

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
On Thursday, 6 December 2018 at 2.00 pm**

**Present
Members**

Councillors Hosken, Mellings, Milner, Price and Sahota

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Dave Myers	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Ged Edwards	Planning, Performance and Communications Manager	PPCM
Neil Griffiths	Group Manager	GM
James Bainbridge	Prevention Manager	PM
Derek Taylor	Fire Crime Officer	FCO
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Mr Jones	Grant, Thornton, External Audit
Mr Akhtar	Grant Thornton, External Audit
Mr Seddon	Audit Services, Shropshire Council

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Adams. Mr Walton, Treasurer

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

The CFO reported that, as agreed at the last meeting of the Committee, the Annual Audit Letter has been forwarded to the Police and Crime Commissioner with an appropriate covering letter from the Chair of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee agree the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 20 September 2018, and that the Chair sign them as a correct record.

5 Audit and Performance Management Committee Work Plan 2019

This report put forward a 2019 Work Plan for the Audit and Performance Management Committee for consideration and approval by Members. The report also reviewed implementation of the activities listed in last year's Work Plan.

Resolved that the Committee approve the Audit and Performance Management Committee Work Plan 2019, attached as an appendix to the report, without amendment.

6 External Audit Progress Update Report

The Committee received the External Auditor's Progress Update Report, which summarised Grant Thornton's progress in delivering their responsibilities as external auditors.

Mr Jones presented this report and talked through the information contained in it, in particular highlighting fire trading companies and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) comments on prevention and protection. Mr Jones also advised that he would be meeting with officers next week to discuss the audit for 2018/19.

The Chair, referring to Roy Wilsher's comments on page 8 of the report, asked why there had been a 23% reduction in firefighter numbers over the last 10 years. The CFO explained that whilst there had been a reduction in demand, there was a lack of corresponding reduction in resources. There is an ongoing debate between the Home Office and fire services about resourcing to risk rather than demand. In the last 10 years, there has been a 21.6% reduction in incidents and a 23% reduction in firefighters. There is concern over evidence as to why this should not reduce any further. Fire Services have resourced to mitigate against catastrophic failures as well as everyday demand.

Members asked when the Financial Resilience Index (FRI) would be rolled out following the consultation that was undertaken over the summer. Mr Jones advised that he did not know the roll out date for this but he could find out and advise Members. This issue was not fully covered in the report as the Fire Authority does not have the same status as a Council and therefore is not directly affected by the introduction of the FRI

Resolved that the Committee note the External Audit Progress Update Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2019.

7 Internal Audit Plan 2019/20

This report recommended that the Fire Authority approve a one-year extension to the programme of audit work for 2019/20, as set out in the appendix, to reflect the major system of changes being undertaken.

The HoF presented this report and advised that the extension to the Audit Plan will also help to ensure that existing audit recommendations are followed up satisfactorily.

Members asked if Internal Audit would be undertaking any work in relation to the Fire Alliance. Members felt that this was an important area to cover as collaboration and partnerships can give larger risks. The CFO advised that it was too early in the Alliance to provide a definitive response with regard to this but it was a good point to raise and for Officers to look at incorporating in future planning. The HoF also advised that extending the Service's audit planning by an additional year would align it with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority's audit planning.

Resolved that the Committee agree to recommend that the Fire Authority approve the one-year extension to the audit plan for 2019/20, as set out in the report.

8 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report updated Members on the status of risks on the Corporate Risk Register.

The PPCM presented this report and advised that there are currently 13 corporate risks on the Register. The Direction of Travel (DoT) remains the same for 11 of those risks. The DoT for the risk related to the Integrated Communications Control System (ICCS) has reduced. This is because the current supplier has provided assurance that it will continue to provide support and maintenance for the system until a new product is fully installed. The PPCM also advised that there was one new entry on the Risk Register, which relates to introduction of new fitness standards and the potential effect on staffing levels. This risk was previously managed at the Area Command level but it is now more appropriate for this to be managed at the corporate level.

