

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
On Thursday, 5 December 2019 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Blundell, Dee (Vice-Chair) and Milner

Officers

Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Simon Hardiman	Head of Operations and Risk	HOR
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Ged Edwards	Planning, Performance and Communications Manager	PPCM
Germaine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Adam Matthews	Group Manager	GM
Rab Dhami	Prevention Manager	PM
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Robin Baker	Grant Thornton, External Audit
David Rowley	Grant Thornton, External Audit
Mark Seddon	Audit Services, Shropshire Council

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Adams, Minnery, Price, Sahota and Thompson.
Chief Fire Officer Rod Hammerton
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Dave Myers
Treasurer James Walton

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Councillor Dee asked that it be noted that she is a recipient of Service pension

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 18 September 2019, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2020

This report put forward a 2020 Work Plan for the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee for consideration and approval by Members. The report also reviewed implementation of the activities listed in last year's Work Plan.

Resolved that the Committee approve the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2020, without amendment.

6 External Audit Progress Update Report

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

Mr Rowley began by introducing Mr Robin Baker as the Authority's new engagement lead. Mr Baker explained that he is a Director at Grant Thornton and a key audit partner. He is the national lead for fire and rescue sector audits and has undertaken audit work with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Mr Baker commented that it is useful that Mr Rowley will still be working with the Service and added that the audit plans are in hand.

Mr Rowley highlighted the following in the report:

- Page 4 of the report gives a refresher on the key elements of the audit. The auditors are currently at the start of the audit planning process and are formulating plans for year ahead. A more detailed audit plan will be established in the new year.
- Page 5 of the report sets out the timetable for the audit deliverables for 2020
- Page 8 of the report sets out some proposed changes to the Code of Audit Practice. Consultation is currently being undertaken on these changes with a new Code coming into force by 1 April 2020.

The HoF advised that she had met with the auditors prior to this meeting and explained that the Finance Department will work with Mr Rowley and his team to facilitate the audit for the year.

Resolved that the Committee note the External Audit Progress Update Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2020.

Mark Seddon (Internal Audit) left the meeting at this point due to a potential conflict of interest over item 7 on the agenda (2.10pm)

7 Internal Audit Plan 2020/21

The HoF explained that normally, the workplan would be in place now, for the next year. However, this is not possible at present as it was agreed last year that the contract with Shropshire Council for the provision of audit services would be rolled forward for an extra year to cover the period of change related to the Payroll and HR systems. As this year is now concluded, a formal process needs to be undertaken to identify the method for appointment of a new audit provider. The HoF reported that work on this process is being undertaken with the HoR and officers will report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal update given and that the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21 should be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

Mark Seddon returned to the meeting at this point (2.14 pm)

8 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report updated Members on the status of risks on the Corporate Risk Register.

The PPCM presented this report and highlighted the current position of the Risk Register as set out on page 2 of the report. The PPCM explained that the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project (ESMCP) has now been removed from the Risk Register and will now be monitored via the departmental ICT register. The risk rating for the provision of performance information was increased due to capacity issues but a temporary performance analyst has been recruited since the papers went to print, which should help to address this issue.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

9 Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 Improvement Plan

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2019/20.

The PPCM introduced this report and the following updates were given:

People

The DCFO reported that the Collective Agreement for the wholetime shift changes has gone to the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) Executive Board and will hopefully be approved this week.

The Chair asked what will happen if the FBU Executive Board do not approve the Agreement. The DCFO explained that the Agreement would come back for re-negotiation and / or amendment as necessary. Officers are confident that other issues have settled so hopefully agreement will be given. The Collective Agreement for Fire Control is on hold until there is a resolution of the Wholetime agreement.

It had been hoped that the On Call Sustainability Project would start in earnest, but this has been delayed by capacity issues. It is hoped that this will move on significantly over next 12 months

Process

The PPCM reported that there has not been as much progress on the standard test and reporting systems (STARs) as was hoped and officers are in discussions with the developer to try and move this forward.

