

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
Audit and Performance Management Committee  
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury  
on Thursday, 22 November 2012 at 3.30 pm**

**Members**

Councillors Adams, Carter, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones (Chair), Kiernan and Mellings (Vice-Chair)

**Officers**

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Head of Finance, Planning and Performance Manager, Shropshire Rural Performance Group Commander and Executive Support Officer

**External Bodies**

Mrs Mayne (External Audit)  
Mrs Hall (Audit Services, Shropshire Council)

The Chair began by welcoming Mrs Mayne, External Audit, and Mrs Hall, Audit Services, Shropshire Council, to the meeting.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Bould.

Mr Patterson, External Audit, had sent his apologies for absence, as he was unable to attend to present the Annual Audit Letter.

**2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

There were no Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

**3 Minutes**

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 6 September 2012.

Following on from the verbal update on the Operational Performance Assessment (OpA) that was given to the September 2012 meeting of the Committee, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) advised Members that the OpA process had been completed and a full report on its findings will be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 12 December 2012

The DCFO then tabled a document (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes), which set out the priority areas of action from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's point of view. The DCFO also gave a brief outline of the review process, which had been undertaken collaboratively with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, and reported that there had been very positive outcomes from the Review Team's investigations.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 6 September 2012, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

#### **4 Public Questions**

No public questions, statements or petitions had been received.

#### **5 External Audit Matters – Annual Audit Letter**

Mrs Mayne presented the Annual Audit Letter 2011/12 (the Letter) to the meeting and talked through the key messages contained in the Letter. A synopsis of the issues covered is provided below.

Mrs Mayne reported that the financial statements included two material misstatements, which have been amended, and commented that this was a credit to the Authority. Mrs Mayne also thanked the Authority's Finance Team for their co-operation during the audit.

Mrs Mayne then talked through the Auditor's findings with regard to the Financial statements and annual governance statement, as set out on pages 7 to 8 of the Letter; Value for Money, as set out on pages 9 to 10 of the Letter; and the current and future challenges facing the Authority, as outlined on pages 4 to 6 of the Letter.

Councillor Mellings referred to the Value for Money conclusion and asked if the Committee had sufficient focus on this issue or if it perhaps lay elsewhere within the Authority. Mrs Mayne responded that the Auditor looks at Value for Money separately. The Fire Authority already monitors Value for Money, for example through performance indicators. Mrs Mayne commented that the Chief Fire Officer does produce a benchmarking report for Value for Money and the Committee may want to consider checking where this information is reported. Councillor Mellings said that he wished to avoid any duplication of work. Mrs Mayne acknowledged this and added that from External Audit's perspective no additional work is needed on Value for Money.

Councillor Carter referred to page 4 of the Letter and asked if there would be any reports given to Members on the Authority's meetings with the new Fire Minister and, in particular, information on any outcomes of the meetings. The DCFO responded that the new Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, does not appear to have made any radical changes to existing policy. He does have a focus on localism and also appears keen for Fire Authorities to manage at the local level.

The Chair of the Fire Authority, the DCFO and the Head of Finance are due to meet with the Fire Minister in London on 11 December and will raise the precept / Council tax issue with him.

The DCFO also informed the meeting that the Chief Fire Officer had recently met with Simon Ridley, Director, Local Government Finance at the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The Treasurer had arranged for Mr Ridley to spend the day in Shropshire and he had been driven around the County to help put into context the issues of sparsity, faced by Shropshire Council and the Fire Authority. The Treasurer reported that Mr Ridley had found the day incredibly useful and that he would be reporting his findings to colleagues at the DCLG.

Councillor Carter requested that a report on the meeting with the Fire Minister be given to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 12 December 2012. The DCFO undertook to provide this.

Councillor Kiernan commented that the Annual Audit Letter was excellent and that, in his opinion, the Fire Authority has always taken a very prudent approach to its finances over the years. Councillor Kiernan did, however, have concerns over partnership funding and also referred to the issue of Business Rates Retention, as set out on page 4 of the report, and asked on what the 1% adjustment would be based. The Head of Finance (HoF) explained that it will be based on the grant settlement given to the Authority. The HoF undertook to provide further detail on this issue to Members via email. The DCFO responded that, with regard to partnership working, most of the partnerships involve benefit in kind arrangements and, therefore, have minimal financial implications for the Authority.

The Chair thanked Mrs Mayne for presenting the Letter to the Committee, and it was

**Resolved** that the Committee note the Annual Audit Letter 2010/11

## **6 Internal Audit Plan 2013/14**

This report reviewed the programme of audit work for the period 2013/14 and recommended that the Fire Authority approve changes to the programme, as set out in the report.

The HoF drew the Committee's attention to the change that had been made to the Partnership audit for 2013/14, where the number of proposed days for the audit has been reduced from four to two. The remaining two days will be available for further audits as they arise.

