

**Non-exempt Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
On Wednesday, 10 July 2024 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillors Blundell, Burchett, Evans, Hignett, Lea, Overton and Pardy (Chair).

Officers

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| Guy Williams | Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) | ACFO (SS) |
| Ged Edwards | Planning and Programme Manager | PPM |
| James Walton | Treasurer | JW |
| Joanne Codey | Head of Finance | HoF |
| Luke Grant | Station Manager Transformation and Collaboration | SMTC |
| Lynn Ince | Executive Support Supervisor | ESS |
| Aleks Zydek | Executive Support Officer | ESO |

External Bodies

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| Richard Anderson | Grant Thornton (External Audit) |
| Chris Green | Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services (Internal Audit) |

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Carter, Sam Burton (Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer) and Scott Hurford (Head of Transformation and Collaboration).

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved, with abstention from Councillor Burchett, that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 23 May 2024, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Chis Green from Worcestershire Internal Audit joined the meeting at this point.

5 Committee Terms of Reference and Constitution

This report, presented by the ESS, asks Members to consider the Terms of Reference of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, following the annual review conducted by officers.

The ESS explained that although the Committee did consider Terms of Reference at previous meeting, during the Annual Fire Authority meeting it was agreed that a review Terms of Reference and Role Descriptions will take place for Fire Authority and all its committees. Members are asked to highlight areas that need amending.

Members highlighted need to change the reference to 'largest opposition group' in Terms of Reference for Committees and Panels. Members questioned when the review. The ESS explained that there is a plan to set up a working group that will report to October Fire Authority Meeting.

Resolved that the Committee review its Terms of Reference, as set out at the Appendix to the report, and make following recommendations for necessary amendments, to the Fire Authority for agreement:

6 Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 and Improvement Plan 2024/25

The purpose of this report is twofold: it sets out the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2023/24 and the AGS Improvement Plan 2024/25 to be included in the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts. It also reports on the close down of activities contained within the 2023/24 Improvement Plan.

The PPM presented this report and highlighted that on page 2 there is an error. There are 8 key areas of activity not 6 as stated on the report. The PPM added that the Officers updated the current improvement plan based on those 8 key areas. The PPM highlighted that the Appendix A to the report contain names of the Internal Boards those areas are reported to and progress to date; Appendix B contains draft Annual governance Statement 2023/34 and Appendix C contains Improvement plan for 2024/45.

Members were interested in On-call contract briefings and whether those have been completed. The ACFO SS confirmed the last briefing took place in Baschurch last week and this have now been completed.

Members questioned Telford New build and if full completion is still expected in September. The ACFO SS assured the Members that Telford is now an operational building with a functioning fire station. There is work still ongoing on car park and landscaping that is due to be completed in September.

Members commented on improvement in the look of the station. The ACFO SS added that it is an impressive building. Members asked about staff in the new build. The ACFO SS explained that moving into the new building has been a positive for staff after working in not ideal conditions for past 3 years.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) note the progress and close down of the 2023/24 Improvement Plan; and
- b) agree the AGS 2023/24 and 2024/25 Improvement Plan for inclusion in the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.

External Audit

7 Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Audit Progress and Sector Update

This paper provides the Standard, Audit and Performance Committee with a report on external auditor progress in delivering responsibilities. This paper also includes a series of sector updates in respect of these emerging issues which the Committee may wish to consider.

The EA presented this report and highlighted the key messages on page 4 of the report. He added that planning procedures for the 2023/34 report were presented during May meeting of the Committee. The final accounts audit is due to begin in September 2024 and end by the end of the calendar year.

The EA added that sector update includes commentary on Audit Backstop that was due to be laid before Parliament prior to summer recess but the calling of a General Election put this timetable in considerable doubt.

The last section of the report focuses on update about the engagement with External Auditors.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

8 Informing the Audit Risk Assessment for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority 2023/24

This report contributes toward the effective two-way communication between external auditors and the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, as 'those charged with governance'. The report covered some important areas of the auditor risk assessment, where external audit is required to make inquiries of the Committee under auditing standards.