The PPCM advised that three risks are currently at the highest risk rating. These are the failure of supplier contracts; the potential change of governance to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC); and the migration across to the new Payroll, HR and Finance systems.

The Chair asked what impact the PCC issue was having on long-term planning. The CFO explained that it is having an impact on things such as shared Communication Departments so stopgap solutions are being put in place. The Strategic Alliance will help to manage some of these issues as will the Fire Authority's decision to review its structure.

Proactive steps are being taken but the future is uncertain. A change in governance could potentially have a serious impact on the Service, for example with changes to senior management. The CFO reported that the risk is managed but this does not mean that it is diminished. The Chair stated that it should be noted that there is a risk related to the PCC but that the uncertainty around it lies elsewhere.

Members stated that there are other risks grouped around change in governance risk and asked if there needed to be a separate corporate risk included for the Fire Alliance as the Authority does not have direct control over it. In addition, Members acknowledged that the Fire Alliance could be a risk and / or an opportunity. The CFO advised that consideration needs to be given to this, for example in relation to finance although the Alliance is being built into financial planning. It may be a matter of timing as the Alliance is still in its early days.

The Chair asked when the new fitness standards would be introduced. The DCFO explained that VO_2 max increase would come into effect from April 2019, with a 12-month pilot scheme. It is thought that the new level could affect around 20% of operational staff. Additional fitness support has been introduced across the Service to try to eliminate as much of this impact as possible.

Members asked what the Unions' position was in relation to the potential implications for 20% of staff. The DCFO explained that staff are able to have multiple tries at the test and the national position is that failure is more likely to be because of an underlying health condition rather than an inability to improve fitness levels. The Service are trying to mitigate the impacts by providing fitness equipment and advisory support.

The CFO further advised that a framework document is due which will have regard to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) standards. The higher VO_2 level has been challenged but advice has been that this increased level is necessary to safeguard firefighters from coronary events. The VO_2 max increase was brought in at the same time as the firefighter working age was raised to 60 and as the move to recruit a greater number of female firefighters. The then Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt MP, stated that nobody would be sacked for not passing the fitness test but the Government cannot give this assurance as it fetters the employer's rights.

Members supported the CFO's view that the change needs to be brought in carefully so as not to frighten staff. The CFO also explained that the new fitness standards will also affect recruitment. Recruits will meet the new VO_2 standard but this erodes over time so it becomes important to recruit those who have a lifestyle that maintains their fitness. The issue is further complicated by the ambition to recruit greater numbers of female firefighters as the VO_2 max level is affected by the menopause.

The CFO also advised that the Service is taking a pragmatic view to avoid losing long serving staff on the ground of capability to meet the VO₂ max levels. For example, job roles are being looked at to identify those staff who may need to meet the new standards but who are unlikely to need to wear a BA set.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

9 Annual Governance Statement 2018/19

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2018/19.

The PPCM presented the report and advised that the AGS had been revamped to tie in with the Service's Annual Plan.

The DCFO talked through the People area of review and with regard to the Collective Agreement. He explained that if the Fire Brigades Union Executive Council does not agree this, then the Service will continue to work as it is locally until there is change at a national level. The DCFO explained that the improvements in Fire Control could be linked to a reduction in sickness levels within the department. A recommendation on the Fire Control shift pattern will be brought to the April 2019 meeting of the Fire Authority.

The PPCM reported that with regard to the Systems / Infrastructure area of review, all stations would be on-line next week. The Service will also maintain existing paper systems until it is satisfied that the electronic systems are working satisfactorily.

In relation to the Collaboration area of review, the CFO advised the three key areas of the Strategic Alliance Programme are ICT, Fire Control and Integrated Risk Management Planning. The CFO further explained that whilst Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service are pushing for 'red lines' to be established with regard to the projects and finance, he is keen for there to be no fixed ideas in relation to this. It is, however, essential that an engaged change model be developed to enable changes to be delivered with staff, and not to them. Early feedback from the HMI Inspection has highlighted serious concerns about how the changes will be achieved and how staff will be treated and / or affected. Failure of alliance working tends to be on cultural differences.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made against each of the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2018/19.

