

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Wednesday, 18 September 2019 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Adams, Blundell, Milner, Minnery, Sahota (Chair) and Thompson

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Andy Johnson	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	DCFO
Dave Myers	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	ACFO
Simon Hardiman	Head of Operations and Risk	HOR
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Ged Edwards	Planning, Performance and Communications Manager	PPCM
Guy Williams	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HTC
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Adam Matthews	Group Manager	GM
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Mr Rowley	Grant Thornton, External Audit
Mr Chadderton	Audit Services, Shropshire Council

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Dee and James Walton, Treasurer

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 18 July 2019, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

5 Committee Workplan 2019/20

This report put forward an amended version of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee 2019/20 Workplan for consideration and approval by Members.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the amendments that have been made to the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee 2019/20 Workplan; and
- b) Approve the Workplan for 2019/20, attached at the appendix to the report, without comment or further amendment.

6 External Audit

Annual Audit Letter

The Committee received the External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter, which summarised the key findings of the work carried out for the year ended 31 March 2019.

Mr Rowley presented this item and explained that the Annual Audit Letter is the formal close of the audit process. The Letter is submitted to Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) and is made available to public on the PSAA website. Mr Rowley explained that the risks outlined on pages 6 and 7 of the report are standard risks that the auditors have to include in the Letter. Two of the risks are specific to the Fire Authority and these are the Valuation of land and buildings and the Valuation of net pension liability. The latter is a national issue arising from the McCloud judgment, which affects Local Government and the Police and Fire sectors.

Members asked for clarification of the McCloud judgment. Mr Rowley explained that it concerns a court case regarding transitional pension arrangements which has had implications for public sector as a whole. There was a risk that the liability had been understated for this Authority and work was undertaken to ensure that the actuary had taken all relevant information into account and to check if the implications of the judgment had been understated. It was found that the implications for the Authority had been understated and the assessment was that the impact would be above the materiality threshold for this Authority. A £9million adjustment has now been made to the liability and factored into the final accounts scheme. There is no indication of any error by the Authority in relation to this issue.

The CFO commented that the remedy for this complex situation is as yet unknown and therefore the Authority has based its calculations on the worst-case scenario. Attempts have been made to quantify possible outcomes, but these will not crystallise in one go.

Resolved that the Committee note the Annual Audit Letter for the Year Ended 31 March 2019.

7 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 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 this report and, with the relevant officers, gave the following updates on the improvements set out in the Appendix to the report:

People

The DCFO reported that the collective agreement for the wholetime shift change has been agreed locally and submitted to the National Executive of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for decision, which is still awaited. The number of firefighters on the establishment has reduced from 136 to 128 so there is a need to ensure resilience. This has been done through the integrated crewing system with the provision of short-term contracts to cover short to medium term gaps in crewing. A draft collective agreement for the Fire Control flexible crewing system has been drawn up. Once the outcome of the wholetime agreement is received from the National Executive of the FBU, officers will use any learning points from this to inform the Fire Control agreement and prepare it for approval.

Process

The PPCM reported that the Risk Management System is up and running. Officers are currently working to identify costings for the standard testing and reporting system (STARS). Feedback has shown that the Learning Pool total package is working well across the Service.

Building Facilities

The PPCM reported that the final version of the concept plans (version 11) for the Telford Central refurbishment have been received from the Design Team. These have been agreed and preparations are now being made to go to tender for the project. Groundworks have been undertaken and it has been concluded that it will be a refurbishment and extension project and pre-planning work is being undertaken in relation to this. An internal programme plan is being drawn up and will follow the same process as the Shrewsbury Project with functions being maintained on site during the build. Consultation is ongoing with West Mercia Police regarding their use of the site and it is hoped that their requirements can be factored into current plans. If the Police identify that they have further requirements there will be financial implications, which will need to be addressed.

Appliances / Equipment

The HOR reported that the Incident Command vehicle is now in build at Emergency One following the delay on the chassis. The delay was due to the Service requiring 4x4 capability for the vehicle and a high-top to enable individuals to stand up in the vehicle. The Service is currently in a procurement exercise with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) for incident command software to improve capability. There is however a time critical element to this as there will need to be sufficient time for training once the software is installed.

The five new appliances are in place and training on these has been completed. Work is now being undertaken to identify the next five vehicles for replacement.

Collaboration

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

The HTC reported that risk workshops have been run across both Services to undertake a PESTLE analysis etc. The next part of the process is to undertake 'Setting the Scene' visits with each station / department which should highlight any local risks for inclusion in the IRMP. Outcomes, outputs and impacts of what we do have been agreed across the Services and communal actions for Alliance have also been agreed. A set of performance measures to sit across the Alliance have been agreed which will enable benchmarking with other services.