The EA presented this report and explained that this report includes responses to a series of questions that form part of risk assessment to obtain understanding of management process and the Authority's oversight of the areas listed on page 4 and inform audit planning for those areas.

Members questioned question 2 in Impact of laws and regulations around On-call annual leave. The ACFO SS assured members that Fire Service Rota (FSR) are currently in process of developing app but the new policy for On-call leave has been introduced. There is no date when this work will be completed. Members questioned if On-call staff are able to take unpaid leave. The ACFO SS confirmed that they can take unpaid leave or change their availability too. He assured the members that the Service is listening to views of those working for SFRS in implementing new policies.

Members expressed their concern around consequences of On-call roles with regards to Working Time Directive. The ACFO SS explained that it is a role of the primary employer to ensure Working time directive is upheld and the Service is not a primary employer for on-call.

Members questioned answer to question 11 in Accounting Estimates section. The HoF explained that the issue of accounting estimates was brought to May meeting of the Committee and the reasons on use and non-use of estimates was laid out in the paper.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Internal Audit

9 Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2023/24

This report provided the Committee with the overall results in terms of meeting Internal Audit's objectives as set out in the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24; an audit opinion and commentary on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment; and a copy of the current Internal Audit Charter.

The IA presented this report and explained that it feeds into Annual Governance Statement that was discussed earlier on the agenda. The report attached as the Appendix explains how conclusion have been reached and how the Service comply with public sector. He added that out of 7 graded assignments completed, 6 resulted in an opinion of either Substantial or Reasonable assurance, with 1 Limited Assurance rating.

The IA commented that the Risk Management processes well embedded within the Service. He added that section 5 of the appendix confirms that the Independent Audit service is independent and objective which is demonstrated in number of ways.

The IA brought the Members attention to section 4 Quality Assurance and Compliance with Professional Standards where independent External Quality Assessment achieved highest of 3 grades. He added that the action plan from that assessment will to be brought to next meeting of the Committee.

The IA highlighted 92% satisfaction rating with its stakeholders.

Members questioned Leave Processes on page 11 of the appendix. p11. The ACFO SS will request Head of Service Delivery to send Members an update outside of this meeting.

Resolved that the Committee note the report and the 2023/24 Internal Audit Opinion and Commentary.

10 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report, presented by the PPM, updated Members on the status of risks on the Corporate Risk Register.

The PPM highlighted that the direction of travel for three risks have changed as detailed in the appendices to the report. Other risks remain the same.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Performance

11 Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April 2023 to March 2024 (Year End)

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the year April 2022 to March 2023.

The ACFO SS presented this report and acknowledged the SMTC work on bringing this report together. He provided the following commentary on each of the Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs)

CPI 1 – All Fires

This CPI is very susceptible to weather as illustrated on page 2 when number of fires spiked in June due to heatwave. The Service have seen 9.5% reductions on last year's total of 1157 fires.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

The cumulative total for the year is 201, which is a 6% increase on last year. The ACFO SS added that previous year was historically low. The two top causes of these fires were faulty appliance/leads (38.7%) and misuse of equipment/appliances (26.3%). This could be related to cost-of-living impact.

The ACFO SS was pleased to report that 91.8% of these fires were confined to room of origin, and 87% had smoke alarms fitted in the property.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fire

Decreases of 7% on the same period last year. The ACFO added that arson is opportunistic in nature. Which is reflected in increase during summer months. The Service has seen increase in vehicle arson, predominantly by OCG rivalry which featured heavily in the media. The Prevention team continues to work with crews and partners to identify hot spots. d

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

The AFCO reported 6 serious injuries and 1 fire related death.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

The ACFO SS explained that this CPI gives the Service a chance to assess combined Prevention, Protection and Response performance. Year to date there is 1.3% improvement. This CPI is vulnerable to accuracy of reporting. The service is becoming better at auditing and challenging recording.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff Through Operational Activity

This CPI is moving in the right direction but has seen increase in RIDOR. It is difficult to predict the trajectory or any pattern behind it. The reporting has improved, and H&S manager reports better recording of slips trips and falls.

