

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 6 June 2013 at 2.00 pm**

Members

Councillors Adams, Mrs Bould, Kiernan, and Mellings (Vice-Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer , Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Head of Finance, Planning and Performance Manager, Head of Development, Safety and Risk, Resources Manager, Information and Communications Technology Manager (for item 13b), Assistant Group Commander (South) (for item 15b) and Corporate Services Manager

External Bodies

Mrs Hill (External Audit) for item 7

Mrs Hall (Audit Services, Shropshire Council) for items 1 to 13a

Mrs Pilawski (Audit Services, Shropshire Council) for items 1 to 13a

In the absence of Councillor Dr Jones, Chair of the Committee, Vice-Chair Councillor Mellings acted as Chair.

At the start of the meeting the Chair welcomed internal auditors Mrs Hall and Mrs Pilawski.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Carter, Hurst-Knight and Dr Jones.

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.

No Disclosable Pecuniary Interests were declared.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 7 March 2013.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 7 March 2013, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No public questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Audit and Performance Management Review of Committee Terms of Reference

This report asked Members to review the current Terms of Reference of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, and make recommendations regarding any amendments required to the Fire Authority.

A revised Appendix to the report (the Terms of Reference of the Committee) was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes), setting out further amendments proposed by Internal and External Audit. Mrs Pilawski explained the reasons behind these amendments, which resulted from changes in the professional guidance.

It was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Mrs Bould, and

Resolved that the Committee approve the amendments to its Terms of Reference, as set out in the tabled Appendix, and recommend them to the Fire Authority for approval

6 Review of Member Role Descriptions

This report asked the Audit and Performance Management Committee to review the current Role Descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit and make recommendations regarding any amendments to the Fire Authority.

Members discussed whether the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit should be required to report annually to the Fire Authority. It was agreed that there should be an annual report, as it was useful to have a mechanism to show what had been achieved during the year. The report should, however, be made to the Committee, rather than to the Fire Authority, as the work of the Champion linked in so closely with that of the former. Any matters of significance raised by the Champion would still be taken to the full Authority, where appropriate.

Subject to the above amendment, it was proposed by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Kiernan, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend the proposed amendments to the Fire Authority for approval

Mrs Hill from External Audit arrived at this point. The Chair welcomed her and introduced her to Members.

7 External Audit Matters

7a Audit Plan

Mrs Hill presented the External Auditor's Audit Plan for the year ended 31 March 2013 to the Committee.

The Chair thanked Mrs Hill for producing such a comprehensive document, which provided a useful background for the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee note the External Auditor's Audit Plan for the year ended 31 March 2013

7b Audit Fee Letter 2013/14

Mrs Hill presented the External Audit Fee Letter 2013/14 to the Committee, which set out details of the 2013/14 audit fee for the Authority, along with the scope and timing of External Audit's work and details of their team.

Resolved that the Committee note the External Audit Fee Letter 2013/14

7c Informing the Audit Risk Assessment

This report contributed towards the effective two-way communication between auditors and the Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee, as 'those charged with governance'. The report covered some important areas of the auditor risk assessment where External Audit are required to make inquiries of the Audit and Performance Management Committee under auditing standards.

Mrs Hill explained the purpose of the document and emphasised the importance of communication. She brought the Committee's attention to the responses given by management to External Audit's questions, which had not highlighted any areas of concern.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

The Chair thanked Mrs Hill for attending the meeting and presenting her reports.

Mrs Hill left the meeting at this point.

8 Internal Audit Annual Report 2012/13

This Annual Report provided Members with details of the work undertaken by Internal Audit for the year ended 31 March 2013. It reported on progress against the annual audit plan. It also provided the Head of Audit Service's (Audit Service Manager's) opinion on the internal controls, which in turn contributed to the review of the effectiveness of the systems of internal control.

In presenting the report Mrs Pilawski emphasised the comments made in section 5.7 relating to information and communications technology (ICT) and the limited audit assurance opinions delivered for this area and also for purchasing cards. There were, however, no fundamental recommendations made in any of the audits conducted.

The Chair thanked Mrs Pilawski and her team and the Service officers involved in the 2012/13 audits. He recognised that ICT was a key issue and reminded the Committee that there would be a presentation from the ICT Manager later in the meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer also thanked Internal Audit for their support and direction, particularly in the area of ICT. With the Chair's permission he asked the Head of Finance to provide some further information on the issues relating to purchasing cards.

The Head of Finance advised that the Service had only recently moved from using credit cards to government procurement cards. As a result a new process had been established, aligned with that of Shropshire Council. She had been keen for an audit to be carried out, although the process was not yet embedded, to see whether improvements could be made. The Internal Audit had identified a number of issues and made recommendations, which would now be implemented.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

9 Facing the Future: Findings from the Review of Efficiencies and Operations in Fire and Rescue Authorities in England

In December 2012, the Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, commissioned Sir Ken Knight to undertake a review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England. The terms of reference for the review were to explore the activity of fire and rescue authorities and see what the scope for change might be. The report 'Facing the Future: findings from the review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue services in England' is the culmination of the review.

