

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 14 June 2012 at 3.00 pm**

Members

Councillors Adams, Carter, Hurst-Knight, Kiernan, Mellings (Vice-Chair) and Miss Reynolds

Officers

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Performance and Operations) (from 3.30 pm), Head of Finance, Treasurer, Planning and Performance Manager, Group Manger Prevention (from 3.30 pm), Shropshire Rural Performance Group Commander (from 3.30 pm) and Executive Support Officer

External Bodies

Mr Patterson (Audit Commission) (from 3.25 pm)
Mrs Mayne (Audit Commission)
Mrs Pilawski (Audit Services, Shropshire Council)
Mr Chatterton (Audit Services, Shropshire Council)

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

Before the business on the agenda was considered, Councillor Mellings welcomed a new Member to the Fire Authority, Councillor Gilly Reynolds, who had taken the place of Councillor Leon Murray as a result of re-organisation within Telford & Wrekin Council. Councillor Mellings asked that recognition of Councillor Murray's contribution to the Authority be noted and expressed regret at his departure.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Dr Jones (Chair), the Chief Fire Officer and the Corporate Services Manager. Mr Patterson and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Performance and Operations) had advised that they may arrive late and subsequently arrived at 3.25 pm and 3.30 pm respectively.

2 Declarations of Interest

CLlr Carter declared a personal interest relating to agenda item 11c 'Operational Performance Assessment', in that he is a National Peer Councillor for the Local Government Association.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 1 March 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 1 March 2011, 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 Committee, attached as an appendix to the report and make recommendations regarding any amendments required to the Fire Authority.

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

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority approve the minor amendments as per the annotations in the appendix and appoint Councillor Reynolds to the vacant Labour seat on the Committee

6 Review of Member Role Descriptions

This report asked the 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.

It was proposed by Councillor Reynolds, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority approve the minor amendment to the Role Description for the Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit, as per the annotation in Appendix C

7 External Audit Matters

7a External Audit Statement of Audit Progress

Mrs Mayne, from the Audit Commission, presented the External Audit Statement of Audit Progress report and advised that post Statement testing would commence on 18 June. She reported that there were no issues with meeting the timetable of work and that the opinion forms would be ready for the September meeting of the Committee.

Referring to paragraph 3 on page 2, she commented that far more work had been completed during the interim audit than in previous years and conveyed her gratitude to the Service's Finance team. The Value for Money work is done, with no issues to date or anticipated.

Councillor Hurst-Knight enquired whether there was a published scale of fees for National Fraud Initiative work. The Treasurer advised that this was available on the Audit Commission website but that the cost for the Authority would remain at the 2010/11 amount of £1,000 plus VAT.

Councillor Kiernan asked whether the greater amount of work covered during the interim audit could be attributed to increased resources in the Finance team, which had been previously understaffed. Mrs Mayne replied that she had met with the Head of Finance and they had agreed on a more streamlined process. The Head of Finance added that more staff had been involved in the production of the Statement and in the additional work of previous months.

With respect to paragraph 17, page 5, the Head of Finance reported that the Authority participated in the National Fraud Initiative, as all local authorities are required to under The Localism Act. However, it was often another authority, which took the lead on any investigation, although there was rarely anything pertaining to Authority employees to report.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer assured Members that operational risk information coming from the Department of Communities and Local Government was acted upon and would be built into the Service's operational approach. He added that he also anticipated guidance arising from the investigation into the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service firefighter deaths at Atherstone on Stour.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

7b Communication with the Auditor

Mrs Mayne presented this report, referring Members to its purpose, as defined within the Introduction on page 2. She advised that the report's inclusion on the Committee's agenda was intended to provide Members with the opportunity for comment or to support the report in its current form.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

8 Internal Audit 2011/12 Summary Audit Report

Mrs Pilawski, from Audit Services Shropshire Council, presented the annual Summary Audit Report and the year-end opinion on internal controls.

She asked Members to note that the beginning of paragraph 1.3 should read "**Four** good and three reasonable assurances were made" and not "Five good etc". She also drew Members' attention to the fact that no Fundamental Recommendations had been made and that, based on management responses, the financial systems and risk management processes were sound.

