

**Draft Minutes of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Performance and Scrutiny Committee
held in the Oak Room, Headquarters
on Wednesday, 1 April 2026, at 1.30 pm**

Present

Elected Members

Councillors Blundell, Coleman (Vice Chair), Huseman and Waite (Chair)

Independent Members

Robin Bennett (RB), Yasser Khan (YK), and Justine Vaughan (JV)

Officers

Simon Hardiman	Chief Fire Officer	CFO
Mark Price	Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer	T/ACFO
Jacqui Dungey	Section 151 Officer	S151 Officer
Richard Phillips	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer	Deputy Clerk
Scott Hurford	Head of Transformation and Collaboration	HoTC
Lynn Ince	Executive Support Team Leader	ESTL

1 Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed Robin Bennett, Yasser Khan and Justine Vaughan to their first Performance and Scrutiny Committee meeting and all those present at the meeting provided an introduction.

2 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Mosley
Marc Millward, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Services)

3 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None

4 Public Questions

None

5 Member Questions

None

BW requested the Committee to look at specific areas rather than taking a scattergun approach. Asked Committee to identify specific items as go through. P&S Committee look at issues and report to Fire Authority to provide assurance.

BW advised that are using planners and dashboards in this meeting as reports are out of date when issued to the committee. Provision of live data is better for this committee and for the Fire Authority to consider.

Councillor Coleman asked if members could log in to the dashboards, planners etc. The CFO explained that it is coming onto the website to ensure transparency. Councillor Coleman asked what the timing for this is. The CFO advised that the website is being refreshed and a quotation has been received for the cost of including this information on the website. It is estimated that a demonstration should be provided with approx. 8 weeks.

RB agreed that transparency is the right and important idea. RB asked if there is a clear understanding of the role of the Independent Members in the functioning of the Committee. BW stated that she believes the role of the Independent Members is to address the Cause of Concern and Areas for Improvement progress and provide scrutiny of these areas.

The Deputy Clerk advised that training on scrutineering skills will be provided. Independent Members are full participating and equal members of the Committee with the only difference being that those members cannot vote as elected members can. The inclusion of Independent Members is designed to provide an added layer of transparency and scrutiny to the Committee.

Councillor Coleman stated that she has already made comment that she believes that the Committee is top heavy with three independent members and that her opinion is that two independent members would probably be more helpful as the Fire Authority does tend to be self-scrutinising.

6 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMI) Cause of Concern (CoC) Recommendations

The CFO introduced this agenda item and explained the following background:

In the HMI inspections that took place in 2019 and 2021, the Service received 16 Areas for Improvement (AFIs). In their 2024 inspection, the HMI found that 13 of those 16 AFIs were still outstanding and did not meet the standards expected by the HMI. It is not an excuse, but this lack of response can be attributed to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and a Service focus on operational response or that the Service "rested on its laurels". The outcome of the 2024 Inspection therefore included 30 Areas for Improvement and 1 Cause of Concern.

The Transformation and Collaboration (T&C) Department are responsible for co-ordinating how the Service manages its response to the AFIs and the CoC.

The T&C Team are working with Andy Groom (HMI Service Liaison Lead for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service) to ensure regular contact and positive work. The Service is now working in partnership with the HMI, and their inspections are now viewed as an audit of the fire and rescue service which guides the way we deliver services to the communities of Shropshire.

The T&C Team have designed a MS Planner site to monitor and capture actions for both the CoC and AFIs.

Cause of Concern Planner

There are 5 separate areas within the CoC. The Planner has been set up with a bucket for each of these areas. These are split into cards with key milestones and success factors included on them. The T&C Team have used the HMI Characteristics of Good, and the success factors are aligned to Fire Standards national best practice guidelines.

Each action has a Service lead assigned to it and start and completion dates have been set for each action. The Planner is set up to send email reminders for the completion dates.

