

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 13 March 2008 at 5.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Dr Drummond, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones (Chair), Mason and Mellings

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Allen and Davies.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 22 November 2007.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 22 November 2007, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No public questions, statements or petitions had been received.

It was agreed that Agenda Items 5a and 5b would be considered later on the agenda, as Mr Corcoran from the Audit Commission had not yet arrived at the meeting.

6 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 Information Officer reported that the first set of data, which relates to 2006/07 has been verified and published by the Audit Commission.

The Information Officer then presented the second set of data relating to 2007/08 to the meeting and highlighted the following issues.

- It should be noted that the first six indicators are all in the upper threshold.
- Indicator F3 needs to stay at its current level. One further fire death would mean that the indicator would drop into the mid threshold, whilst a further four deaths would cause it to drop into the lower threshold.
- Work, including monitoring, implementing action plans and call challenging, is ongoing on indicators F8 and F9.

Councillor Jones expressed concern that indicator F8b is the only one in the lower threshold. The Information Officer explained that, whilst this was a cause for concern, it is actually the lower-weighted indicator.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that there had been a discussion regarding fire deaths at the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting. The Committee has tasked officers with analysing fire deaths over the last five years and reporting the results to the Fire Authority meeting. Work is ongoing with Shropshire County Council to ensure that vulnerable groups are being reached.

Councillor Mason asked how cause of death is determined, i.e. if a person died before a fire started or if they died because of the fire. The Chief Fire Officer explained that, in cases such as this, the coroner is responsible for determining the cause of death, with the coroner's decision influenced by expert advice.

Councillor Drummond arrived at this point (5.15 pm).

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that Bridgnorth Hospital does regular health checks for elderly people, which they attend with their carers. There may be an opportunity to include some fire safety information during these checks.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report content;
- b) Monitor action plans necessary on failing or high risk indicators; and
- c) Agree to remove the 2006/07 verified figures from future reports

7 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April 2007 to December 2007

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 December 2007.

The Statistical Research Officer talked Members through each of the indicators detailed in the summary table in Appendix A of the report. A brief summary of the more significant points raised is given below.

- 143 Communities and Local Government (CLG) have removed one fire death from the figures for October 2005.
- 144 This indicator is still failing but has shown an improvement from the last quarter. A quality check has been undertaken on the data and the estimated outturn is now up to 94%.
- 206 206(i) is being achieved. 206(ii) is still failing. The target for 206(iii) is still to be confirmed, so performance against this cannot be measured. 206(iv) is failing and the Easter holidays will also have an impact on this indicator.
- 207 This indicator is being achieved and ongoing verification work is being undertaken on the data.
- 2a Level 2 is currently being achieved on this indicator but the Service is working towards achieving, in August 2008, Level 3 for it. Capacity building funding has been received, which should help with this.
- 2b Councillor Jones asked how achievement of this indicator was judged. The Statistical Research Officer explained that there are 18 processes, against which authorities are judged. Shropshire is currently achieving 17 of these processes.
- 16 There is currently no data available, against which performance for both parts of this indicator can be measured. A data gathering / monitoring exercise is to be undertaken in relation to this.
- 210 One female firefighter has left the Service during the quarter being reported on.

Councillor Mellings asked about indicator 209, which relates to smoke alarms and dwelling fires. The Chief Fire Officer explained that over 80% of properties in the County have smoke detectors fitted. Work is ongoing to target hard-to-reach properties. He also explained that the targets for this indicator are set against other fire and rescue services. As the total number of accidental dwelling fires occurring reduces, it will make 209(iii) harder to achieve.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that it was now likely that the Retained issue would be factored into the targets set in relation to ethnic minorities.

In relation to Appendix D, Councillor Hurst-Knight asked if partnership working was having any effect in Shrewsbury / Telford. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the 18-20 year old age group was being targeted through local colleges but this does not always work, as evidenced by a recent fatality in Bishop's Castle.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the report content in respect of performance; and
- b) Having considered the information provided, make no amendments to future reports to aid the regular assessment of performance

8 Retained Duty System Performance Monitoring

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

Two amended graphs and an updated version of the report's appendix, which showed appliance availability up to the end of February 2008, were tabled to the meeting by the Assistant Divisional Officer (copies of which are attached to the signed minutes).

RDS recruitment levels are increasing, which is leading to an upward trend in the establishment. This has also meant that the last training course, which took place in November 2007, was fully attended. There has been a downward trend in the number of personnel leaving the Service.

Councillor Mason asked about the difference in the number of Home Safety Visits and the number of smoke detectors fitted. The Assistant Divisional Officer explained that the difference occurs because the properties visited may already have smoke detectors fitted, in which case officers would assess the condition of the existing detectors but not necessarily fit new ones. The difference in figures is good news for the Service, as it means more homes have detectors already fitted.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the number of home safety visits may also be less as home risk assessments are now being undertaken, which take longer to complete. In addition, crews are now concentrating on rural villages, which impacts on the numbers of visits that they can undertake.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that four more XL cabs will come into use in August 2008. The Retained establishment will, therefore, increase to 340 during 2008.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report

9 Quarterly Summary of Progress within the Improvement Priorities Programme 2007/08

The purpose of this report was to advise Members of progress within the Improvement Priorities Programme for quarter 3, October to December 2007.

