

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 7 September 2006 at 5.00 pm**

Present: Councillors Lt Col Allen, Hurst-Knight, Mellings and Tandy

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Hurst-Knight:

That Councillor Allen be elected Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Allen was duly elected Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Hurst-Knight:

That Councillor Tandy be appointed Vice-Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Tandy was duly appointed Vice-Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Davies, Lloyd and Picken.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 15 June 2006.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 15 June 2006, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.*



6 Public Questions

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

7 Audit for the Year Ended 31 March 2006 and Letter of Representation

The Chair welcomed Ms Diane Hughes, Audit Manager Shropshire, to the meeting. Ms Hughes presented the Audit Commission's report on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2006. The Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

The Governance Report is very positive. No amendments were needed to the accounts and both the Audit Commission and the Finance Department felt that the audit had gone very smoothly. Ms Hughes clarified that the report only covered Value for Money and Use of Resources up to 31 March 2006. The one area for concern is the Information Technology (IT) Strategy. This will be picked up in the future but it would be beneficial, if the work were agreed and developed within the next couple of months.

Ms Hughes outlined the upcoming Performance Framework assessment. This will be made up of the Service, Use of Resources and Direction of Travel Assessments. The Service Assessment, which will focus on operational service delivery work, is undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and will be carried out over two weeks, starting from 16 October 2006. A report will be published on this in February 2007. The Use of Resources will look at value for money, internal controls and financial functions and will be linked with the Direction of Travel assessment. This will be carried out in November/December 2006 and reported on in March 2007.

The Chief Fire Officer pointed out that this Fire Authority is in the top quartile for five of the seven indicators, which the Audit Commission has selected to assess the outcome of services delivered by Fire and Rescue Authorities. Evidence gathering for the Value for Money assessment has started and the Audit Commission's comparison tool has been utilised. A report on the comparison tool will be submitted to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 21 September 2006. A twelve-page self-assessment for the Direction of Travel needs to be submitted to the DCLG by 16 October 2006. It was agreed that this document would be circulated to Committee Members by e-mail prior to its submission. The Committee Chair and the Chief Fire Officer will also meet to discuss the document before it is submitted.

The Chair asked if there were any issues other than the IT Strategy, which needed to be addressed. Ms Hughes confirmed that, apart from some minor issues, there were no other major concerns. The Chair also asked for clarification of the term 'moderation', which had been mentioned in relation to forthcoming assessments. Ms Hughes explained that there is a moderation panel, which examines the work of the assessors to ensure that their marking is fair.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked how the Fire Authority was compared with others, i.e. whether sparsity is taken into account. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the comparison tool provided a high-level overview of the 49 fire authorities but, once the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy information was updated, a comparison based on sparsity could be carried out. Councillor Hurst-Knight confirmed that the County Council has raised the issue of sparsity with a visiting Government Minister.



Ms Hughes confirmed that the Letter of Representation for the year ended 31 March 2006 could be signed and submitted to the Audit Commission after the meeting. It was agreed that the Chair (in accordance with the authority delegated to him by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 19 July 2006), Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer would sign the letter at the end of the meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked the Finance Department for their hard work on the audit. Ms Hughes highlighted the closing paragraph of the report, which thanked the Fire Authority for its assistance and co-operation. Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation of the Finance Department's work.

Resolved: *that the Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report be noted.*

8 Performance Plan 2006 – 08 Direction of Travel Statements Progress Update

This report informed Members of progress to date against the Direction of Travel Statement contained within the 2006 – 08 Performance Plan.

The Chief Fire Officer presented the report and explained that Appendix B provided details on the progress made towards implementing the Fire Authority's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan. The report highlighted which of the objectives have been fully completed and which were ongoing and, therefore, incorporated into Departmental Business Plans, through which they could then be monitored.

Councillor Tandy commented that the report did not show the improvements or how close the improvements were to being achieved. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this information could be provided but it would create an extensive report. It was also explained that the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), which would be reported on at Item 9, provide more detailed information on how targets are being met. Performance information is also available on the website and is updated quarterly.

Councillor Mellings asked if local indicators would be of any use in providing more detailed information. The Statistics Officer explained that an appendix on local indicators had been added to the BVPI report. This information is also reported to the Service's Policy Group on a monthly basis.

The Committee agreed that they would like to receive a quarterly summary of information on the number of visits carried out and smoke alarms installed. They also agreed that this should link to, and add value to, any other information provided.

Although Members discussed the reporting requirements relating to the CPA Improvement Plan, they did not reach a decision. Officers will, therefore, submit a further report to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: *that Members note the contents of the report in respect of progress against the Direction of Travel Statements.*



9 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April 2006 to June 2006

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2006 to 30 June 2006.

The Chief Fire Officer gave a commentary on each of the indicators, included in Appendix B, and answered questions from Members. Below is a brief summary of the more significant points raised.

- 142(ii) This indicator showed a bad start to the year, the reasons for which were not clear. It would appear, however, that the situation is similar for other members of the family group.
- 143(i) These figures included recent deaths, some of which have not yet been before the Coroner.
- 143(ii) These figures have changed, as several children have now been removed from them, following confirmation of the extent of their injuries.
- 144 This indicator is currently just below target. This will improve after proper verification of the information submitted. An education programme is underway to ensure that information about dwelling fires is recorded correctly.
- 149(i) The improvement in this indicator is the result of previous investment to tackle the problems of false alarms.
- 206(ii) This indicator is currently not on target due to a bad start to the year. The Government has, however, set a ten-year target of a 10% reduction by 2010. Shropshire has already achieved a reduction of well over 40%.
- 206(iii) This indicator includes incidents, such as bin and grass fires. It is likely that this indicator will rise due to the high temperatures experienced during July, which have resulted in a massive increase in such incidents.
- 207 There has been some difficulty with the definitions for this indicator, however these have now been clarified and numbers should drop.
- 208 This indicator is currently on target. It seems strange to record the number of people, who escaped unharmed without assistance, but this shows the impact of smoke alarms, which provide early warnings.