Councillor Coleman asked how members identify how many reminders have been sent for actions. The checklist on the Planner informs the data that is presented in reports to Committee and Fire Authority, although the data on the Planner may not always be updated immediately. Each item on the checklist is evidenced by commentary and attachments, and the T&C Team are trained to provide assurance against the three pillars of assurance model.

Councillor Coleman asked who the Planner is for and if a RAG rating can be applied to the checklist. The CFO explained that the RAG rating on the Fire Authority report reflects the grading provided by HMICFRS.

Councillor Blundell asked if the Service Liaison Lead can view the Planner. The CFO confirmed that he does and that the relationship between the Service and the HMI has matured and improved.

The HoTC provided more detail on the information that is displayed on the cards within the Planner.

The top task on the bucket is the overarching task which is then broken down into constituent tasks with a parent task giving a summary of each one. When a task is completed, the relevant cards are closed and these show at the bottom of the bucket. The final completion date is set by the Service in its Cause of Concern Action Plan, which is submitted to, and agreed by, the HMI. When all items on the checklist are completed, the bucket is then signed off.

The Chair suggested that as there a time lag issue with the reporting of the data captured in the Planner, the best to present information to this Committee is via the live Planner and/or dashboards.

RB suggested that AI could be used to pull an executive summary of the Planner together and identify areas with gaps. Councillor Coleman added that AI could also be utilised to run a “plain speak” check of the report to avoid issues with corporate speak and fire and rescue service jargon

7 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Areas for Improvement Recommendations

The HoTC explained that the approach to the Areas for Improvement (AFIs) is the same as that taken to the Cause of Concern. The 30 AFIs have been split into manageable tasks with an individual owner assigned to each task. All task owners are linked to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and other fire and rescue services to take advantage of good practice. A product pack has been developed for each AFI as part of the framework for Action Plans.

The tags at the top of the Planner entries give assurance and/or provide an overview of progress. Councillor Coleman said it is not clear which year the date is in. The HoTC advised that this can be included in the Executive Summary.

The HoTC gave the example of AFI 11 – Evaluation of partnerships and completed tasks. An evaluation of the evaluation has been done so can be used in other areas.

Councillor Coleman asked what “recurring AFI” means. The HoTC explained that this shows AFIs that have been carried over from the 2021 HMI Inspection.

Councillor Blundell commented that she does not like the use of strikethrough for completed tasks.

The HoTC explained that tasks completed are used to calculate the percentage completion of an AFI; although not all AFIs are aligned in how they are broken down i.e. some AFIs may only have one task.

The CFO explained that a deliberately similar approach has is being taken across both the CoC and the AFIs. The tabs used on the Planner help officers to identify where efforts need to be focused. Some tasks are also very closely linked for example AFIs 16 and 17.

YK asked where there are changes in operational processes and procedures is the impact on the teams involved being recorded. The CFO responded that work is ongoing to set organisational priorities of right people in the right place with the right tools so workforce planning, organisational assurance and HMI will be used to inform this work for the next 6 to 12 months.

RB said that he would expect the public to see a high level of data being reported to evidence progress across the HMI recommendations; Staffordshire Fire and Rescue have similar on their website.

8 External Audit Recommendations from 2024/25 Audit Findings Report

It was proposed by Councillor Coleman, seconded by Councillor Husemann and resolved that for Agenda Items 6, 7, and 8 information will be put through AI and then shared with Committee Members to assist with Members identifying those areas that require a deeper dive by the Committee.

9 Corporate Performance Indicators

Numbers of fires have plateaued so no longer looking to reduce but now have tolerances. Five-year average and identify bandwidth.

Councillor Coleman commented that there are a high level of false alarms and it would be good to see these reported on the dashboard. The CFO explained that Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) are being reduced dramatically due to call challenging and appropriate responses through Fire Control. AFAs are calls that come from receiving centres when fire alarms are activated in public buildings or businesses, rather than hoax calls.

