

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 11 September 2008 at 5.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Allen, Dr Drummond, Mason and Mellings

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Allen and seconded by Councillor Mellings

That Councillor Dr Jones be elected Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Dr Jones was duly elected Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Dr Drummond

That Councillor Allen be appointed Vice-Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Allen was duly appointed Vice-Chair to hold office until the meeting of the Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Allen, as Vice-Chair of the Committee, then took the Chair, as Councillor Dr Jones, the Chair of the Committee, was not present.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Gibbon, Hurst-Knight and Dr Jones.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 May 2008.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 29 May 2008, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

6 Public Questions

No public questions, statements or petitions had been received.

7 Amendments to Final Accounts

Since the approval of the Statement of Accounts by the Fire Authority on 11 June 2008, there has been an amendment to the Pension Account contained within the Statement. Additional payments were made to firefighters who retired on or after 1 October 2007, following changes to the calculation of commutations. These payments were confirmed after the accounts had been submitted for approval, and the necessary changes have now been made. The effect is to increase debtors by £141,000 offset by the same increase in the amount due from Pension Top Up Grant to pay for this.

In addition, valuations of a number of the Authority's buildings are being carried out, following capital expenditure in the 2007/08 year. These valuations are being done retrospectively, as the total capital expenditure on the buildings concerned is not material. In 2008/09, valuations will be carried out prior to the closure of the accounts, on those assets where capital improvements have been made or where it would be in the Authority's interest to bring forward valuation from the next scheduled valuation in 2010/11.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal update on amendments to the Final Accounts

8 Audit for the Year Ended 31 March 2008 and Letter of Representation

The Chair welcomed Mr Tony Corcoran and Ms Diane Hughes, from the Audit Commission, to the meeting.

Ms Hughes presented the Audit Commission's report on the audit for the year ended 31 March 2008. The Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report was tabled to the meeting (a copy is attached to the signed minutes).

Ms Hughes reported that the final accounts are of a high standard with only minor errors being identified and this is currently an unqualified opinion.

The Authority is recommended to undertake a reconciliation exercise between the personnel data that it holds and the payroll data which Shropshire County Council maintains as it is deemed good practice for this to be done on regular basis.

With regard to the Internal Audit services provided by Shropshire County Council, Ms Hughes reported that a full review of Internal Audit's compliance with CIPFA and the Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in 2006 had been undertaken. The Authority had complied with both CIPFA and the Code but three opportunities for improvement had been identified during the audit. The Treasurer assured the meeting that these issues can be addressed speedily.

Ms Hughes reported to the meeting that the Audit Commission are about to undertake the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel audits for the Authority. It is hoped that the Audit Commission will be able to bring information on the outcomes of these audits to the November meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

Mr Corcoran confirmed that the Letter of Representation for the year ended 31 March 2008 could be signed and submitted to the Audit Commission. It was agreed that the Chair (in accordance with the authority delegated to them by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 19 July 2006), Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer sign the letter. This was duly done and the letter was presented to Mr Corcoran. (A copy is attached to the signed minutes).

The Chair thanked the Audit Commission for the work that they had undertaken.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report and presentation.

9 Internal Audit Reports and Risk Management Group

This report presented progress on dealing with recommendations by the Internal Auditors, resulting from the 2007/08 audits.

The Head of Risk Management reported that all actions from previous audits are up to date. He also explained that it is hoped that asking responsible officers to report to the Risk Management Group will increase awareness of internal audit and risk management processes.

The Head of Risk Management clarified that the Risk Management Group is made up of himself, the Treasurer, the Corporate Services Manager and Councillor Dr Jones who sits on the Group in her capacity as both Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee and Risk Management and Audit Champion.

The Head of Risk Management asked what the Committee would wish to happen if these roles are split in future. The Committee agreed that for accountability purposes both roles should continue to sit on the Risk Management Group.

Resolved that the Committee note progress to date and approve the actions of the Risk Management Group.

10 Performance Assessment – Key Performance Indicators

This report informed Members of predicted performance assessment scores based on the current performance of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) gave a very brief synopsis of this report as there was duplication with the information being reported in item 11 on the meeting agenda – Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April to June 2008.

