ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY
Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

MEETING		AGENDA ITEM
	Audit, Governance & Review Committee	**4**

MEETING DATE		REPORT NUMBER
	7 October 2015	**EFA/086/15**

SUBJECT	
	Audit Recommendation – Report on Progress Against Action Plans

REPORT BY	
	The Finance Director & Treasurer, Mike Clayton

PRESENTED BY	
	The Finance Director & Treasurer, Mike Clayton

SUMMARY

This paper reports on the progress against the action plans developed by the Service in response to audit reports. Items reported as completed in the previous quarter's report have been deleted from the table.

RECOMMENDATION

Members of the Audit Sub Committee are asked to review the progress.

BACKGROUND

This report brings forward the progress made by the Service in response to Audit recommendations. It includes those made by the Audit Commission in their annual audit letter, and in internal audit reports. The recommendations in the review of Risk Management are the subject of a separate action plan and a progress report will be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

MATTERS RAISED IN THE FOLLOW UP REVIEW

At the last meeting of the Committee the Internal Auditor presented their follow up review for 2014/15. Five recommendations that had been outstanding in the previous year were re-stated. The position regarding these audit recommendations is detailed below:

Original Recommendation	Current Position
Business Continuity - A planned schedule of Business Continuity testing should be established to ensure that the Business Continuity Plans are fit for purpose and teams	**Completed -** The dominant business continuity activity throughout 2014 was the response to industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union. The numbers of strikes, and the times each spanned, placed a level of

Original Recommendation	Current Position
are knowledgeable of their roles.	demand on the Risk & Business Continuity Manager. During 2014/15, there were 42 periods of industrial action ranging in length from 1 to 96 hours. The department conducted four business continuity exercises in 14/15 involving nine departments. Joint exercises were held with particular regard to inter-dependencies. •27 January. Operations and Finance •29 April. Technical Fire Safety and Safer Communities •4 July. HR&OD, Learning & Development and Occupational Health •24 October. H&S and Executive Support. Department activity over FY14/15 was reported to the Strategic Management Board on 21 May 2015. .
Partnerships - A signed agreement between all parties should be held by the Service for each partnership to provide assurance to the Service that all parties have agreed to their respective responsibilities.	**In Progress –** One of the eight agreements on the Partnership register is fully signed off.
ICT Controls - Management should ensure that It policies are periodically reviewed, in particular the Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy, and all IT policy documents should identify the date for review and contain a review history**.**	**Completed** – All staff advised of acceptable use policy when new Wi-Fi enabled.
Property Maintenance - The Service should review the process to record and monitor if repairs are completed within the required timescales. This could then be utilised to determine whether job sheets have been provided and use this as a basis to approve payments for repairs conducted by contractors.	**Completed -** The implementation of the new Property Management System (Concerto) in the first quarter of 2015/16 brings in a complete process to ensure that all property related orders are recorded and monitored.
Procurement - Reporting should be undertaken using the system Dream to monitor ordering patterns that may be indicative of disaggregated ordering practice. It is recommended these be run twice a year, unless major issues are uncovered.	**Completed** - A report has now been run through Dream on a biannual basis The report is constructed to identify two areas: 1. Ongoing low to medium value orders placed with the same supplier for similar products or services. 2. Ongoing low value orders placed for similar products or services with a range of limited suppliers.

Original Recommendation	Current Position
Employee Taxes - In addition to the work already undertaken, Essex Fire Authority should continue to recover the excess Class 1A NIC from HMRC. As there is likely to be tax and NIC due to HMRC on the payments discussed in 3.7 any overpayment can be set off against these sums.	**In Progress** – This matter was overlooked by the department and is now being pursued.

RISK MANAGEMENT, LEGAL, FINANCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management, legal, financial, environmental or equality implications from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of appendices attached to this paper: Table of Recommendations	
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Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
ICT General Controls	All network users should formally agree that they are aware and will comply with the ICT Acceptable Use Policy.	Agreed in principle to automate. Implementation deferred until resources available after completion of the Control Project. Resources not available to create this additional automated process as part of the user logging in process. All users notified of the acceptable use policy when the Wi-Fi system altered in Summer 2015.	Head of ICT December 2015	Completed
HR Transactional Processes	We would recommend that a workshop is run to identify the HR Transactional processes and to identify opportunities for process simplification and automation.	We will be undertaking a complete review of processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, under the SAP Next Steps Project.	Head of HR March 2016	On Track

