

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
on Friday, 30 September 2022 at 2.00 pm**

Present**Members**

Councillors Burchett, Evans (Chair), Lea, Minnery (Vice Chair) and Thompson

Officers

| | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------|
| Rod Hammerton | Chief Fire Officer | CFO |
| Simon Hardiman | Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) | ACFO (SS) |
| Joanne Coadey | Head of Finance | HoF |
| Ged Edwards | Planning and Performance Manager | PPM |
| Jan Morris | Head of Transformation and Collaboration | HoTC |
| Germaine Worker | Head of Human Resources and Administration | HHRA |
| Lynn Ince | Executive Support Officer | ESO |

External Bodies

| | |
|--------------|---|
| David Rowley | Grant Thornton, External Audit |
| Andy Bromage | Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services |

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Hignett, Overton and Price
James Walton, Treasurer
Avtar Sohal, Grant Thornton

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 27 April 2022, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Committee Constitution and Training

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members. It also asked Members to consider what training they wish to receive in order to fulfil their role on the Committee effectively.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the constitution of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee (attached as an appendix to the report); and
- b) Advised that at this point, there is no specific training that they wish to receive in order to fulfil their role on the Committee effectively.

6 External Audit

Update on Audit for the year ended 31 March 2022

Mr Rowley gave the following verbal update on the Audit for the year ended 31 March 2022.

30 November 2022 is the statutory deadline for audits. The audit for this Authority is not yet fully complete so the External Auditors are giving a verbal update only at this meeting.

The Audit Plan sets out significant risks for the Fire Authority: value of property, plant and equipment (PPE); net defined pension liability; and management override and controls. The audit is substantially complete; and PPE has been reviewed and a control implemented on the valuer report, but no significant amendments have been identified so far. The Pension Fund value is three to six months in arrears, and this may require the actuary to re-value the Fund. This issue has been picked up with the Finance Team. The Auditors are still working through the management override and controls risk, but no key concerns have been flagged so far.

The Auditors are substantially through the audit process and the Audit Findings Report will be brought to this Committee on 1 December 2022. This is the day after the statutory deadline but there is some fluidity in this deadline. Completion of the audit is reliant on the confirmation of Pension Fund value. The Value for Money (VfM) assessment is now more involved and the deadline for this is three months after the Audit Findings Report so the VfM findings will be released in the winter

Councillor Evans advised that the delay to the Pension Fund value relates to one company not being able to provide information at present. This sits on the margin of materiality so needs clarifying what is causing the delay. Mr Rowley explained that the Fire and Rescue Service has a large asset base but very low materiality which leaves it vulnerable with minor changes in materiality having a major effect for the Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal update given.

7 Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 and Improvement Plan 2022/23

The purpose of this report was twofold: it set out the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2021/22 and the AGS Improvement Plan 2022/23 to be included in the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts. It also reported on initial progress of activities contained within the 2022/23 Improvement Plan. The PPM presented this report and talked through the information contained in it.

Members asked for an explanation of New Ways of Working (NWOW). The ACFO (SS) explained that NWOW captures the Service's learning from the pandemic with the ACFO (SS) and the Heads of Department agreeing new working patterns as well as identifying and exploiting new technologies etc.

Referring to Area of Review 1 which relates to People, Members asked when the outcomes of the On Call Sustainability Review will be reported to the Fire Authority. The ACFO (SS) advised that the ACFO Service Delivery is leading on this project which is been managed internally through the Service's Programme Board with updates being provided to the Fire Authority through this Committee.

Members asked for an update on the progress with the Telford Central refurbishment project. The PPM advised that the project is ongoing, but issues have been identified with the existing steels in the building and there is a meeting with Building Control on Monday to discuss this further. This issue may impact on the cost of the project but there is a contingency fund in place for issues such as this.

In relation to the Appliances / Equipment Area of Review, Members asked what the Service's new appliance strategy is. The ACFO (SS) explained that three of the new appliances have increased foam capacity and carry 2000 litres of water and 1000 litres of foam, instead of the traditional 3000 litres of water, which supports the use of the specialist environmental pod, increasing effectiveness. Six of the additional ten new appliances are now on the run with the remaining appliances going live once vehicle familiarisation and training has been completed.

Members asked what the usual lifespan of an appliance is. The ACFO (SS) replied that the average lifespan is 15 years, and the Service rotates appliances between stations to prolong this lifespan. The vehicles that the new appliances are replacing will be disposed via the usual appropriate methods. Two of the vehicles are however being donated to the Ukrainian Fire Service and a team of six volunteers from this Service will leave on 5 October to drive these to Poland. The Service will issue a press release regarding this in the next week.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Agree the Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 and 2022/23 Improvement Plan for inclusion in the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts; and
- b) Note the progress made on the 2022/23 Improvement Plan.

8 Annual Review 2021/22

This report presented the draft Annual Review (also known as the Annual Statement of Assurance) for 2021/22 and gave the Committee an opportunity to make comment on the draft, prior to it going forward to the full Fire Authority for consideration and approval.

Members commented that they thought that it was an excellent report and were particularly pleased with the attendance standards achieved which are set out on page 49 of the document.

Resolved that the Committee recommend the draft Annual Review 2021/22 for consideration and approval by the Fire Authority, without amendment.

9 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2018/19 to 2021/22

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2021/22, with comparisons to the previous three years.

The ACFO (SS) presented this report and advised the Committee that there has been a change in the type of complaint received with more complaints regarding conduct prejudicial to the reputation of the Service being received in 2021/22 than relating to poor driving behaviour. However, most of these complaints are not substantiated when investigated and appear to relate to domestic situations that are being brought into the workplace.

