

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury,
on Thursday, 15 June 2006 at 5.00 pm**

Present: Councillors Lt Col Allen (Chair), Davies, Hurst-Knight, and Mellings

Before the meeting commenced, the Chair welcomed Councillor John Hurst-Knight, from Shropshire County Council, who had taken the place of Councillor Bill Benyon on the Fire Authority.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Lloyd, Picken and Tandy.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Performance Management Committee held on 30 March 2006.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Performance Management Committee meeting, held on 30 March 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 Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators
April 2005 to March 2006**

This report informed Members of the Brigade's performance against nationally prescribed Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006. A document containing amendments to the report was tabled (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes).

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a commentary on each indicator, included in the report, and answered any questions that Members had. Below is a brief summary of the more significant points raised.

143(ii) The figures for this indicator included the two children, who were rescued from a fire at Newport. These figures might change, once confirmation of the extent of the children's injuries was received from the local Health Trust.



- 146(ii) The low figures for the number of malicious calls attended were due to Control staff employing call challenging techniques with suspected malicious calls. The Fire Service worked closely with telephone companies to block the phones of persistent hoax callers and was engaged in an education campaign in conjunction with the Police and Ambulance Services.
- 149(i) The reduction in the number of false alarms caused by automatic fire detection apparatus was due to the Fire Authority's investing money in an officer, who dealt specifically with these cases.
- 149(ii) The amendments tabled to this indicator were due to clarification of definitions that had been made by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
- 206(i) and (ii) The 40% reduction, which was far greater than the Government set target of 5%, was due to education initiatives and work with local authorities on the removal of abandoned cars.

Councillor Mellings asked why the target for 2006/07 had been set only marginally below the target achieved in 2005/06. The Chief Fire Officer explained that it was due to prioritising investment. Huge investment might be needed to achieve only a small improvement in performance on indicators such as this and that money could be better invested in initiatives, such as the Retained Review, where huge improvements could be made.

- 207 The tabled amendment to this information was due to clarification of the definitions of non-domestic premises.

Members noted that the Corporate Health Indicators were common to all local authorities and looked at how equality and diversity issues were being addressed. The previous indicators were specific to fire authorities.

- 12(i) An amendment was tabled to this indicator, which related to the number of working days lost.
- 16a(ii) There had been a change in the definition of disability following the Disability Discrimination Act and people could now self declare disabilities. A cultural audit was being carried out to find out who within the Service would self declare their disabilities.
- 17a Uniformed staff included retained staff. Retained staff were normally based in rural areas with a low ethnic minority population, which made it difficult for the Service to achieve this target.
- 157 Councillor Mellings asked why the total had changed to be out of a total of 51 rather than 69 interactions. The reason for this was that a full audit of all the interactions had been undertaken and some had been identified as not relevant to fire authorities. Following guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Fire Authority was no longer required to report on these interactions.

The Government no longer required reporting on the indicators contained in Appendix C but they had been retained in the report to cover the transition between nationally set standards and those that have been set at a local level.



OPS3 The dip in wholetime availability was caused by the planned reduction in crewing the Aerial Ladder Platforms, which took effect from 1 April 2006. With this in mind, those firefighters who left the brigade in February and March had not been replaced. This brought crew levels down to the number required in April and performance on this indicator should now be static.

The crewing and appliance availability rates for each retained station showed the effect that one person being on leave or sick could have when crew numbers were so low. Examples of this could be seen in Cleobury Mortimer, where two female recruits were waiting to join, and Much Wenlock, where a firefighter had been on three weeks' sick leave. These figures showed the importance of current investment in retained staff recruitment.

Councillor Hurst-Knight asked how the numbers of injuries received while on duty were recorded. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the DCLG did not ask for this as a Performance Indicator but the Audit and Performance Management Committee could ask for the figures to be brought to them. Members agreed that they would like to see this information and the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Fire Officer agreed that it would be provided to them at the next meeting.

