

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee  
Held via Microsoft Teams  
On Thursday, 16 July 2020 at 2.00 pm**

## **Present**

### **Members**

Councillors Blundell, Dee (Vice-Chair) (from 2.20pm), Sahota (Chair) and Thompson

### **Officers**

Dave Myers	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
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
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

### **External Bodies**

David Rowley	Grant Thornton, External Audit
Ceri Pilawski	Audit Services, Shropshire Council
Pete Chadderton	Audit Services, Shropshire Council

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Adams, Milner, Minnery and Price.

## **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 30 April 2020, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## 5 Statement of Accounts 2019/20

The HoF gave the following verbal update

The Statement of Accounts was due to be presented to the Committee at this meeting. However, as the Pension Fund audit is not yet complete, and this is out of the control of both Grant Thornton (External Audit) and the Authority, the accounts cannot be signed off and will now be presented for consideration at the September meeting. This is within the legal deadline of 30 November 2020.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the verbal update given by the Head of Finance.

## 6 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2019/20

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

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

## 7 Internal Audit Annual Audit Report

This report provided Members with details of the work undertaken by Internal Audit for the year ended 31 March 2020. It reported on progress against the annual audit plan and also provided the Head of Audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management and control processes when considering the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards or Guidance, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

Ms Pilawski presented this report and reported the following in relation to the audits undertaken by Internal Audit:

- No fundamental recommendations have been made to the Service by Internal Audit during 2019/20
- No limitations were placed on the scope of the audits during the year
- Follow up of recommendations is ongoing in most audited areas
- No 'unsatisfactory' assurances have been awarded on the audits undertaken in 2019/20
- Confidence on auditors will be formally reported to Shropshire Council's Audit Committee on 31 July 2020 but no issues have been raised on this
- Internal Audit operates an internal moderation process with formal feedback being gathered from customer surveys

The Committee gave a vote of thanks to the Internal Audit team for their work and for the report which was pleasing.

Councillor Dee joined the meeting at this point (2.20 pm)

Members asked for further information regarding the credit card misuse referred to in paragraph 5.7 of the report. Ms Pilawski explained that a management report has been produced on this issue and procedures put in place to prevent future occurrences. The DCFO added that misuse by a member of staff had been addressed; this included appropriate discipline action for the individual and processes being implemented. In response to a member's question, Ms Pilawski explained that details of the misappropriation had been provided to the relevant officers and the level of detail in the report was appropriate in this arena.

**Resolved** that the Committee endorse

- a) Performance against the Audit Plan for the year ended 31 March 2020;
- b) That reasonable assurance can be provided that the system of governance, risk management and internal control is operating effectively and can be relied upon when considering the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20; and
- c) The Head of Audit's reasonable year end opinion on the Authority's internal control environment for 2019/20 based on the work undertaken and management responses received.

## **8 Internal Audit Plan 2020/21**

This report informed the Fire Authority of a one-year extension to the Internal Audit programme of audit work for 2020/21, as set out in the appendix to the report, to reflect the continuing work on system changes and new ways of working.

The HoF presented this report and explained that the one-year extension to the current contract with Shropshire Council will enable officers to continue to embed ongoing changes and to retrospectively review working practices during the pandemic.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the one-year extension to the audit plan for 2020/21 and approve the programme of audits for 2020/21 as set out in the report.

## **9 Corporate Risk Management Summary**

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

The PPCM presented this report and informed the Committee that there are currently no new risks on the Risk Register. There has only been one change to the Risk Register since April 2020. This is the downgrading of the risk related to potential changes in governance under the Policing and Crime Act.

The risk rating for this has been reduced to reflect that the Fire Strategic Alliance is mitigating the effects of the uncertainty over governance.

Members asked if there any impacts for the Risk Register as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The PPCM explained that the risks related to this have been captured on the Risk Register. At the internal level, the Service's Business Continuity Plan has been invoked and restoration planning has commenced.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the contents of the report.

Councillor Sahota left the meeting at this point (2.30 pm) and Councillor Dee took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

## **10 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2016/17 to 2019/20**

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2019/20, with comparisons to the previous three years.

The DCFO talked through the contents of this report and, having highlighted the increase in complaints related to poor driving behaviour, explained that this increase is being addressed across the organisation.

Members commented that it is very encouraging to see the increase in compliments received by the Service, particularly as people are not always quick to praise.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the report.

## **11 Performance Monitoring**

### **11a Service Targets April to June 2020**

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to June 2020.

The ACFO presented this report and highlighted performance against the Response standard which is 86% for Quarter 1 against the target of 89%. The ACFO reminded the Committee that this is only performance for the first quarter of the year so it is too early to predict what the annual performance against this target will be.

