



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



Draft V02

Item 2

**MINUTES OF THE ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT PANEL (ETAP) FIRE & RESCUE
MEETING held on Wednesday 27 September 2023
Conference Room 2, Block 7, Police HQ**

Present:

ETAP members	Officers
Bob Simpson (BS) Chair	Glynn Luznyj - Deputy Chief Fire Officer (GL)
Craig Brown (CB)	David Greensmith - FARS Director of Finance (DG)
Chris Gill (CG)	Corrina Bradley - FARS Assistant Director of Finance (CBr)
Emma Christmas (EC)	Louise Clayton - SCO Chief Executive (LC)
Jane King (JK)	Victoria Jones - SCO Head of Governance & Assurance (VJ)
John Wheatley (JW)	Jean Cass - SCO Governance Manager (JC)
Sue Westacott (SW)	Also, in attendance
	Angela Ward - Senior Manager, RSM Auditors (AW)
	Jim McLarnon - Audit Director, Grant Thornton (JM)
SCO - Staffordshire Commissioner's Office	
Force - Staffordshire Police Force	
FARS - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services	

A member of the public Chris Key (CK) was also in attendance.

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

1. Update Deputy Chief Fire officer

GL, presented an overview of current areas of work of the service.

Prevention work – Safe and Wellbeing visits, the service has carried out approx. 1100 home visits per month; this equates to a total of 13,200 in total per year. These visits are based upon a risk-based methodology to target elderly individuals. The service also continues to evaluate the impact of this prevention work.

FARS is currently undertaking structural review. This is looking at all aspects of the teams, the structure and the roles to ensure that they are all as efficient as possible and to assist with future financial planning against the MTFS assumptions.

FARS are taking a new approach to community engagement events. Instead of having the Family Fun Bi-Annual events at Fire HQ, the service is now looking to localise these events. Events have been held this year at Leek, Cannock and Burton Fire Stations. These events proved very popular with over 3000 visitors at each station and there has been lots of funds raised for the Firefighters Charity.

Protect work, the service is continuing with reviews of the structure including terms, conditions and remuneration. The market around fire safety is very fierce at the moment with higher

salaries being paid in the private sector. Therefore, FARS has had to focus internally on training and the retaining of staff.

Looking at the community sprinkles project, to date 23 systems have been fitted working in partnership with other stakeholders to achieve this. This might be an area that ETAP members could review at a later date.

The service is continuing to work on a number of action plans for the HMICFRS, Grenfell, Manchester Arena bombing incident.

Future projects include the procurement of new breathing apparatus for all staff, the issuing of new PPE, aerial ladders, vehicles and an enhanced rescue pump for Longton Fire Service.

Q: SW, is there any news on Grenfell 2 Report?

A: GL, there is no update at the moment.

Q: JK, can comment on the delays in the Emergency Services Network (ESN)?

A: GL, this is a national issue that has been paused due to a huge procurement exercise over the providers for the hardware and software for the project. Locally, there are policies and procedures in place with West Midlands.

BS thanked GL for his update.

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

i. Declarations of Interest: None

Apologies: Rob Barber, Chief Fire Officer (RB) Sarah Jassal Grant Thornton (SJ), ETAP member Jane Barr (JB), Daniel Harris (DH) Audit Partner RSM.

ii. Minutes & Actions of the meeting on the 26 July 2023

Page 5, JM advised that the draft accounts were published at the end of May 2024. This should read *JM advised that the draft accounts were published at the end of May 2023.*

AGREED - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 26 July 2023, with one adjustment as above, are confirmed as an accurate and true record.

Carried forward from 22 February 2023

ACTION 3: DG to provide an update on the Benchmarking group at a future meeting of the Finance Panel - carried forward on-going

3. Questions from the Public

There have been no questions received from members of the public.

4. Deputy Chair's Feedback

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

EC advised, the Finance Panel will continue to meet 6 times per year. During the year the panel meets four times to receive quarterly finance reports and twice for 'Insight' topics.

The first insight meeting was held on the 21 September. This meeting focused on the reporting of risks for both the SCO and FARS. The new format of Insight meeting gives members the opportunity to ask more in-depth questions and gain a stronger overview of number of topics associated with their assurance role.

EC advised that there will be a full finance panel next month.

DG advised that FARS are happy to continue to provide monthly finance reports and these will be available on Huddle for members.

BS thanked EC for her update.

ii. Chair of the Ethics and Review Panel - Jane King (JK)

JK confirmed that the panel has met once in September since the last ETAP Public meeting.

