

**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, 13 July 2023 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

Councillors Blundell, Evans, Hignett, Overton, Pardy (Chair) and Thompson

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Guy Williams	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO (SS)
Ged Edwards	Planning and Programme Manager	PPM
Jan Morris	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Luke Grant	Station Manager Transformation and Collaboration	SMTC
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Avtar Sohal	Grant Thornton (External Audit)
Helen Tiffney	Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services (Internal Audit)

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Burchett (Vice-Chair) and Lea

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 27 April 2023, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

External Audit

5a Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Audit Plan for year ending 31 March 2023

This paper set out an overview of the planned scope and timing of the external audit, as required by the International Standard on Auditing (UK & Ireland) 260.9/20.

Mr Sohal presented this report to the Committee and highlighted the following points:

Significant Risks Identified

- The areas of significant risk set out on page 7 of the report are areas that in the judgment of the auditor require special audit consideration.
- The Management over-ride of controls risk is a normal risk for any audit and is not specific to this Authority.
- The risk related to the revenue cycle including fraudulent transactions has been rebutted as the Audit Team do not view this as a significant risk for this Authority.
- Both are generic risks that are not specific to the Fire Authority
- The valuation of land and buildings (PPE) is seen as a significant risk due to there being a lot of areas within the Authority with the potential for error.
- The valuation of the pension fund net liability is also seen as a significant risk because of the use of actuaries and estimates.

Materiality

Materiality has been set at £580k during the planning stage of the audit which equates to 2% of the Authority's gross expenditure for the period. The level of triviality reporting has been set at £29k.

2022/23 Audit

- Work is still being completed on the 2021/22 audit due to staffing changes within the Audit Team.
- No significant areas of weaknesses have been identified for the 2022/23 audit.
- There have been major changes to two Auditing standards: ISA 315 – Identifying and assessing the risks of material misstatement and ISA240 which deals with the auditor's responsibilities relating to fraud in an audit of financial statements. There may be additional audit work required in relation to these two standards, which impact on the audit fee for the year.
- Audit visits are planned for October 2023 with the aim of the final accounts being signed off by the end of the year.

Resolved that the Committee note the Audit Plan for the year ending 31 March 2023.

5b Informing the Audit Risk Assessment for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority 2022/23

This report contributes toward the effective two-way communication between external auditors and the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, as 'those charged with governance'. The report covered some important areas of the auditor risk assessment, where external audit is required to make inquiries of the Committee under auditing standards.

Members asked for an update on the information given in response to Question 3 on page 17 of the report, which relates to holiday pay for overtime worked and On Call annual leave. The CFO explained that there is case law which deals with overtime worked being linked to holiday pay. The ACFO (SS) added that a formal proposal for the resolution of this issue has been put to the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) this morning. The proposal needs to be agreed by the FBU, but it is not envisaged that this will be an issue. There are also no significant financial implications arising from the proposal.

The issue with On Call annual leave has been delayed due to the Service not having an effective system for recording On Call annual leave. It has now been decided that the Service will use FSR to record leave and overtime payments. It should be noted that there is no national solution to the On Call leave issue with individual brigades having to find their own resolutions to it.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Internal Audit

6 Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2022/23

This report provided the Committee with the overall results in terms of meeting Internal Audit's objectives as set out in the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23; an audit opinion and commentary on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control environment; and a copy of the current Internal Audit Charter.

Mrs Tiffney presented the report to the Committee and highlighted Appendix 3 to the report which shows that there is nothing of concern to note from the work undertaken by the Internal Auditors. Mrs Tiffney thanked officers for their co-operation and assistance with the Internal Audit work.

The Committee then thanked the officers concerned for their work and for keeping all in order.

Resolved that the Committee note the report and the 2022/23 Internal Audit Opinion and Commentary.

7 Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 and Improvement Plan 2023/24

The purpose of this report was twofold; it set out the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2022/23 and the AGS Improvement Plan 2023/24 to be included in the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts. It also reported on the close down of activities contained within the 2022/23 Improvement Plan.

The PPM presented this report and explained that most of the 2022/23 closedown report will be transferred to the AGS Improvement Plan for 2023/24. The PPM also confirmed that details of reporting to Internal Boards have been included as requested by the Committee at its last meeting.

The PPM also explained that the Committee does receive a snapshot / high level report and that the internal Programme Board arrangements have been updated to provide assurance to Members.

The following points were raised in relation to the Appendices to the report.

Under Area of Review 1 – People, the ACFO (SS) explained that the Collective Agreement for Wholetime shift changes is with the FBU Executive Committee for agreement. The shift system which sits underneath the Agreement is, however, well-embedded. The CFO added that the Wholetime shift arrangements have run without the Collective Agreement for seven years and that the local FBU reps are very supportive of staffing model that is in place.