Councillor Coleman asked when an AFA is counted as a false alarm. The HoTC explained that if the Service does not send an appliance, then it is not counted in the figures.

Councillor Husemann asked what action the Service takes with persistent offender repeat calls. The CFO explained that the Protection Team can be sent to assess any issues and the response scaled accordingly. Enforcement powers range from recommendations to property owners, then prohibition and finally prosecution if the recommendations given are not actioned.

Councillor Husemann asked if the Service can bill offenders. The CFO explained that this is not possible as fire is a statutory responsibility and premises are allowed x number of AFAs based on the number of detector heads in the premises. It is a complex issue, and the Service prefers the approach of working with businesses to address issues rather than taking action which may result in them shutting down.

Councillor Blundell asked if there have been many issues with air fryers. The T/ACFO explained that currently the bigger issue is with lithium batteries.

The HoTC then gave an overview of the Service Response standards.

There are three different standards based on urban, town and fringe and rural and the Service's availability performance is currently second in the county to the Isles of Scilly, and this supports response times. The HoTC explained that there are a lot of variables that can affect response times including for example traffic, particularly in Shrewsbury; not being able to identify the precise location of an incident; and levels of local knowledge of access. The previous cohort of the Fire Authority asked to be provided with detail of those incidents where the response standard was not met.

The Fires confined to Room of Origin performance indicator demonstrates the quick intervention of crews. Members asked if the Service has any input into planning applications. The CFO explained that it does for example for Air B&B usage but not for residential developments. Fire Service consultation relates to water supply, development layout and turning circles, although some statutory consultation requirements do need updating for example the measurement of turning circles is currently based on historical data.

The HoTC advised that the Corporate Performance Indicators are very operationally focussed, and the HMI have advised revision of them. A new suite of performance indicators is being developed and will be taken to Strategy and Resources Committee in July for agreement, with performance against those indicators being monitored by this Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Husemann, seconded by Councillor Coleman and resolved that the Committee are happy with the reporting format as it currently is and that other incidents and enabling services will also be reported on, at future committee meetings.

10 Communications Action Plan Update

This report outlined the progress that has been made by the Communications Team against the Year 1 Action Plan set out in the Communication Strategy 2025-28 and the performance of communications in the last quarter (Jan-March 2026)

The HoTC presented this report and explained that the demand on the Communications Team fluctuates due to the impact of incidents, such as the canal breach in Whitchurch.

Appendix B shows social media engagement over the past 6 months. The HoTC explained that the Service always tries to get Prevention messaging across in its social media posts.

Councillor Coleman commented that it is good to have the report, but she does not agree with the issue of demand fluctuating with incidents and feels that a rolling communications plan is needed as the Communications Team stands separate from the functions of the Service. Councillor Coleman thinks that communications aids with recruitment for example showing female firefighters in posts and is concerned that there is not enough resource in the Communications Team.

The HoTC confirmed that the Service does have a scheduled Communications Plan and the data included in this report is to try and illustrate the impact of operational incidents which require the focus of the Team.

Councillor Coleman queried if the Communications Team look at other fire and rescue services Facebook pages as ours seem to be quite static and unengaging.

The Committee requested specific dates for completion and/or activities be included in the report going forward.

The CFO emphasised to the Committee that the Communications Team is made up of two people, and it is recognised that this is an area of under-capacity. Councillor Coleman stated that she feels that communications need to be given more priority and that more resilience is needed in the Team.

RB suggested that AI could be used more to generate content for posts etc. The CFO agreed with this suggestion and added that the Service needs to move to embracing new technology to address capacity issues rather than increasing headcount. In other words, prioritisation of resource to get the best return or “invest to save”

It was proposed by Councillor Blundell, seconded by Councillor Huseman and

Resolved that the Performance and Scrutiny Committee note the information provided in the report.

11 Committee Work Plan

The Committee Work Plan will be created based on feedback from the Executive Summary being circulated to the Committee.

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm

Chair.....

Date.....