

# **Dorset Fire Authority**

## **Audit and Scrutiny Committee**

Minutes of a meeting held at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 6 January 2015.

### **Present:**

Mr Trevor Jones (Chairman)  
Mr Christopher Rochester (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr Les Burden, Mr Barry Goldbart, Colin Jamieson and Mr John Wilson.

### Officers Attending

Mr Darran Gunter (Chief Fire Officer), Mr Richard Bates (Treasurer), Mr Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services), Ms Lisa Pharaoh-Workman (Deputy Clerk) and Mrs Helen Whitby (Committee Officer).

Mrs Rebecca Knox attended under Standing Order 49.

### Also attending, for certain items, as appropriate:-

Mr Ben Ansell (Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery), Mrs Carol Swan (HR Manager (Support and Relations)) and Mr Craig Baker (Area Manager – Dorset).

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Fire Audit and Scrutiny Committee on **13 March 2015**).

### **Future Working of the Committee**

1. The Chairman explained that Item 11 would explore a recommendation that the Committee operate on a reduced basis by way of a rationalised work programme in future in order to allow additional resources to be provided to enable the merger with Swindon and Wiltshire Fire Authority to proceed.

### **Apology for Absence**

2. An apology for absence was received from Mr Mike Byatt.

### **Code of Conduct**

3. There were no declarations by members of any disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

### **Minutes**

4. Members were provided with the finalised minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2014 in place of those draft minutes circulated with the agenda papers. The finalised minutes were confirmed and signed.

### **Matters Arising**

#### Matters Arising – Minute 61.1

5.1 The Chief Fire Officer reported that the meeting between the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable and himself would take place later in January 2015.

5.2 The Committee were informed that a rigorous system for examining deaths due to road accidents in Dorset was now in place. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Fire Service chaired a multi-agency panel to learn lessons from any fire deaths which had occurred in Dorset and we had now introduced the same road road deaths Its first meeting

Dorset Fire Authority  
Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2015

had been chaired by the Area Manager – Dorset. It would meet quarterly and any lessons learned would be reflected in the Dorset Road Safety Strategy

5.3 The Chairman of the Authority added that the Children's Safeguarding Board was also reviewing serious accidents and it and the Adults' Safeguarding Board welcomed the introduction of this new panel.

Corporate Statement of Assurance – Minute 64.11

5.4 The Chief Fire Officer explained that the majority of the thirty eight areas for improvement and actions within the Corporate Statement of Assurance had been completed. However, some of these dated back to 2011 and by their nature would be on going activities. However, actions would be identified for the new authority as part of the combination work and closure of the Dorset Fire Authority.

Dorset Overarching Information Sharing Protocol – Minute 72.4

5.5 With regard to whether Dorset was to be a pilot for a national data sharing agreement, the Chief Fire Officer explained that this had been suggested because of Dorset's accreditations for data sharing arrangements. No progress had been made on this.

**Noted**

**Quarterly Workforce Report**

6.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an overview of workforce performance for Quarters 1 and 2 of 2014/15, including updates on staff performance regarding competence, wellbeing, conduct, composition and other workforce issues.

6.2 The HR Manager (Support and Relations) presented the report in detail. She highlighted areas above target and those areas where targets had not been met. With regard to the shortfall for PDR completion in Dorset, this was attributed to the concentration of staff on work for the combination. Attention was also drawn to the upward trend for general sickness absence.

6.3 Members were unhappy with the current performance for completed PDRs. They questioned whether the target should be 100% or whether, in view of sickness absence levels, the completion rate should be for the maximum number of staff available. The Chief Fire Officer explained that as manager posts were filled on a temporary basis, PDR completion rates were not a priority for them so 100% target would not be achieved. Whilst he accepted that 100% would be the ideal, it was not possible to undertake PDRs for staff absent through illness and there were a significant number of staff in this position. However, Fire Control staff would be interviewed as part of the consultation process for the move to Potterne so it would be possible to undertake PDRs for all staff.

6.4 Looking forward, members asked that when arrangements for the new combined authority were being considered, steps be taken to ensure that it addressed the aspirations and challenges of the PDR process. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery added that the new PDR year started on 1 January 2015 and he would be emphasising the importance of their completion to his managers.

6.5 In response to questions about patterns of sickness absence, whether absence levels affected the Service's ability to undertake its statutory duties and whether Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority experienced similar sickness absence levels, the Chief Fire Officer agreed to look at performance across the two Services.. He explained that

Dorset Fire Authority  
Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2015

Dorset's sickness absence arrangements were robust and these identified short and long term causes for absence. He was concerned that managers were prioritising the combination work but this was necessary if the new authority was to operate from 1 April 2016. It was also noted that return to work interviews were undertaken and any trends and triggers arising were analysed. The Chairman of the Authority added that work was on-going to ensure that the combination was effective and the Shadow Board would need to satisfy itself that monitoring arrangements were in place and adequate for the new authority when it came into operation. A fuller report on sickness absence and the effects of the new occupational health contract would be provided for the March 2015 meeting.