Under Area of Review 3 – Process, the PPM advised that the recruitment of a Business Analyst is still to be progressed. The Service is using the Skills for Information Age (SFIA) framework to evaluate technical jobs and there has been a delay in getting this role through the framework.

Under Area of Review 4 – Systems / Infrastructure, Members noted that Shropshire Council has adopted a new policy to in relation to cyber threats which requires employees to complete a training module once every 12 months. The CFO explained that Service employees are required to complete mandatory training on issues such as information security etc.

Under Area 5 – Building Facilities, the ACFO (SS) explained that a Training Review of how training is delivered across the Service's estate is ongoing. There is a capital programme in place to maintain existing facilities. The CFO commented that there are almost two projects at the Telford Central site: the refurbishment of the station and building and the training review of.

The CFO also explained that the Telford Central project has illustrated the present volatility in the construction industry, so the Service has moved to short and/or medium-term investments in its buildings to ensure good standards are maintained without fettering future developments.

Regarding the 2023/24 AGS Improvement Plan, Members asked if there are key dates for the Telford Central Project. The CFO explained that there is a very detailed project plan in place and a Project Manager has been appointed from Entrust. There are over 1000 entries on the project plan and the challenges that have been faced over the past 12 months are starting to be overcome. An update report on the project, including exact costings will be brought to the Fire Authority later this year.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) note the progress on and close down of the 2022/23 Improvement Plan; and
- b) Agree the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 and 2023/24 Improvement Plan for inclusion in the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts.

8 Corporate Risk Management Summary

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

The PPM presented this report and advised Members of the following changes to the Risk Register since the last report to this Committee.

- Two new risks have been added to the Risk Register. These relate to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services Values and Culture Report and the rollout of new fire kit.
- The risk related to the impact of the new fitness standards on service delivery was removed from the Risk Register following the May meeting of the Risk Management Group.
- The risk ratings for two risks have increased. These are the risks related to the failure of Primary Contractor, or failure or disruption of supply chain or uncontrolled cost increases for critical goods, and the security and resilience of the IT network.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Performance

9 Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April 2022 to March 2023 (Year End)

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the year April 2022 to March 2023.

The HoTC presented this report and provided the following commentary on each of the Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs)

CPI 1 – All Fires

Performance for this CPI is slightly over the target for the year due to a spike in incidents that is related to extreme hot weather in the summer months.

Members noted a typo on the graph for this CPI. The target figure should read 1090 not 1190.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

Performance for this CPI is well below yearly target, and this demonstrates the positive impact of the prevention work undertaken by the Service.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fire

Again, performance for this CPI is well under target. This shows that the interventions carried out by the Service are working.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

Unfortunately, there have been seven fire related deaths and two serious injuries related to fire, during the reporting year. Incident reviews have been completed for all incidents and relevant learning points identified.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

There was a dip in performance against this CPI in the first two quarters of 2022/23, but this has since improved with performance being back into tolerance by the end of the reporting year.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff Through Operational Activity

31 injuries to staff through operational activity were recorded during the reporting year; four of which were RIDDOR reportable. The cumulative figure for the year is slightly ahead of the previous two years but is still within reasonable tolerances.

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

Performance over the reporting period has been strong for this CPI. The average response standard achieved of 94% means that the combined response average requirement of 85% was surpassed in all three areas of the response standard areas.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

The Service has experienced fairly low levels of fires in regulated buildings during the reporting year, with a 19% decrease from the same reporting period last year.

CPI 9 - Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

- **Establishment**
Overall, the Service is just below its total establishment posts with 96.7% of posts currently filled.
- **Diversity**
There has been little movement in the diversity figures since the last report to this Committee. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Department are still encouraging staff to complete monitoring information to ensure the Service's diversity data is as up to date as possible.

- **Competencies**
Competency levels are looking positive. There are several reasons why operational staff are not 100% competent in all areas. These reasons have been investigated and appropriately addressed.

On Call Duty System Performance

The Service's overall On Call availability remains good in comparison to national figures, but the figure of 89.16% availability is slightly down on performance in 2021/22. There has, however, been some success from the recent recruitment campaign and there are several new staff that are awaiting competence sign-off before joining their stations.

Members commented that they were impressed with the accuracy of the targets that have been set for the CPIs and raised the following issues in relation to the report.

