

**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, 10 July 2025 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Blundell, Coleman (Vice Chair), Handley (Chair), Huseman, Kerr, and Waite.

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Sam Burton	Deputy Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	DCFO
Karen Gowreesunker	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support)	ACFO
Joanne Coadey	Head of Finance	HoF
Scott Hurford	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Germine Worker	Head of HR and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Supervisor	ESS

External Bodies

Mr Terry Tobin Grant Thornton (External Audit)

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Hannington and Radford
Mr Richard Anderson, Grant Thornton (External Audit)
Mr Chris Green, Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Services (Internal Audit)

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved, that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 10 April 2025, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Committee Terms of Reference and Constitution

This report, asked Members to consider the Terms of Reference of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, following the annual review conducted by officers.

Resolved that the Committee note its Terms of Reference, as set out at the Appendix to the report.

6 Committee Training

Members were asked to consider and agree what training they wish to receive in order to fulfil their role on the Committee effectively.

Resolved that the Committee wish to receive the following training:

- Corporate Risk
- Audit Awareness Training
- Corporate Performance Indicators

External Audit

7 The Audit Plan for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

This paper provided an overview of the planned scope and timing of the statutory audit of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority ('the Authority') for Standards Audit and Performance Committee.

Mr Tobin gave his apologies for not attending the meeting in person.

Mr Tobin explained that there are two parts to the audit; the first is the audit of accounts, and the second is the Value for Money (VfM) opinion which is a separate report. Mr Tobin talked through report highlighting various issues including management override factors such as the valuation of buildings etc. There has been a slight increase in the reporting of materiality misstatements that are deemed as 'clearly trivial' for the Authority. The financial stability of the Service was also highlighted financial sustainability.

Further Audit reports will be brought to this Committee by Mr Eliot Baker who is the new auditor for the Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Internal Audit

8 Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion 2024/25

This report provided the Committee with the annual internal audit opinion on the organisation's framework of internal control, risk management and governance.

The HoF presented this report on behalf of Mr Green who had given his apologies for the meeting.

The HoF highlighted the Appendix to the report, particularly the Internal Audit Opinion on page 2 of document which states that the Head of Internal Audit's overall opinion on the organisation's system of internal control is that reasonable assurance can be given that there is an adequate and effective control framework in place, designed to meet the organisation's objectives.

Page 11 of the Appendix sets out the summary of Internal Audit Findings for the year by Audit Area:

Payroll & Pensions – a substantial assurance was given in this audit area and the HoF advised that different areas will be audited next year

HR – Movers & Leavers – an assurance rating of reasonable was given in this audit area and it has highlighted that there is a need to ensure a proper flow of information between departments. The CFO commented that this relates to ensuring that starters, movers, and leavers are in the right place in the system

Members asked what a 'reasonable assurance rating' means. The HOF explained that it means that the recommendations given need to be dealt with in a timely manner.

Corporate Health and Safety received a reasonable assurance rating with the audit highlighting that further work is needed on the risk assessment matrix. Members raised concerns about the reference in the Auditor's report to there being a lack of information due to absence. The DCFO provided assurance that the Service will be recruiting a Health & Safety Manager to increase resilience in the department.

A limited assurance rating was given to the **IT Network & Cyber Security** audit area and the ACFO advised that the department is in transition, with a new Head of Digital and Data taking up post in September.

Resolved that the Committee note the report and the 2024/25 Internal Audit Opinion and Commentary.

9 Corporate Risk Management Summary

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

The ACFO presented this report and advised that all existing identified risks have been mapped to the new Risk Register. There have been no changes to the open risks since the last report to Committee and the risk rating for one exempt risk has been reduced.

The Service's new approach to risk management and reporting will mean that there are no longer exempt risks on the Risk Register and all risks will be reported in the public session of Authority and Committee meetings.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) note the contents of the report; and
- b) agreed the close down of the current risk register and risk management approach

10 Corporate Risk – new process and risks

For decision

This report provided the Committee with an overview of the progress and outcomes that have been achieved in the identification of new Corporate Risks for the Authority. The report also detailed the supporting process, which will provide robust arrangements for monitoring, review, and assurance.

The ACFO gave a presentation which set out the salient points of the report for the Committee.