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
HR Transactional Processes	In relation to the aspect of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) there is a need for an overhaul of the current system.	The review of processes will include reviewing the FAQs as a dependency and will include all relevant links Where appropriate, the team will signpost staff to the FAQs – an additional sentence will be added to the intranet site to guide staff to do this and the team will ask them if they have accessed the FAQs if they call and send a link to the FAQs if they have e-mailed. A process will be introduced to review requests received that cannot be answered via an existing FAQ to introduce new FAQs where appropriate.	Head of HR & OD Call management system to be implemented by September 2015	Completed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (<mark>or amended</mark>) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
HR Transactional Processes	The Authority should develop and adopt a more functional and less manually intensive process for the receipt and management of queries. There will be a need to ensure that a structured and automated workflow/ call system is established to manage the process and include as a minimum; ☐ A Senior Responsible Officer; ☐ RAG rating; ☐ Timescales per query.

The reporting functionality should also be reviewed to determine whether automated reports can be run, to ensure accuracy and use of information to inform decision making. | SAP specialist/helpdesk operative would be involved in workflow/call system, call logs, response rates – if this does sit within IT – will need joint working

RAG rating/triage for calls/emails will be introduced as part of process review and improvement – this will include SLAs/timescales for responding. | Head of HR & OD Head of ICT Call management system to be implemented by September 2015 | Completed |

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
HR Transactional Processes	The Authority should undertake a 'Phase Two' of the HR Transaction Project to ensure the original PID is delivered. A separate Project Initiation Document (PID) should be drafted for the Phase Two piece of work and the Benefits identified within the original PID should be substantiated. The measures must also be quantified to ensure the Authority can identify whether all benefits have been realised.	The next steps project for SAP will address these issues. This is expected to be a 12 – 18 month project, so benefits realisation will be subject to the project milestones which are yet to be scoped and agreed.	Head of HR & OD March 2016	On Track
Communications	The Head of Communication should devise three separate strategies and implementation plans, demonstrating outcomes and performance measures for the following: ☐ Corporate Public Relations; ☐ Employee Engagement; and ☐ Community Safety. These documents should be approved at the Strategic Management Board, and then disseminated to staff via the Service intranet.	A restructure to give the Head of Corporate Communications strategic lead on these activities and professionalise the department with resources to deliver these three key strands of activity have been agreed and recruitment process is under way with funding from April 2014/15. Work to develop these strategies to support strategic ambitions of the Service is already under way.	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Communications	The Communications governance structure needs to be established for each of the three work streams: ☐ Corporate Public Relations; ☐ Employee Engagement; and ☐ Community Safety. This structured needs to demonstrate the relationship between each individual and group.	This proposal was put forward by the Head of Corporate Communications to introduce wider governance from within the SMB team with the benefit of ensuring more cohesive communications activities with consistent messages delivered to all stakeholders and all three strategies working together. Expanding reporting lines will also assist SMB in presenting a collective narrative. CFO to maintain line management for Corporate PR, Director HR & OD for Employee Engagement and Director Safer and Resiient Communities for Community Safety marketing	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Communications	The Fire Service should ensure there is an appropriate process for managing the Communications Plans for each project implemented. This should include: ☐ An approval process, during project initiation, from the Head of Corporate Communications for each Project; and ☐ Monitoring of the Communications Plan of the project.	This process is in place for major programme boards but a number of projects undertake communications activities beyond the oversight of the professional Corporate Communications team. This approach will ensure corporate scrutiny and provide more corporate context and alignment, maximising opportunities to share corporate lines. Will require buy in, particularly from operational side of the organisation. First step to consider communication implications in meeting papers and as part of all project planning. Additional resources will allow introduction of greater governance around communications activity	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Communications	The Fire Service need to ensure that it has appropriate policies, procedures and/or protocols in place governing the key channels of external communications, such as the media, press releases, 'images as incidents' and acceptable uses for all social media platforms. These should be approved, dated and assigned an annual review date to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Following this, the documents should be made available to all staff via the Service intranet	These policies, procedures and protocols exist in practice but need to be formalised. Additional resources will allow introduction of greater governance around communications activity. In January, the Service procured a social media management system and is currently training official service users to operate via a single, formal channel. This allows oversight of activity and encourages sharing of current messages and campaigns through a single portal. A programme of training supports new users and will allow expansion of official social media participants without some of the significant associated risk.	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Communications	The Head of Corporate Communications should implement a training needs analysis, identifying which service personnel require communications training, and a training log, to effectively monitor training completion. Additionally, the Service could incorporate a training incentive scheme with the new social media software purchased by the Head of Corporate Communications.	Corporate Communications offers in house Media, Social Media and internal communications skills training, primarily to uniformed staff to give them the skills they need to present the Service in a professional way, limiting risks to ECFRS image. Currently delivered on request, there is some urgency now to train more station managers to be able to deliver information to the media, particularly at incidents. This recommendation supports the delivery of a more formal programme of training and development that is recorded and recognised. Rather than incentive, it is proposed to implement a proficiency standard before individuals can represent the Service to the media.	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed
Communications	The Fire Service should ensure a guidance document or procedure is developed for processing Freedom of Information requests, to ensure the process is implemented consistently.	This will be reviewed when management of the FoI process moves in to Corporate Communications. This work will be completed once additional resources are in place.	Head of Corporate Communications Following the departure of the Head of Corporate Communications agreement has been reached with Essex CC to provide oversight of Corporate communications. New Timescale March 2016	Delayed