Referring to the response standard, Members asked if officers could provide any indication of what happens to those incidents where the standard was not met in urban areas. The HoTC advised that the Service does scrutinise the reasons for the response standard not being met. The CFO added that a database is maintained to aid performance monitoring. The Service employs Wholetime crews in urban areas as it is known that this is where the greatest risk level is. Performance levels may also be impacted by concurrent incidents with on call stations coming in. The ACFO (SS) added that crews having to respond from one incident to another when the Service is in spate conditions, may also affect these figures.

Members queried the competence figure of 65% for the First Responder Emergency Care (FREC) competence for On Call. The ACFO (SS) explained that the Service has rolled out a very intensive training programme over a period of three months to address this issue. The training was a bridging course to enable employees to move from one qualification to another. Accreditation of the training was also a factor in the low competence figure. Since these issues have been addressed, the competence figure for this area has now increased to circa 90 - 95 %.

Members expressed concern over the On Call availability figure for Shrewsbury which was at 32% in March 2023. The ACFO (SS) explained that the Service is constantly trying to recruit On Call employees for Shrewsbury but On Call recruitment is a challenge in urban areas. The ACFO also explained that this figure does not affect the overall On Call availability due to the excellent performance at other stations.

The CFO then explained that, in anticipation of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) update, initial conversations are underway regarding how both Shrewsbury and Tweedale stations will be managed over the coming year.

The second pump from Telford Central moves to Tweedale in the evening as the risk level moves from business locations to residential and the Service effectively 'chases the risk'. This does present some concerns for the Service, so initial work is being undertaken in advance of the the CRMP to ensure that resources are located where the risks are.

On Call availability is generally adversely affected during the school holidays, and particularly during August. An additional issue with Tweedale is that the On Call employees are a mix of wholetime firefighters from other services and Ministry of Defence firefighters who were taking up overtime with that service, which reduces their On Call availability.

The Service currently offers two types of On Call contracts: a 75% contract which is equivalent to 80 hours of cover per week and a 100% contract which equals 120+ hours a week cover. These cover levels are however, affected by the Working Time Directive and driving regulations which take into account hours worked in employees' primary employment.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

10 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2019/20 to 2022/23

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2022/23, with comparisons to the previous three years.

The ACFO (SS) presented this report and advised the Committee that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of compliments and a minor increase in the number of complaints received during 2022/23. The increase in complaints is mainly related to failures to deal correctly with incidents / inspections / procedures. The increase in this type of complaint may be related to the Service's remit having extended in recent years to include incidents such as gaining entry to buildings and missing person searches.

The ACFO(SS) also reported that of the 27 complaints investigated during 2022/23, 17 were either substantiated or partially substantiated which is an increase of 15.1% on the previous year.

The ACFO also highlighted to the Committee the social media metrics that were included on page 5 of the report and which show that 65% of the 430 messages received on the Service's Twitter account since 1 January 2023, have a positive sentiment.

Compliments that are received by the Service are logged and acknowledged where possible. These compliments are shared with the employee(s) concerned and their line management. Compliments are also shared with members for information as part of this process.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

11 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service Values and Culture Report Update June 2023

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 SMTC presented the report to the Committee and advised that there are 20 recommendations from the HMICFRS report that the Service needs to complete. An Action Plan has been produced to ensure that these recommendations are completed within the stated deadlines. The Service is sharing the developments associated with the recommendations with all staff and is involving the Rep Bodies where appropriate.

Two recommendations were due to be completed immediately; both of these have been completed.

Nine recommendations were to be completed by 1 June 2023; of these five have been completed. Two of the nine are in the approval process and one is awaiting legal comment to ensure that the proposed solution is correct.

The progress made so far, together with the Action Plan and previous Service developments, puts the Service in a good place to meet the recommendations as required.

The CFO explained that it would have been easy to just comply with the Report's recommendations, but the Service was cognisant that it wanted to embed developments to improve its culture moving forward.

The ACFO (SS) added that the Service has decided it will commission an independent cultural review into the Service. This is because the Service would rather undertake a review now and identify areas for improvement that needs addressing rather than waiting for them to occur and having to respond to them.

Members asked about the recommendations that must be completed by the end of March 2024. The SMTC explained that the Service is on course to complete these recommendations on time but there is a barrier as some of the recommendations require the Service to review some national documents that have not yet been produced.

Members also asked how the Service will know what the other responsible organisations are doing in relation to the recommendations that are assigned to them. The CFO explained that the Fire Standard is to be implemented by March 2024 but the deadline for producing this is December 2023. The other responsible agencies are the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council etc.

Members requested that future reports include a brief summary of the recommendations rather than just the numbers of them. The SMTC undertook to do this.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The meeting closed at 3.10 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____