

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 22 November 2007 at 5.00 pm**

Present

Dr Drummond, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones (Chair), Mason and Mellings

Before business commenced, the Chair asked the meeting to stand for a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the four firefighters, who lost their lives in Warwickshire.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Allen and Davies.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 27 September 2007.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 27 September 2007, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

Correspondence had been received from a member of public in relation to agenda item 11. The meeting agreed that this should be deferred to agenda item 11 for consideration.

5 Internal Audit Programme 2008/09 to 2011/12

The Chair welcomed Mr Graham Tart, Head of Audit and Consultancy Services at Shropshire County Council, to the meeting.

This report recommended a four-year plan of audit work to be commissioned from the Internal Audit section of Shropshire County Council.



The Treasurer explained that the Information Technology (IT) audit will be carried out in 2008/09. As IT underlies everything that the Service does, it is important that this audit is undertaken and the Audit Commission is supportive of this. As some audits do not need to be carried out every year, there are some saved days that can be used to undertake the IT audit.

Councillor Jones asked for clarification that the IT audit would take an extra 17 days. The Treasurer confirmed that this was correct and that the entire audit would be undertaken in 2008/09.

Councillor Mellings was happy with the advice received from the Treasurer and Internal Audit and the Committee accepted the four-year audit programme, as set out in Appendix A to the report.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the IT audit would have any effect on the planned computerisation of documents. The Treasurer confirmed that this would not be affected but the robustness of the system would be examined. Mr Tart explained that the storage and security of information is a key issue.

Resolved that the Committee approve the programme of audits, set out in Appendix A, and agree (subject to Authority approval) to add £3,900 as a one-off budget addition to 2008/09

6 Self Assessment Checklist for Audit Committees

This report set out, at Appendix A, the Fire Authority's compliance with the Self-Assessment Checklist devised by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) for measuring the effectiveness of an authority's Audit Committee. The Committee was asked to consider the Checklist and decide whether any further action is required.

The Treasurer explained that, as the Fire Authority does not have an executive / scrutiny function, it was difficult to apply some of the items on the checklist to it.

Councillor Jones commented that, having read appendices B and C, it appears that the Committee's current Terms of Reference (ToRs) seem to be broader than the ToRs suggested by CIPFA. The Treasurer confirmed that this was the case and that he would not recommend any changes to the Committee's ToRs. The differences in the ToRs are acceptable because of the differences in authorities.

Councillor Hurst-Knight referred to Item 7 on the checklist – "Does the committee input into the external audit programme?" and asked if there would be any benefit in this report being considered by Audit and Performance Management Committee, before being presented to the full Fire Authority. The Treasurer explained that the Audit Plan is a proactive process and it would provide an opportunity for the Committee to raise any concerns that it had, although, so far, there have been no issues with the external audit plan.



Councillor Jones felt that having formal input into the external audit plan would add validity to the Committee and Councillor Mellings felt that it would strengthen the process by adding checks and balances to it.

Councillor Drummond asked if induction training was provided for members of the Committee. The Treasurer confirmed that this was the case. Councillor Drummond then explained that she had not received any specific training for the Audit and Performance Management Committee. The Management Support Officer explained that one-to-one induction sessions could be arranged for Members and undertook to organise these for those Members, who felt they needed them.

Councillor Mellings referred to item 13 on the checklist, which concerned Member training, and asked about the outcomes of the recent Member Development Reviews. It was confirmed that a report on this issue would be taken to the Human Resources Committee meeting on 6 December 2007.

Councillor Mellings also commented that the explanation against Item 11 on the checklist – “Is the chair free of executive or scrutiny functions?” – should be amended to reflect the arrangements for the Chair of the Committee, i.e. that the Chair is elected from a member of the largest opposition group.

Having considered the CIPFA Self-Assessment Checklist, the Committee

Resolved:

- a) To recommend to the Fire Authority that no changes are made to the terms of reference of the Audit and Performance Management Committee to reflect better those suggested by CIPFA; and.
- b) That the comments relating to checklist items are taken into account to ensure full compliance with the Checklist.

7 Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring

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

The Training Manager tabled two amended graphs (copies of which are attached to the signed minutes), which show an increase in appliance availability following the downward trend that occurred in the summer months. The graphs show a general upward trend in appliance availability.

Councillor Mason asked how holiday arrangements are organised. The Training Manager explained that annual leave is managed as far as possible but in some cases, for example where factories have a set annual shutdown period, this can be problematic. Annual leave should be managed by the station's Officer in Charge (OiC).

Councillor Drummond asked why some stations have a current establishment figure, which is higher than the station establishment figure. The Training



Manager explained that this is due to OiCs' preplanning to ensure that they have sufficient crews to provide cover in the event of, for instance, retirements.

The Training Manager reported that the retained training course in November is full, with 10 trainees, including 1 female recruit, due to attend. The total retained establishment has increased by 31 people, which means that availability has improved. OiCs are also being encouraged to operate a rota system, which should help to improve the work / life balance of retained duty staff. There have been no more leavers since the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting in September.

The Training Manager reported that, in relation to community fire safety, letters have been sent out to the 18 people, who will be undertaking Community Safety Advocate roles. This should further increase the number of home safety visits and smoke detectors fitted.

The Training Manager then gave a brief synopsis of the current availability at individual stations, highlighting those that are having difficulties, such as Albrighton and Much Wenlock, and those that have improved, such as Craven Arms.

Councillor Mason asked how training was apportioned to stations. The Training Manager explained that the decisions are based on a wide range of information, including the appliance availability graphs that were discussed earlier. This ensures that full explanations can be given to applicants to explain why they will not be attending training immediately.