Fire Control

Options are being explored to increase resilience within Fire Control and staff engagement in this process is being undertaken in both brigades with Control and any associated teams. A meeting was held in Tenbury Wells on 4 September where stakeholders scored the basic options appraisal, which will be brought back to the Strategic Alliance Board for consideration.

The CFO commented that this is an interesting issue with the challenge being to find a solution to Control being inundated in a critical / major incident, which is difficult in small brigades. Significant events happen infrequently so how do you build capacity to deal with peak demand in relation to a critical or major incident, i.e. 'how do you get big quickly?'. The Control Room is a sophisticated part of the overall command and control arrangements.

Members asked what the current capacity of Fire Control is. The CFO explained that it is difficult to say. Current resilience arrangements involve offsetting calls to partner agencies which does mean that the Service is not capturing all intelligence in relation to these. Other, larger, fire and rescue services model on staffing of 9 (three times more than ours) to be comfortable.

ICT

A Strategic Change Manager has been appointed and will work to facilitate joint ICT plans across both services. This is hugely important as ICT underpins all change going forward.

The CFO asked Members if the correct level of information is provided in the report. Members felt that the detail given is enough as the Committee only requires a high-level overview to inform a holistic picture of what is happening within the Service. Members also commented that the verbal explanations provided by officers are very helpful.

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

8 Annual Review 2018/19

This report presented the draft Annual Review (also known as the Annual Statement of Assurance) for 2018/19 and gave the Committee an opportunity to make comment on the draft, prior to its going forward to the full Fire Authority for consideration and approval.

The ACFO presented this report and explained that all fire and rescue services must publish an Annual Statement of Performance which is a backward-looking review of its objectives and its performance against them. The document has been produced in 'Sway' as it enables it to be more interactive and good for publication on the Service's website. The ACFO then talked through the Annual Review itself.

Members commented that they felt that the report was missing firefighters / equipment in its contents. They felt that it was important to include these as they may aid public involvement and interest in the document. They suggested that they would like to see inclusion of the following:

- Information on safety measures used to support staff and reduce injuries
- Details of help and support given to staff with issues such as dyslexia
- Highlighting a possible 'hero of the year' i.e. an employee who has done something outstanding

Overall Members felt there was a need to bring people forward more in the document, particularly as Her Majesty's Inspectorate are very interested in having people stories associated with the areas that they are assessing.

In response to comments from Members regarding the images used in the document, the ACFO explained that the new Communications Team will increase the library of pictures held by the Service which will in turn improve the images used in future documents.

Resolved that the Committee, having made comment that the draft Annual Review 2018/19 should be amended to include more 'people' stories, forward the Report to the Fire Authority for consideration and formal adoption

9 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report was the latest of regular risk summary report, to the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee.

The PPCM presented this report and advised that no new entries have been added to the Corporate Risk Register since the last report to this Committee. Paragraph 6 of the report sets out the changes that have been made to the Register and regarding Direction of Travel, no risks have increased, eight have remained static and four have decreased. The PPCM also advised that the Service is currently undertaking planning for a 'no deal' Brexit scenario and a new risk related to this is to be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

Members asked for more information on the risk related to fitness standards. The ACFO explained that there has been a change to the national recommended standard with a substantial increase in the fitness levels required. A lot of work on health and wellbeing has been undertaken across the workforce in preparation for the change including placing fitness equipment on stations with instructions for use and the provision of treadmills to enable employees to test themselves against the new standards. During the crossover period between the change in measures, any employees falling into the 'amber' group of fitness levels will be given a training programme with the aim of improving their results. The risk is long-term, but it is hoped that all staff will be able to achieve the new standards by the end of the year with new recruits being measured against the new standard from the start.

The CFO added that this will remain a risk for a long time as the work contract and fitness standards have changed and this will require a lot of work to address. The Service is investing as heavily as it can in bringing employees up to the required standards and maintaining these once achieved. This is a long-term investment to tackle long term issues.

Members asked how many employees are failing. The GM responded that, to date, there are two employees who have fallen below the lower threshold. The Service is taking a risk assessment approach to the issue, hence the 'amber' group, which is those employees who need additional support to meet the required levels, but who can still respond and maintain appliance availability. It is predicted that approximately 120 employees could fall into the 'amber' group but there are only 30 so far. The CFO reassured the Committee that the Service knows that the new standards are challenging and that there will be future issues with this. Therefore, steps have been taken to provide equipment to enable self-testing and is working to remove the fear from the process for employees.

Members queried why there was no risk related to employee stress on the Register when this has been identified as one of the highest levels of risk at Shropshire Council. The CFO explained that the main reason for sickness within the Service is musclo-skeletal issues. The Service is however focusing more on mental health and undertaking initiatives in relation to this. There is also the advantage that employees are working in an organisation that is well funded and equipped to do its job with staff being fully consulted regarding changes. All these factors help to reduce stress levels within the workforce.

