

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
Held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
On Thursday, 30 November 2023 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillors Evans, Hignett, Lea, Overton and Pardy (Chair)

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Adam Matthews	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Guy Williams	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
James Walton	Treasurer	
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Ged Edwards	Planning and Programme Manager	PPM
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Luke Grant	Station Manager Transformation and Collaboration	SM (TC)
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Blundell, Burchett and Carter

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 28 September 2023, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2024

This report put forward a 2024 Work Plan for the Standards, Audit and Performance 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 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2024, as attached at the Appendix to the report.

6 Statement of Accounts 2022/23

This report presented the completed Statement of Accounts to the Committee, for consideration and approval.

The HoF presented the report and advised the Committee that the audit has been carried out later this year but has been substantially completed this week.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee

- a) Approve the Statement of Accounts 2022/23 (subject to final auditor amendments); and
- b) Delegate final amendments following completion of the audit to the Head of Finance, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

7 External Audit

7a Audit Findings Report for the Year ended 31 March 2023

Mr Sohal from Grant Thornton, External Auditors for the Fire Authority, presented the Audit Findings Report for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Mr Sohal advised that the auditors started work on the audit around five weeks ago and the audit is now nearly complete. There is some information regarding Pension Fund net liability that is still to be received from the Shropshire County Pension Fund and there are some areas of work that are still to be completed including related parties and third-party investments.

Mr Sohal thanked the Finance Team for the excellent way in which they have engaged with the auditors.

Mr Sohal informed the Committee that no material misstatements or errors have been identified during the audit which is good. An issue has been identified with the valuation of land and buildings which is due to differences in the timing of valuations used for this. The asset values in the financial statements are therefore overstated by £341k however this is below performance materiality and therefore does not require adjustment in the Statement of Accounts.

Resolved that the Committee formally adopt the Audit Findings.

7b Auditor's Annual Report on Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority 2021/22 and 2022/23

Mr Sohal from Grant Thornton, External Auditors for the Fire Authority, presented the Annual Auditor's Report 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Mr Sohal reported that the auditors have not found any significant risks in how the Authority manages itself and it is a testament to the Authority's Value for Money (VfM) arrangements that the report is so good.

There is one improvement recommendation included in the report under governance which relates to the reporting of corporate risk to the Committee. Members asked how this recommendation could be addressed going forward. The CFO advised that the way that corporate risk is currently reported, with only new or changed risks being covered in the report, is based on a request from the Committee. Councillor Evans explained that he was Chair of the Committee when this was requested to address the ongoing issue of the reporting of out-of-date risks. The Committee agreed that it would be good to expand reporting to include any risks that are considered to be current, and it was agreed that future Corporate Risk reports will be structured to include both current static risks and dynamic risks, i.e. those that are moving.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

8 Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 Improvement Plan

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2023/24.

Members requested an update on the Collaboration Area of Review which relates to the replacement of the new Command and Control (C&C) system. The ACFO (SS) advised that the finalised contract for the C&C is still awaited. The CFO explained that the C&C Project is the key cornerstone to the strategic fire alliance and involves four fire and rescue services: this Service, Hereford & Worcester, Cleveland and Durham and Darlington. The contract has therefore had to go through legal for all four services. It has taken longer than anticipated to get the contract correct but this has been necessary to ensure that it is right for this Service.

A paper on the C&C Project will be taken to full Fire Authority on 13 December 2023 but the contract will not be signed before this date, as the Service would like to take advantage of the opportunity to secure a favourable price for the replacement of the ICCS by tying this into the C&C contract.

The Committee asked what back-up is in place for the ICCS. The CFO explained that should the ICCS fail, the system falls back to Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in the first instance with Fire Control relocating to the secondary control room in Wellington, if necessary.

Members asked if the initial findings from the data analysis that will underpin the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), as referred to in the Operations Area of Review, had been received. THE ACFO (SS) confirmed that they were received yesterday and explained that they are key to developing the CRMP 2025-29. The report contains some interesting findings that are positive for the Service, such as mobilisation times.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made on the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan.

9 Corporate Risk Management Summary

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

The ACFO (SD) presented this report and advised that since the last report to this Committee, the risk related to the Wholetime Duty Pilot Scheme has been closed and removed from the Corporate Risk Register. A new risk has been added which is related to the provision of firefighter pensions support and the potential for the Service to fail to comply with pensions regulations because of a lack of pensions technical knowledge within the Service.

The ACFO (SS) also highlighted the addition of a risk related the On Call Sustainability Project (OCSP) and the potential for reduced On Call appliance availability due to issues with On Call recruitment and retention.

The ACFO (SD) explained that the initial OCSP review identified 27 recommendations for action. Some of these are not a priority and Officers are therefore keen to fine-tune these recommendations with some becoming business as usual to allow focus on those that are the most important to the On Call workforce, such as banded contracts, remuneration, and reward and recognition. It is important that the Service starts to show that it is making progress on these issues as this will maintain the engagement of its On Call employees. The CFO echoed the importance of the recognition and reward issues and reassured Members that there is currently no evidence that the Service's On Call system is broken.

