



LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

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MINUTES

## AUDIT COMMITTEE

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DATE

Tuesday, 5 May 2026

TIME

2.00 pm

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VENUE

Microsoft Teams - Virtual

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Minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of Audit Committee held Microsoft Teams - Virtual on Tuesday, 5 May 2026

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### **Present:**

Marta Phillips OBE, Independent Member (Chair)

Kay Boycott, Independent Member

Seyi Obakin OBE, Independent Member

Martin Spencer, Independent Member

### **In Attendance:**

Nastasha Naidoo, Senior Audit Manager, Ernst and Young

Karen Mason, Group Internal Audit Lead

Mostaque Ahmed, Director for Corporate Services

Spencer Sutcliff, Deputy Commissioner and Operational Director for Prevention, Protection & Policy

Catharine Gregory, Assistant Director Finance

Thomas Goodall, Assistant Commissioner Risk, Assurance, Strategy and Portfolio

Vamba Konneh, Capital and Treasury Manager

Karen Jones, Head of Finance Capability and Continuous Improvement

Sally Bigland, Head of Strategy & Planning

Andy Mobbs, Head of Information Governance

Andrew Beesley, Head of Governance

Anna Flatley, Governance Manager

### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2026 were agreed as a correct record and the updated actions noted with the following additional points made.

Actions AC54 and AC56 (consideration on how the Audit Committee should interact with the Risk and Assurance Board). The Chair asked that this be kept open as further discussions were required.

Action AC60 (implementation of training for staff on Person in Charge of Premises responsibilities). The Chair expressed concern on the delays shown and asked for further explanation to be provided.

The Chair noted that she had attended the recent Deputy Mayor's Fire Board where she reported on the Audit Committee's recent visit to Islington Fire Station and the demands which were on the LFB to meet Cardon Net Zero targets. She reported that the Deputy Mayor asked that his thanks be passed on to the Audit Committee for its work in supporting the London Fire Brigade.

The Chair further reported that she had met the Commissioner and relayed his thanks to the Committee for their work.

The Chair also reported that she had met individually with all Members of the Committee to review the Committee's work and discuss future membership.

#### **4. LFC Executive Summary of Current Events**

The Deputy Commissioner, followed by the Director for Corporate Services, gave a verbal update which the Committee then discussed. Issues raised and discussed included the following.

Impact of Iran War. Weekly continuity meetings had been held since the end of February to ensure key objectives continued to be met. It was noted that there had been multiple arson attacks linked to the conflict with pressure on fire investigation which had an important role in this work. Response had been increased to deal with the additional pressures as well as building confidence in local communities. The Committee welcomed the LFB's 24 hour dedicated service and engagement team.

It was noted that the Metropolitan Police had asked for additional funding from central government to deal with the additional pressures and consideration was being undertaken as to whether the LFC should do the same. The additional costs were being calculated and these were both direct, including fuel and inflation, as well as indirect such as staff costs through overtime. It was noted that the major impact on resources had seen an increase in pre-arranged overtime being used to balance the risk. The Committee considered whether the increased costs disproportionately affected London and how this should be included in such calculations. It was noted that national demonstrations disproportionately affected London and whilst the London factor was recognised financially in the police service this was not the case in the fire service.

The Committee then considered the impact on staff and was assured that liaison with staff groups had been undertaken and clear messaging sent out.

New Headquarters (HQ) – The lease on Union Street HQ would expire in March 2027 and the new permanent HQ had been agreed for 8 Albert Embankment, with expected occupation in 2029 following building works. Final planning permission from Lambeth Council was expected in June 2026. In response to questions it was acknowledged that previous planning permission submissions had been refused but this was a far less ambitious and controversial ask as it focused on the fire stations and HQ, excluded housing proposals and every indication, including responses to a consultation, was that this would be agreed.

Two possible interim HQs had been located and it was expected that, following final negotiations, a lease would be signed later in May 2026 with a phased move from September.

ICT department – Following an external review it was decided to combine the ICT and Data & Improvement departments into a new Digital, Data & Technology department to help take forward a new digital and data strategy, with recruitment commencing for a new Chief Digital & Data Officer (CDDO).