Mrs Pilawski had not drilled down further from the percentages given in the table of Customer Feedback Survey Forms performance at paragraph 5.23, because of the high percentage of 'excellent' and 'good' responses. She stated that nothing of significance underlying these figures was known, with which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer concurred.

Councillor Mellings referred to the significant issue of the ICT network failure in 2011 but stated that the Committee had every confidence in what was being delivered now.

Councillor Mellings thanked Mrs Pilawski and her team for their efforts, while recognising the significant contribution made by the Authority.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

Mr Patterson joined the meeting at this point (3.25 pm).

Councillor Mellings welcomed Mr Patterson.

9 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2011/12

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2011/12.

The Planning and Performance Manager presented the report in the absence of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations), who was detained in another meeting. He reported that 5 of the 7 areas in the 2011/12 Improvement Plan were completed.

Risk management and business continuity planning was partially completed with the Planning and Performance Manager having been appointed into the corporate risk management role and Risk Management Group members programmed to receive additional training.

He acknowledged that the implementation of a Resources Asset Management System had been outstanding for some time but that it was now up and running for Information and Communications Technology and operational equipment. The intention was to test thoroughly those 2 elements, before expanding the System across all areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Adams, the Planning and Performance Manager assured him that risk management training would be completed by September 2012.

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight, seconded by Councillor Kiernan and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress made against each of the improvements contained in the AGS Improvement Plan 2011/12; and
- b) Agree to receive the AGS Improvement Plan 2012/13 at its September meeting

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) joined the meeting at 3.30 pm, closely followed by the Shropshire Rural Performance Group Commander and the Group Manager Prevention.

10 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2009/10 to 2011/12

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2011/12, with comparisons to 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate, Performance and Operations) highlighted the continuing decline in complaints received. He reported that only 6 of the 23 complaints recorded in 2011/12 had been fully upheld, with 3 partially upheld.

Councillor Mellings commented that Members could take assurance from the low numbers of complaints and that no complainant had requested further action or appealed to the Ombudsman.

Councillor Adams asked whether the complaints concerning the driving style of Service personnel originated from 'blue light' driving or Retained Duty System (RDS) staff responding to their alerters. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer detailed the differing concerns, including the fire appliances responding to incidents and the public's perception of the danger and need to take evasive action, the use of mobile phones and Service vehicles wrongly parked. He specifically referred to one complaint from the Ambulance Service concerning an appliance being driven on blue lights, which had been upheld and the driver disciplined.

Councillor Miss Reynolds expressed concern that there had been a reduction in compliments received. However, many compliments are sent direct to the stations, with only those addressed to the Chief Fire Officer being available for documenting.

Councillor Carter had concerns that complaints relating to 'failure to deal correctly with an incident / inspection' had increased over the last 3 years, contrary to the trend in the other categories. The Assistant Chief Officer assured him that these complaints had been rigorously addressed and, where appropriate, individuals disciplined.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

11 Performance

11a Public Value Performance Measures 2011/12

This report presented a summary of the Service's year-end performance for the period April 2011 to March 2012, as recorded against the Public Value performance measures set out in 2011/12 Service Plan.

Councillor Mellings referred to the paper 'Public Value Performance Targets 2012/13' of the Strategy and Resources Committee, held on 15 March 2012, and the accompanying minutes, which he had asked to be circulated to the Committee to inform them of the rationale behind how these performance measures were set.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer briefed the Committee on the history of extensive Government performance indicators, removed by the current Administration, which had allowed the Service to establish its own specific, pertinent performance measures. This paper covered the first year's complete reporting against these indicators: 4 Public Value measures had exceeded their target and 4 had failed, albeit generally by a negligible margin.

The following measures had not met target:

1b 'The first fire engine will arrive with a minimum competent crew of 4 staff on 100% of occasions' – failed by 0.6%. The only way to ensure 100% performance would be to double the number of RDS personnel employed.

2a 'Accidental fires will be maintained to not more than 616 fires during 2011/12' – 642 accidental fires occurred and, tragically, 7 fire deaths, making this the worst year on record for the Service. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the Service is determined that there will be no repetition of these and referred to initiatives, which had been put in place, including partnership working with local Primary Care Trusts; an increase in home fire safety visits; and the issuing of 1,000 smoke alarms to vulnerable groups championed by the Shropshire Star newspaper.