The Programme Manager gave a brief verbal summary of the progress within each workstream identified in the report. Quarter 4 progress is on schedule and a report on this will be brought to the May meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Hurst-Knight commented that the issue of unitary status, which had been identified as a risk on page 8 of the report, should not, in his opinion, affect the existing initiatives. In fact, the impact of unitary status may be positive rather than negative.

The Programme Manager explained that this report had been submitted to Policy Group and it had been recommended that the two accompanying presentations on Performance Management and the Business Continuity aspect of Preparedness be brought to the Audit and Performance Management Committee. Copies of the slides for each presentation were circulated and copies are attached to the signed minutes. There were no questions raised by Members in connection with either presentation.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress of each improvement priority and the review of the associated risks and issues; and
- b) Note the presentations on Performance Management and the Business Continuity aspect of Preparedness

10 Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan 2007/08 – Closure Report

This report informed Members that the Fire Authority's current 'Statement on Internal Control (SIC) Improvement Plan' is being brought to a close, and provided a summary of the improvements that have been made to the Authority's control systems as a consequence. It also highlighted the need for those pieces of work that remain uncompleted to be included in the new Improvement Plan that will be created as a result of the Statement of Accounts in June 2008.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that with regard to environmental legislation (Improvement ID 7) accreditation to ISO 14001 had been achieved. It is believed that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is the first fire and rescue service in the country to achieve this accreditation for all areas of the Service.

Councillor Jones referred to Improvement ID 19 and asked if there were any concerns about the capacity of the Training and Development Department to complete the required work on Rank to Role. The Chief Fire Officer reported that this was not a major concern.

Resolved that the Committee note:

- a) That the SIC Improvement Plan for 2007/08 is being brought to a close;
- b) The improvements made to the Fire Authority's System of Internal Control as a result of this Improvement Plan; and
- c) That, if not completed by June, the unfinished work streams, from this Plan, will be included in the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan 2008/09

5 Audit Commission

The Chair welcomed Ms Johanna Wong from the Audit Commission to the meeting.

5a Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/07

Ms Wong presented the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/07.

An updated version of the table on page 7 of the Annual Audit and Inspection letter was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

Ms Wong began by thanking the Fire Authority and staff for helping to ensure that the audits ran smoothly. She then reported that the Annual Audit letter contained 'very good news'. The Service is making good progress and is performing well. There are no issues with the Performance Plan and Use of Resources performance is improving well, as shown in Table 2, Page 13 of the report.

There are, however, some issues which do need to be addressed, including demonstrating the full impact and benefits of Member Champions.

Councillor Mellings commented that it was an excellent and very positive letter.

The benefits of the Audit and Performance Management Committee also need to be demonstrated, i.e. examples of initiatives etc that have brought about progress and/or operational improvements need to be identified. Ms Wong commented that it can be difficult to identify examples of good practice and she believed that Ms Hughes from the Audit Commission had emailed some examples to the Treasurer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer to help with identification. The Chief Fire Officer said that officers would bring a report, outlining the Committee's achievements, to date to the next meeting of the Committee in May.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/07

An improvement plan outlining the Authority's response to some of the issues highlighted by the Auditors in the Annual Audit and Inspection letter was tabled and discussed (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

5b 2007/08 Audit – Outline Plan

Ms Wong reported that that the Audit Commission has started to look at the 2007/08 Audit and is currently undertaking interim work in relation to it.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal report on progress with the 2007/08 Outline Audit Plan

Councillor Hurst-Knight left the meeting at this point (6.25 pm).

11 Internal Audit 2007/08

This report set out progress to date with the current year's audit programme. It also sought approval to a process for handling specific audit recommendations.

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the current progress in completing the 2007/08 Internal Audit programme, as appended to the report; and
- b) Approve the process for dealing with internal audit recommendations

12 Audit Committee Training

Discussions took place on 6 March 2008 with County Council officers regarding Audit Committee training, which they may be able to provide for the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee. Officers provided a verbal update on progress at the meeting.

The Terms of Reference for the Audit and Performance Management Committee and for Shropshire County Council's Audit Committee were tabled (copies of which are attached to the signed minutes). The Treasurer explained that it was felt to be prudent to review the Committee's Terms of Reference and make any necessary amendments before training for the Committee commenced. This was why the two sets of Terms of Reference had been distributed to the meeting.

Members felt that this was a very timely exercise and Councillor Mellings recommended that reference be made to the Self Assessment Checklist devised by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), when the Terms of Reference are being expanded.

Resolved that:

- a) Officers bring a report to the next meeting of the Committee in May regarding expansion of its Terms of Reference, including taking into account those of Shropshire County Council's Audit Committee; and
- b) The priority areas for training and how training would be delivered should be defined in light of the above report and that these issues, therefore, be discussed at the May meeting

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm

Chair.....

Date.....