

Dorset Fire Authority

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Poundbury, Dorchester on 13 March 2015.

Present:

Mr Trevor Jones (Chairman)
Mr Christopher Rochester (Vice-Chairman)
Mr Les Burden, Mr Mike Byatt and Mr John Wilson.

Officers Attending

Mr Richard Ironside (for Treasurer), Mr Colin Chapman (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Mr Ian Cotter (Head of Financial Services), Mrs Alison Holmes (Senior Auditor, South West Audit Partnership), 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:-

Ms Jo Abbot (Therapy and Rehabilitation Provider), Darren Gilbert (Director, KPMG), David Graham (Head of Projects and Standards), Mr John Lincoln (Health and Safety Adviser), Jenny Long (Director of People Services), Mrs Carol Swann (HR Manager (Support and Relations)), Jill Warburton (Community Engagement and Inclusion Manager) and David Wilcox (PE Officer).

(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 **7 July 2015**).

Apologies for Absence

14. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Barry Goldbart and Colin Jamieson.

Code of Conduct

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

Minutes

16. The minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2015 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising

Minute 5.1 – Matters Arising

17.1 The Committee noted that the meeting between the Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer and Chairman of the Authority had taken place on 15 January 2015. Part of the discussion had centred upon Safewise and how funding from various sources could be used to best effect. It was also noted that the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board had added “Reducing the harms from road Traffic collisions” as one of its objectives and would be holding a workshop on this objective in September 2015.

17.2 With regard to joint use of Fire Stations, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that there were a number of projects underway, one of them being the use of the

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Portland Fire Station by Dorset Police which would be concluded by April 2015. He also referred to projects at Beaminster and Wareham Fire Stations, the possibility of shared accommodation with the Dorset Police at Swanage Station and a Police Community Support Officer was now based at Fire HQ. The Fire and Rescue service had an “open door” policy with regard to shared accommodation for blue light partners.

Minute 5.2 – Matters Arising

17.3 It was noted that the first meeting of the multi-agency panel had been held in January 2015. It would consider road traffic collisions information with a view to identifying trends and ways to prevent recurrences.

Minute 6.4 – Quarterly Workforce Report

17.4 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that managers were completing PDRs, although undertaking Fire Control PDRs was proving a challenge. He recognised the importance of PDR completion, especially during a time of uncertainty, and stated that 100% completion was expected.

Minute 11 - Future Governance Arrangements

17.5 The Chairman of the Authority informed the Committee that the Combination Order had been signed and laid before Parliament and the Shadow Board would come into effect on 1 April 2015. The Committee were pleased to note that Dorset’s Chief Fire Officer had been appointed as Chief Fire Officer Designate for the Combined Fire Authority.

17.6 The Chairman referred to a meeting which had been held on 10 February 2015 to consider transitional audit arrangements to ensure that the closure of the Dorset Fire Authority would be achieved with a smooth transition to the Combined Fire Authority. Members were provided with a copy of the notes of the meeting and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer updated members on the actions arising, the majority of which had been completed. The way forward would become clearer following the June 2015 meeting of the Dorset Fire Authority.

17.7 Members noted that the Dorset Fire Authority had a statutory duty to monitor the outcome of the Dorset Fire and Rescue Service until 31 March 2016 and that the Committee would continue its scrutiny function until that time although would have no role in approving the governance arrangements for the Combined Fire Authority. They could, however, via the Dorset Fire Authority influence the Shadow Board. They also noted that the Chief Fire Officer Designate would provide a combination update on a two weekly basis on the outcomes and way forward, including the Work Streams.

17.8 With regard to the proposal that members of the Fire Authorities Audit and Scrutiny Committees be able to attend their counterpart meetings, it was suggested that some form of briefing would be needed in advance of meetings and a question raised as to whether this applied to meetings of both Fire Authorities. The Chairman of the Authority explained that both Committees operated very differently and the invitation had been made so that members could see how the Committees operated so that a view of best practice could be gained. As both Fire Authority meetings were public, she saw no problem with members observing these meetings. She confirmed that the minutes of Shadow Board meetings would be received by both Fire Authorities. The Chairman of the Authority and the Chairman of the Committee would discuss how best to facilitate members’ attendance at meetings of their counterpart authorities.

Noted

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External Audit Plan 2014/15

18.1 The Committee considered a report by KPMG on how they would deliver their financial statements audit work for the Dorset Fire Authority and their approach to value for money work for 2014/15. An amendment to section 4.3 of the report which replaced the words “includes directed work to meet the requirements of the External Auditor” with “includes work determined by the Internal Audit based upon the testing approaches shared with them by the External Auditor” was noted. It was also noted that Dorset Fire and Rescue Service had been invited to take part in a national public bodies group. Members were proud that the authority had been sighted by a Minister as having a clear vision.

18.2 The Director presented the report highlighting that no significant risks had been identified. The Committee noted that KPMG would be undertaking an additional piece of work, with an additional fee, to assess the key risks and preparation for the Combination with the findings being reported to the two Authorities respective Audit and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee noted that future External Audit fees would be split equally between the two Fire Authorities until the Combination.

18.3 With regard to whether the September 2015 meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee could be used to take stock of transition arrangements and existing outcomes and reflect on them, the Director explained that audit work would focus on this and the outcomes reported to that meeting.