Councillor Mellings raised concerns about Oswestry (OS1) and Prees stations, as their availability was showing a downward trend. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this dip was due to holidays and availability was now starting to go back up. The Training Manager also explained that Oswestry (OS1) was now providing three-quarter rather than full cover.

The Chief Fire Officer thanked the Training Manager for his successful work on the Retained Review, which he was now giving up, as he had been promoted to the Training Manager position. This praise was echoed by the Committee members. The Training Manager thanked all those people, who had given him assistance during his work on the Retained Review.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

The meeting adjourned at this point (5.40 pm) and reconvened at 5.45 pm.

8 Quarterly Summary of Progress within the Improvement Priorities Programme 2007/08

The purpose of this report was to advise Members of progress within the Improvement Priorities Programme for quarter 2, July to September 2007. The information is collated from the Project Managers and this report



represents the progress made within each of the nine improvement priorities identified during the strategic planning process earlier in the year.

The Programme Manager explained that this report had been submitted to Policy Group and it had recommended that the three accompanying presentations on Resources, Environment and Sustainability and Finance and Governance be brought to the Audit and Performance Management Committee. Copies of each presentation are attached to the signed minutes and a summary of the discussion generated by the presentations is given below.

Resources

Members felt that the work on reducing road traffic collisions was beginning to show results and the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that further road safety “open days” were to be held.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that section 13 agreements are in place and that section 16 agreements are being compiled. Both types of agreement concern over-the-border working arrangements. A map showing the proposed section 16 areas was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes). The Chief Fire Officer explained that time trials etc are being carried out before the section 16 agreements are confirmed.

Environment and Sustainability

Councillor Mason asked about the cost implications of the initiatives outlined in the presentation. The Resources Manager explained that both cost and environmental implications are considered, when evaluating proposals. There may be financial and environmental benefits to schemes but the financial benefits may not be significant.

Councillor Drummond asked which was the more important: environmental benefits or costs. The Resources Manager explained that the two issues are interlinked. Councillor Drummond commented that there seemed to be high initial costs, which then flatten out. The Resources Manager explained that Cost Benefit Analysis is undertaken on potential schemes.

Finance

Councillor Jones asked if a capacity amount was built into bids for funding. The Principal Accountant confirmed that this was not the case.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress of each improvement priority and the associated risks and issues; and
- b) Note the presentations on Environmental Sustainability, Resources and Finance and Governance



Councillor Mellings left the meeting at this point (6.30pm).

9 Performance Assessment – Key Performance Indicators

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

The Information Officer reported that the figures for the 2006/07 Operational Assurance indicators had been confirmed. There was concern about KPI F5, as the difference between the upper and lower threshold is very small. KPI F8a and F8b have been amalgamated to give a midtable result, as have KPI F9a and F9b.

For the 2007/08 Operational Assurance indicators, KPIs F1 to F7 are currently predicted to achieve an upper threshold. A lot of work has been undertaken on KPI F9a over the last two weeks. Week-to-week monitoring will now be done on this indicator, with Fire Control taking a lead on managing the indicator.

It is predicted that, if current performance levels continue, the Fire Authority will achieve an overall score of 4 for 2007/08.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report content; and
- b) Agree to monitor action plans necessary on failing or high risk indicators

10 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators – April 2007 to September 2007

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April to 30 September 2007.

The Statistical Research Officer talked Members through each of the indicators detailed in the summary table in Appendix A to the report. A brief summary of the more significant points raised is given below.

- 143 There have been no fire deaths during the reporting period.
- 144 This indicator is still failing but it has shown an improvement from the last quarter.
- 146 This indicator has two parts and has been affected by the school holidays. It is a problem indicator and will now be monitored on a weekly basis.
- 206 The target for this indicator should be achieved in the next quarter.



- 208 There has been a slight improvement on this indicator, which equates to 1 or 2 people escaping from fires.
- 8 Performance against this indicator is consistently high and is continuing to improve.
- 11 There has been an increase in the establishment figures, which means that the number of employees in the top 5% of earners has increased from 14 to 16.
- 17a The establishment figures will change in the next quarter, which will change performance against this indicator.
- 209 One women firefighter has left the Service but it is hoped that up to two will be gained.

Resolved that the Committee:

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

11 Summary of Complaints and Compliments

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2005/06 and 2006/07.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that another report on this issue would be brought to the Audit and Performance Management Committee after April 2008, to bring reporting in line with the fiscal year.

An amended version of Table 2 was circulated to the meeting (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that six anonymous complaints had been received in the last 12 months. Whilst these are not included in the breakdown of complaints within the report, they are investigated as fully as is possible and any necessary action is taken.

A copy of the correspondence received from a member of the public, relating to this agenda item, was tabled (and is attached to the signed minutes). Any personal details had been removed from the letters concerned to protect the complainant and the ombudsman.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that he had written to the correspondent, explaining the error that had been made in the report. The last sentence of the third paragraph on page 3 should read 'During 2005/06 and 2006/07, no successful appeals were lodged.'



Councillor Mason asked how complaints were handled. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer talked through the complaints procedure, which can also be found on the Service's website.

Councillor Jones asked if the complaints concerning poor driving behaviour related to emergencies. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that 2 to 3 of the complaints received did relate to vehicles responding on blue lights.

Councillor Mason asked if complaints had any effects on firefighters. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that any complaints received are investigated and the results are communicated to either the individual or the station in general. Any training needs highlighted in the investigation are also addressed.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the report.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

