

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 27 September 2007 at 5.00 pm**

Present

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

1 Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 26 July 2007.

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 26 July 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 Audit for the Year Ended 31 March 2007 and Letter of Representation

The Chair welcomed Mr Tony Corcoran, Relationship Manager, Audit Commission, to the meeting.

Mr Corcoran presented the Audit Commission's report on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2007. The Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report was tabled (a copy is attached to the signed minutes).

Mr Corcoran commented that it was a very positive report and that the Fire Authority was to be congratulated on their ranking. For Use of Resources, the



Authority has gained a level 3 across the board, which is a significant achievement.

Mr Corcoran reported that the financial statement was of a high standard with few errors and, therefore, there is nothing to be highlighted on this. The Use of Resources assessment has shown that the Authority uses its resources effectively. Current indications are that the Authority will perform as well this year.

Councillor Hurst-Knight congratulated officers on the work that had gone into achieving these results. Mr Corcoran commented on the excellent working relationship that has been established between the officers of the Authority and the auditors. The Chief Fire Officer echoed these sentiments, particularly in relation to Ms Johanna Wong.

Mr Corcoran confirmed that the Letter of Representation for the year ended 31 March 2007 could be signed and submitted to the Audit Commission. It was agreed that the Chair, Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer sign the letter (in accordance with the authority delegated to them by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 19 July 2006). This was duly done and the letter was presented to Mr Corcoran.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the meeting that Pauline Mack and Paul Higton, from the Audit Commission, would be undertaking the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel audits on Monday and Tuesday next week. As part of this, they would be attending an Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) session at Wellington on Monday.

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

6 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 highlighted the situation at Minsterley and Much Wenlock, where the current establishment figures are much lower than the station establishment figures. Recruitment is currently ongoing in Minsterley, with a focus on recruiting female firefighters and working with local employers.

There are ongoing problems with Much Wenlock, particularly as there is a lack of employment in the area. Councillor Allen asked if affordable housing had helped with recruitment / retention. The Retained Project Manager reported that information had been provided to Retained firefighters but there had been little take-up. Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the recent safety day at Much Wenlock had had any effect on recruitment. There is no evidence of any effects as yet.



The Retained Project Manager reported that the September course for new recruits is full and five recruits have been allocated to the November course. 13 recruits are currently waiting for medicals and it is anticipated that the November course will also be full.

The Retained Project Manager also reported that six RDS staff have left the Service so far this year. However, as exit interviews have improved, the reasons for leaving have all been identified. Councillor Mellings asked how the recruitment standards for whole-time and RDS staff compare. The Retained Project Manager confirmed that the recruitment standards are the same for both whole-time and RDS staff but RDS staff do not sit a written exam.

The Retained Project Manager reported that the Community Fire Safety (CFS) figures for this year are much lower than those for previous years, as full surveys are now being carried out. Also, there were 14 CFS advocates last year. There are fewer advocates this year but recruitment is taking place. The CFS advocates are employed part-time and many are RDS staff. Councillor Jones asked how many repeat visits are undertaken, if access cannot be gained on the first visit. The Retained Project Manager explained that advocates will return to a property on a number of occasions. The Chief Fire Officer also explained that the changes to the CFS budget, agreed by the Fire Authority at its July meeting, will have had an impact on the number of CFS visits.

The Retained Project Manager drew Members' attention to the graph on page 13 of Appendix A, which shows that there was a dip in retained appliance availability in August 2007. This can be attributed to leave, particularly as some employers in the County have prescribed leave periods. Retained Support Officers (RSOs) do infill on appliances during these periods, with appliances at non-resilience stations coming off the run. Councillor Mellings asked if there was a dip in callouts during August. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the callout figures are weather dependent, with hot dry summers showing increased levels of calls. Councillor Mellings then asked if the improvement in figures between this year and last year could be attributed to the RSOs. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that this was the case but also cautioned that this could be bad news, as appliance availability needs to improve and be maintained through increased staffing.