The ACFO (SS) also explained that there has been an increase in the Service's social media connectivity with the public and the graphics on page 5 of the report show that the majority of messages received on Twitter in particular, are positive.

Members commented that were particularly pleased with the compliments that the Service receives and feel that the stand-out compliment in Appendix A to the report is the one regarding the assistance given to a couple by a senior operational officer when the woman was in labour. This type of compliment shows the strong sense of community within the Fire Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10 Corporate Risk Management Summary

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

The PPM presented this report and advised the Committee that a new risk has been added to the Corporate Risk Register. The new risk relates to the Government White Paper on Fire Reform which has a risk of reputational damage for the Service together with a risk from increased media interest.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Performance Monitoring

11a Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April 2021 to March 2022

This report presented a summary of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) performance from April 2021 to March 2022.

The ACFO (SS) presented this report and advised that new Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs) were introduced in 2021/22 with tolerances to aid trend analysis. The ACFO (SS) then highlighted the following in relation to the CPIs

CPI 1 – All Fires

At the start of the year, this CPI was above the tolerance level but the cumulative total at year end is now below the lower tolerance level which is an impact of Prevention work.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs)

The number of ADFs has reduced in the reporting period.

Members asked if the Service anticipated an increase in ADFs with the current cost of living and fuel crises. The ACFO (SS) responded that the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have launched a pack in relation to this which contains a lot of information including Prevention messages. The Service's Prevention Team is currently gearing up to run campaigns on this issue.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

There has been a significant reduction in the cumulative total for deliberate fires with 291 in the reporting period which is a 7.9% reduction on 2020/21. Members asked if the Covid-19 pandemic had had an impact on this. The ACFO (SS) confirmed that the Service believes that this is the case.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

This remains a narrative reporting target with 1 death and 9 serious injuries being recorded in 2021/22.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

Performance for the year for this CPI is within the tolerance level of 2%

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff through Operational Activity

This is also a narrative reporting target with 26 injuries to staff from operational activity being recorded in 2021/22.

CPI 7 – Response Standard

Performance against this CPI has been really positive with an overall response standard of 95% achieved in 2021/22. All three categories of urban, town and fringe and rural have achieved in excess of 85% over the year.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

This was a new indicator for 2021/22 so there is no comparison data available, but a month-by-month breakdown of incident types is given in the report. The fire premises type, cause of fire and origin are within the current Risk Based Inspection programme. There is a risk that fires within regulated buildings will increase as a consequence of the cost of living crisis.

CPI 9 – Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

The competencies set out in the report are critical to the effectiveness of the Service and the safety of its staff; these are currently broadly in line with where they should be.

On Call Availability

Average On Call Availability for 2021/22 is 93.35% with the majority of stations achieving an average availability of over 90% for the year; two stations achieved 100% availability for the year.

Members queried the average availability for Albrighton which has been consistently low throughout the year. The ACFO (SS) explained that this is due to low numbers on the station but there has been an increase in performance in the first quarter of 2022/23.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

11b Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April to June 2022]

This report presented a summary of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) performance from April to June 2022.

The ACFO (SS) presented this report to the Committee and highlighted the following in relation to the CPIs

CPI 1 – All Fires

Performance for this CPI is currently within tolerance levels

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

Performance against this CPI is currently with tolerance levels

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

This CPI is currently within tolerance levels and is showing a 26.9% reduction on the same period last year.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

There have been no fire related deaths in the reporting period. One of the three serious injuries that have been recorded in the period was due to a fire setter in an arson incident.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

The year to date average for the reporting period is within the tolerance level for this CPI.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff Through Operational Activity

There have been seven injuries to staff recorded within the reporting period but none of these have been RIDDOR reportable.

CPI 7 – Response Standard

Current average performance is 93% for the three areas of Urban, Town and Fringe and Rural. There were however 27 occasions in the reporting period where the response standard target was not achieved.

Members queried that 10 incidents where the response standard was not achieved due to the incident location being different to the mobilising location and asked if this was due to wrong places being given and roadworks. The ACFO (SS) explained that crews do change the location on the mobile data terminal if it is incorrect. The Service does have links with the Highways Agency and does receive information regarding road closures which Control use to update mobilising, this works particularly well with long-term roadworks and allows the Service to develop contingencies to negate effects on response times. The CFO added that there is, however, an issue with emergency roadworks where information is often not passed to the Service quickly enough. In such cases, the Service is then reliant on the local knowledge of its On Call crews. An automated solution to this issue will be incorporated in the new Command and Control System and the Operations Department is currently working on this.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

A steady trajectory is being seen for performance against this CPI.

CPI 9 – Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

Establishment and Diversity figures are reported on a six-monthly basis and will be included in the next report to this Committee however the competency figures which are set out in the report are in line with what is expected.

On Call Availability

Average availability is currently 91.40% but an improvement should be seen in this going forward.

Members again referred to Tweeddale’s performance which was relatively low in comparison to other stations. The ACFO (SS) explained that this is due to several periods of sickness on the station which has affected specific skill sets. Members asked if this has an effect on attendance time. The ACFO (SS) explained that it can, but it does depend on where the station is, for example Tweeddale switches to wholetime crewing over night as Service provision follows the risk from Telford to the Tweeddale station area.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Pension Board

12 Pension Board Minutes

Resolved that the Committee note the minutes of the Pension Board meeting, held on 23 May 2022.

13 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a to the Local Government Act 1972.

14 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the Committee receive and note exempt Appendix B to report 10 – Corporate Risk Management Summary.

15 Industrial Action Presentation (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the Committee note the presentation given on Industrial Action

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

Chair.....

Date.....