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (**or amended**) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Key Financial Controls	HR should ensure that all starter, leaver and amendment documents are scanned and placed as an attachment to the employee records on the PRF Human Resources system in a timely manner.	A new service level agreement (SLA) will incorporate this	HR Support Team Manager September 2015	Completed
Business Planning	The Service should monitor the submission of departmental plans against planned completion dates. Each Department Strategy document should be annotated with details of submission date, document author, reviewer and approver.	Agreed – this will be incorporated into the process running during 2015/16.	Performance Improvement Manager March 2016	On Track
Business Planning	The Service should ensure that the Guide to Business Planning is reviewed annually to ensure it mirrors current practice and effectively guides the business planning process for the year ahead.	Agreed – the process is likely to change during 2015/16 as it will need to fit with changes being riven by Programme 2020.	Performance Improvement Manager March 2016	On Track
Business Planning	The Service should ensure that the action plans within the Department Strategies are formally monitored.	Agreed – this will monitored by SDB.	Performance Improvement Manager March 2016	On Track

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (or amended) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Business Planning	The Service should ensure that there is an annual self-assessment of the business planning process to identify areas where the process was effective and areas that could be improved upon, taking the process forward.	Agreed – this will be built into the business planning cycle from this point onward.	Performance Improvement Manager March 2016	On Track
Business Planning	As part of the Business Planning process, the Service should evidence and retain the initial assessment of resources required to meet objectives within the Departmental Strategies and future iterations including the final version which matches the approved budget.	Agreed – this will be built into the business planning process from this point onward.	Performance Improvement Manager March 2016	On Track
Risk Management	Provided the review frequencies are configured correctly in JCAD, risk owners must review their assigned risks in line with the next review dates.	Clearly, managers should heed their self-imposed review dates.	Departmental Managers Dec 2015	On Track
Risk Management	Risk descriptions should adequately state the actual risk, and follow the guidelines set down for risk descriptions in the Risk Management Guidance.	In addition to that already offered, further support will be available to managers to achieve this.	Departmental Managers Dec 2015	On Track

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (==or amended==) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Risk Management	Control descriptions should give sufficient detail to describe the workings of the control and how it mitigates the associated risk. There should be consistency in the description of controls across all departments.	In addition to that already offered, further support will be available to managers to achieve this.	Departmental Managers Dec 2015	On Track
Risk Management	The Service should ensure a documented process exists for the obtaining and recording of assurances, and that control owners are made sufficiently aware of their responsibilities in this regard. Furthermore, relevant assurances should be documented against existing risks to provide evidence that risks are being managed and controls are working.	Additional training and assistance to that already provided is in hand with managers. An assurance model and narrative will be added to the risk documents for approval by the Strategic Delivery Board	Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Manager Dec 2015	On Track
Risk Management	Risk scoring, as documented in the Risk Management Guidance, should be applied consistently across departments and individual programmes and projects.	This will be referred to managers at risk surgeries. Once this report is finalised, a summary will be provided to managers.	Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Manager Dec 2015	On Track

Source	Recommendation from Audit report	Original (**or amended**) Service Action Plan	Responsibility and Timescales	Progress
Risk Management	The risk escalation procedure should be clearly documented in narrative form, and roles and responsibilities in relation to escalation should be clearly defined	V II Risk Management Strategy contains a graphic that identifies reporting and escalation, and V III at Annex C contains an action plan for risk escalation. Further narrative can be added but it remains for the human component to take action. Nonetheless, additional narrative will be added to the appropriate documentation.	Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Manager Dec 2015	On Track
Risk Management	The SMB should ensure that the departmental and corporate risk registers are a regular part of its agenda. Additionally the Terms of Reference should be updated to state more clearly the wider risk management responsibilities of the Board and how this relates to and supports the work of other groups such as the Strategic Delivery Board.	SMB will be so advised.	Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Manager Dec 2015	On Track