

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 17 September 2015 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Fletcher, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones (Chair), Kiernan, Mason and Mellings (Vice-Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance, Planning and Performance Manager, Group Commander Prevention and Protection, Company Manager Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services, Treasurer, Corporate Support Manager and Executive Support Officer

External Bodies

Mr Stocks, Miss Edmonds and Mr Meek (Grant Thornton, External Audit)
Mr Chadderton (Audit Services, Shropshire Council)

1 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair reminded Members that they must not participate in the discussion of, or voting on, any matter, in which they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and that they should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate on any such matter.

Councillors Kiernan and Mellings declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in items 13 and 16, as Directors of Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd.

Both Members had been granted a dispensation by the Fire Authority, which allowed them to take part in the discussion of, and vote on, matters, relating to Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd, providing that legal opinion considered the participation to be appropriate. On this occasion, the report to be considered detailed the performance of Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd and was for information purposes only. It was, therefore, deemed appropriate for Councillors Kiernan and Mellings to participate in the discussion of these items.

3 Minutes

23 April 2015

At its meeting on 9 July 2015, Members were unable to agree the minutes of the Committee meeting, held on 1 April 2015, because of a lack of quorum (four Members) to consider this item. Councillors Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mellings and Roberts had since confirmed that those minutes represent a true record of the meeting.

Members were, therefore, asked to agree that the minutes of Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 23 April 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 23 April 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

9 July 2015

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 July 2015.

Councillor Fletcher commented that item 9 of the minutes stated that it was seconded by Councillor Hurst-Knight, who had not been present at the meeting. The Executive Support Officer undertook to amend this error.

It was proposed by Councillor Fletcher, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 July 2015, be agreed, subject to the amendment detailed above, and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Statement of Accounts 2014/15

This report presented the completed Statement of Accounts to the Committee for consideration and approval.

The Head of Finance (HoF) presented this report and thanked External Audit for their work. She explained that there was an issue relating to firefighter pensions, whereby the Government Actuary Department had, between 2001 and 2006, used incorrect information when calculating some pension payments. A tribunal had recently ruled that additional payments should be paid to rectify this issue. The Service had worked with External Audit to ensure that there was a provision in the accounts for these additional costs. It was expected that Department for Communities and Local Government would provide a grant to cover the full cost of these additional payments.

Councillor Mellings thanked the HoF for the Statement of Accounts awareness session that she had delivered immediately prior to meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Approve the Statement of Accounts 2014/15 (subject to final auditor amendment);
- b) Delegate final amendments following completion of the audit to the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee; and
- c) Approve the amended Annual Governance Statement, for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts.

5a Annual Governance Statement 2015/16 Improvement Plan

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2015/16.

Councillor Adams referred to IRN 6 – Operational Assurance – and asked what format the peer challenge would take. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that the Local Government Association (LGA) had reviewed the Operational Assessment programme and decided to create teams to cover all aspects of the assessment. The Head of Service Delivery (HSD) would be trained in spring 2016 as part of the national programme, after which it was anticipated that the HSD would lead on a self-assessment of the Service. The LGA would then identify the most appropriate Chief Fire Officer nationally to lead on the peer challenge later in 2016.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made against each of the improvements contained in the AGS Improvement Plan 2015/16

6 Audit Findings 2014/15

Mr Stocks presented the Audit Findings Report on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2015.

He began by stating that the audit had gone well with good quality accounts and supporting papers being provided and excellent officer support. He then explained that he would issue an unqualified Audit Opinion, as, even though the pensions figures were still estimates, they did not change the Authority's expenditure or reserves, as set out in the Statement of Accounts. He also reported that an unqualified Value for Money Conclusion would be issued. He then talked through the Audit Findings for the year ended 31 March 2015 and highlighted the issues set out in the report.

Mr Stocks concluded by saying that a clean Audit Opinion and Value for Money Conclusion would be issued and thanked officers for their co-operation during the audit process. Councillor Dr Jones thanked auditors for their work and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) also commented that the audit had been a positive experience, which had gone very well.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mason and

Resolved that the Committee formally adopt the Audit Findings for 2014/15

Committee Clerk's Note

The Letter of Representation for the year ended 31 March 2015 was signed later that day by the Committee Chair, Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer (in accordance with the authority delegated to them by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 13 February 2012).

7 Code of Corporate Governance 2015/16

This report gave the Committee an opportunity to make comment on the draft Code of Corporate Governance 2015/16 (the Code), prior to its going forward to the full Fire Authority for consideration and formal adoption.