The table on Local Standards shows whether attendance targets for incidents are being met. The targets have been set and are being worked on. They will also be addressed through Integrated Risk Management Planning.

- 12(i) & (ii) The figures for both these indicators are down for this year.
- 16a (i) & (ii) The cultural audit, which will be carried out at the end of 2006, may have an effect on these indicators.
- 210 There has been a focus on recruiting more female firefighters to both retained and wholetime positions.



Appendix C concerns the BVPIs, which the DCLG no longer requests but which are still being monitored by the Service. These indicators are currently all at 90% or above.

Appendix D shows the availability of the Service's retained and wholetime firefighters. Wholetime availability has improved on last year but is currently dropping. This should improve, however, due to recruitment and transfers into the Service.

Retained availability should show an improvement after August due to the Retained Support Officers commencing their duties. This improvement should also be reflected in the individual retained stations.

The Committee agreed the Chief Fire Officer's recommendation that those stations that have an availability of over 95% should be excluded from future reports and only those stations, which have a problem, will be reported on. A summary of Retained Support Officer improvements will also be included in the report.

Appendix E provided information on accidents on duty, as requested by Members at the last meeting of the Committee. Members questioned the main cause of accidents on operational duties. The Chief Fire Officer undertook to bring further details of the accidents to the next meeting and to invite the Health and Safety Officer to attend to provide background information.

Appendix F shows that a high percentage of accidental dwelling fires were out when firefighters arrived. This reflects the success of education campaigns.

Appendix G provides a summary of whether BVPIs will be met or not. Councillor Mellings asked that this appendix be moved to the front of the report, as it is a very useful summary. The meeting agreed this request and that Appendix A no longer be included in the report, as it is a duplication of information.

Having considered the information provided and given comments for amendments to future reports to aid the regular assessment of performance, Members

Resolved: *that the report content in respect of performance be noted.*

10 Quality of Service Survey after the Incident 2005/06

This report presented the above draft survey recently carried out by Opinion Research Services Ltd. on behalf of the Service and outlined the major results and proposed method for taking forward recommendations for further improvement.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service is extremely pleased with the findings of this survey. There is only one area for improvement, which is information and advice. The results of the survey will be built into the Integrated Risk Management Planning process. The Chief Fire Officer also explained that this is a draft report and that a more detailed report will be received, which will enable those areas, where respondents were not satisfied, to be investigated further by the Service.



Resolved: *that Members agree that the Chief Fire Officer*

- a) *Takes the findings of the report, together with detailed recommendations for action, through the Service's Policy Group and produces a detailed report to the next meeting of the Fire Authority; and*
- b) *Reviews the resource requirements of the process and recommends a timeframe for regular surveys of this type.*

11 Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 – Service Assessment

This report asked Members to note that officers have completed and submitted the required Operational Assurance Self Assessment sought by the Audit Commission. The Self Assessment forms one element of the recently introduced Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07.

In support of this report, a summary of scores for the Key Lines of Enquiry was tabled to the meeting (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The summary, which follows a peer review, gives an overall score of four. Councillor Mellings asked why Audit and Review had a score of only two. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this was because evidence, which is needed to give a score of four, could not be provided to show the work being done in this area. The Head of Performance and Risk explained that areas, which score four, could be viewed as 'Best Practice'.

The Programme Support Officer said that some Members may be invited to be interviewed as part of the service assessment review.

Resolved: *that Members note the contents of the report.*

12 Policy for Reserves, Provisions and Balances

This report sought Members' views on the Fire Authority's policy on reserves, provisions and balances, in order to advise the service and financial planning process for 2007/08 to 2009/10.

Members agreed, in general, that current policies are still appropriate subject to the following:

- A full re-appraisal of the risks covered by the general reserve;
- Monitoring of other reserves and provisions;
- The capital reserve being closely linked to outcome of the review of the capital programme, particularly in view of the relatively large element of borrowing not supported by Government grant, and of the potentially significant cost of managing relocation from St Michael's Street in future years; and
- Reviewing the total level of funds held and the opportunity costs for the Fire Authority and Council Tax payer of holding these sums.

Resolved: *that the Committee report its views to the Fire Authority in order that they are considered during the planning process for the next three years.*



13 Internal Audit 2005/06 Follow-Up Issues

This report sets out the actions taken by officers on the outstanding issues in the Internal Auditor's Summary Audit Report of their work last year.

Resolved: *that Members note the actions taken to address the issues highlighted by Internal Audit, as set out in the appendix to this report.*

14 Internal and External Audits: Data, Information Technology and Communications

This report requested Members to note the developments that have taken place in reinforcing the Service's policies and procedures to secure further improvements in the management of data, information technology and communications.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Brigade Order 16 on Data, Information Technology and Communications had been rewritten and was currently going through consultation. The Chief Fire Officer undertook to bring an update on progress to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the report*

15 Progress against the Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan 2006/07

This report informed Members of the progress being made against the Fire Authority's Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan 2006/07.

Councillor Mellings asked if the actions listed in Item 2.1 of the appendix were in hand. The Head of Performance and Risk confirmed that they were. Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if Members were supposed to receive the Brigade's weekly newsletter. The Chief Fire Officer explained that they currently did not but it will be available through the website in future.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the report.*

At the end of the meeting Councillor Allen congratulated Officers on the presentation of information, which he felt was very clear and concise.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....

