

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 26 July 2007 at 5.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen (Vice-Chair), Hurst-Knight, Mason and Mellings

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Mason

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

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

1a Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Mason

That Councillor Lt Col Allen be appointed Vice-Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

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

Councillor Lt Col Allen, as Vice-Chair of the Committee, chaired the meeting, as Councillor Dr Jones, the Chair of the Committee, was not present.

1b Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Davies, Dr Drummond and Dr Jones.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



3 Minutes

Members received the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 March 2007.

Resolved that the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 March 2007, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Public Questions

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

5 Summary Audit Report

At its meeting on 29 March 2007, the Committee considered progress on the 2006/07 Audit. A number of programmes were, at that stage, still in progress. Audit work has now been finalised with the completion of work on "Fire Grant and Other Statistics, Purchasing and Procurement, Computer Services and Corporate Governance / Review of SIC". In addition, work reviewing previous years' recommendations has also been finalised.

The Fire Authority's Internal Auditor has produced the Annual Summary Audit Report, which covers all of the work carried out in the year. Mr Tart, Head of Audit and Consultancy Services at Shropshire County Council, and Ms Chapman, Senior Auditor (Systems), presented this report to the meeting.

Mr Tart explained that, with effect from April 2007, the Statement on Internal Control and Code of Corporate Governance will be incorporated into an Annual Governance Statement. Mr Tart only received the paperwork regarding this a couple of weeks ago. He is currently reviewing it and will report his findings to the Treasurer.

Mr Tart thanked the Fire and Rescue Service's staff for their support during the audit and gave particular thanks to the Treasurer and the Finance team for their work. Mr Tart explained that the audit had mainly found housekeeping issues and was "a good year". The next round of audits will start in September 2007.

The Chair thanked Mr Tart and Ms Chapman for their report.

Mr Tart also gave a short presentation on the processes involved in setting the internal audit programme (a copy of the presentation slides is attached to the signed minutes). This gave Members the opportunity to discuss the matters they will need to consider later in the year, when the 2008/09 to 2011/12 Programme comes to the Committee.



The Chief Fire Officer asked if the recent decision about unitary status would affect the auditors' ability to complete the audit. Mr Tart confirmed that the intention is that all the work will still be delivered but that some aspects of the work may need to be realigned to enable this to happen.

The Treasurer reported that the last four-year plan had been initially drawn up by the Treasurer working with the Head of Audit. The intention this year was for a report on the forthcoming four-year plan to be brought before the Committee at its November meeting for Members' approval. This would also allow Members to take issues, such as budget, into consideration and also the wider remit of auditing non-financial issues.

The Chair thanked Mr Tart for his presentation, which Members had found informative and clear.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the report and the presentation.

6 Internal Audit 2006/07 Miscellaneous / Estates Management

This report set out the detailed outcome of the audit undertaken on miscellaneous and estates management during 2006/07.

Councillor Allen asked if there was a point at which the cost of auditing becomes greater than the figures involved in the audit. The Treasurer confirmed that this is the case. As the Fire Authority spends approximately £12,000 per annum on internal audit a balanced approach is needed. The planning process outlined in Mr Tart's presentation enables these judgements to be made.

Councillor Mason asked how 'low-value' assets are defined. The Treasurer explained that officers decide what a 'low-value' item is based on how much it would cost to replace and what the risk of it being removed is.

Resolved that the Committee note the outcome of the audit, and approve the actions being taken by officers to address the recommendations made by the Fire Authority's internal auditors.

7 Local Government Act 19721

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 22, 23 and 24 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, by virtue of paragraphs 1 and 2 and of confidential information.

8 Miscellaneous / Estates Management Audit 2006/07

This report was for Members' information and provided full details of the internal auditor's recommendations, the officers designated to deal with the



various recommendations and whether action is complete or the anticipated date by which it is hoped that it will be.

Resolved that the Committee notes the schedule of recommendations, attached as an appendix to the report, and progress on implementation.

9 Confidential Minutes

Members received the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 March 2007.

Resolved that the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 March 2007, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

At this point the meeting reverted to open session.

