

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 29 March 2007 at 5.00 pm**

Present

Councillors Lt Col Allen (Chair), Davies, Hurst-Knight, Dr Jones, Mellings and Minnery

Before the meeting commenced, the Chair welcomed Mr Tony Corcoran and Ms Diane Hughes, from the Audit Commission, to the meeting. They attended to present agenda items 6a and 6b.

The Chair also welcomed Councillor Jean Jones, from Shropshire County Council. Councillor Dr Jones has taken the place of Councillor Tandy on the Fire Authority.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Picken.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, held on 7 December 2006.

***Resolved** that the minutes of the Audit and Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 7 December 2006, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record*

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Confidential Information

***Resolved** that the public be excluded from the meeting for items 6, 7 and 8 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of information, which the Government has directed should, for the time being, be kept confidential.*



6 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006

Mr Corcoran, Relationship Manager, Audit Commission, presented the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements to the meeting.

Resolved *that Members note the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter and the contents of the Use of Resources Auditor Judgements 2006*

7 Fire and Rescue Service Performance Framework 2006/07 Overview and Outcomes

This report provided Members with a summary overview of the Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 (introduced by the Audit Commission in 2006), together with the recently published performance results in respect of this Fire Authority.

Resolved *that Members note the contents of the report*

8 Performance Summary

This report summarised the Fire Authority's statutory responsibility to prepare and publish an annual Performance Summary, and presented a draft of the document for consideration.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer suggested that recommendation b) be amended to read 'approve publication of the Performance Summary after 5 April 2007. This would allow the information that is currently embargoed to be published. Mr Corcoran stated that the proposed amendment to delay publication of the Performance Summary was a satisfactory arrangement.

The amendment to recommendation b) was proposed by Councillor Davies, and seconded by Councillor Minnery. With all Members in favour it was

Resolved *that Members*

- a) *Note the contents of this report; and*
- b) *Approve publication of the Performance Summary, after 5 April 2007.*

At this point the meeting reverted to open session.

9 Draft Improvement Priorities for Inclusion within the Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08

This report summarised the Fire Authority's statutory responsibilities to prepare and publish an annual best value performance plan and presented a suite of draft improvement priorities for consideration and inclusion within the plan at a later date.



Mr Corcoran confirmed that the Audit Commission had been involved in the processes described in the report. The Audit Commission is, therefore, happy to commend the further actions outlined in the report.

Resolved *that Members note the content of the report*

10 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators April 2006 to June 2006

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 December 2006.

The Statistical Research Officer gave a commentary on each of the indicators detailed in the table in Appendix A and answered questions from Members. The information contained in this table is more up-to-date and accurate than the graphs in Appendix B, which only cover up to the end of December 2006. A brief summary of the more significant points raised is given below.

- 144 It was likely that this target would be failed however analysis carried out on the data has led to this indicator now being on target and it is improving all the time. Councillor Allen asked if this was due to the redefining of data. The Statistical Research Officer confirmed that it was a result of improved data quality. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the forms used to record the data are complicated and the improvements have been led by education. However the Deputy stressed that the main reason for the performance was the introduction of initiatives, such as Community Fire Safety.
- 145 The three parts of indicator 145 have been monitored over the last 12 to 18 months to prove that they are not detrimental. Performance has been shown to be the same as on the old standards.
- 149 These are key indicators for the Service. A full audit has been carried out on the statistics for these indicators and sheltered housing complexes have been removed from the data as these were previously included. Robust and accurate controls are now in place on the data.

The targets for 149(ii) and 149(iii) are to be revisited. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that there are a small number of persistent poor performers, such as hospitals and factories who are having an impact on this indicator. The next step in tackling these organisations may be to impose sanctions on them, e.g. not attending calls. There is however an ongoing national case in which this action is being challenged and the outcome of the case has to be heard before any decisions can be made. Councillor Allen asked if there was any way of charging for these false alarms. There is not as we are legally required to attend calls unless we can be sure that they are 'false'.



206 It is likely that the targets for 206(i) and 206(iv) will be achieved. There are issues with the reporting procedures for 206(iii). The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the problem seems to be a historical one with officers putting the cause of fires as 'a child with matches' rather than 'unknown' on too many occasions without sufficient evidence. However, this does not mean that the fire was necessarily malicious. Staff will be retrained on this issue over the next 12 months; therefore anomalies will appear in the figures.