The Corporate Support Manager (CSM) presented this report and explained that the changes shown in the Appendix to the report were minor housekeeping amendments to ensure that the Code was accurate and up-to-date.

Councillor Hurst-Knight referred to Principle 2 of the Code – Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles. Following which there was a discussion between Member and officers about the extent of Members' involvement in operational issues.

Referring to the Authority's mission statement (set out on page 3 of the Code), Councillor Adams asked for a more clear definition of 'other emergencies', as he was concerned about 'mission creep'. The CFO explained that the phrase 'other emergencies' was used in other documents, such as the National Framework, and that the Authority's terminology was, therefore, mirroring that used in current legislation. The DCFO suggested that this was perhaps something that should be defined as part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan.

It was proposed by Councillor Kiernan, seconded by Councillor Fletcher, and

Resolved that the Committee agree to forward the draft Code, without amendment, to the Fire Authority for consideration and formal adoption

8 Internal Audit Report Corporate Governance 2015/16

Mr Chadderton from Audit Services, Shropshire Council presented this report, which set out the findings from the review of corporate governance within the Fire Authority.

Mr Chadderton reported that Audit Services were happy with all statements, set out in the Code of Corporate Governance, and that any queries that had been raised with officers had been dealt with very efficiently.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Fletcher, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report

9 Review of Whistleblowing Policy

This report requested the Committee to recommend that the Fire Authority approve the Whistleblowing Policy (attached as an appendix), following the annual review conducted by officers.

The CSM presented this report and advised that the changes set out in the appendix to the report were minor housekeeping amendments to ensure the Policy was up to date.

Councillor Mason commented that he did not like the term whistleblowing, as it has certain connotations. The CSM responded that it was a commonly known term, which was used in both the public and private sectors. The CFO added that it was not intended as a negative label and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) highlighted that the full title of the Brigade Order was 'Reporting of Illegality and Malpractice'

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority approve the Policy without amendment

10 Annual Review 2014/15

This report presented the draft Annual Review (also known as the Annual Statement of Assurance) for 2014/15 and gave the Committee an opportunity to make comment on the draft, prior to its going forward to the full Fire Authority for consideration and approval.

Councillor Adams commented that he had found the pie charts in the document very informative, particularly those on pages 6 and 7. Councillor Adams referred to false alarm incidents and asked if officers used a breakdown of false alarms to identify trends. The Group Manager Prevention and Protection (GMPP) explained that previously businesses would have been contacted after three false alarms but now they received a letter every time there was a false alarm activation. The Protection Team also maintained a league table of the top 10 premises for automatic fire alarm activations. The CFO added that most false alarms were automatic activations, which could in some cases be due to the age of the system and the level of maintenance undertaken.

Councillor Dr Jones commented that she had found the Annual Review to be a clear, informative and interesting document.

It was proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Kiernan and

Resolved that the Committee forward the draft Annual Review 2014 to the Fire Authority for consideration and formal adoption

11 Performance against Improvement Objectives in Operational and Peer Assessments

This report provided an update on performance against improvement objectives in Operational and Peer Assessments. It also informed the Audit and Performance Management Committee of a proposed request to the Service Management Team to agree the closedown of the Operational Assessment and Peer Review Action Plan.

The DCFO reported that there had been changes in the wider environment, particularly with regard to regional collaboration and Project Arrow. The Service was enthusiastic about collaboration but was mostly focusing its efforts on those areas where there was the potential for the biggest gains. In terms of policy alignment, there had been a focus on operational policies.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Adams and

Resolved that the Committee note:

- a) The update on performance against improvement objectives in Operational and Peer Assessments; and
- b) The proposed request to the Service Management Team to agree to the closedown of the Operational Assessment and Peer Review Action Plan

12 Performance Monitoring

12a Service Targets April to September 2015

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the period April 2015 to August 2015.

The PPM presented this paper and reported that the Service was predicted to achieve 5 out of the 6 targets. It had also achieved an unqualified value for money conclusion from External Audit.

The DCFO referred to failing Indicator 2b – Accidental dwelling fires will be reduced to not more than 236 during 2015/16. He explained that there were some positives in relation to this, in that, of the 122 accidental dwelling fires attended in the reporting period, over 50% had been out on arrival. In addition, 90% of the premises attended had smoke detectors fitted. The DCFO added that the increase in accidental dwelling fires was believed to be related to 'white goods' fires, with households using cheap or copy appliances or continuing to use appliances that were subject to a manufacturer's recall, probably due to financial factors. In response to this, prevention was being targeted to vulnerable groups, such as families, and a tailored approach would be taken going forward. The GMPP added that e-cigarettes were also an increasing factor in accidental dwelling fires.