Members' attention was, however, drawn to the analysis of BVPI 206 (i) and (ii), on page 3 of the appendix, which shows that there is a predicted net reduction of 53.65% in the number of deliberate primary fires per 10,000 population between 2001/02 and 2008/09.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report content; and
- b) Agree to monitor action plans necessary on failing or high risk indicators.

11 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April to June 2008

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2008 to 30 June 2008.

The ACFO explained that the format of this report had been altered and detailed the changes that had been made to the report. Each of the appendices to the report was then discussed in detail and the following significant issues were highlighted.

Appendix A

The ACFO explained that the BVPIs are split into 3 sections: Corporate Health, of which there are 5 indicators that could potentially fail, Fire Prevention, of which there are 4 indicators that could potentially fail and Operational Response of which there are 2 indicators that could potentially fail.

BVPI 206

Councillor Mellings commented that all parts of this indicator appear to be showing a positive improvement. It was explained that this can be attributed to change in the reporting method and the quality of the data that is being reported.

BVPI 207

Councillor Mellings asked why this indicator is currently predicted to fail. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) explained that this is the indicator in which there is a discrepancy between the types of property that the Audit Commission defines as non-domestic properties. Officers currently check closely any fires deemed to be in non-domestic properties and it is thought that the predicted outturn number will drop.

BVPI 11c

Councillor Dr Drummond asked if it was difficult to place people with disabilities in uniformed posts. The CFO explained that there are currently no statutory requirements to declare disability and therefore it may be a while before major progress is seen in relation to this indicator. Councillor Dr Drummond then asked about learning disabilities. It was confirmed that mild learning difficulties could possibly be accommodated.

BVPI 144

Councillor Mellings asked for an explanation of the difference between the target and the predicted performance for this indicator. The difference is due to the recording of data which has now been checked and verified.

Councillor Mellings suggested, and the meeting agreed, that a comments box for failing indicators be included in Appendix A in future reports. Officers agreed to the future inclusion of additional information in support of failing indicators.

Appendix B

It is predicted that 2 of these indicators relating to resilience may fail based on quarter 1 outturn. It is likely that the impact of the additional resilience officer role on minimum levels of officer cover will start to be seen next year.

Appendix C

The targets and recording method for the Equality and Diversity Performance Indicators is still to be determined by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, subject to national guidance.

Appendix D

Councillor Mellings commented that the pass rate for 8 firefighters attending life risk fires has dropped throughout the quarter. The CFO explained that the reasons for this were not clear at the moment. The introduction of 8 seater appliances, of which there are 3 more to be handed over, should help to improve performance. Councillor Mellings thought that more realistic targets should be set and suggested that the target for attendance of 5 firefighters at

life risk fires be adjusted to 85% and the target for the attendance of 8 firefighters at life risk fires also be adjusted to 85%. The meeting agreed.

Appendix E

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer is championing National Indicators (NI) 33 and 49 through the Local Area Agreements (LAA). The CFO reported that NI 49 which relates to the number of primary fires and related fatalities and non-fatal casualties has been included in Shropshire County Council's LAA. The Chair asked if there had been problem with including these indicators in Telford & Wrekin Council's LAA. The CFO explained that Telford & Wrekin Council did not consider these indicators to be problematic and therefore did not include it in the LAA.

There are issues to be resolved with regard to the counting of fires and fatalities as there is the potential for multiple counting to occur.

Appendix F

This is a local benchmarking indicator relating to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service's impact on the environment.

Appendix G

There have been no sickness days due to accidents in May and June 2008. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of accidents although it is likely that this may increase over the winter.

Appendix H

The further analysis behind BVPI 142(iii) shows that firefighting action is only required at approximately half the incidents attended.

The Road Traffic Collision statistics show that there have been a low number of incidents in the first quarter of the year although it is likely that these incidents may peak during the winter months due to the effect of the weather.

The Principal Accountant advised the meeting that the key financial health indicators included in the report may change following the forthcoming Use of Resources audit.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the new reporting style and content in respect of performance; and
- b) Having considered the information provided, agreed that to aid the regular assessment of performance, future reports should be amended to include a comments box for failing indicators in Appendix A to the report and that the attendance targets, for 5 and 8 firefighters at life risk fires, both be changed to 85%.