Members asked if there are any issues arising from Brexit. The HOR explained that business continuity planning is being undertaken in relation to logistics and supply chains. The supply chain issue is also being considered at the national level and assurances have been given that supply chains will still be there. The main issues for this Service are vehicles and BA kit. For example, the BA kit is from Interspiro who are based in Telford but the parts for it come from Latvia. Fuel supplies should be unaffected as fuel is imported via pipelines. There are issues around bunkered fuel supplies and planning is being undertaken in relation to this issue. There should also be no issue with power supplies. Possible solutions for issues with fuel are to look at alternative working arrangements for staff and the use of alternative vehicles.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

10 Performance Monitoring

10a Service Targets April to August 2019

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the period April to August 2019.

The DCFO presented this report and explained that there is an error on page 3 of the Appendix to the report. The comments for the fire related deaths and serious injuries target should read '...1 fire fatality and three serious injuries' not two fatalities and two serious injuries as stated in the report.

Overall, performance against the targets is good and there is an improved picture with an additional target now being met. This means that five out of seven targets are likely to be achieved over the year with the Response standards and Fires confined to room of origin target not likely to be met.

The DCFO explained that this is the final year of stretching targets related to the 5% reduction in targets year on year over five years. Regarding the fire and heat damage being confined to the room of origin target, the DCFO explained that the peak for this target occurs during June / July, in relation to agricultural fires with barn fires being an anomaly within the target.

Councillor Minnery left the meeting at this point (3.30 pm).

Members asked how a reduction in accidental fires can be achieved and calculated when some of the reduction may be attributable to sheer luck. The DCFO responded that luck is a factor but the fact that it has not been a great summer has had a greater impact on performance against the accidental fires target. Performance against this indicator can also be attributed to the work that is undertaken by the Service and improvements in building regulations.

With regard to injuries to staff, Members asked if there had been any attacks whilst out on firecalls. The HOR explained that there have been none in Shropshire, but this is becoming an increasing issue nationally, particularly in the north-east of the country.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

10b Presentation on Service Targets

As agreed at the July 2016 meeting of the Committee, the HOR gave a presentation on the following 2019/20 Service Target:

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

The HOR gave this presentation and explained that work has been undertaken on identifying what is actually an incident. Analysis of data used for this target has shown that lone working, requests for Fire Safety Officers, NILO cover for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service which involves long travel times, and stand-bys over the border have all been included in the data-set for this target which skews performance against it.

Additionally, it has been identified that the availability of the rescue tender for animal rescue incidents has also impacted the data. This is because there is a different dynamic to mobilising and the tender does not respond on blue lights if it is a non-life risk incident. Analysis of the data has shown that there were 25 animal rescue incidents where the Service failed to meet the Response standard.

Once these incidents had been accounted for, officers drilled down into the data by station and found that there was a spike in the data for Shrewsbury. It was then identified that there was an issue with the Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) on one of the appliances. This had occurred during the live test phase of the MDT implementation when steps were taken to try and 'break' the technology. This had resulted in the MDTs not sending status updates to the Command and Control system which had skewed the data. The next steps in relation to this issue is for the Business Intelligence Team to undertake work on the corporate dashboard to rectify the corrupted data.

The CFO commented that this has been a useful target over the last five years as it gives a simple measure for the public to understand. However, for the future a more realistic standard based on risk areas are needed with realistic assessments of response times for those people who live in rural areas. This feels more open and honest and should make it easier to measure performance. The HTC explained that these standards will be covered across the whole strategic alliance area as part of a public consultation.

Resolved the Committee note the presentation

10c Wholetime and On-Call (Retained Duty System) Performance Monitoring April to June 2019

This report provided summary information for April – June 2019, regarding the performance and management of the availability of Wholetime and On-Call (Retained Duty System) appliances in Shropshire.

The GM presented this report and particularly highlighted Prees who are maintaining 80.7% availability with 7 personnel.

The GM also explained that the colour coding on the table on page 3 of the report indicates how stations are performing in relation to availability.

The GM also reported that he had recently attended the National On-Call Conference where lead officers from other fire and rescue services were very keen to speak to Shropshire about how it maintains such high availability. Whilst this is very pleasing the Service cannot rest on its laurels, hence why it is undertaking the On-Call Sustainability Review to identify how it can support its On-Call staff into the future.

The new Corporate Communications team are keen to get messages out about On-Call recruitment and there will be a national On-Call week in January 2020.

Members asked if there were plans in place to take on more crew at Prees. The GM explained that it is a priority for recruitment and that the Service looks to recruit for all stations constantly.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

11 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the Committee being satisfied in all the circumstances of the case that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information, formally resolve that the press and public and press 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 paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

12 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

The Committee received Appendix C to report 9 – Corporate Risk Management Summary, which was considered in closed session, as it contained exempt information.

Resolved that the Committee note exempt Appendix C to report 9.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....