10 Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan 2007/08

This report presented the new 'Statement on Internal Control' (SIC) Improvement Plan 2007/08, formally approved by the Fire Authority on 13 June 2007, for monitoring by the Committee.

The Chair asked for a definition of the term 'stakeholder'. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that a stakeholder may, in general terms, be defined as any individual or group that can effect the business transactions of an organisation, or any individual or group that are affected by the business transactions of an organisation.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked for an explanation of 'Rank to Role'. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this was part of the modernisation process. It was judged that 13 ranks were too many and they were, therefore, rationalised to six roles. One effect of this is that a manager no longer needs to come up through the ranks and may join as a direct entrant.

Resolved that Members

- a) Note the contents of the Fire Authority's SIC Improvement Plan 2006/07; and
- b) Note that the Committee will receive regular progress reports on the SIC Improvement Plan.

11 Performance Assessment – 14 Key Performance Indicators

This report informed Members of predicted performance assessment scores based on the current performance of the 14 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

A revised appendix to the report was tabled to the meeting (a copy is attached to the signed minutes).



It was confirmed that Communities and Local Government (CLG) have reduced the indicators from 14 to 10. Officers indicated that they are confident that the Service will maintain its predicted score of 4.

The Information Officer gave a brief commentary on each of the KPIs and the Service's performance against them for 2006/07. The following were of particular note:

KPI - F2 This indicator is only just in mid-table and may go to upper-table.

KPI – F3 There is an improvement on this indicator. The deaths in Newport have been confirmed but Shropshire is still in the upper table with two deaths per year. The Chief Fire Officer warned that one property fire with multiple deaths could seriously affect performance on this indicator.

KPI – F8 This indicator was previously measured in two parts. These have now been combined to form an overall measurement of performance. The performance for F8a is upper table and for F8b is lower table, however the amalgamation of the two parts means that the overall performance is mid table.

KPI – F9 This indicator was previously measured in two parts. These have now been combined to form an overall measurement of performance. The performance against F9a does appear to be improving but there is a difference of opinion between the Audit Commission and CLG as to whether a high or low score indicates better performance.

The Information Officer then gave a brief commentary on each of the KPIs and the Service's performance against them, so far, in 2007/08. The following were of particular note:

KPI – F8 For F8a, Shropshire are currently 10 performance improvement points above the rest of the league table. There has also been an improvement in performance against F8b, which is due to improved working practices.

The Chair thanked the Information Officer for her work and stated that he found the reported information to be very encouraging.

Councillor Mellings commented that the performance against KPI F13c appeared to have gone up, which equates to a reduction in performance. He asked for an explanation of this. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service only attends around 16% of all fires and that very often the presence of smoke detectors alerts occupiers to a fire early and, as such, the Service is not called. He agreed that performance against this indicator should be showing improvement due to the large number (12,000+) of smoke detectors fitted in rural Shropshire during 2006/07, and that future performance would be monitored closely.



Resolved that Members

- a) Note the report content; and
- b) Monitor action plans necessary for failing or high risk indicators.

12 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April 2006 to March 2007

This report informed Members of the Service's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

The Information Officer talked Members through each of the indicators in the summary table in Appendix A and highlighted those indicators for which failure was likely in the full year 2006/07. A brief summary of the more significant points raised is given below.

- 146(i) There is a difference of opinion between the Audit Commission and CLG as to whether a high or low score indicates better performance for this indicator.
- 149 Parts (ii) and (iii) of this indicator have been removed from the suite of KPIs.
- 206(ii) Performance, for the year, against this indicator has been affected by incidents during June and July 2006, however all fire and rescue services have had the same problem.
- 11c The performance against this corporate health indicator is currently not being recorded. Recording will start once ResourceLink is in place. The Chair asked if it was realistic to expect honesty from staff. Officers are aware that not all staff will declare information about this matter.
- 12 Performance against both parts of this indicator has been affected by long-term sickness, however this sickness is not due to injuries sustained whilst on duty.
- 17a The Equality and Diversity Officer is addressing the issue of recruitment from ethnic minorities.
- 210 This indicator would have been achieved with the recruitment of one more female firefighter.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the malicious fires were confined to specific areas or were spread across the County. If they are in specific areas, then local Safety Partnerships do a lot of work on issues such as this. The Chief Fire Officer reported that better targeting and prevention has been established to tackle this issue and that work is about to start on CADDIE (crime and disorder information sharing), which Telford & Wrekin are also using.