Councillor Adams asked whether smoke alarms were provided by the Service where properties attended did not have them fitted. The DCFO responded that smoke alarms would be fitted, where appropriate, or there would be a referral for further fire safety input as necessary.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report

12b Presentation on Service Targets

In accordance with the request made at the March 2015 meeting of the Committee, the Group Manager Prevention and Protection gave a presentation on the following 2015/16 Service Target:

- Deliberate fires will be reduced to not more than 693 fires during 2015/16

A copy of the presentation slides has been placed on the signed minute file for this Committee.

Councillor Adams requested that a copy of presentation be emailed to Committee Members. The Executive Support Officer undertook to do this.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Adams, and

Resolved the Committee note the presentation

12c Wholetime and Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring April to July 2015

This report provided information regarding the ongoing performance and management in terms of the availability of Wholetime and Retained Duty System (RDS) appliances in Shropshire.

The DCFO presented this report and highlighted that the primary problem facing RDS availability was low levels of establishment. Work had been undertaken on the reduction of sickness levels within the RDS establishment and this appeared to be having a positive impact for stations, such as Minsterley. He advised that overall RDS availability was a success story but the following factors did impact: an ageing workforce; difficulty in attracting young people; and retention of RDS employees due to activity levels and family commitments. Measures were being undertaken to address these factors, including an overall awareness campaign.

Councillor Adams asked if the stations, which showed the most strain on their establishment, were feeling the impact of falling incident levels. The DCFO responded that there was an optimum threshold for incident levels at RDS stations and that anything below 100 a year was problematic. The Service was looking to enrich the RDS role by enhancing their emergency medical response capability and increasing their community safety work.

Councillor Dr Jones referred to Albrighton Fire Station and asked if the reason for the female applicant withdrawing from the recruitment process was known. The DCFO did not have the information to hand but undertook to find this out.

Councillor Dr Jones then referred to paragraph 10 of the report and asked if the Service was happy with the current Retained Availability System. The DCFO explained that there had been both technical and practical issues with the version, which was accessed via mobile phone.

However significant improvements had been made to this to achieve a more robust, resilient and usable system. Furthermore, a review of the Retained Availability System was to be undertaken in the near future.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mason, and

Resolved that the Committee note the report

13 Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd. Performance Reporting

This report provided information on the performance of the Fire Authority controlled company, Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services (SFRMS). The appendix to this report contained exempt information and would, therefore, be considered in closed session at item 16.

The Head of Service Delivery Transformation (HSDT) presented this report and highlighted paragraph 4, which detailed the review of the Company Business Plan to be discussed in greater detail at the Fire Authority meeting in October 2015.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that the Committee note the report

Councillor Adams left the meeting at this point (3.47 pm).

14 Local Government Act 1972

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Fletcher, and

Resolved that, under section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12(A) to the Act, by virtue of Paragraph 3

15 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 3)

29 January 2015

At its meeting on 23 April 2015, Members were unable to agree the exempt minutes of the Committee meeting, held on 29 January 2015, because of a lack of quorum (four Members) to consider this item. Councillors Mrs Bould, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones and Roberts had since confirmed that those minutes did represent a true record of the meeting.

Members were, therefore, asked to agree that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 January 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 29 January 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting

23 April 2015

At its meeting on 9 July 2015, Members were unable to agree the exempt minutes of the Committee meeting, held on 23 April 2015, because of a lack of quorum (four Members) to consider this item. Councillors Adams, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones and Roberts had since confirmed that those minutes did represent a true record of the meeting.

Members were, therefore, asked to agree that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 23 April 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 23 April 2015, be signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting

9 July 2015

Members received the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 July 2015.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 9 July 2015, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting

Councillor Adams returned to the meeting at this point (3.50 pm).

16 Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd. (Paragraph 3)

The Committee received the Appendix to report 13, which contained exempt information:

The HSDT outlined recently issued guidance from the Chief Fire Officers' Association regarding the use of fire service brands by companies set up by fire services. The HSDT advised that further detail of this guidance and how it impacted on SFRMS and this Service would be brought to the Fire Authority meeting in October 2015.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Adams, and

Resolved that the Committee note the exempt appendix to report 13.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....