6.6 With regard to Fire Control, the Chief Fire Officer stated that absence levels provided a significant issue for coverage. He referred to the remarkable efforts made by the reduced numbers of staff generally and particularly over the Christmas and New Year period in order to maintain a service. Members asked that their thanks be expressed to staff providing coverage over this period.

6.7 The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority that following a request from firefighters involved in recent industrial action, he had agreed that pay deductions being split over two pay periods in order to spread the cost for staff at Christmas. This had been well received.

6.8 The Authority noted that the moratorium on recruitment of station managers and above had led to the temporary promotion of appropriate staff to fill such vacancies. This had led to a recent national advertisement for a one year post of station manager and this vacancy had been filled with effect from February 2015. The Chief Fire Officer added that it would be necessary for the new authority to address workforce planning and firefighter establishment levels at an early stage.

**Noted**

**Detailed Analysis of Key Corporate Performance Indicators**

7.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided a summary of the performance for each of the nine key corporate indicators for the first six months of 2014/15. Of these, five had met or were ahead of the expected six-monthly performance levels, two had not met the expected target and two were behind the target by more than 4%.

7.2 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery presented the report in detail, highlighting the indicators where performance was above target and those where targets were not met. Of particular concern were the indicators for the percentage of properties "with sleeping risk where the second appliance met the response standard" and "percentage of other properties where the first appliance met the response standard". The performance had been 73.3% and 72.4% respectively compared to the 80% target for both. Performance of these areas was scrutinised by the Community Safety Forum and managerial action taken if appropriate. A report would be provided for the next meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

**Noted**

**Annual Audit Letter 2013/14**

8.1 The Committee considered a report by the Treasurer on the Annual Audit Letter issued by KPMG which summarised the key findings from their 2013/14 audit work. No recommendations had been raised as a result of the audit work.

Dorset Fire Authority  
Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2015

8.2 The Treasurer explained that the Audit Letter had been issued in October 2014, with no issues being raised. The Authority noted that the role of External and Lead Auditor would be carried out by Darren Gilbert in future.

8.3 The Chairman reported that a workshop would be held following the Authority's meeting on 10 February 2015 to consider transitional audit arrangements for the Authority over the period leading up to the combination.

**Noted**

**Retained Duty System (RDS) Recruitment and Retention**

9.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which showed how information about reasons for staff leaving was collected, analysed and used to inform approaches to continuous improvement. It also provided a number of key long term measures to be explored.

9.2 The Area Manager – Dorset reported that steps taken to improve recruitment were now taking effect with starters (39) now outnumbering leavers (30) for the first time in a number of years. He drew attention to current recruitment difficulties at Wareham Fire Station that mirrored previous recruitment difficulties at Sturminster Newton Fire Station which had been resolved. He added that more information needed to be gathered about why staff were leaving the Service so that steps could be taken to try to improve staff retention. The current procedure was being reviewed in this light.

9.3 With regard to whether any enhancements could be provided to aid recruitment in particular areas, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Authority had the ability to provide enhancements but the impact of any incentives would need to be considered as part of a review of retained staff. The Deputy Clerk (Senior Solicitor) urged caution advising that consideration must be given to relevant legislation

9.4 The Chief Fire Officer referred to the current exit procedure which was voluntary on the part of staff. He thought staff should be encouraged to complete the exit form or have an interview as this would identify any lessons to be learned for the Authority and possibly improve retention.

8.5 Members welcomed the improvement in recruitment and retention of staff.

**Resolved**

10. That a further update report be provided in six months' time.

**Future Governance Arrangements for 2015/16**

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Financial Officer which provided a rationalised work programme for 2015 which would enable the necessary work for the combination with Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority to be undertaken.

11.2 The Chief Fire Officer explained that arising from discussion with the Chairman, a rationalised work programme had been proposed which would free up resources to allow the combination work to proceed, whilst maintaining performance monitoring to ensure that statutory duties were fulfilled, and that the annual statement of accounts process was closed for 2014/15.

Dorset Fire Authority  
Audit and Scrutiny Committee – 6 January 2015

**Resolved**

12. That the future work programme of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee 2015/16 be approved.

**Questions**

13. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 17.

Meeting duration - 10.00am – 11:20am