CPI 7 – Response Standard – Attendance on average of 85% of occasions

The average Response Standard was 94%. Reasons for not achieving the target are listed on page 8 of the report. The Service continues to monitor this is 3 ways in preparation for introduction of National Response Standard.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

This CPI added in 2021/22 presented challenges in accuracy of data. The Service has seen 21% increase compared to 19% decreases in previous year. Quality assurance issues around input of data. More training for staff on what constitutes a regulated building.

CPI 9 - Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

Competencies are all very positive percentages with only minor numbers waiting for renewals.

On Call Duty System Performance

The ACFO SS reported it is encouraging to see that on-call availability remains good compared to national figures. He highlighted the station at Preece with good availability despite losing 3 members of staff due to change in driving hours regulations. Tweedale with 53% is on positive trajectory and stations like Church Stretton and Elsmere with 100% availability.

The Committee questioned how the Service can achieve 100% of properties with fire alarms fitted. The ACFO SS advised that the Service is promoting the fact that fire alarms save lives but achieving 100% is not a realistic goal. He highlighted Crucial Crew where young people can learn about fire safety and encourage their families to fit fire alarms in their homes.

Members commented it is encouraging to see increase in number of fire alarms fitted in properties.

The Members questioned if the roadworks in the Shrewsbury town centre still contribute to not achieving the Response time. The ACFO SS explained that this has improved but as part of Community Risk Management Plan 2025-29 there is consideration around the second station in Shrewsbury for emerging risk of growing town, increase cover to west and provide resilience against flooding.

The Committee asked if more training provision is planned around recording fires in regulated buildings. The ACFO SS noted that Fire Safety audits all the reports which feeds into improved training. There is also focus on developing a system better suited to incident reporting than one that is currently in place.

The Members questioned if loss of 7 on-call staff is worried to the Service. The ACFO SS explained that the Service was expecting this number to be bigger, and that recruitment is important as much as keeping staff who are fully trained. Things are in place to give people reassurance about working for The Service.

The Committee questioned why those who on-call who left due to change in driving hours regulation had to leave the Service at Preece. The ACFO SS explained that due to the changes they were unable to continue working for the Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The ESS left the meeting at his point.

12 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2020/21 to 2023/24

This report, presented by the ACFO SS, advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2023/24, with comparisons to the previous three years.

The ACFO SS reported that the Service has received more compliments than complains as shown on page 2 of the report. He added that as not all compliments are passed to Executive Support Team this number may be greater than shown.

The ACFO SS informed the Committee that out of 25 complains logged during 2023/24 8 were related to 'failure to deal correctly with an incident/inspection/procedure'. He added that theme emerging out of these is around the Service having to break into buildings while assisting colleagues from Police and Ambulance service. He urged the Members to keep an eye on this kind of incidents as it is an emerging issue.

The ACFO reported that complains around conduct remain consistent. He was pleased to inform the Committee that 80% of the complains were either fully or partially substantiated which means the Service is able to properly investigate the complaints. He added that there has been a vast improvement on standards of complains process. He also noted that number of vexatious complains have been low.

The Committee noted that complains help to improve the Service but are pleased to also note that the community is willing to share their positive experience and praise good practises. This is welcomed as a culture change. The ACFO SS that the Service will continue to forward the compliments to Members and noted that 34% of compliments relate to Prevention activities. He highlighted a recent compliment received from the Police where an off-duty firefighter helped member of a public who got stabbed prior to arrival of the ambulance.

The ACFO SS was pleased to report that during challenging time for the Service the staff are going above and beyond to support the community.

The Committee recognised low number of complains about poor driving behaviour.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

13 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service Values and Culture Report Update June 2024

This report presented the Service's progress against the recommendations made to the sector in the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Values and Culture in the Fire and Rescue Services report.

The SMTC presented this report and stated that out of 20 recommendations 19 has been recorded as complete. The only outstanding recommendation is recommendation 22 related to 360 feedback. The roll out to Senior Management Team has been completed and wider integration plan is in place. The Service currently looking at NFCC product efficacy and value for money. The SMTC assured the Members that recommendations are well embedded within the Service.

Resolved that the Committee notes the report.

14 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items 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

15 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 23 May 2024, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

16 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

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

Members thanked the ACFO SS for his service he has given to Shropshire.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____