10 Review of Whistleblowing Policy

For decision

This report requested the Committee to recommend that the Fire Authority approve the Whistleblowing Policy (attached as an appendix to the report), following the annual review conducted by officers.

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority approve the Whistleblowing Policy without amendment

11 Performance Monitoring

11a Service Targets April to October 2018

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to October 2018.

The DCFO presented this report and advised that the Service's performance is an improving picture with four of the eight targets on course to be attained. The DCFO then provided the following information in relation to the targets.

Target 1a

The first fire engine will arrive at an emergency incident with at least 4 firefighters within 15 minutes on 89% of occasions.

The Service is, for the first year, struggling to meet this target. Effort is being put into exploring the reasons for the underperformance and officers hope they will be able to provide information on these reasons by the end of the year. Initial indications are the drift of incident profiles away from urban areas with an increasing proportion of incidents occurring in rural areas which is affecting performance against this target

Target 2a

All accidental fires will be reduced to not more than 462 fires during 20018/19.

This target is still challenging particularly around incidents involving vehicles, including HGVs, and farms but the Service can understand the reasons for this.

Target 2b

Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs) to be reduced to not more than 198 during 2018/19.

Officers are hopeful that the Service will see an improvement against this target, especially as performance has improved on this quarter last year. There is, however, a need to further look at who is having the fires to enable even more targeting of community fire safety visits.

Target 3a

Fire related deaths and serious injuries in the community will be reduced to not more than 17 during 2018/19.

The Service is likely to meet this target but there have been two additional deaths since the last report to Committee. The coroner's verdict is still awaited to confirm if these were fire deaths.

Target 4a

Fire and heat damage emanating from accidental fires in domestic dwellings and regulated businesses will be confined to the room of origin on not less than 89.5% of occasions during 2018/19.

Performance is starting to come up to target for this indicator so it is hopeful that this target can be met by the end of the year.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

11b Presentation on Service Targets

The Station Manager Prevention gave a presentation on the following 2018/19 Service Target:

Deliberate fires will be reduced to not more than 584 fires during 2018/19

Members asked what percentage of offenders are repeat offenders. The FCO explained that, whilst there are currently no definite figures in relation to this, there is the example of the Herongate arsonist who is now serving a life sentence following capture with DNA evidence.

The Chair asked if the FCO was one of the first on scene at incidents. The FCO explained that he was not but he does liaise closely with fire investigation officers regarding incidents.

The Chair asked how arson rates could be reduced, given that if an individual is going to set something on fire, they are probably not concerned about the consequences. The PM explained that it is a difficult issue to address but spending time and resources on education from early age raises awareness. The CFO added that it is also important to understand the reasons for arson and identify the motivation for doing it so this can be addressed. Publicity about successful convictions for arson also helps. The FCO explained that when offenders are due for release they attend fire offender programmes in prison to address previous behaviours. Boarding up and occupancy rates of properties can also deter arson.

Resolved that the Committee note the presentation.

11c Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty System) Performance Monitoring April to October 2018

This report provided information regarding the ongoing performance and management in terms of the availability of Wholetime and On Call (Retained Duty System) appliances in Shropshire.

The GM presented the report and advised that On Call availability remains an issue nationally. Within the Service, a lot of work has been done on recruitment, for example improvements to the website. The GM also reported that the Prees Station Open Day was held on 4 December and Officers are following up those attendees who showed interest in joining the On Call Service.

The GM also reported that FireServiceRota (FSR) is now running successfully across the On Call stations. Staff are happy with the system and it seems to be giving increased availability. Officers hope that it will be possible, in the future, to replace the performance dashboard reporting with FSR.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

12 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

13 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

The Committee received Appendix C to Report 8 – Corporate Risk Management Summary, which contained exempt information.

Resolved that the Committee note the exempt appendix to report 8.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

Chair

Date