

**Non-Exempt 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, 10 December 2015 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Dr Jones, Kiernan, Mason and Mellings

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Head of Finance, Business Change Manager, Group Commander Prevention and Protection, Group Commander Shrewsbury, Telford and Wrekin, Group Commander Shropshire Rural Performance Group (for item 9c), Planning and Performance Manager and Executive Support Officer

External Bodies

Ms Edmonds (Grant Thornton, External Audit)
Mr Chadderton (Audit Services, Shropshire Council)

Councillor Mellings took the chair for the meeting as Councillor Dr Jones was not well enough to do so.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Fletcher and Hurst-Knight. Mr Stocks from External Audit had also given his 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 10 and 12, 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 voting on, matters, relating to Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services, providing that legal opinion considered the participation to be appropriate.

On this occasion, the reports to be considered detailed the performance of Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services and were for information purposes only. It was, therefore, deemed appropriate for Councillors Kiernan and Mellings to participate in the discussion of these items.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 17 September 2015.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 17 September 2015, be agreed 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 Audit and Performance Management Committee Work Plan 2016/17

This report put forward a 2016/17 Work Plan for the Audit and Performance Management Committee for consideration and approval by Members. The report also reviewed implementation of the activities listed in last year's Work Plan.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) advised that the Committee Self-Assessment, which had been discussed in the training session on the Role of the Audit Committee, would be included in the Work Plan and it was agreed that a session on Committee Self-Assessment would be arranged to take place before the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Adams referred to item 21 on the Work Plan, which related to the Policy on Reporting of Illegality and Malpractice (Whistleblowing), and asked if this had been used at all over the years. The ACFO confirmed that it had but not recently. Councillor Adams asked if staff had confidence in its use. The ACFO explained that the necessary contact information was contained in a Brigade Order, which was available to all staff. An Employee Engagement Survey was to be undertaken in February or March 2016, which could include an assessment of employees' awareness of the Policy.

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

Resolved that the Committee approve, without amendment, the Audit and Performance Management Committee Work Plan 2016/17, attached as an appendix to the report

6 External Audit Update for Year Ended 31 March 2016

This paper reported on Grant Thornton's progress in delivering their responsibilities as external auditors.

The paper also included a summary of emerging national issues and developments that might be relevant to the Fire Authority and a number of challenge questions in respect of these emerging issues, which the Committee might wish to consider.

Ms Edmonds presented the report to the Committee and advised that the audit plan would begin in April. Only one interim visit would be undertaken with the aim of bringing forward work in preparation for the earlier audit deadline for 2017/18, when accounts would need to be approved by 31 July. Ms Edmonds highlighted the changes to the Value for Money conclusion, as outlined in the document, and drew Members' attention to the challenge questions.

Councillor Mellings referred to page 8 of the report relating to the 'Enabling Closer Working between the Emergency Services' consultation paper and advised that this had been considered by the full Fire Authority in October 2015.

Councillor Adams asked how co-operative the Ambulance Service was with regard to collaborative working. The ACFO advised that it was a joint Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government and Department for Health consultation. There was a commitment to look at collaboration with ambulance services but some difficulties had been caused by the regionalisation of the Ambulance Service. A West Midlands Fire Service representative had met recently with the Chief Executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service, when the issue of collaboration had been more positively received. There was, however, still some way to go.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

7 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.

The Planning and Performance Manager (PPM) presented this report and highlighted the areas of review detailed in the appendix.

Councillor Mellings referred to IRN1 - Service Transformation Programme and Integrated Risk Management Plan Action Plan - and asked when electronic travel claims would be extended to Fire Authority Members. The ACFO advised that it was technically possible but advice was needed on how best to arrange the process, so there was minimum impact on Members.

Councillor Dr Jones referred to IRN 6 – Operational Assurance - and asked if there were any operational issues with capacity with regard to the self-assessment and peer review. The ACFO responded that officers were looking at the resource implications but there were currently no clear timescales for the process. Officers were, however, ensuring that interim arrangements were in place.

Councillor Mason asked for a further explanation with regard to the Command Support Unit as detailed in IRN 4 - Operations. The PPM clarified that Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services were working collaboratively on the development and procurement of a vehicle, which would be used by both Services.

Councillor Mellings commented that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was a big issue for the Service and keeping pace with change was a huge challenge. The ACFO explained that this was where the work of the Service Transformation Board work was vital, for example the introduction of the Portal and issue of Surface Pros to officers. Skype for Business was another important area of development and interactivity should be achieved in the first quarter of the following year.

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

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

8 Risk Management Group Internal Audit Progress Monitoring Report

This report provided an update on the monitoring of recommendations made by Internal Audit, which was undertaken by the Risk Management Group (RMG). It specifically covered details about the progress made against outstanding recommendations.

The PPM highlighted Section 4 of the report, which set out the number of outstanding recommendations. He explained that, as two audits were still to be undertaken, these figures might change. He also advised that the outstanding ICT recommendations had reduced from 16 to 8 due to the Command and Control virtualisation.

Councillor Mellings commented that the report was very positive and it was particularly pleasing to see the reduction in outstanding ICT issues. Referring to page 2 of the report, he asked what the timescales were for review of the recommendations that had been taken forward. The PPM explained that measures were in place to address these recommendations and that evidence was now needed to show that these measures were embedded.