Building Facilities

The PPCM reported that three exterior designs are being considered for the Telford Central project. These have gone to Members for consideration and public consultation is being undertaken via Facebook. It is hoped that a final decision will be reached tomorrow afternoon (6 December) to enable submission for planning approval.

Appliances / Equipment

The HOR reported that the Command Support Unit (CSU) has moved to Cardiff for technology solutions to be installed. The CSU should be with the Service before the end of the year. Two potential providers have been identified for supply of incident command software and it is hoped that a final provider will be appointed next month.

Of the five new appliances, two will be located at Shrewsbury, two at Telford Central and one at Baschurch with the wholetime appliances that are being replaced being converted for on-call use. Members queried what the lifespan of the new vehicles is. The HOR explained that the lifespan is 13 to 15 years, dependent on usage. Members also queried if there could be any issues with the supply of spare parts for the vehicles. The HOR explained that officers have been looking at this issue, but it is being addressed at a national level through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

Collaboration

The DCFO explained that there will be two separate Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP) for Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Services as they are two sovereign bodies. Integrated Risk Management Planning is about local risk but there are obviously large commonalities across both Services and the IRMPs will be used to identify common measures and best practice.

Both Services are working together to explore future options for Fire Control.

The Strategic Change Manager is in post and has commenced work on the review of the ICT Departments in both Services.

Members congratulated officers on the work undertaken so far and asked for some examples of what the Services have learnt from each other during the process. The PM gave the example of differences in Prevention education activities across both Services, for example, the focus in this Service is on schools' education whilst Hereford & Worcester currently have a focus on road safety.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made against each of the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2019/20.

10 Performance Monitoring

10a Service Targets April to October 2019

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to October 2019.

The DCFO introduced the Head of Operations and Risk Simon Hardiman to the meeting. Mr Hardiman has received a temporary promotion to Assistant Chief Fire Officer with responsibility for the service delivery function, with effect from 1 January 2020.

The DCFO presented this report and informed the Committee that performance against service targets continues to be very good although the Prevention Department's good work is having a detrimental effect on performance against response standards.

The DCFO also explained that the severe weather conditions in October had a significant impact on the Service. There was a 20% increase in call levels which moved the Service into 'spate' conditions and brought October's performance against Service Target 1a down to 77%. Members asked that their congratulations to staff for their work over this period be placed on record. Recognition was also given to the national resilience response to South Yorkshire, in particular to the Fishlake area.

The DCFO reported that the Service is very likely to achieve its targets going forward. As the Service is now coming to the end of its 5-year service plan, if it manages to achieve its targets, this would be a fantastic performance with a 25% reduction in target levels being achieved over the 5 years.

Members commented that the levels of punishment for those convicted of arson seem to have lowered and queried if this was having an effect on the levels of deliberate fires in the county. The DCFO explained that the Service works well with the Police regarding detection of arson when there is evidence that it has taken place, although there can be difficulties obtaining evidence.

The DCFO reported that officers have not experienced a diminution in sentences for those convicted of arson.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10b Presentation on Service Targets

As agreed at the July 2016 meeting of the Committee, the Prevention Manager gave a presentation on the following 2019/20 Service Target:

Accidental dwelling fires will be reduced to not more than 186 fires during
2019/20

Members asked any work was being undertaken with Senior Citizens Forums. The PM confirmed that it was and explained that there is a need to look at the retention of the existing links that have been established. The PM explained that whilst some organisations, such as the Red Cross will help, others require a more formal route, such as a referral pathway. The Service does link closely with organisations and is willing to take a flexible approach although there is more that can be done in this area.

Members asked if there were any technological developments for Alexa / Google equipment to help with fire detection. The PM advised that a vast range of technology is becoming available, but it is still in its infancy and expensive, although it will become mainstream eventually.