The agenda for this meeting included: -

Project management for tracking improvements.

BS, extended an invite to GL and fire officers to a future ERP meeting, if and when this is appropriate to give members a fuller understanding on how particular functions are operated including how part time fire fighters help in providing cover of the service for the public.

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 updates.

5. FARS Governance Report

GL, presented a six-monthly Governance report from FARS.

GL confirmed that FARS are currently preparing for the HMICFRS Misconduct Inspection. The Inspection Team are due on site from 6 November to 21 November.

The HMICFRS will be carrying out a full inspection in February 2024. From the last inspection, there were 20 recommendations and 7 of these are now signed off through the Governance process of the Service Delivery Board.

Risks are currently steady at the moment with 10 risk currently on the Strategic Risk Register. Risks on watch relating to HR issues include the pay pressures for next year and the time to address to the pension remedial work

Q: CB, Service and Action Report Action plan, item 13 involving HR issues - how long as this area been off track?

A: GL, the risks have been off track for approx. 3-6 months, this was due to significant HR issues. 3 new members have now joined the HR team and the service have seen some improvements in this area.

Q: BS, looking at the pension remedial work, how is this updating and who is financing this?

A: DG, the Home Office are committed to continuing with FARS current pension grant until 2025 and the service understands that there will be no future costs coming after this date. For future valuation of the scheme from 2022, there will be additional costs and it's unsure who will be funding this. The remedy data has now been submitted to the administrators of the scheme, West Yorkshire. There is also in place a member's calculator for the legacy scheme. This is a very complex area for members and officers are working through this.

GL shared his concerns; the timescale is not realistic for the remedy work for this scheme. and this system is very complex to unpick.

Q: BS, have you employed any specialist staff to help calculate the remedies for the pension scheme?

A: DG, a new member of staff has been recruited to help work through the remedies for the scheme.

BS thanked GL and DG for their updates.

6. Internal Auditors

i. Progress paper

AW advised that RSM are currently working on audits in Driving Training and Whistle blowing. These reviews should be concluded shortly and the results will be presented at the next ETAP meeting in November.

Changes to the 2022/23 Audit Plan

Data Integrity will be completed in Qtr. 2, the findings will be reported at the next ETAP.

The Payroll Audit has been moved and will be completed in February 2024 and reported to ETAP's May meeting.

Fleet, this is a joint review with the Force and will take place in Qtr. 4 to give the changes in the service to embed.

ii. Focus on Fraud – for information

ETAP Finance Panel members have been offered an invitation to join a webinar on fraud.

iii. Emergency Services Benchmarking Report 2022/23

AW advised that this benchmarking includes data from 20 PCC and Police Services and six Fire Services.

DG, added that for Whistleblowing audit, there is a new member of staff working in this area. In order to ensure no areas are missed during the audit, AW confirmed that she would align the findings of the review with DG and GL.

BS thanked AW for the report and her updates.

7. External Auditors

i. Verbal update on the External Auditor Audit of Statutory Accounts 2022/23

JM, advised that significant progress made since the last ETAP meeting. A few areas are outstanding and a report will be submitted to the November meeting of the ETAP.

Significant override of journals, now complete. Figures have been received for the land and building valuations and this area should be complete.

The pension figures and the assurance letter from EY are outstanding; these are due by the end of October. There are also certain considerations to be made on the assets, pension valuation, GT will be agreeing these after liaising with Highmans for calculations. GT are now looking to complete after these are received and this is planned to be before the next ETAP meeting in November.

Q: BS, reflecting on the lateness of accounts, are there some negotiations moving this forward?

A: JM, GT will feed into any consultations, the accounts will be qualified

CBr added, this will be the first time that the accounts were not published to the required date of the 30 September. She will be arranging for a delay notice to be published on the FARS website.

DG advised that draft accounts had been published to meet the deadline of the 31 May.

DG, advised that there will be a cost associated in the Pension Asset issue, he was not sure of the benefit of this but the will be set fee of £700 plus an additional £600 for a call to the actuary.

BS thanked JM for his update.

ii. VFM report update

JM advised that the VFM review is now 'hot of press'. This is in draft and subject to review by SJ & JM. No significant weakness areas have been found, which is this is a good result with a couple of areas of improvement to be discussed with management for their sign off.

BS thanked JM for this VFM report update.

8. AOB

The date and time of next meeting is the Thursday 23 November 2023 11.30 – 13.00