Julian Martin, the current Chief Information Officer had decided to leave but was continuing in post until the new CDDO had been appointed, to ensure business continuity and security of critical systems. The Committee thanked him for his long service.

It was noted that the advert for the new post had gone live on 5 May 2026 via the executive search firm Gatenby Sanderson. Further to discussion it was agreed that the link to the job be circulated to Committee Members.

**ACTION** – Link to job advert for CDDO post be circulated to members of the Audit Committee.

The Committee then noted the verbal update, and thanked officers for the update.

## 5. **LFC Budget Report 2026-27 - LFC - 26-021**

The Assistant Director, Finance introduced the report which was the finalised 2026/27 budget. She noted that this budget had been set in constrained times but due to the steps put in place last year the budget setting process had improved since the previous year. The Committee recorded its appreciation for the assurance that this report provided, noting it was clear and more nuanced than previous budget reports, and highlighted the increasingly limited opportunities for additional savings.

The Assistant Director then summarised the key points as detailed in the report, specifically how the £12 million gap was closed, which included by deferring training and receipt of additional funding from the Mayor. She noted that an additional target of £6.2m savings had been added to the previously agreed ongoing savings.

The Committee then discussed the report and specifically considered the following points.

The challenge posed by the fact that the bulk of the budget was committed to staff costs and that areas where future savings could be made were limited, in part due to the efficiencies already achieved. The Committee suggested that future savings would need to come from work being done in a smarter and more efficient way.

The Committee asked whether the LFB had the right level of commercial procurement and contract management expertise in order to achieve savings which disproportionately fell in this area. The Committee was assured that the procurement department, following a restructure and new management and professionalism, was being transformed. It was noted that in conjunction with IT and other departments, procurement was developing a forward plan of all decisions needed for contract renewal and to support a more joined up approach. The Director for Corporate Services added that an update to the Committee could be provided on procurement capability if required, in a similar way to the update on finance capability which was programmed for later on this agenda.

**ACTION** – Consideration be given to providing an update on procurement capability to a future meeting of the Committee.

The impact of the war in Iran as previously discussed. It was acknowledged that if the war continued for any length of time difficult decisions and compromises would be required, unless there was additional funding to compensate. It was noted that in-year savings could be achieved from areas of discretionary spend with reduced programmes and rephasing but this was not sustainable. As indicated further discussions were taking place with the GLA and government to make the case for additional funding from government to protect the front line commitment.

The relationship between Capital and Revenue spend, in light of inflationary pressures. It was noted that there was growing pressure was on revenue spend due to additional borrowing for capital investment, the most significant of which was the new HQ. The Committee asked what the consideration was on the trade-off between borrowing for capital spend and the risk to future efficiencies. It was acknowledged that it was a complex matrix, particularly in the area of technology, where increasingly the market was moving to "software as a service" which was replacing capital expenditure with revenue costs, and work was being undertaken to assess this.

It was noted that it was not possible to fully meet the Mayor's commitment to Carbon Net Zero without additional resources and compromises would have to be made. This message had been communicated to the GLA and had been reflected in the sustainability strategy.

The Audit Committee then noted the report.

## **6. Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27 -LFC-26-022**

The Capital and Treasury Manager introduced the report which set out the agreed Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2026/27. He drew the Committee's attention to the decision to increase long-term borrowing in future years to fund the significant investments required, noting that a risk averse approach had been employed in the treasury management strategy.

Further to discussion it was noted that the advice from the LFC's treasury advisor, Mitsubishi UFG, on borrowing was being headed in light of the possible impact of the Iran war and other factors. Therefore the planned move to more long term borrowing instead of short term had been delayed.

With regard to short term borrowing to fund the LFB's annual pension grant it was noted that this was necessary to cover the three months from April to June as the grant (for the whole year) was received in July. Whilst not ideal it was noted that on balance this was preferably to getting the grant later in equal instalments throughout the year, as it meant that the LFC was provided with 100% of the full year's grant in month 4, thereby benefitting from surplus funds to invest for the bulk of the year which more than offset the interest for the first quarter. The Chair asked that in future additional comments be included in this report for clarity.

The Audit Committee then noted the report.