12 Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring

This report provided information regarding the ongoing performance of the Retained Duty System (RDS) in Shropshire.

Retained Appliance availability continues to increase. 4 RDS stations, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock, Oswestry and Prees, were targeted for recruitment and this has produced some success with several new recruits currently going through the recruitment process. Appliance availability statistics for July 2008 are approximately 98.4%. This is a slight decrease compared to June 2008 but is an effect of the holiday period.

There are 9 recruits attending the current training course and places on the course scheduled for December 2008 are currently half filled.

Retention levels for the RDS continue to improve although a discrepancy in previous figures has been identified as the system used to calculate the total numbers leaving did not remove those serving as wholetime and retained. This issue has now been addressed.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

13 Quarterly Summary of Progress within the Improvement Priorities and Core Business for 2008/09

The report provided Members with an overview of progress and highlighted any areas within the Improvement Priorities Programme 2008/09 that were slipping or failing along with the actions taken to resolve the slippage. To report progress on Core Business, a presentation was included on the Core Value area of Diversity, which the Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) presented to the Committee. A brief summary of the discussion generated from this presentation is given below.

Councillor Mellings asked how many people had attended the cultural audit discussion sessions. The ACO explained that 58 employees had indicated, on the Cultural Audit survey, that they would be interested in attending a discussion session but only 8 took up the opportunity to attend the discussion sessions that were held in May 2008. A further session was held in July with a total of 24 people attending across both sessions. The Unions have been consulted throughout the process and are kept informed of any further developments. The external consultant, who facilitated the discussion sessions, has provided good feedback but it should be remembered that only a small number of employees were involved in the exercise.

Councillor Mason queried how the method of delivering the sessions, in case this had affected attendance. The ACO confirmed that the sessions had been run mainly as verbal discussion groups with very minimal written communication. The poor take-up of the sessions may be due to apathy or may be because employees felt that they had no issues to address.

The CFO reported that, nationally, 24 Fire and Rescue Services have now completed a cultural audit and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service have maintained third place in the ranking of these results.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) note the progress and any actions taken to manage the delivery of the Improvement Priorities that are slipping / failing; and
- b) receive the presentation on the Core Business included within the Core Value area, Diversity.

14 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2008/09

This report presents the new 'Annual Governance Statement' Improvement Plan 2008/09, formally approved by the Fire Authority on 11 June 2008, and the progress made to date against the improvements contained in that plan.

The Head of Risk Management reported that the revised completion date for Improvement ID 1, as detailed on page 2, was agreed by Policy Group on Tuesday 9 September 2008.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the contents of the Fire Authority's AGS Improvement Plan 2008/09; and
- b) Note the progress made against each of the improvements contained in this plan.

15 Audit Training for Members

This report informed Members on progress to put in place a training programme.

Councillor Mellings commented that he is a member of Shropshire County Council Audit Committee and has attended 23 training sessions in 2 ½ years. He suggested that it may be best to try and link the training topic to the time of the year when the issue concerned is most relevant. He also felt that the most obvious topic to start with would be the role of the Audit Committee.

The meeting agreed that the proposed questionnaire gave focus to the training issues and agreed that it should be circulated to all members of the Fire Authority for completion.

The ACO informed the meeting that the Member Development Review process had been delayed this year so that a review of the forms used can be undertaken. It is likely that a new format similar to the proposed Audit Training questionnaire will be adopted.

Resolved that the Committee note progress on addressing the training needs of members, and agree that the attached questionnaire would help identify the specific priorities for this committee.

16 Equality and Diversity Steering Group Action Plan Progress

This report provided Members with an update on the progress of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG).

The CFO thanked the Equality and Diversity Officer for the work she had done to facilitate the Service gaining level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, and Councillor Dr Jones for her input as Equality and Diversity Champion.

A full report on the outcomes of the Equality Standard for Local Government assessment will be presented to the Fire Authority at its October 2008 meeting.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress against the plan of action contained within this report.

17 Quarterly Progress on the Corporate Equality Action Plan

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the progress of the actions identified within the Corporate Equality Action Plan which are being monitored through the Directorate Business Plans.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress on the actions in the Corporate Equality Action Plan.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....