

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards, Audit and Performance Committee
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
on Thursday, 2 December 2021 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Evans (Chair), Hignett, Lea, Price and Sahota (Vice-Chair)

Officers

Rod Hammerton	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Simon Hardiman	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Services)	ACFO (CS)
Dan Quinn	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)	ACFO (SD)
Richard Phillips	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Deputy Clerk
James Walton	Treasurer	Treasurer
Germaine Worker	Head of Human Resources and Administration	HHRA
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Officer	ESO

External Bodies

Mrs Joanne Woolley Audit Services, Shropshire Council

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillors Burchett and Minnery.
Councillor Thompson did not attend the meeting.
Joanne Coadey, Head of Finance
Avtar Sohal and David Rowley, Grant Thornton
Ceri Pilawski, Audit Services

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

3 Public Questions

None

4 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee meeting, held on 24 September 2021, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

5 Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2022

This report put forward a 2022 Work Plan for Standards, Audit and Performance Committee for consideration and approval by Members. The report also reviewed implementation of the activities listed in last year's Work Plan.

Resolved that the Committee approve the Standards, Audit and Performance Committee Work Plan 2022, attached as the Appendix to the report, without amendment.

6 External Audit Update

The CFO gave the following verbal update on behalf of the External Auditors

The financial statements opinion has been given and the Value for Money (VfM) work is well progressed but not yet complete. The statutory deadline for the VfM opinion is now mid-January 2022 so whilst this work is not yet complete, we are still comfortably within the timeframe.

The CFO explained, in response to a query from Members, that the VfM conclusion is being expanded to give a more in-depth opinion of the organisation, including areas for improvement. This does mean that the cost of the VfM opinion has increased.

Resolved unanimously that the Committee note the verbal update given.

7 Internal Audit Services

The CFO gave the following verbal update on Internal Audit Services

The Authority's Internal Audit function is currently provided by Shropshire Council and is due for renewal on 1 April 2022. Members will be invited to a meeting early in the new year to discuss the approach that they would like to see from an Internal Audit function going forward.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal update given.

8 Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 Improvement Plan

This report summarised the progress made to date against the improvements contained in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) Improvement Plan 2021/22.

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and drew Members' attention to the Financial Implications section of the report. The ACFO (CS) then provided the following updates to the Committee on the areas of review set out in the Appendix to the report

Area of Review 1 - People

Steady progress is being made on the Retained Sustainability Project (RSP) and its key areas of focus, which are migration of staff and Pay and Contracts.

Members asked who sits on the RSP Board. The ACFO (SD) explained that only Service personnel are involved in the Board including an ACFO and an Area Manager.

Area of Review 2 – People

A Business Case for an in-house fitness advisor has been completed. This will assist with the adoption of the new fitness standards and associated improvements to fitness support facilities.

The CFO commented that this is a major risk for the Service as it needs to balance its duties to protect both firefighters and communities. There is an impact on availability if employees are removed from responding due to not meeting the fitness standard. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to a more nuanced approach for dealing with individuals that are in this situation.

Members queried why the timeframe for personnel to achieve the fitness standard is being reduced from 12 to 6 months. The ACFO (SD) explained that this is because the 12-month timeframe was in relation to the 42.3 standard being introduced a year ago but as this is now embedded, the timescale for achievement has been reduced.

Members asked if stations that currently have low staffing levels are further impacted by losing staff who do not meet the fitness standard. The ACFO (SD) confirmed that they are but any such cases are managed carefully through an approach of individual risk assessment and work to improve fitness.

Area of Review 5 – Building Facilities

There have been some contractor delays to the refurbishment of Ellesmere, Market Drayton, Whitchurch and Tweedale Fire Stations but these have been addressed and the projects are on track for completion. Work has commenced on the major refurbishment of Telford Central Fire Station and this is due for completion in November 2022. A temporary fire station has been provided at Telford Central and crews continue to operate and mobilise as normal.

Area of Review 6 – Appliances / Equipment

Referring to the first three pumping appliances that are due in February 2022, Members asked where these would be based. The ACFO (CS) responded that it is not known exactly where at present but there will be in the north, one in the west and one in the south of the county.

Resolved that the Committee note the progress made on the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan.

9 Corporate Risk Management Summary

This report updated Members on the status of risks on the Corporate Risk Register.