The Information Officer then talked through performance to date for 2007/08 for each of the BVPIs. A brief summary of the more significant points raised is given below.

- 144 The procedures for the correct recording of data for this indicator have been established.
- 206(iii) The targets for this indicator are currently under debate, as there has been a change in the recording code.
- 209 Councillor Mason asked what targets had been set for the installation of smoke alarms. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the long term aim is for every household to have smoke alarms but currently the installation targets are 5000 – 6000 per year for wholetime watches and 12,000 per year for Retained crews, i.e. approximately 20,000 per year. It is also important that the rural areas of the County are not neglected.

The biggest problem encountered is in those households where access cannot be gained. Councillor Mason asked if officers are trained to deal with 'no entries'. The Chief Fire Officer explained that in the Telford and Shrewsbury areas, each watch has been assigned an area. The watch then works within the area and establishes a relationship with the Community Support Officer, who can help with situations like this. Ethnic minority advocates are also used to gain access to those households where language and culture is an issue.

Appendix D shows data relating to the number of accidents on duty and any related sickness absence. The Information Officer reported that there is a downward trend in accidents, particularly in those sustained during training, which is always a high risk area. There has been an increase in the number of accidents reported, particularly under RIDDOR, which is due to the education work undertaken by the Health and Safety Officer.

Appendix E details the number of accidental dwelling fires, which were out on arrival. For 2006/07, 60% of accidental dwelling fires attended were out on arrival. This figure can be attributed to the success of smoke alarm installation.

Councillor Mellings asked how effective work undertaken through the Road Safety Strategy had been. It was agreed that statistics related to this would be brought to the next meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, where a decision would be made about including this information in the BVPI report on a regular basis.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Notes the report content in respect of performance; and
- b) Having considered the information provided, make no amendments to future reports to aid the regular assessment of performance.



13 Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring

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

The Retained Project Manager provided an update on some of the information contained in the report.

- **Recruitment**
There are now 8 people on the September course. Some applicants, who do not pass the medical, are being reassessed and 10 potential recruits are attending a taster evening on Tuesday, 31 July.

Councillor Mason asked where recruit training is carried out. The Retained Project Manager explained that training is initially done at Telford. The recruits then spend some time on the stations and return to Telford to complete the course.
- **Retention**
The Retained Project Manager explained that retention can be affected by issues such as employment. There have been 4 retained leavers so far in 2007/08.
- **Appliance Availability**
The Retained Project Manager explained that not all fire and rescue services measure the availability of their retained appliances, however it has been found to be a good motivator for retained staff in Shropshire.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked about Much Wenlock, which had had availability problems. The Retained Project Manager confirmed that Much Wenlock had had problems, which were mainly due to a lack of employment in the area but that the situation had improved recently.

Councillor Allen asked about the situation regarding priority housing. The Chief Fire Officer explained that information and help had been offered to employees but that there had not been much uptake.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that a Passing Out Parade was being held on the evening of 30 July 2007 for those retained recruits who had recently completed their training.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) note the contents of the report; and
- b) considering the information provided, made no amendments to future reports to aid the regular assessment of performance.



14 Update on 2006/07 Shared Priorities and Performance Reporting

The purpose of this report was twofold: to inform Members on progress of the Shared Priorities contained within the 2006 – 08 Performance Plan; and to recommend alternative performance reporting arrangements for the 2007/08 year.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked for a definition of 'Station End Equipment'. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that this is the equipment on station, which receives despatch transmissions from Fire Control. This equipment, whilst still in service, is now obsolete and presents an issue for ongoing routine maintenance and replacement.

Resolved that Members

- a) Note the contents of the progress on the 2006/07 Shared Priorities; and
- b) Agree the revised performance reporting schedule for 2007/08.

The Chair thanked officers for their work and for the clear and concise nature of their reports.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