209 209(i) is on an upward trend with an increase from 35% to 43%.

209(iii) has been driven down from approximately 50% to 41% largely due to Retained Duty staff undertaking Community Fire Safety work. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer feels that 41.2% of premises which experience a fire not having a smoke alarm fitted is a shocking figure as these are people who have had fires and are actually at risk. The problem is being addressed through partnership working with other agencies to target those people who are most at risk but a lot more needs to be done, as these people could have been killed or seriously injured by the fires.

2a + b The targets for these indicators have been achieved. Performance is currently higher than 2 but not quite high enough to declare it as a 3.

11c This indicator cannot currently be measured as the information required is given anonymously on application to join the Service. It is hoped that a small questionnaire can be sent out amongst the top 5% of earners which will allow this indicator to be measured in future.

The Statistical Research Officer confirmed, in response to a query at the December meeting of the Committee, that the number of top earners in the Service is 14 and that this number applies to all three parts of indicator 11.

16 A full analysis of the data obtained from the Cultural Audit is needed before this indicator can be measured.

17a One ethnic minority member of staff was recruited in January.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service needs to represent the communities that it serves. Every single member of staff is counted in the indicator, including Retained staff, but many are from areas where there are few or no ethnic minorities. This then makes the Service's performance look worse than it actually is and the wholtime areas need to go above their targets in order to even this out. This issue has been raised with Communities and Local Government.

The Statistical Research Officer circulated maps to the meeting which addressed a query regarding life risk road traffic collisions that was raised at the December meeting. The query was on the figure for September 2006



where 6 out of 12 incidents had not been attended within the target time. The IRMP Manager explained that four of these failures had been due to distance problems; one had been on the dual carriageway and on one occasion the appliance had been mobilised to the wrong location. The reason for this was that the wrong address for the location had been given initially.

It was suggested that Appendix C be removed from the report as this contains the old suite of indicators which were being monitored to ensure that there were no detrimental effects on the Service.

The Statistical Research Officer talked through Appendix D to the report which shows the availability of wholetime and retained staff. 100% of wholetime appliance shifts were crewed in October, November and December 2006. The availability of Retained staff is also improving steadily and this is due to recruitment and the impact of the Retained Support Officers, who are helping to ensure that appliances are kept on the run.

Appendix E shows figures relating to accidents on duty. There are some accidents that do not lead to any sickness absence but which have to be recorded under Health and Safety regulations. The number of accidents has also gone up as the Health and Safety Officer has investigated and found that small accidents are occurring which may previously have not been recorded.

Appendix F gives further analysis on BVPI 142(iii). It shows that crews are attending more fires but more of these are out on arrival.

The Programme Manager tabled a document (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) which gave information on the impact of the Retained Review. This is in response to a request from Members at a previous Fire Authority meeting. It can be seen from the document that Retained appliances are increasingly available but they are not always fully crewed. The document also gives information on the number of leavers and on the levels of recruitment to the Retained System. Members felt it was encouraging to see that the Retained Review had had a positive impact.

Councillor Hurst-Knight proposed that, as discussed earlier, Appendix C be removed from the report. Councillor Mellings seconded the proposal and the Committee

Resolved *that the report content in respect of performance be noted and that Appendix C be removed from the future reports*

11 Performance Assessment – 14 Key Performance Indicators April 2006 to December 2006

This report informed Members of predicted performance assessment scores based on the current performance of the 14 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).



Councillor Dr Jones asked for an explanation of the deprivation adjustment which is referred to in the report. The Statistical Research Officer explained that this is an adjustment which is applied when there is a proven link between an indicator and the levels of deprivation in an area. It is not, however, applied to all indicators, as can be seen in the report.

Councillor Minnery left the meeting at this point (6.00 pm)

The suite of KPIs is currently the subject of national consultation, with proposals that the current number of key indicators be increased from 7 to 14. Early indications from the consultation exercise are that the proposals will eventually lead to a suite of 12 KPIs.

The Service is currently in the mid to upper quartile for each of the KPIs and it does not want to drop into the lowest quartile. Councillor Allen asked if there was any sanction for dropping into the lowest quartile. There is no sanction but it would obviously have a negative impact on staff as the Service has been performing well.