The ACFO (SD) said that recognition is given to Members for decisions such as the use of XL cabs, which allow up to nine individuals to respond to incidents, which helps from a retention perspective. The CFO added that this exemplifies the 'invest to save' principle. Every On Call individual that is retained in employment by the Service saves on recruitment which has an average cost of £28k from an individual joining the Service to attaining competency.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Performance Monitoring

10a Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April to September 2023

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to September 2023. The ACFO (SS) presented the report and highlighted the following points to the Committee.

Corporate Performance Indicator (CPI) 1 – All Fires

Performance to date is currently at 612 incidents with the effect of the outlier month of June having been reduced. There has been an overall reduction in incidents of 17.2% in the year to date, but it needs to be recognised that there will be monthly variations on this CPI.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

Performance on this CPI is currently at the higher end of the tolerance band. The main causes of incidents seem to be faulty appliances and/or misuse of equipment. This is raising questions with the Prevention Department who are monitoring the situation.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

Performance on this CPI is currently at the lower end of the tolerance range. There was a spike in incidents in June 2023 which is attributable to the weather during that month but overall, there is a 27.2% decrease on the same cumulative period last year. At lower end of tolerance. The Service's Arson Crime Officers are continuing their work to address ongoing issues with fly tipping with the removal of rubbish being actioned as needed.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

This CPI remains fairly static with no fire related deaths in the year to date. There is the potential that this may change due to depending on how deaths at a recent road traffic collision are recorded but this is awaiting confirmation.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

This CPI is a good indicator of the impact of the Service's Prevention work, with data showing that 16% of fires were not confined to the room of origin in the year to date. The low number of incidents for this CPI does mean that it is vulnerable to swings in the tolerance levels, but it also enables all incidents to be investigated.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff Through Operational Activity

There have been 7 injuries to staff from operational activity in the year to date which is in line with the same reporting period last year.

CPI 7 – Response Standard – Attendance on average of 85% of occasions

Response standards remain very high and are above the levels expected for each of the three areas, as well as for out of area incidents.

Incidents where the response standard has not been met do are challenged to determine the reasons for this, although it may simply be a case of the distance to the incident being further than can be achieved in the designated timeframe.

Members praised the excellent performance on this CPI but queried if the data is comparable across all the areas, that is why the times for getting to urban fires and rural fires are different, and asked if there is any option to increase the response times. The ACFO (SS) explained that there have been some issues with crews responding from one incident to another, rather than from a station to an incident. It was also confirmed that attendance time is recorded as to when an appliance lands at the incident ground.

The CFO explained that the Service at beginning to look at increasing the turn-in time for the On Call service as this may potentially increase the recruitment pool for stations. The ACFO (SD) added that data and technology are leading the Service forward on this as it is believed that the 5 minutes turn-in time that is currently in place is a historical decision from 40 to 50 years that was based on the limits of the signal range from stations.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

This CPI is a good news story as it is currently below tolerance. The numbers do include agricultural buildings but these are not classified as regulated buildings so it may be necessary to provide two separate figures for this CPI in future reporting.

CPI 9 - Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence.

The percentage figures for competencies are very encouraging.

On Call Duty System Performance

Shrewsbury On Call and Tweedale are ongoing challenges for the Service; availability for the rest of the On Call stations remains high overall although there are still a few challenges with some stations.

The Committee asked if there is a target associated with ethnicity. The HHRA confirmed that whilst there is no target for ethnicity, there is an ongoing challenge for the Service regarding recruitment. Officers have looked at demographics and recruitment methods, such as positive action events but recognise that it is difficult to recruit from ethnic groups. It is also important to remember that ethnicity cannot be looked at in isolation as the Service's aim is to be reflective of its communities.

Members asked if there is the ability for degree entry level into the fire service. The CFO explained that this Service had taken part in the pilot for the Direct Entry (DE) Scheme which covered this. Unfortunately, the DE candidates did not meet the standards that the Service require but also did not boost diversity figures.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10b Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service Values and Culture Report Update

This report presented the Service's progress against the recommendations made to the sector in the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Values and Culture in the Fire and Rescue Services report.

The SM (TC) presented this report and highlighted the following to the Committee:

- Recommendation 21
The 360-degree feedback process is now being rolled out and is in progress.
- Recommendation 33
This has been completed in line with indications of good practice from other HMICFRS inspections, but the Service are looking at ways that this could be improved further.
- Recommendation 24
The Cultural Review is currently being undertaken and this recommendation will be marked as completed once the Review has concluded.
- Recommendation 26
Progress is being made on this recommendation with the Service being involved in National Fire Chiefs Council Executive Leadership and Middle Management Development Programmes.

The SM (TC) clarified that the Service is working hard to complete the recommendations whilst also ensuring that its responses to them are practical and appropriate for its employees.

Members queried the completion dates that are given in the report and asked if there is any flexibility in these dates. The CFO explained that the completion dates were set by the HMICFRS and therefore, the Service does not have any flexibility in regard to them. However, the Service has taken the view that embedding the changes made in response to the recommendations, which takes longer, is just as important as implementing them and it is therefore comfortable that some recommendations have been completed after the prescribed date.

The Committee thanked staff for the delivery of the recommendations that have already been met.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Before formally closing the meeting, the Chair of the Committee thanked all those who had presented reports and thanked all Officers for their work in relation to the meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____