2b 'Fire crimes will be maintained to not more than 1,114 fires during 2011/12' – 1,205 occurred in 2011/12

3b 'Injuries sustained to staff through firefighting will be maintained to not more than 25 injuries during 2011/12' – 40 injuries sustained in 2011/12

Councillor Carter expressed his concerns at the degree to which the latter measure had failed given that the Service would hope to be able to exert more control over in-house outcomes. He stated that the Authority would be looking closely at performance against this measure.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer assured the Committee that the organisation focussed very closely on the reduction of risk. However, risk could never be eliminated when fighting fires on someone else's property and with others' risk assessments. He referred to the Service's imminent improvements to breathing apparatus equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE). This figure also includes injuries sustained during training, where it can be difficult to balance achieving realism against risk. Many injuries are minor, with individuals not requiring attendance at hospital. The Service's Health and Safety Officer is also promoting the importance of reporting 'Near Misses'.

Councillor Carter had attended a recent Member development session at the Service's Training Centre and expressed his appreciation of what was a beneficial experience and his disappointment that more Members had not attended.

He had especially noted the difference in the weight of the current and new PPE and commented that he welcomed the continuing improvements being implemented to protect Service personnel.

Councillor Mellings acknowledged the work that had gone into the report.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

11b Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring January to March 2012

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

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced Mark Donnelly, newly in post as Shropshire Rural Performance Group Commander. The latter explained that the report was in the process of being revamped to make it briefer and simpler, with the inclusion of fewer graphs, to ease understanding.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that the overall performance was down 0.6% from last year. This was due to the usual issues of recruitment and successful selection, which the Group Commander was addressing in an attempt to increase numbers.

The Group Commander reported that very few stations have problems and that it is the same 4 stations, which require RDS Officers' support. The results of a FINDS¹ request had identified the high level of performance in this Service compared to others but he assured Members that this was not seen to negate the need to address the shortfall.

Councillor Adams drew attention to the low number of trainees recorded for 2012 on page 7 of the report. The Group Commander assured him that a high profile recruitment campaign targeting specific stations had begun, with training courses pending.

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that stations with recruitment issues were generally those where there was no major industry nearby. The Group Commander replied that it was often a few key staff, who were responsible for keeping an appliance on the run.

Councillor Hurst-Knight cited the importance of employers recognising the transferrable skills that RDS personnel acquired. The Group Commander confirmed that this benefit was communicated to employers.

Councillor Carter asked whether receipt of an RDS allowance and its adverse affects on the benefits of the unemployed was still a problem. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer replied that it was not because the RDS allowance, on a sliding scale of payments, was exempt from benefit calculations.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

¹ FINDS is a secure UK fire service email network.

11c Operational Performance Assessment

This report presented a summary overview of the operational performance assessment process and the Government's requirement to provide assurance in respect of operational matters.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer tabled a Government guidance leaflet (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) on the process, which, he explained should be undertaken once every 3 years with an expectation that the findings are published. Use of the suggested toolkit is voluntary, however no alternative mechanism is known.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred Members to paragraph 5.1, outlining that the Service will approach the Operational Assessment in partnership with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. It is intended to implement this by the end of October 2012 and link outcomes to budgetary preparations. A copy of the findings will be circulated to Members.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

11d Business Fire Safety Presentation

The Group Manager Prevention gave a presentation on the Service's Business Fire Safety (BFS) Department (a copy of the presentation slides are attached to the signed minutes).

The Treasurer asked whether the information was shared with the Area Directors of Shropshire Council, who would be useful points of contact. The Treasurer was particularly keen that the figures relating to care home incidents were communicated. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer responded that the BFS Department had close links with both constituent authorities but acknowledged the potential benefits of sharing information at a senior level.

Councillor Mellings thanked the Group Manager Prevention for providing Members with a greater understanding of the issues and expressed Members' appreciation for the positive work of the Department. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer credited the Group Manager Prevention for an excellent presentation.

Councillor Mellings thanked Members and officers and particularly for agreeing to bring the meeting forward an hour.

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....