Councillor Adams asked how it was ensured that there was no slippage. Mr Chadderton explained that Audit Services recommended a follow-up audit to pick up those recommendations that were not audited annually. Councillor Mellings asked if follow-up audits would also be done on the basis of risk. Mr Chadderton confirmed that audits might be brought forward in the Plan, if it was perceived that there were significant issues.

Councillor Dr Jones referred to the 'Requires Attention' recommendations and asked if these were old or new recommendations. The PPM explained that it was a mix of both. Councillor Mellings asked if officers could provide details of the split between old and new 'requires attention' recommendations. The PPM was unable to provide this information at the meeting but undertook to do so after the meeting.

The ACFO added that the Risk Management Group monitored those recommendations that were 'Significant' or 'Requires Attention'

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

Resolved that the Committee note:

- a) The progress made against the outstanding recommendations; and
- b) That the Risk Management Group would continue to monitor progress against all recommendations, reporting to the Committee on a regular basis

9 Performance Monitoring

9a Service Targets April to October 2015

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

The ACFO presented this paper and reported that targets were currently being achieved. Members were particularly pleased about the achievement of target 1a. The ACFO explained that this was the target that contained a reference to firefighter competence. This had now been redefined and was now being achieved.

Councillor Mellings asked the Group Commander Prevention and Protection (GCPP) if there were any trends that had been identified in relation to targets 2 a), b) and c). The GCPP replied that focus was on protecting the elderly but this also had to be balanced with protecting families and other vulnerable people. Over 3,500 smoke and carbon monoxide alarms had been distributed to private landlords and a database had been established.

The GCPP reported that over 60% of accidental dwelling fires had been out on arrival and that there had been an upward trend in white goods fires. Councillor Mason asked what the causes of these fires were. The GCPP explained that there were several issues, which included austerity, poorer production of goods, failure to adhere to service periods and the advertising of product recall notices.

Councillor Kiernan asked if private landlords were now legally bound to provide smoke alarms. The GCPP confirmed that they had been since October 2015.

Councillor Mellings commented that the quarterly Prevention and Protection newsletter was very helpful.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

9b Presentation on Service Targets

In accordance with the request made at the March 2015 meeting of the Committee, the Group Commander Shrewsbury, Telford and Wrekin gave a presentation on the following 2015/16 Service Target:

The first fire engine will arrive at an emergency incident with at least 4 firefighters within 15 minutes on 89% of occasions

A copy of the presentation slides has been placed on the signed minute file for this Committee. At the request of Members the Executive Support Officer undertook to email a copy of presentation to the Committee.

Councillor Mellings asked if there could be an increase in the target. The ACFO explained that this was done through the Service Management Team. The process had started to ensure that the amended targets were ready for April. The Business Change Manager (BCM) referred to future shift pattern changes and cautioned that setting over-challenging targets could lead to poorer performance in the future.

Councillor Kiernan referred to the secondees from Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) and asked if they were already trained and if the secondments were ongoing and only with HWFRS. The ACFO confirmed that the secondees were trained and that the secondment programme began because HWFRS were in financial difficulties and needed to reduce their staffing. As SFRS had had an early start on Public Value, it had been able to use its underspend to cover staffing till December 2016. Three of the secondees had now transferred to SFRS. SFRS Staffing has been profiled to 2020 and wholetime recruitment of one firefighter per watch would be undertaken at Easter 2016. Secondments would also be looked at as part of this process.

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

Resolved the Committee note the presentation

9c Wholetime and Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring July to September 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 ACFO explained that the Fire Brigades Union had indicated that there would be no further wholetime industrial action until at least 2017.

The Group Commander Shropshire Rural Performance Group (GCSRPG) then presented the report and highlighted that RDS availability remained high.

The RDS Working Group had started to look at issues affecting RDS firefighters. The next meeting of the Working Group was scheduled for January 2016 and there would be reports back to Committees following this meeting. The number of female recruits had increased and there were now 20 female firefighters in the Service.

The GCSRPG reported that the project to trial the use of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) as RDS firefighters was progressing and the first joint training course for PCSOs, SFRS and HWFRS RDS firefighters would commence on 25 January 2016. The course had been condensed into a six week period, instead of the usual 18 to 19 weeks. There had been a reduction in the numbers of PCSOs eligible to attend due to the results of fitness tests and medicals but HWFRS had six candidates attending.

The GCSRPG then highlighted the individual stations referred to in the appendix to the report, particularly Much Wenlock where crewing had increased from 8 to 12.

Councillor Dr Jones was pleased to see the improvement at Much Wenlock. Referring to the Retained Availability System (RAS), she asked for more detail about controls and reports. The GCSRPG explained that originally the RAS had focused on recording RDS availability. Officers were now beginning to look at the reports and information, which it would produce. The BCM added that there had been systemic issues, for example with the Wide Area Network, that had impacted on the RAS but these were now being resolved. The Service Management Team had accepted the SEED system as the substantive system and investment had been agreed to ensure that the system met the Service's requirements.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

10 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 12.

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

Resolved that the Committee note the report

11 Local Government Act 1972

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

Resolved that, under section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it 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

12 Shropshire Fire Risk Management Services Ltd. Performance Update

The Committee received the following appendices to report 10, which contained exempt information:

- 12a Appendix A
SFRMS Financial Statements up to 31 October 2015; and
- 12b Appendix B
SFRMS Performance Summary up to 31 October 2015

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

Resolved that the Committee note exempt papers:

- 12a SFRMS Financial Statements up to 31 October 2015
- 12b SFRMs Performance Summary up to 31 October 2015

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....