The new Corporate Risk Register is aligned to the Service's Strategic Aims, statutory duties, and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) with three areas identified for each risk: cause, effect, and consequence.

The following have been identified as new Corporate Risks

- Staff Engagement
Triggers are important e.g. industrial action either local or national
- Political and Organisational Change
- Cyber Security and Systems Resilience
potential for reputational damage; unpatched software e.g. website
- Digital and Data Capability
skills and level of staffing looked at to mitigate risks
- Finance
Risk from how we receive funding e.g. council tax; business rates, government grant
- Environment
- Health & Safety
It is anticipated that this will be a 12-month risk as it relates to increasing capacity in the department

Regular updates on issues and management and/or mitigation of risks will be given, and risks will be reviewed on a quarterly basis within the Service. A 'deep dive' of corporate risk will be undertaken once a year and reported to the appropriate Committee of the Fire Authority. This will ensure that the Service is continuing with its risk management journey and that risk is being reported correctly.

The CFO said that the new corporate risk management process is a testament to the work undertaken by officers and thanked the ACFO and the Transformation & Collaboration Team for their input.

Councillor Kerr thanked the team for work done on this and advised that he is Chair of Audit Committee at Shropshire Council and has experience of corporate risk management. Councillor Kerr acknowledged the value in showing unmitigated and mitigated risk scores and undertook to share the Lincolnshire Police Force assurance model with the ACFO.

Members questioned how so many issues were found in the Service that appear in the HMICFRS Cause of Concern. Members also asked if there should be mention of the Service's culture in the Corporate Risk Register. The ACFO advised that culture and transformation are reflected in the mitigation of identified risks. A Cultural transformation process is being undertaken to look at how to move the Service's culture forward.

The DCFO explained that in the second week of her role with SFRS, she attended a Strategic HMI Briefing where it was clear that the HMICFRS were inspecting with a 'fresh pair of eyes'. It is apparent that recommendations have not been embedded in a contemporary manner over previous years and the Service needs to be open and transparent about the fact that work needs to be done.

Members asked if the Executive Officers think it was a case of employees getting too comfortable and/or resting on their laurels. The CFO commented, that in his opinion, the Service did not commit fully to the findings of its 2021 Inspection. There appears to have been a lack of engagement with the Inspectorate and Areas for Improvement (AFIs) were treated as business as usual (BAU), instead of being prioritised. The CFO thinks the Service is at a different stage with the latest inspection with structures and internal scrutiny in place to ensure AFIs are addressed.

In response to a Member query regarding battery energy storage sites (BESS), thermal runaway, and toxic fumes, the CFO explained that the Service is a statutory consultee for BESS sites, but it does not have any regulatory powers in relation to them.

Resolved that the Members:

- a) note the report,
- b) approve the new corporate risks,
- c) agree the reporting of corporate risk into the committee at each of its meetings four times a year. Reporting of all risks at three of these meetings with one meeting enabling a deep dive into a risk, and
- d) approve the amended policy to reflect the new process.

11 Corporate Performance Indicators including On Call Duty System Performance – April 2024 to March 2025 (Year End)

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the year April 2024 to March 2025.

The HoTC presented this report and acknowledged the Station Manager Transformation & Collaboration's work on compiling the report. The HoTC explained that there are nine Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs) which the Service is utilising for this year whilst a review is carried out to expand the CPIs and introduce Corporate Health Indicators (CHIs). The HoTC also explained that tolerance levels for each CPI are based on historical incident data and provided the following commentary on each of the CPIs.

CPI 1 – All Fires

The target figure for this CPI is 1060, actual performance was 993.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

The target for this CPI is 202, actual figure was 177. There are fluctuations against this CPI throughout the year. It is also important to note that the CPI covers a range of incident severity from total destruction of a property to a small kitchen fire. It is, however, pleasing to report that 96% of the incidents attended had smoke detectors fitted in the property.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

The target for this CPI is 267, actual figure was 260. There has been a sustained focus on prevention activity related to deliberate fires which has seen the total number reduce greatly.

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

There is no target set for this CPI due to the nature of it, but the Service aims for a total figure of zero which has been met during this reporting period. The CPI measures deaths and/or serious injuries from fires only, other incidents such as road traffic collisions are not included,

Responding to member query regarding the age demographic of victims, the CFO gave the example of 2023, where there were six fire deaths in three months, all from vulnerable groups, i.e. elderly or disabled.