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and advised the Committee that the format for reporting the Corporate Risk Register has been amended, taking into account the feedback from Members at the September meeting of the Committee.

The ACFO (CS) highlighted the following in relation to the Corporate Risk Register

- The Primary contractor risk has been amended to include the current fragility of supply chains. The risk is being managed and the risk rating is unchanged
- The risk related to changes from the Policing and Crime Act has been downgraded due to the publication of the Government's White Paper being delayed
- A 'live' risk review on Cyber Security risk has been undertaken by Zurich, who are the Service's insurers. Their report has identified that whilst there are some good control measures in place there are also some major gaps in relation to this risk. The Service has established an action plan to address these issues and will monitor progress against this via internal meetings
- A Project Team has been established to address the new Firefighting PPE Maintenance Standard
- A new risk related to the Wholetime Duty Pilot Scheme 2022 was added to the Risk Register in November 2021. The Pilot Scheme has been developed with the engagement of employees and the local Fire Brigades Union (FBU) representatives, but it will eventually require sign-off by the national FBU which may present challenges in the future.

Resolved that the Committee note the contents of the report.

10 Risk Management Group Internal Audit Progress Monitoring Report

This report provided an update on the monitoring of recommendations made by Internal Audit, which is undertaken by the Risk Management Group. It specifically covers details about the progress made against outstanding recommendations.

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and advised the Committee that no fundamental recommendations have been identified for the Authority.

Members were pleased to note that the number of outstanding recommendations has reduced.

Resolved that the Committee note

- a) The progress made against the outstanding recommendations; and
- b) That the Risk Management Group will continue to monitor progress against all recommendations, reporting to this Committee on a regular basis.

Performance

11 Corporate Performance Indicators including Retained Duty System Performance – April to September 2021

This report presented a summary of the Service's performance from April to September 2021.

The ACFO (CS) presented this report and talked through each of the Corporate Performance Indicators (CPIs) giving the following updates.

CPI 1 – All Fires

Performance against this CPI is within the tolerance levels with a month-on-month improvement in performance being seen. Performance is, therefore, in line with expectations for this point in the reporting year.

CPI 2 – Accidental Dwelling Fires

The cumulative performance for this CPI is below the lower tolerance limit and is less than the anticipated performance for this time in the year

Members commented that it was pleasing to see that there were only four accidental dwelling fires in September, which is the lowest figure since performance recording was established.

Members also asked if there were any identifiable reasons for this reduction. The ACFO (CS) explained that it appears to be a combination of the Service's education work through its Prevention Strategies and improvements in building construction. The CFO added that it is not possible to identify definite reasons as the Service has undertaken less prevention work during the pandemic. It is likely that this will only become clearer when there has been 12 months without the pandemic situation.

CPI 3 – Deliberate Fires

This CPI is within tolerance levels and Prevention work is continuing together with the sharing of intelligence data between the Service's Arson Crime Officers and West Mercia Police

CPI 4 – Fire Related Deaths and Serious Injuries

Unfortunately, there one fire related death and two cases of serious injury were recorded in Quarter 2 of the reporting period. The Service continues to analyse and learn from each incident that involves fire related death and / or serious injury

CPI 5 – Fires confined to Room of Origin

Cumulative performance for this CPI is currently within tolerance levels. The Strategy and Resources Committee agreed that the Service should retain this CPI as it gives an overview of how the many elements of the Service's work, such as Prevention and Protection, are performing.

CPI 6 – Injuries sustained to staff through operational activity

During the reporting period, there has been a cumulative total of nine injuries sustained to staff through operational activity. Three of these injuries were RIDDOR reportable as they involved absences of over 7 days.

The Service fully investigates all accidents to determine any culpability and to inform how current processes and working practices can be improved.

In response to a query from Members, the CFO confirmed that the Service has rigorous ill health management system and that there is not much reticence from employees with regard to returning to work

CPI 7 – Response Standard

Performance of over 85% has been achieved in all three areas of the response standard which evidences that the Service's resources are in the right places and at right levels.

CPI 8 – Fires in Regulated Buildings

Performance against this new CPI is following a steadier trajectory than in 2020/21, where a dip and a spike were experienced in performance as lockdown periods commenced and ended.