Members' attention was then drawn to Appendix B and the various articles about the Retained Conference that was held in July 2007, particularly the positive item that appeared in the Retained Firefighters' Union newsletter. Members' attention was also drawn to the two resignation letters included in Appendix B. Members congratulated officers on the comments within the letters. Councillor Mellings asked if the letters could be used for future recruitment. The Retained Project Manager confirmed that permission to use the letters had been given by the individuals concerned.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.



7 Progress against the Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan 2007/08

This report informs Members of the progress made against the Authority's 'Statement on Internal Control' (SIC) Improvement Plan 2007/08.

The Head of Risk Management provided an update on progress on the Improvements highlighted in the report, following discussions at the Policy Group and TecCom Group meetings held this week.

Improvement ID 6 – The TecCom Group met today and discussed this issue. Business plans will be co-ordinated and taken to the next meeting of the TecCom Group. The deadline dates will be reported to the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting in November 2007.

Improvement ID 7 – Members were referred to page 3 of Report 10. The Head of Risk Management explained that the Business Plan and Improvement Priorities are to be integrated.

Improvement ID 16 – There are concerns about this, as it is a business continuity issue and there is potential for delay. Policy Group has discussed the issue and has asked the TecCom Group to co-ordinate to ensure that deadlines are met.

Improvement ID 21 – The new target date is achievable and has been accepted by Policy Group.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the training for support staff referred to in IRN 9 (page 8 of appendix) could be made open to Members. It was agreed that some sessions may be appropriate for Members and that this would be looked at.

Councillor Jones asked if a timetable had been set for the Business Continuity Manual tests identified in IRN 14 (page 9 of appendix). The Head of Risk Management explained that this will be discussed by Policy Group and it is likely that some events will be tied into Business Continuity Week.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

8 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 explained that there was an error on page 2 of the appendix. The heading of the third column from the right should read 'Estimated SFRS Average for 2006/07'.

The Information Officer anticipates that the performance results for 2006-07 will be confirmed once all returns are received by Communities and Local



Government (CLG). Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is predicted to receive a score of 4.

Page 4 of the appendix shows that for 2007-08 there are 6 upper table scores. Performance against the following indicators was highlighted:

KPI - F5 This has moved from a lower mid score to an upper table score. This is due to verification work that has been done on forms and the impact of fire safety advice.

KPI - F8b This has improved from a low to an upper score.

KPI - F11 Current performance is mid table but this includes farms etc and it is possible that performance against this indicator may improve once CLG clarifies the definition of non-domestic properties.

Resolved that the Committee:

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

9 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April 2007 to June 2007

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2007 to 30 June 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) CLG has confirmed that a higher figure indicates better performance on this indicator.
- 206 Of the four parts of this indicator, part (ii) has failed due to vehicle fires; however the numbers involved are very low. Part (iv) has hit target and, due to a change in reporting procedures, monitoring is still ongoing for part (iii), although this is set to be on target.
- 208 This indicator is currently failing but Shropshire is in a high position in the league table.
- 209 The three parts of this indicator were predicted to fail but part (ii) has been achieved this time.
- 2a It is possible that level 3 will be achieved for this indicator later in the year.



8 The failure for this indicator equates to one invoice.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked why some indicator targets were set to one decimal place and others were set to 2 decimal places. The Information Officer explained that the targets are dictated by CLG.

11 There have been no changes in performance against parts (a) and (b), as there have been no changes in staff. Part (c) has changed as a result of a survey of the top 5% of earners.

16 An audit on staff records is awaited, which may change the performance for these indicators. The cultural audit figures cannot be used due to confidentiality issues.

Appendix C shows data relating to accidents on duty and those leading to sickness absence. The Information Officer explained that the 52 days absence in June 2007 was for two people. It was also noted that fewer accidents have occurred on the training ground.

At the July meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, there had been a request for statistics relating to road traffic collisions (RTCs). This data was included in Appendix D. The Information Officer explained that Shrewsbury and Telford are the main areas in which RTCs occur. There are also high incidences in areas such as Bridgnorth and Ludlow.