Councillor Mellings asked how many performance indicators had gone up or down or stayed the same, in the league tables, in comparison to last year. The Chief Fire Officer undertook to bring annual comparative information, showing what percentage of the Fire Authority's performance against the BVPIs fell in the upper and lower quartiles and where performance had improved, remained the same or deteriorated, to the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: *that Members:*

- a) *Note the report content in respect of performance; and*
- b) *Amendments to future reports be made, as outlined above, to aid the regular assessment of performance.*

6 Performance against Performance Plan 2005/06

This report informed Members of the Fire and Rescue Service's performance in delivering the service objectives set out within the Fire Authority's Performance Plan 2005/06.

Resolved: *that Members note the contents of the report in respect of performance against the stated objectives for the period 2005/06.*

7 2005/06 Expenditure Statistics

At its meeting on 25 May 2006 the Strategy and Resources Committee agreed that the comparative financial information for fire authorities, as reported by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), should be an important element in the value for money strategy and should be noted as such in the Medium Term Financial Plan. A further report on the CIPFA financial information had been considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 14 June 2006.

The report had been approved and the Fire Authority had agreed that its Strategy and Resources Committee should be delegated responsibility for receiving further



details from Officers on those areas where expenditure was in excess of the average for Combined Fire Authorities.

Resolved: *that Members note the latest position regarding the 2005/06 expenditure statistics.*

8 Statement on Internal Control Improvement Plan Progress

This report presented the new Statement on Internal Control (SIC) Improvement Plan 2006/07 for monitoring by this Committee.

The report had been presented to, and approved by, the Fire Authority at its meeting the previous day. Members noted that the Audit and Performance Management Committee was responsible for monitoring the Implementation Plan and progress would be reported to each meeting of the Committee with the first report being given at the next meeting

Resolved: *that Members note*

- a) *The contents of the Fire Authority's SIC Improvement Plan 2006/07; and*
- b) *That the Committee would receive regular progress reports on the SIC Improvement Plan.*

9 Internal Audit – 2005/06 Summary Audit Report

This report presented the Summary produced by the Fire Authority's Internal Auditors, following their work during 2005/06. It also updated Members on the latest discussions with Internal Audit.

The Treasurer explained that this was the first time that this report had been brought to the Committee. Previously, the Treasurer had responsibility for overseeing the process of Internal Audit, which was carried out by Shropshire County Council at a cost of £10,000 per year. It was now this Committee's responsibility to oversee internal audit functions and, as such, Members needed to be aware of the Auditors' report and recommendations.

Overall the Auditors gave the Fire Authority a clean bill of health. No areas were identified where there were fundamental systemic issues to be addressed. There were, however, numerous issues identified as significant and requiring attention. Members should bear in mind that the report focused on these areas and those where no improvement had been shown from the previous year. The Treasurer had asked the Auditors to attend the meeting and discuss their findings but they were unable to do so on this occasion. They were, however, willing to attend a future meeting, if Members wished them to do so.

There were several information technology (IT) issues on the Auditors' report that had not been addressed and these were brought to Members' attention. The Chief Fire Officer reported that these issues were now being addressed and should be fully resolved by the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Mellings was concerned that there was an issue raised in the 2003/04 audit, which had been carried forward to the 2004/05 audit. The Treasurer explained that carry forwards were often because the auditors found instances of failure to follow procedures in the samples they took, which indicated housekeeping issues



rather than systems problems. Officers were following procedures but there were lapses. The issues, which were not fundamental, but were significant if they recurred year after year, would be addressed with the personnel concerned.

The specific 2003/04 carry-forward related to the debtors system, where there was an outstanding issue over whether efficiencies could be obtained by using the IT system to produce invoices rather than create them manually. Given the small volume of invoices raised, this had not been seen as a priority issue, but would be followed up.

The Chair asked for guidance on what Members would be expected to do in relation to Internal Audit issues. The Chief Fire Officer explained that an action plan would be put together in response to the audit findings and the Committee would need to monitor the progress of this plan. The Treasurer added that Members would also need to look at the audit plan each year and agree that it was appropriate. Furthermore Members would need to consider whether the plan was value for money.

Members agreed that an action plan should be produced, so that issues could be prioritised. The Chair asked that explanatory text be included on those items which might not be immediately clear to Members. The Chief Fire Officer agreed that this would be done for the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: *that Members note the attached report and the actions taken by officers in response.*

The meeting closed at 6.25 pm

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....