It was proposed by Councillor Hurst-Knight, seconded by Councillor Kiernan and

**Resolved** that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority:

- a) Approve the programme of audits for 2013/14, as set out in the report; and
- b) Note the proposed programme of audits for years 2014/15 to 2015/16

## **7 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2012/13**

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2012/13.

The Planning and Performance Manager (PPM) drew Members' attention to Appendix A to the report and highlighted the following issues.

With regard to IRN 3 – implementation of the Asset Management System – the Head of Resources (HoR) had prepared a report, which is attached at Appendix B to the report and which the HoR would address later in the meeting.

IRN 4 – embedding of Command and Control system – is being addressed. It is envisaged that Station End Equipment will be installed prior to March 2013, subject to agreement on the scope of works. This may include consolidation of other ICT infrastructure at stations. IRN 5 – in-life support arrangement for the Command and Control System – is dependent on the installation of the Station End Equipment.

With regard to IRN 9 – improved resilience at shadow site at Telford Central – work has been undertaken to improve resilience at Telford and it is anticipated that the updating of Business Continuity Manuals will be completed by the December deadline.

With regard to IRN 10 – training for Risk Management Group – the Group received a full-day training session on 1 November 2012. There has been good feedback from the session and the Group is to address the issues raised by the training. The Chair commented that the training session had been excellent.

Councillor Mellings commented that Appendix B to the report had provided a very useful overview of the Asset Management System and associated issues and asked that a similar report on IRN 8 – Service Transformation Programme – be prepared for the next meeting of the Committee. The PPM undertook to provide this.

The HoR then presented the report on the Asset Management System to the Committee and informed Members that the first two ICT System Actions, as detailed on page 3 of the report, have been completed.

The Chair asked if the Service was happy that there was enough capacity in the ICT team to undertake the work outlined in the report. The DCFO responded that the Service Transformation Programme and the 2020 Consultation have recognised that there is a limit to capacity within the Service. A resource has been identified in ICT to undertake the work required but it is recognised that a longer timeframe is needed for the work to be completed and that rationalisation of work priorities needs to be undertaken.

**Resolved** that the Committee note:

- a) The progress made against each of the improvements, contained in the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2012/13; and
- b) The amendment to one workstream, as detailed in section 5 of, and the appendix to the report

## **8 Performance Monitoring**

### **8a Public Value Performance Measures 2012/13 Quarter 2 Performance April to September 2012**

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance for the period April to September 2012.

The PPM presented the report and drew Members' attention to Section 4, which highlighted that the number of 'don't know' responses on the questionnaires used for Aim 4 – To deliver an effective fire and rescue service at a cost that is acceptable to our community – have reached 10%. Work is underway to investigate how the question could be changed to gain better responses, for example it may become a comparison question.

As shown in the appendix to the report, the only measure that is currently failing is Measure 1b – The first fire engine will arrive with a minimum competent crew on 100% of occasions. The results for this measure are taken from aggregated performance across the three areas of breathing apparatus competence, medicals and fitness. The failure is due to 15 staff that currently have expired fitness tickets.

The Chair asked how the performance measurement works. The DCFO explained that performance against the measure is based on a snapshot of stations and there are currently people on stations with no record of fitness testing. Investigations are being undertaken as to whether they have not completed the fitness tests or there are errors in recording of fitness test results. The DCFO commented that this uncertainty is partly as a result of the change from one Occupational Health (OH) provider to another, as a result of the OH tendering process. Officers do not, however, have any serious concerns about the competence of staff, because of this as they are competent in terms of breathing apparatus and medicals.

Councillor Mellings asked if this would have a knock-on effect over the course of the year. The DCFO confirmed that it will have a cumulative effect on the performance for the year. Councillor Mellings asked that a further brief on this issue be provided to the next meeting of the Committee. The DCFO confirmed that this would be done.

Councillor Kiernan referred to the reporting of firefighting injuries and asked if near misses were recorded as well. The DCFO confirmed that these are recorded and undertook to provide figures for these in the next report to the Committee.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the report

## **8b Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring July to September 2012**

This report provided information regarding the ongoing performance and management of the Retained Duty System in Shropshire.

The Shropshire Rural Performance Group Commander (SRPGC) explained the changes made to reporting for the appliances at Oswestry. The graph on page 2 of the report does not include the 2 person appliance, which has resulted in an increase in availability levels from August 2012 onwards.

In terms of recruitment, the recent high-profile campaign has resulted in a large number of applications. These have included potential recruits for the five priority stations, where availability levels have fallen to below 97% in the past 12 months, as well as recruits for the more established stations.

The Chair asked if there were many female recruits. The SRPGC explained that there had been two female applicants but they had failed to progress through the recruitment process. There are a further two female applicants in the system at present.

**Resolved** that the Committee note the contents of the report

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....