q: CB, do you know when letters will be received and is there any risk in association with this?

A: PG, have received the letter that bridges the gap, just waiting for final letter which should be received sometime in October, as the deadline they set was for the end of September. Backstop date is not until February next year so confident this will all be dealt with by this time.

The only external confirmation still waiting on is the bank confirmation, expect to receive this and there are no issues around this information.

Internal time controls recommendations, nothing of significant risk or concern and recommendations have been agreed with relevant management.

BS added his thanks to the both Finance Team and the Auditors on this clean report.

9. AOB

The date and time of next meeting is on Thursday 5 December 2024 starting at 14.00

DRAFT