A copy of the report had previously been emailed to all Members of the Fire Authority.

The Chair advised the Committee that a full report on the Review would be taken to the July meeting of the Fire Authority, when a discussion would take place with all Members.

The Chief Fire Officer then went through the key issues in the Review, citing measures, which had already been adopted by this Authority to increase efficiency and reduce costs.

A discussion took place about some of the proposals within the report, which would not be appropriate for this Authority or would not result in any significant savings. Members and officers agreed that the key issue for this Authority was sparsity and the inequity of the grant funding mechanism.

Councillor Adams felt that Daniel Kawczynski MP should be approached to lobby the Chancellor in an attempt to obtain some recognition of the specific financial pressures facing the Fire Authority. The Committee agreed with this suggestion and the Chief Fire Officer undertook to write to the MP.

Resolved that the Committee note the update given

10 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2012/13

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2012/13.

Resolved that the Committee note:

- a) The progress made against each of the improvements contained in the AGS Improvement Plan 2012/13; and
- b) The amendment to one work stream, as detailed in section 5 of, and the appendix to, the report.

11 Government Guidance Documents Statement of Assurance and Intervention Protocol

This report brought to the attention of Members guidance in respect of Annual Statements of Assurance and the revised Intervention Protocol.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

12 Coroner's Rule 43 Letter, Shirley Towers, Hampshire

This report set out the recommendations made in the Coroner's Rule 43 Letter relating to a fire at Shirley Towers, Hampshire.

The Head of Development, Safety and Risk reported that the majority of the recommendations made in the Letter had already been implemented by the Service and recommendation 5a was in hand. The Service would not be implementing 5b, as the cylinders used by this Service were of a different type and a risk assessment had identified that there was no need for any modification.

Hampshire had now issued its final report on the incident, together with a DVD. This set out a training package, which this Service had now copied and issued to all stations.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

13 Officer Presentations

As requested at the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 7 March 2013, the Committee received the following presentations from officers.

13a Information Technology (IT) Infrastructure Investment

The Committee received a presentation from the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Manager, detailing the investment made in the Service's IT infrastructure and the resulting improvements.

Before giving her presentation, the ICT Manager circulated a hand out of her slides, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

In response to a question from the Chair, the ICT Manager advised that a project plan had been produced for the outstanding recommendations from the ICT audit to ensure that they were implemented in a timely manner.

The Chair thanked the ICT Manager for her informative presentation and commented that the Service's ICT had progressed significantly over the last few years.

Resolved that the Committee note the presentation

Mrs Hall and Mrs Pilawski left the meeting at this point.

13b Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Committee received a presentation from the Resources Manager, providing details of the PPE work stream, including the cost of implementation and the resulting benefits. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to the signed minutes.

After the presentation the Chair asked what key lessons had been learned in the procurement process. The Resources Manager responded that the process had highlighted vested interests in the market and officers' naiveté about what the reaction would be from those with such interests.

The Chair thanked the Resources Manager for his presentation, which had been very interesting.

Resolved that the Committee note the presentation

14 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2010/11 to 2012/13

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2012/13, with comparisons to 2010/11 and 2011/12.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer drew the Committee's attention to Figure 1 in the report, which indicated that both complaints and compliments had reduced year on year. The figures relating to compliments were, however, possibly misleading, as those received either at stations or via social media were not always captured.

He advised that complaints relating to poor driving behaviour was a key area, which the Service was actively addressing.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

15 Performance

15a Public Value Performance Measures 2012/13

This report presented a summary of the Service's year-end performance for the period April 2012 to March 2013, as recorded against the Public Value performance measures set out in 2012/13 Service Plan.

At the request of the Chair, for the benefit of the Committee, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer described the background to the measures: how they were set initially and then year on year, and how they were measured. This exercise was a balance between the risks faced by the Service and the resources available to mitigate those risks.

Only one target had not been achieved, namely 1b - The first fire engine will arrive with a minimum competent crew on 100% of occasions. This was because a small number of firefighters had not attained the fitness standard or they were out of time for their medical. Officers were currently working with Occupational Health and the fitness assessor to address these issues.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer also highlighted the fact that over a five-year period there had been a rising trend in the number of injuries sustained. This rise corresponded with an increase in training activity over the same period, which explained the escalation. Most of the injuries were, however, of a minor nature.

Resolved that the Committee note the report's contents regarding year-end performance for 2012/13

15b Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring January to March 2013

This report provided information regarding the ongoing performance and management of the Retained Duty System (RDS) in Shropshire.

The Assistant Group Commander (South) presented the report on behalf of the Group Commander Shropshire Rural Performance Group.

Councillor Mrs Bould left the meeting at this point (4.20 pm).

The Assistant Commander reported that the next recruit course would take place on 17 June with a full complement of ten students, including one from Much Wenlock. He then outlined the various measures taken to recruit at Much Wenlock.

The Chair thanked him for presenting the report, commenting that it was good to see the progress being made in recruitment.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....