CPI 9 – Diversity, Establishment and Firefighter Competence

Performance against this CPI is reported to Committee in Quarters 2 and 4 of the year. It is not currently possible to provide any comparative data for previous years as this CPI was only introduced in 2021/22. The competency data in the report covers both the Wholetime and the On Call Duty Systems.

Retained Duty System Performance

A dip in availability was experienced during July, August and September 2021 which corresponds with the summer leave period. Availability has also been affected by changes in the Public Health England guidance on close contact definitions and associated action to be taken.

The CFO commented that the Service is at a tipping point regarding On Call Availability and it is hoped that the Retained Sustainability Project, which is a key piece of work for the Service in 2022, will help to address this.

The CFO also explained that the Group Support Team (GST) and the Retained Support Officers (RSOs) provide on-going support to enable appliances to maintain availability, but this is a double-edged sword as it does have a cultural impact on employees. Members asked if the GST support is included in the reported performance data. The ACFO (CS) confirmed that it is with the GST being redeployed daily according to need. The ACFO (CS) undertook to include data on the levels of GST support provided in future reports.

Members commented that is good to see that a lot of compliments have been received recently which shows the public appreciation for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Resolved that the Committee note the report

Standards

12a Committee on Standards in Public Life – Review of Best Practice Recommendations

This report updated the Committee on the recommendations made by the national Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) in relation to ethical standards in local government and identified the next steps in implementing the recommendations of the CSPL.

The Deputy Clerk presented this report and advised that many of the recommendations made by the CSPL have been mitigated through the adoption of the model Code of Conduct by Fire Authority in October 2021. The Appendix to the report sets out the further actions needed to address the remaining recommendations.

The Deputy Clerk also advised that further work is being undertaken on the Public Interest Test. A further report on the recruitment of Independent Person(s) will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life as outlined in the report;
- b) Note the steps taken to date to implement the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and
- c) Approve the proposed actions contained in the report to implement the remaining recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

12b Ethical Framework Matters

This report dealt with ethical framework matters, namely a review of the arrangements for dealing with a complaint made against a Member of the Fire Authority.

The Deputy Clerk presented this report and explained that a more detailed process for dealing with complaints against Fire Authority Members has been drawn up and is attached at Appendix B to the report. Notable changes to the procedure include the introduction of a three-stage test for decisions on complaints; and the publication of decision notices related to complaints involving Members. The updated process will be freely available on the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service website, following approval by this Committee

The Deputy Clerk also advised that there may be some streamlining of these processes as future reviews of them are undertaken.

Members noted that Shropshire Council adopted the model Code of Conduct from 1 December 2021 and Telford & Wrekin Council adopted it in July 2021 and queried if there was a requirement for Fire Authority Members to complete an additional interests form for 'non-pecuniary interests' as Shropshire Council Members have been required to do. The Deputy Clerk advised that the Members Interest Form has not changed in relation to 'non-pecuniary' interests. It is the responsibility, under the Localism Act 2011, of Members to inform the Monitoring Officer of any Other Registerable interests within 28 days of these being identified and it would therefore be sufficient for Members to notify these to either the Clerk and/or the Deputy Clerk.

It was agreed however, that an amended Member Interests Form would be developed to include 'Other Registerable Interests' and issued to Members for completion. The ESO undertook to work on this with the Deputy Clerk.

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the adoption of the Members Code of Conduct at the meeting of the Fire Authority on 13 October 2021 and agree to review this Code in December 2021; and
- b) Note the review of related procedures and documents and approve the updated arrangements for dealing with standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011.

Pension Board

13 Pension Board Minutes

The ACFO (CS) presented the Pension Board Minutes to the Committee and highlighted the following issues as set out in those minutes

- The transition of the Pension Administration Contract to the West Yorkshire Pension Fund
- Updates to the Pension Board Risk Register

Resolved that the Committee note the minutes of the Pension Board meeting, held on 30 September 2021.

14 Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved that the Committee being satisfied in all the circumstances of the case that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information, formally resolve that the press and public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraph 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

15 Corporate Risk Management Summary (Paragraph 4)

The Committee received Appendix B to report 9 – Corporate Risk Management Summary, which was considered in closed session, as it contained exempt information.

Resolved that the Committee note exempt Appendix B to report 9.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....