The DCFO explained that there is currently no correlation undertaken between CPIs and risk and vulnerability factors, which would assist in targeting prevention activities. Personcentric visits will mean that more data is collected but this will then need to be turned into intelligence. Partnership working for referrals etc.

Members requested that social media messages for fire safety campaigns throughout year be shared with the Fire Authority so that Members can share them across their social media as well. Parish Councils and/or parish magazines are useful for publicity as well. The HoTC will feed this into the Comms Team.

CPI 5 – Fires Confined to Room of Origin

This CPI is linked to reducing the severity of fires. It has a target of 87% with actual performance of 88.3%. This CPI is slightly odd as the higher the figure, the better the performance against it. The CPI tests Prevention, Protection and Response activity, for example presence of smoke detectors, bedtime routine together with the competence of response capability.

Smoke alarm ownership has increased due to changes in legislation related to building regulations.

Member asked is performance is reviewed each month. The HoTC advised that it is done quarterly at Performance and Risk Group. Prevention provides an immediate response to dwelling fires. They receive a full report on the incident and carry out a 'hot strike' in the locality to provide reassurance and/or prevention advice to residents, as well as ensuring there is support in place for those directly involved in the incident.

CPI 6 – Injuries Sustained to Staff Through Operational Activity

There is no target set for this CPI due to its nature although the Service aims for zero injuries in its operational environment. Each incident is investigated to identify possible areas for mitigation. The HoTC explained that the figures reported include injuries sustained in the training environment as well as operationally.

Members requested that the reason for the injury be demonstrated in future reports, together with the inclusion of RIDDOR reportable injuries as was provided in previous reports.

Members queried where vehicle fire statistics are reported. The HoTC explained that CPI 1 – All Fires includes vehicle fires. He also advised that there will be a new suite of CPIs for Members to give feedback on for adoption for 2026/27.

Members asked what action was taken in regard to accident clusters. The HoTC responded that the Service works with Community Safety Partnerships on this. The Head of Prevention and Protection is working on data sharing in relation to this and the Service is involved in the MORSE programme which is run by the Officer of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

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

The overall target for this CPI is 85%, actual performance is 94%, with three different standards for urban, town and fringe, and rural localities. Timings are based on when Fire Control press the alerter to turn crews and assets out. As part of the Community Risk Management Plan 2025-28 there will be a change to attendance standards to include the time taken to mobilise crews and assets.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

There has been a total of 116 fires in regulated buildings which are buildings that are not domestic dwellings.

CPI 9 - Establishment, Diversity and Firefighter Competence

The establishment figures show that there is a large turnover of staff in the On Call System and that there are a number of vacancies being carried in the support staff area.

The ethnicity figures for employees reflect the general population of the county.

The competency figures show that the percentages of competent staff are high although it should be remembered that not all operational staff are trained in all of those skills and it is always ensured that those staff who are on duty are fully competent.

On Call Duty System Performance

Availability levels are pleasing and are a credit to the Service and its culture.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

The meeting adjourned for a comfort break at this point and Councillor Kerr left the meeting (4.00 pm). The meeting reconvened at 4.10 pm.

12 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Cause of Concern Progress Report

This report detailed the Service's progress towards improvement identified by the HMICFRS Cause of Concern.

The DCFO presented this report and advised that it will be unfamiliar to new Committee members, although it was shared with the Fire Authority at its June meeting. Officers undertook to provide a bespoke awareness session on the HMICFRS Report to Fire Authority Members.

The HMICFRS identified the following Cause of Concern (CoC) from its inspection of the Service in June 2024: the Service doesn't have adequate processes, controls or internal governance arrangements in place to manage strategic risks, performance and improvement plans.

In response to this, the Service developed a CoC Action Plan to address the recommendations made by the HMICFRS and this report presents the progress against that Action Plan. The Action Plan is a dynamic document which includes realistic planning and timelines. Officers are utilising MS Planner which provides analytics on progress with the Action Plan and ensures relevant information is kept in one central location. The Action Plan has been shared with the HMICFRS but there are still some gaps and/or priorities on it which need to be addressed.