Members asked if the PM could provide any information on the amount of money saved through the Prevention activities that are being undertaken. The DCFO explained that this information would be the out-turn from the Service Plan and will probably come out through the IRMP.

Members commented that there has been a noticeable cultural change within the Service with there now being a greater focus on prevention activities and thanked the PM and his department for their hard work.

Resolved that the Committee note the presentation.

10c Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty System) Performance Monitoring July – September 2019

This report provided summary information for July – September 2019, regarding the performance and management of the availability of Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty System) appliances in Shropshire.

The GM presented this report and informed the Committee that the nine new wholetime firefighter recruits have returned from the Fire Service College and are now embedded with wholetime watches.

The GM explained that table on page 3 of the report shows the support given to individual stations by the Group Support Team (GST). The figures in brackets on the table are the additional support given in addition to last year. The amount of GST support provided so far during this year is the highest since 2011 so there is obviously a greater demand on the GST to provide fire cover. There is however a significant issue with fire cover at Prees so this may be having an effect on the level of fire cover.

With regard to Prees, the GM reported that there are currently 6 personnel on station achieving 70 – 80% availability which is a credit to the service. There is good news however as there is one new recruit on the run, one recruit on initial training course and one undertaking job related tests.

The GM explained that the forthcoming On Call Sustainability Review is the key to ensuring the long-term future of the On Call Service. The Review is well timed as the Service is still leading nationally in On Call availability. The Service are keen that the Review be driven from bottom up ie by those who are working in the On Call system.

Members congratulated the Service on the developments at Prees and asked how this Service compares with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in terms of On Call availability. The DCFO responded that he believed that Hereford & Worcester's On Call availability is lower and officers are certain that there are no Services that currently have higher availability than Shropshire.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

Standards

11 Ethical Framework Matters

This report dealt with ethical framework matters, namely a review of the Members' Code of Conduct and related documents.

The HHRA presented this report and informed the Committee that the Code of Conduct and related documents should be reviewed on an annual basis as stated in the Committee workplan. Officers have undertaken an appropriate review and the changes recommended relate to the changes to Fire Authority governance which were agreed in June 2019.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the review of, and the proposed amendments to, the Members Code of Conduct;
- b) Note the review of related procedures and documents, and the proposed amendments to:
 - Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure;
 - Code of Conduct Complaints form;

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests form; and
 - Dispensation Procedure; and
- c) Agree to recommend these amendments accordingly to the Fire Authority for agreement.

12 Pension Board Minutes

The DCFO presented the Pension Board minutes to the Committee. The DCFO explained that the Pension Board consists of both employee and employer representatives and highlighted the following common themes across both sets of minutes:

- The re-enrolment process, which is a Government requirement, is happening now and steps are being taken to ensure that this is done appropriately
- The transitional protection court ruling may become a significant financial issue. The Firefighters Pension Schemes will be looking at this issue during December and January and it is thought that this could involve significant sums of money although it is believed that this may be funded by the Government in the interim period
- With regard to data scores, an evaluation of pension data for quality / accuracy has been undertaken. This has shown that the Service has improved on last year's data scoring report but there is still an impact from the contributions rate data. This was not recorded as it was not deemed to be relevant, but it currently cannot be removed from the data assessment. It is hoped that this can be done which will improve data scores.

Resolved that the Committee note the minutes of the Pension Board meetings, held on 27 June 2019 and 2 October 2019.

13 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the Committee being satisfied in all the circumstances of the case that public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interests in disclosing this information, formally resolve that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

14 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

The Committee received Appendix C to report 8 – Corporate Risk Management Summary, which was considered in closed session as it contained exempt information.

Resolved that the Committee note exempt Appendix C to report 8.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair thanked the DCFO for all his hard work over the years and wished him well for his retirement. The DCFO thanked the Committee for their good wishes and expressed how pleased he was to be leaving with the Service in such a good position.

The meeting closed at 3.50 pm

Chair

Date