## **7. Finance Capability - Deep Dive**

The Head of Finance Capability and Continuous Improvement gave a presentation based on the slides included in the agenda pack which the Committee asked questions on and discussed. Specific areas discussed included the following.

The enhanced systems and restructured department were welcomed, and the progress made and the priorities for 2026/27 noted. The Committee commented that hard targets and deadlines on individual activities were necessary.

The focus on staffing was positive and it was noted that although there were still some agency staff in the department the posts they were filling were being actively recruited to. All the new staff recruited were professional qualified and new induction materials had been developed. The use of other ways of recruiting had helped in securing these individuals, as well as greater engagement with candidates. The Chair welcomed the use of the apprenticeship scheme.

In response to questions on how to retain these staff and reduce the previous problem of high turnover it was noted that there was additional training and engagement in place. It was acknowledged that the new systems would help too as staff previously had to work with out of date systems and processes. There was also a greater emphasis on supporting staff in learning and development.

The Audit Committee noted the presentation and noted that progress of this work would be tracked through external audit reports.

## **8. LFB Annual Plan 2026 - LFC-26-028**

The Head of Strategy and Planning introduced this report and the next (LFB Service Strategies 2026) concurrently. She noted that both aligned to the LFB's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and sought to articulate high-level information on the actions and improvements intended to be delivered in the forthcoming year to the public. It was noted that there was overlap between the documents as they would be used separately as relevant, noting that there were six separate strategies. The reasons for this repetition was noted and it was commented that there may be a place for an overarching document in the future.

The Committee then discussed the reports and welcomed the fact that they were easy to read and highlighted key issues, such as the increased number of arson attacks recently and the prevention work being undertaken. The Committee asked whether there was a check on the number of partnerships operating to ensure they were all still relevant and valuable in terms of resourcing. It was noted that whilst many strategic partnerships were clearly visible some local partnerships were not so easy to trace and it was acknowledged that this was a matter which would be beneficial to consider further.

The Committee then asked for some further information on the specifications behind these plans and strategies to ensure these improvements were achieved. The Head of Strategy and Planning assured the Committee that there was a structure and framework behind this capturing all the change commitments with specific detailed deliverables. These deliverables would be closely monitored at the new Service Improvement Board and Heads of Service would be held to account for these through the individual objectives within their appraisals. In addition an annual report on the plan showing what had been achieved would be produced and it was anticipated that this would be in April/May which would provide transparency on the improvements made.

It was noted that these documents were very much designed to be used as communication tools and would be placed on the external website and used in various forms of engagement with external stakeholders.

The Committee then welcomed the reports, and other than asking that the abbreviation NEBOSH (page 170 of the agenda pack) and NOG (page 171) be included in full and inclusion of comment on the difficulties of meeting the carbon net zero target, supported them.

**9. LFB Service Strategies 2026 (Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Respond, Recover) - LFC-26-029**

This was covered in the previous item.

**10. Annual Report on Information Rights 2025**

The Head of Information Governance presented the report on information rights and provided a verbal update which the Committee then discussed.

The Committee noted the increased number of cases where there was failure to achieve statutory deadlines and discussed the reasons behind this.

It was noted that there had been a 42 percent increase in requests in the last five years, with many being from staff. Further to discussion it was confirmed that where specific themes were raised individuals were directed to published documents, for example on lithium batteries, although this often led to follow up questions. Also audits for buildings were published. However in many cases requests had personal data confidentiality implications and had to be responded to individually.

It was noted that additional resources had been agreed to deal with the problem and implement a recovery programme. It was noted that the team were reliant on subject matter experts providing the necessary information. The point was also made that some requests were very large and the impact significant. It was noted that for subject access requests, the ability to ask individuals to narrow down requests would be possible from June under changes to legislation. The LFC proposed to take a fair but rigorous approach to this and anticipated this would help in the long term but not necessarily the short term.

The Committee then discussed the fact that FOI legislation had resulted in an increasing burden of work on local authorities in particular which had been recognised and it was anticipated that changes might need to be made nationally to address this.

The Audit Committee then noted the report and update.

**11. Workplan**

The Audit Committee workplan was noted.

**12. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **13. Dates of Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Audit Committee was scheduled to take place on 23 July 2026 in person.

Anna Flatley Governance Manager  
Clerk to Audit Committee