The DCFO gave the following update on each of the five CoC areas:

CoC 1: There are appropriate strategic oversight arrangements in place to manage risks, performance and improvement plans effectively.

SMT has established a RAIDO to capture risks, actions, interdependencies, decisions and actions

Concerns about whether the internal governance structure is fit for purpose have led to a Service Structure Review being undertaken

The Service is adopting a Portfolio Management approach going forward and the methodology for this is currently being designed. Portfolio Management enables the delivery of an organisation's programme and priorities and ensures that decision-making takes place at the most appropriate level.

CoC 2: The Corporate Risk Register is actively used to mitigate and manage known risks

Progress against this CoC is covered at item 10 on the agenda for this meeting.

CoC 3: All processes in place to support performance management are effective

This CoC covers several areas but mainly relates to the strategic approach to Service performance

The HHRA advised that the Individual Performance and Development Review (IPDR) process has been simplified and how managers hold staff accountable across the organisation is also being addressed with Performance Management and Critical Conversation training being provided to managers at all levels.

CoC4: There is access to accurate data and analysis to support effective performance management

This CoC links to CoC 3 and across the Service as a whole.

The Digital and Data Strategy will be considered by the Service Management Team (SMT) at its meeting next week. The digital strategy will be implemented first followed by the data strategy. The foundation of the data strategy is establishing how good the data that the Service holds is. For example, for CPIs this would involve looking at the data collected, how it is reported, and how it is presented to the Service and the Authority.

Assessment is needed of whether the data is right at source, is processed properly, and is output properly.

CoC 5: There are robust processes for reporting accurate and suitably detailed finance and risk information to the Fire Authority

This CoC is split into two areas:

5.1 Develop a robust budget setting, monitoring and reporting framework that provides accurate, transparent, and timely information at all levels of governance

External Audit comments are being reported to the Fire Authority along with details of improvements made in response to those comments

The HMICFRS questioned the robustness etc of information provided when reporting to the Authority on projects such as the Telford Central Re-development. Work to address this will be undertaken as part of the move to a Portfolio Management approach.

5.2 Strengthen the involvement of statutory officers in strategic management and decision making

A report on changes to the Authority's Strategic Officer arrangements was considered and agreed by the Fire Authority at its meeting in June 2025. As a result of this, significant strategic recruitment will be undertaken with processes for an ACFO and a Section 151 Officer anticipated to commence in early September.

The DCFO advised that HMICFRS are revisiting the Service in week commencing 21 July 2025, with a focus on assessing progress made against the CoC. Senior Officers are comfortable with the progress that has been made as the Service is still delivering its business as usual (BAU). The use of MS Planner enables internal and Authority scrutiny of progress, and the Service is in regular contact with HMICFRS as part of progress monitoring.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

13 HMICFRS Areas for Improvement Progress

This report detailed the Service's progress towards improvement identified by the HMICFRS Areas For Improvement progress. The HoTC presented the report and explained that the Areas for Improvement (AFIs) identified by the HMICFRS are split into three main pillars of Effectiveness, Efficiency, and People. The Service has a total of 30 AFIs with 85 sub-items sitting under those AFIs. It should be noted that some of the AFIs are carried over from previous HMI Inspections.

The Service has adopted a different approach to addressing these AFIs than it has for previous inspections with better tracking of actions and progress and the assignment of a responsible owner to each AFI. The initial focus of the Service is on 22 of the AFIs. As can be seen from the RAG rating in the report, AFIs 1 and 2 which relate to evaluation and quality assurance are currently behind schedule. Progress against the AFIs is assessed monthly and strategic reporting of this information is being developed.

Members requested that that the deadline by which AFIs are to go green be included on future reporting. Members also noted the interdependencies between AFIs which are set out in the report, and which may impact on completion of several AFIs.

Members asked who has set the timelines for the completion of each AFI. The HoTC explained that each AFI has an identified owner who has set the timeline for completion of their AFI(s). The HoTC welcomed the idea of the Committee being able to scrutinise those timelines as collaboration is vital in this area.

The HoTC advised that the next HMICFRS Inspection is likely to focus on governance arrangements and their effect on service delivery. Officers believe that the Governance Review that has been undertaken, and is currently being implemented, will stand the Service in good stead for such an inspection.

