

**RESPONSES TO MEMBERS' QUESTIONS ON THE  
FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY AGENDA PACK  
FOR 20 APRIL 2020**

**General Comment**

- **From Dr Billings:-**

It would have been good to see a standalone report dedicated to the Covid-19 issues, covering things like what SYFRS is being asked to contribute to the LRF efforts, issues relating to business as usual service, sickness levels in the work force relating to Covid-19 and risk issues generally. I can see that there is a Covid-19 section within the procurement report at item 11 and there is information on SYFRS' website but I had expected more prominence to this at the Authority meeting.

**Response provided by Mel McCoolle:-**

Please note that I have provided Members with Briefing Notes sent on behalf of CFO Johnson, via email, on the following dates:-

18 March 2020  
27 March 2020  
1 April 2020  
20 April 2020

**Agenda Item 9 – Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 February 2020  
at Item 15 Review of Performance Management Framework**

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

After the last FRA meeting I was to receive a briefing on the Task and Finish Group, this has not happened yet due to the current lockdown, is there any way of making progress or is the T&F Group suspended at this time?

**Response received from Area Manager Stewart Nicholson:-**

I was due to meet Councillor Cave on the 24.3.2020 where Nicola Smith and I could have briefed him on the approach we are taking and progress to date. That meeting was unfortunately postponed due to the lockdown however if Councillor Cave has access to Zoom or Microsoft teams I am sure we could reorganise that meeting virtually.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

One matter arising to follow up please – at the foot of page 10 there is mention of my comments about SYFRS’ ability to influence planning decisions being the focus at a future CAG meeting. Has this been followed up and will I be invited to such a session?

**Response received from ACO Tony Carlin**

As part of the wider work falling out of the Grenfell tragedy, the NFCC are trying to use their influence at a national level to deliver greater involvement for the FRS in planning processes. Once this has been achieved we will have our own planning meeting where we will discuss what the new operating environment looks like and all FRA members will be involved in this discussion.

### **Agenda Item 10 – Service Improvement Action Plan**

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

Paragraph 6 Are the timescales still achievable as outlined?

**Response received from Spencer Rowland, Service Improvement Officer**

I feel that the timescales are still achievable. The current situation is making the process slightly more difficult but shouldn’t present any major challenges. I have contacted all the action leads and am still waiting for a number of people to confirm what actions they are suggesting to address the area for improvement identified. Once I have all these responses back, I’ll be in a better position to assess the current timescales.

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

Paragraph 7 Can we still expect an HMICFRS early summer 2021?

**Response received from Spencer Rowland, Service Improvement Officer**

We continue to work towards a May/June inspection date until we are informed otherwise by HMICFRS. I am in regular contact with both HMICFRS Chiefs of Staff. The current situation of HMICFRS is that many of their staff have been released back to service, to the NFCC or Home Office. As a result the Inspectorate is unsure exactly what the inspection process will look like and when they will take place. It is possible that tranche 1 inspections will be delayed and carried out after the planned tranche 3 inspections or that tranche 1 inspections will be delayed for several weeks and that the following tranche 2 and 3 inspections will be delayed for a similar time. It is also possible that the inspection process will change to a thematic inspection or a less involved inspection. At this point we simply don’t know. We will aim for the May and June dates until told otherwise.

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

Paragraph 11 When will we have the outcome of the Police inspections reports review identifying any transferable learning?

**Response received from Spencer Rowland, Service Improvement Officer**

We have a member of the team looking into Police HMICFRS reports. However, this is not deemed as a priority and therefore, a thorough document review has been prioritised over this work at the moment. This is largely due to HMICFRS document submission deadlines. It is acknowledged that following our experiences from the round 1 inspection process and a previous review of Police HMICFRS reports, there are likely to be few areas for improvement that are transferable to SYFR. However, those areas that are transferable may be significant and as a result, this work will be carried out in the very near future, when resources permit.

- **Questions received from Dr Billings:-**

Could I know the extent to which the 93 identified areas of improvement have been addressed as to the strategic fit with the services priorities within its IRMP and priority order within the 93 areas?

Is there any duplication of effort with the internal audit plan?

Paragraph 7 mentions actions to be completed by the end of 2020 – is this calendar or financial year?

Might HMICFRS' inspection activity be postponed now? (Covid-19)

Under further actions there is no mention of the role of CAG, the performance and scrutiny committee or the Authority in monitoring progress against the actions set. Ought the Authority to have a role?