The Statistical Research Officer then gave a brief commentary on each of the KPIs and the Service's performance against them. The following were of particular note:

KPI - F5 This is a high risk indicator due to the thresholds between the quartiles being so close together.

KPI - F11 The Chief Fire Officer has written to Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission about the discrepancy in the types of property that are currently recorded in this indicator. Farms are not included in the number of properties but are included in the number of fires. This has the effect of penalising Shropshire by 15%. Councillor Allen asked if a new classification will be created to tackle this issue. This may be the case and Shropshire may be used as a model for it.

Members agreed that this report should be brought to each meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee

Resolved *that Members*

- a) *Note the report content; and*
- b) *Monitor action plans necessary for failing or high risk indicators*

12 Performance Plan 2006 – 08 Direction of Travel Statements – Progress Update

This report informed Members of progress to date against the Direction of Travel Statement contained within the current 2006 – 08 Performance Plan.



The appendix to the report has been amended to map corporate risks against strategic aims. An example of how a corporate risk may affect the Direction of Travel progress was explained to Members.

The table also shows BVPIs against the strategic aims. This is because the BVPIs provide a measure of achievement for the strategic aims. Some strategic aims do not have BVPIs against them as they are task based, e.g. achieving ISO 9000 accreditation and the measure of achievement in this case would be the completion of the task.

Resolved that Members note the contents of the report in respect of progress against the Direction of Travel Statements

13 Internal Audit Programme

This report updated Members on progress with the 2006/07 audit programme and outlined the 2007/08 programme.

The Treasurer explained that the report gives a summary of the findings to date from the 2006/07 audit. The report does not detail the findings as they are probably too detailed to warrant the attention of the Committee and there are concerns about presentation.

The Chief Internal Auditor from Shropshire County Council will attend the Audit and Performance Management meeting in June to present the findings of the 2006/07 audit. It may be appropriate to raise the question of Member involvement at this time.

The Treasurer confirmed that all the issues raised in the 2006/07 audit have been followed up and should not cause any problems.

The issue of the 2007/08 audit needs to be considered and how many days the Authority pays for needs to be decided. 2007/08 will be the last year of the first four year audit programme which started in 2004/05. The Treasurer's recommendation is to continue as planned and complete the programme that has been set out.

The Chief Internal Auditor will also be starting to look at the process for developing the four year plan from 2008/09 onwards. The Audit and Performance Management Committee will be involved in this process and will need to consider the budget when planning.

Councillor Davies pointed out that the County Council only has a one year plan due to the possible move to a unitary authority. He asked if this would have any impact on the Fire Authority. The Treasurer does not envisage that this will affect the Fire Authority directly although the auditors may find it difficult to provide their time if they are involved in the move to a unitary authority.



A four year plan would help to spread the contents of the audit out and ensure that everything that needs to be audited is. Delivering all aspects in a one year plan may well suffer from a lack of resources at Shropshire County Council. There is also the issue of whether the same provider is kept. There are advantages to the County Council carrying out the audit as the Fire Authority shares many basic systems with the County.

Members asked that the Treasurer bring further detail of the issues in the Miscellaneous/Estates Management category to the next meeting of the Committee. Whilst the Treasurer's caution about how best to present this information into the public arena was noted, it was felt that it would be useful for the Committee to have some examples of the different risk categories.

Resolved *that the Committee note the progress of the current year's audit and endorse the programme for 2007/08*

14 Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan – 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, providing 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 remaining uncompleted to be included in the new SIC Improvement Plan that will be created as a result of the Statement on Accounts in June 2007.

With regard to Improvement Reference Number 7.2, Councillor Allen asked if it was cost effective for the IT back-up. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that the Improvement Reference referred to a standby control facility rather than a data backup system.

Resolved: *that Members note:*

- a) *That the SIC Improvement Plan for 2006/07 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 stream from this Plan will be included in the SIC Improvement Plan 2007/08.*

Date of December meeting

This item had not been included on the agenda but needed to be considered as a matter of urgency to ensure that Members had the correct date in their diaries and that the date was scheduled into Officer's workloads.

The meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee was due to be held on 13 December 2007 but this date has been chosen for the Service's Festival of Carols, therefore the meeting will have to be rearranged.



The meeting was rearranged for 5.00 pm on Thursday, 22 November 2007 at Brigade Headquarters

The Chair thanked staff for the effort and work that had gone into organising the meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