Members noted that there can be a difference between what the Service is actually doing and what it is perceived to be doing. The HoTC acknowledged this and commented that prioritisation of actions is important, and the Committee's opinion on this would be welcomed.

The HHRA advised that Members need to be fully briefed on the details of the AFIs and the interdependencies between them. Members would welcome this and would particularly be interested in understanding the rationale behind the approach taken to the AFIs.

The CFO suggested that the awareness session referred to earlier in the meeting should cover both elements of the HMICFRS as a whole and the Service's CoC and AFIs. Consideration also needs to be given to how the full engagement of the Fire Authority in the addressing of the CoC / AFIS can be achieved.

In response to a Member comment about the Service advertising for an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer and the public perception and understanding of why roles like this are needed in fire and rescue services, the CFO advised that a lot of learning has been taken from previous experiences of backlash on social media to Positive Action campaigns. The Service appreciates that there can be a lack of understanding about EDI, both within the organisation and the communities it serves, and as such aims to ensure that it is clear about the aims of its EDI initiatives.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

14 HMICFRS Standards of Behaviour and Misconduct Progress

This report presented the Service's progress against the recommendations made to the sector in the HMICFRS Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in the fire and rescue services report

The HHRA explained that this report, which was published on 1 August 2024, requested CFOs to action the 15 recommendations identified in it, with the timelines for completion varying from immediate to 1 November 2025. To ensure that the Service was able to meet this request, a gap analysis was undertaken on receipt of the report which informed the development of a Service Action Plan.

The HHRA then talked through the progress against the 15 recommendations which is set out in the report in order of timeline for completion. The following updated were highlighted:

Recommendation 5: By 1 November 2024, chief fire officers should make sure all staff understand how to raise a concern and use grievance and whistle-blowing processes.

This recommendation is complete and the HHRA provided assurance that the Service has had a whistle-blowing policy in place for 10 years plus.

Recommendation 13: By 1 November 2024, fire and rescue authorities and chief fire officers should consider varying the approach to hearing appeals so that appeals for complex or serious cases are heard by a panel rather than one person.

This recommendation is still in progress but a review of the Service's disciplinary policy which the appeals process is part of, has confirmed that the appeals process is appropriate. All appeals against dismissal for ranks up to Brigade Manager will be reviewed by the CFO and the Authority's Independent Person for Standards.

Recommendation 4: By 1 February 2025, chief fire officers should make sure their services create or have access to a dedicated professional standards function to oversee the investigation of concerns raised within a service or from an external source.

Progress against this recommendation is ongoing, but a decision was made by SMT in June that case management will remain in Service unless it is a complex case or it is necessary that a case be investigated externally due to the nature of the issues raised.

The HHRA advised that there is a lot of crossovers in the report's recommendations made which has an impact on the completion of some areas. There has also been some slippage in completion, due to the Service wanting to ensure that any measures put in place are appropriate and are implemented correctly.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Councillor Husemann left the meeting at this point (5.10 pm)

15 Summary of Compliments and Complaints 2021/22 to 2024/25

This report advised Members of summary details regarding the compliments and complaints received during 2024/25, with comparisons to the previous three years.

The CFO presented this report and advised that compliments received by the Service are shared with Authority Members via email. They are also copied to the employee(s) concerned and their line managers.

Complaint figures are reported to SMT on a six-monthly basis to enable monitoring of trends in complaint type and the outcomes of completed complaint investigations, for example how many complaints are fully or partially substantiated in comparison to the number that are unsubstantiated.

There are specific Service performance standards for complaints, and these have been achieved consistently throughout the year, with the exception of three occasions.

Complainants have the right to appeal the outcome of an investigation, if they are dissatisfied with it. The first level of appeal is to the Chief Fire Officer, after which, if the complainant is still not satisfied, they may direct their appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman. During 2024/25, there were no appeals at either of these stages.

Resolved that the Committee note the report.

Councillor Coleman left the meeting at this point (5.25 pm)

16 Pensions Board Minutes April 2025

Resolved that the Committee note the minutes of the Pensions Board meeting, held on 29 April 2025.

17 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a to the Local Government Act 1972

18 Exempt Minutes (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee, held on 10 April 2025, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

19 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

Resolved that the Committee receive and note exempt Appendix C to report 10 – Corporate Risk Management Summary

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm.

Chair _____

Date _____