**Response received from Spencer Rowland, Service Improvement Officer (as mentioned above)**

We continue to work towards a May/June inspection date until we are informed otherwise by HMICFRS. I am in regular contact with both HMICFRS Chiefs of Staff. The current situation of HMICFRS is that many of their staff have been released back to service, to the NFCC or Home Office. As a result the Inspectorate is unsure exactly what the inspection process will look like and when they will take place. It is possible that tranche 1 inspections will be delayed and carried out after the planned tranche 3 inspections or that tranche 1 inspections will be delayed for several weeks and that the following tranche 2 and 3 inspections will be delayed for a similar time. It is also possible that the inspection process will change to a thematic inspection or a less involved inspection. At this point we simply don't know. We will aim for the May and June dates until told otherwise.

**Response received from Spencer Rowland, Service Improvement Officer**

The current plan is to have the areas for improvement actioned by the end of the calendar year (31<sup>st</sup> December 2020). This will help us demonstrate that the improvements that have been made are embedded and business as usual. As I mentioned in my earlier response, this may have to be altered slightly due to the current situation. Although, I am hopeful that the majority will remain on track.

### **Response received from Linda Noble**

In the first instance, the Chair has indicated he would like the FRA to have oversight of the action plan. Undoubtedly, CAG will have a role in discussing the actions / issues in more detail prior to the reporting of progress at FRA.

In respect of the Performance and Scrutiny Board, the FRA can refer any of the actions that may require more in-depth scrutiny to the Board to look at. Conversely, the Board can also 'call in' issues if it has good reason to do so, and in consultation with the Chair and the CFO.

### **Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

As the IA Provider for 2019/20 we have liaised with Fire Service colleagues to ensure that there is no duplication but offered to assist where it is felt there may be some work IA could do to provide independent assurance. None was required during 2019/20.

This will I'm sure, be a feature of the new 2020/21 IA Plan that will be determined over the next few weeks by the new IA provider (see below).

### **Agenda Item 11 - The Procurement Service – A Six Monthly Update**

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

Items 4 & 5 What progress has been made and how is this being affected by the current situation?

### **Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

Barnsley New Build. Zenith Park industrial units have now been secured and Burngreave Construction will begin construction works on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and are expected to take 4 weeks. The main contract with Finnegan is near to completion,

An enabling order has been issued to begin design works and any off-site prelims. A date of 22<sup>nd</sup> of June has been agreed for commencement of on-site works, subject to SYFR staff vacating the existing station.

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

Items 11 – 14 Are we still “reasonably assured” re provision of PPE? If not what is being done to address any shortfalls?

### **Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

We are still reasonably assured and are in fact helping the 4 local authorities by releasing excess stock.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Although the NFCC and opportunity for regional collaboration are both mentioned in this report, I need a better sense of the extent to which our procurement approach is nationally and commercially driven.

**Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

The work of the Procurement Team and its approach is contained within the Member approved Procurement Strategy. This Strategy is in line with industry standards and looks to adopt a category management approach that actively looks at national e.g. Crown Commercial Services, regional e.g. YPO and local frameworks to establish whether these commercially led contracts provide the best value procurement option for SYFR. Alternatively where this is not the case SYFR will, through the NFCC or the Yorkshire and Humber Procurement network, look to put in place a separate contract for example on Structural PPE, Rescue Jackets that looks to realise the benefits from collective buying power.

National frameworks do not always provide best value deals as they may have been negotiated some time ago and in an active / innovative market and/ or supplier base there may be an opportunity to put in place better commercial terms. SYFR is therefore keen to explore both established frameworks and alternative options before making the right commercial decision.

Since putting in place the new procurement team (approx. 18 months), the service has positively shown to Members procurement savings of c£2m across Construction, PPE, ICT, Operation Equipment, Hard and Soft FM and Resilience. This is against an annual non-pay spend of c£8m (after taking out capital financing costs) and capital works of £10m. This equates to savings of c11% which is both positive and welcome news. In addition and as important, the Procurement team is now very well engaged in the organisation ensuring that we are wisely and diligently procuring works, equipment, services that fully meet the business need and at a commercially driven price.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Paragraphs 11-14 deal with Covid-19 issues. Please see my comments above about a standalone report. Members could do with better assurance on the risks and business continuity arrangements around PPE.

**Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

SYFR procurement reacted very early to the threat of PPE supply chain issues and instructed the Stores to lift stock levels and place orders to ensure continuity of supply. As a result of this proactive approach SYFR hold reasonable stock levels across a range of PPE and hygiene / cleaning products to protect our staff linked to actual and likely demand levels. To this end, we have also worked across and with partners to support the South Yorkshire LRF providing them with over 400,000 nitrile gloves for use in community health and social care setting and 500 coveralls for Sheffield Care Trust without compromising our PPE status. We currently monitor daily stock, reorder levels and provide reassurance to the SLT twice weekly and have shortened the process for getting vital cleaning and hygiene products to

stations, officers and staff. So far in the crisis we have had no issues of supply that has compromised SYFRs ability to operate effectively and respond to the service requests made upon it.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Appendix C – Could I have more information on the insurance item which looks a high figure?

**Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

As a result of Covid 19 and the timelines for receiving, considering and deciding upon the FRICs insurance offer, SYFR decided to defer actively considering this and seek to renew its insurances for Property and Engineering. These were negotiated as a single year premium. This will also allow all of our major insurances to co-terminate and allow for consideration of FRIC's in 2021. The quotations received via the FRAs Insurance Officer at Barnsley Council after negotiations with the incumbent supplier provide assurance that we were able to maintain the same levels of cover for a similar price overall.

<b>Summary Insurance Charges</b>	<b>2019 / 20</b>	<b>2020 / 21</b>	<b>Inc / (Dec)</b>
Property	20,231.87	13,276.71	-34%
Liability	170,029.33	178,294.58	5%
Engineering	30,438.91	33,175.24	9%

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Could you also explain the external gym membership item?

**Response received from Dave Nichols, Procurement Manager**

We have 3 stations where due to their nature (retained) and size we cannot provide a gym for the firefighters to help them maintain their level of fitness. We therefore use local gyms (local to ensure they can be recalled to duty if needed). The waiver covers the gym membership of 22 firefighters at Askern, Rossington and Stocksbridge.

**Agenda Item 12 - Draft Minutes of the Appeals and Standards Committee held on 10 February 2020**

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Could I understand the financial implications for the Authority of this decision, particularly if it is an unfunded scheme?

### **Response received from Sue Kelsey, Head of Human Resources**

A cost of £2663 pa to SYFR (index-linked).

### **Agenda Item 13 - Draft Minutes of the Appointments Committee held on 3 March 2020**

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Could I have some background information (e.g. a CV) about Chris Kirby the new Deputy CFO?

### **Response received from Sue Kelsey, Head of Human Resources**

I attach an extract from Chris Kirby's application form (we don't use CV's) that sets out his employment history.

(Document included in the email provided to Members).

### **Agenda Item 14 – Draft Minutes of the Audit and Governance Committee held on 16 March 2019**

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Could the report that comes to the May meeting referred to include clarity on the following things:-

Whether the COVID-19 issues has reduced the number of days achievable for audit activity in 2019-20 or 2020-21.

### **Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

The 2019/20 IA Plan (BMBC as provider) will be completed as planned. The Covid-19 issue has delayed the completion of planned work a little but not to the extent that it will compromise my Annual Report.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

If there has been an impact of 1 above, will there be sufficient work on which to base a formal audit opinion in both years?

### **Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

In terms of 2020/21, then almost inevitably there will be some impact, but that is for the new provider to assess. That said, although working arrangements may well need to be different, I wouldn't foresee a major threat to the IA provider being able to firstly determine a good robust Plan for 2020/21 and then be able to deliver it to

enable them to provide that overall opinion. It's a question to ask them at the next A&G Committee in May.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Will there be a reduction in cost to the Authority of any reduced internal audit activity?

**Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

The tendered figure from the new provider against an indicative plan suggests that there may be a reduction in the cost of IA, but the actual cost for 2020/21 will be determined once the audit plan has been agreed. The tender documents set a cap to the budget which was slightly less than the cost for 2019/20, so there will be at least a minor reduction.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

How has any reduction in activity affected the services risk management arrangement and what assurance can the service give about how any weaknesses or gaps in the arrangements have been alternatively covered?

**Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

BMBC, through myself and the Corporate Governance and Assurance Manager, are continuing to assist and support the Service (and Authority) with regards risk management and governance arrangements.

The Service intend to review its risk management arrangements, but there won't be any gaps whilst any review is being undertaken. It may also be appropriate at the same time to consider the Authority's risk management approach. The new IA provider will also be involved in any proposed changes to the risk management arrangements and process.

- **Question received from Dr Billings:-**

Who is the new internal audit provider please?

**Response received from Rob Winter, Head of Internal Audit, Anti-Fraud and Assurance, BMBC**

The new IA provider is RSM Risk Assurance Services LLP. They are one of the country's leading IA providers and have a number of other Fire Authority (and Police) clients. They were clear winners through the tender process. The Lead partner, Rob Barnett, will I'm sure attend the A&G Committee meeting in May and will wish to introduce himself and his Team more widely. I have every confidence that they will provide a high quality IA service.



## **Agenda Item 18 – Action Table**

- **Question received from Councillor Cave:-**

“How/Is the Action Table timescale affected by the current situation? Do any specific timescales need amending as a consequence?”

**Response provided by Mel McCool:-**

We will endeavour to provide as many updates to Members as possible, but due to the current situation, some of the timescales may slip.