The ACFO then talked through the Appendix to the report and highlighted the following issues:

#### **Target 1a – Response Standard**

- Further work needs to be done to address below target performance for this indicator
- There has been an increase in incidents in rural areas which may be impacting on performance

- Comparisons to national data, as stated in the Appendix, show that the Service's average response time is in line with national statistics

#### **Target 2a – All Accidental Fires**

- The Service is predicted to achieve this target based on Quarter 1 performance

#### **Target 2b – Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs)**

- The quarterly target for this measure is 46 incidents – current performance is 39 for Quarter 1
- If this performance continues through the year, the Service will see a significant reduction in the number of ADFs

#### **Target 2c – Deliberate Fires**

- The Service has achieved performance of 117 against a quarterly target of 130
- This equates to a 10% reduction on target
- Continuation of this performance would lead to actual performance of 468 against the yearly target of 520.

#### **Target 3a – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries**

- There has been 1 serious injury and no deaths in Quarter 1
- Figures for this indicator can fluctuate
- The Covid-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on Safe and Well Visits and work is being undertaken to identify alternative methods for conducting these visits.

#### **Target 3b – Injuries to Staff through firefighting**

- There have been 4 injuries in the reporting period
- Continuation at this level will mean the Service will achieve performance of 16 against the annual target of 19
- The Service is ensuring that it maximises its learning from each injury incident

#### **Target 4a – Fires confined to room of origin**

- There is a marginal gap between the target and performance for Quarter 1
- Work is ongoing to identify trends in incident types and construction methods that may affect fire spread
- Performance may vary during the coming harvest season
- The Service is however confident that it is in a strong position to achieve the annual target

Members commented that it was very pleasing to see how well the Service is performing and asked if the Service is able to comment on flooding risk on planning applications for new construction. The ACFO explained that under the Regulatory Reform Order, the Service holds the position of a statutory consultee and as such is limited to comments on access, water supply and vehicle turning. The ACFO also reported that the major flooding incidents had had an impact on performance against the Response standard.

Members asked if there has been an increase in dwelling fires during the Covid-19 pandemic. The ACFO responded that there has been no significant increase in dwellings fires but there has been an increase in fires in the open due to people burning rubbish because of the closure of waste disposal sites.

Members asked if there had been online support for schools to replace the annual Crucial Crew events. The ACFO explained that the Prevention Team has developed educational materials which can be delivered via social media.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the report.

## **11b Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty System) Performance Monitoring April – May 2020**

This report provided an annual summary of information for April – May 2020, regarding the performance and management of the availability of Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty) Systems in Shropshire.

The GM presented this report and brought the following to Members' attention.

- Availability data for June has now been received and is included in the following figures
- Wholetime availability has remained at 100% throughout the reporting period which is a huge achievement during Covid-19
- On Call availability for the same period has been 99.38% which is an increase of 2.66% on the same period last year
- This is pleasing but it is likely that the increased availability has been an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Appendix B to the report shows that Shropshire's overall fire engine availability was the highest on mainland Britain in 2018/19 according to HMICFRS. The only Service to perform better was the Isles of Scilly
- The Group Support Team (GST) have provided 683 hours of support in the reporting period. This compares to 1383 in the same quarter last year and is probably an impact of Covid-19
- 51% of the GST cover provided has been at Prees
- Prees currently have 6 personnel (out of 15). This could drop to 5 in the future but station availability in June was 99.02% which is a fantastic achievement
- Work is being undertaken to support personnel at Prees and innovative recruitment options are being explored
- The On Call Sustainability Review will commence on 1 September

The Committee asked that their congratulations to all crews on the excellent availability be recorded.

Members asked about apprenticeships and any related impact on job opportunities. The GM explained that currently only one fire service is recruiting for On Call apprenticeships and whilst Officers do not feel that this is an appropriate option for Shropshire at present, the situation is being monitored. Apprenticeships are, however, offered in other areas of the Service.

The DCFO added that whilst there are currently no national apprenticeships for On Call Firefighters, there is, as stated by the GM, a pilot scheme running in Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. This pilot currently has low numbers involved and raises some specific challenges including the high burden on existing On Call staff to deliver the apprenticeship; maintenance of response times which means that apprentices need to live in proximity to the station; and the minimum recruitment age of 18 for firefighters.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the report.

## 12 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 paragraph 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

## 13 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

The Committee received Appendix C to report 9 – Corporate Risk Management Summary, which was considered in closed session as it contained exempt information.

The PPCM presented this item and reported that there has been no change to the current risk rating as stated in the document.

**Resolved** that the Committee note exempt Appendix C to report 9.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm

Chair .....

Date .....