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that he receives data containing a vehicular breakdown of accidents from Shropshire County Council (SCC) and queried whether the information provided here was duplication of that data. The Information Officer explained that the data from SCC would include statistic from different sources, such as the Police, whereas the information provided to this Committee only concerns the Fire Service.

The Head of Risk Management commented that it was interesting that there had been a significant reduction in RTCs in Shropshire but an increase in the percentage of extrications being carried out. Councillor Allen asked if this was due to the design of cars. The Chief Fire Officer explained that this could be the case. Side impact bars and, in particular, the materials that they are made from, do increase the problem of extricating casualties from vehicles.

Councillor Mellings thanked the Information Officer for providing the information on RTCs and requested that the statistics be kept in for future reports.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report content in respect of performance; and
- b) Having considered the information provided, agree that road traffic collision statistics be kept in future reports to aid the regular assessment of performance



10 **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 1, April 2007 to June 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.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if the section regarding Reducing Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), on page 3 of the report should refer to motorcycles rather than cycles. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that it should be cycles, as some Retained stations, in the more rural areas of the County, have started to deliver cycling proficiency training. Councillor Mellings asked how many areas this was happening in. The Chief Fire Officer was unable to provide exact details to the meeting but asked the Programme Manager to find out and email the details to the Members of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

The report was accompanied by three presentations, which highlighted action and progress on the People, Audit and Assessment and Partnerships Improvement Priorities. Copies of each presentation are attached to the signed minutes. A summary of the discussion generated by the presentations is given below.

People (Human Resources Manager)

The Chief Fire Officer commented that it will be necessary to recruit 20 people in 2010, to account for Telford Central, which will have been open for 30 years. This is likely to cause problems and the issue will be brought before a future Fire Authority meeting for discussion. Councillor Allen asked if firefighters could stay on past the normal retirement age. The Human Resources Manager confirmed that firefighters could request an extension of service but must undertake and pass a fitness test.

Councillor Mason queried the training that is provided particularly with regard to information technology. The Human Resources Manager explained that training and support is provided to all staff and that training is designed to fit the needs of staff.

Councillor Mellings asked about the connection between Individual Personal Development Reviews (IPDRs) and succession planning. The Human Resources Manager explained that IPDRs are being rolled out across the organisation with the aim of each member of staff completing one. There were difficulties with RDS staff completing IPDRs due to time constraints but a simplified IPDR has been developed to address this problem.

The Treasurer reported that a three-year financial plan will be submitted to the Fire Authority meeting in October.



Audit and Assessment (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer tabled a case study to the meeting. The case study supports the self-assessment for the Direction of Travel and Use of Resources audits. The case study has been submitted to the Audit Commission, who were impressed with it.

Partnerships (Programme Manager)

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that the main problem is identifying partners. The Programme Manager reported that following recent work the Fire Authority's list of partners had been reduced from 127 to 20.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress of each improvement priority and the associated risks and issues; and
- b) Note the presentations on People, Partnerships and Audit and Assessment

11 Response to the Audit Commission Consultation on Performance Indicator Set for the Service Assessment and Thresholds 2007/08

This report informed Members of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's response to the Audit Commission's proposals for treatment and thresholds of new performance indicators to be included in the 2007/08 fire and rescue service assessment.

The Programme Manager reported that the Audit Commission have still not reached a decision in relation to the issues outlined in the report.

Resolved that the Audit and Performance Management Committee note the contents of the report

12 Integrated Strategic Planning Process – Service, Financial and Improvement Planning

This report outlined how the Service proposes to integrate further the Strategic Planning Process in order to align Service, Budget and Improvement Planning. The outcome of the proposals will be two overarching integrated strategic documents – a forward looking 'Corporate Plan' and a backward facing performance report – 'Annual Report'.

The importance of Committee decisions in relation to strategic planning was highlighted to Members.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Approve the further alignment of the Strategic Planning Process; and
- b) Recognise the interdependencies behind Service, Budget and Improvement Planning



Councillor Mellings left the meeting at this point (6.45 pm)

13 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for item 14 on the grounds that it 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.

14 Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 26 July 2007.

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 26 July 2007, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