Noted

Quarterly Workforce Report

19.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an overview of workforce performance for Quarter 3 of 2014/15, including updates on staff performance regarding competence, wellbeing and other work force issues.

19.2 The Chairman welcomed Mrs Jenny Long to her first meeting following a period of ill health.

19.3 The HR Manager (Support and Relations) explained that it had not been possible for representatives from the Authority’s Occupational Health providers to attend the meeting so this had been deferred until 7 July 2015. As the current doctor was retiring this would provide an opportunity for members to meet his replacement.

19.4 The HR Manager (Support and Relations) presented the report drawing attention to the improved competence of the workforce, the deteriorating sickness absence levels, and other workforce issues set out in the report.

19.5 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred to the worsening sickness absence level and stated that figures were consistent with previous years. The Chairman commented that at a time of change absences were likely to rise.

Noted

Firefighter Fitness

20.1 The Committee considered a report on Dorset Fire and Rescue Service Fitness Statistics for 2013/14.

20.2 The PE Officer explained that the report provided information about current fitness levels and gave comparative data for the general population. Overall, firefighters were fitter than the general public and where firefighters did not pass the required standard a

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fitness and support programme was created so that they could regain fitness and return to operational duty.

20.3 The Committee noted that increased body fat occurred with age but the aim was to reduce levels to within the healthy range and there had been a downward trend since 2011. Firefighters being fitter and healthier compared to the general public was the result of the Fire Authority's policies and the support that was provided.

Noted

Occupational Health

21.1 The Committee considered the Occupational Health Service Annual Review November 2013 to September 2014.

21.2 The report summarised occupational health referrals for the previous year. Since February 2014 the Therapy and Rehabilitation Provider had attended courses so that she could better understand firefighter injuries. She gave details of the number of patients she had seen, a breakdown of which areas they worked in and the outcomes of treatment. She aimed to identify the cause of any injury so that she could achieve a higher success rate in getting staff back to work. The Committee noted that members of staff were entitled to six appointments, although this could be extended for complex cases.

21.3 The Chairman of the Authority congratulated the Therapy and Rehabilitation Provider on the excellent response to the survey and the positive outcomes for staff.

Noted

Health and Safety Interim Report

22.1 The Committee considered a report by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer which provided an update on the scheduled continual assessment visits (CAV) necessary to maintain the BS 18001 Management of Health and Safety Systems award and, in particular, the first in visit in September 2014 and the forthcoming visits on 17 and 18 March 2015.

22.2 The Committee noted that the two pre-existing minor non-conformities had been closed at the September 2014 visit when no new non-conformities had been identified. Further CAV visits between September/October 2015 and March 2016 were scheduled but future visits would be determined by progress with the Combination.

22.3 The Chairman of the Authority highlighted that these assessments might not continue in future. The Chairman, however, was of the view that they should continue as they provided assurance that the Fire Authority was well run. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that there had been discussions about the potential for the Combined Authority to achieve the BS18001 award and this decision would be taken at the appropriate level in due course.

Noted

Progress Report against the Actions Identified in the Annual Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Assurance

23.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided a short progress update against the outstanding actions identified in the Annual Diversity and Inclusion Assurance.

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23.2 The Community Engagement and Inclusion Manager presented the report in detail. The Fire Authority was one of only two Authorities in the South West to achieve the highest “excellent” level of the Equality Framework in 2012 and she highlighted the need for continued monitoring and actions to be progressed so that the rating could be maintained. The Local Government Association had agreed to the Fire Authority keeping the “Excellent” rating for a period of two years to allow the Combined Authority to reach this standard. She then highlighted progress against issues from the Diversity and Inclusion Assurance Report which were of particular note.

23.3 With regard to the Fire Authority becoming “dementia friendly”, it was noted that training for staff was to be rolled out over the next six months and could be provided after a future meeting for members. As a Mindful Employer, managers would be provided with information about mental health issues. The Authority Chairman added that such training was available through many sources and it was a question of not repeating it unnecessarily. Members would be asked if they would like Dementia Friendly or Dementia Champion training.

23.4 The Chairman commented that the diversity and inclusion work had helped transform the Authority.

Resolved

25.1 That the progress made against the issues outlined in the progress report be approved.

25.2 That members be asked whether they would like Dementia Friendly or Dementia Champion Training.

Internal Audit Update for 2014/15 Audit Plan and the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Treasurer to the Fire Authority which presented the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16 and summarised the work of the Internal Audit Service for the 2014/15 Audit Plan, including a schedule of completed audits since the last update.

26.2 The Chairman explained that the previous Audit Manager was leaving the South West Audit Partnership and that he would write and thank her for the work she had undertaken on behalf of the Fire Authority.

26.3 The Senior Auditor reported that the audit programme for 2014/15 would be completed by May 2015 and highlighted that discussions were on-going with regard to the risks associated with the Combination. The Audit Plan for 2015/16 was less prescriptive with some time allocated for internal reviews but the majority would be used to respond to the Combination work.

26.4 With reference to the priority four recommendations for the ICT Change Management and Disaster Recovery Audits, it was noted that steps were being taken to mitigate risks, some of which related to the Combination. It was noted that there were no on-going concerns.

26.5 The Committee noted that the two Fire Authorities had completely different ICT platforms and would need technical assistance to overcome this and that part of the transformation funding was to be used to develop the ICT infrastructure necessary for the Combined Authority. The Chairman referred to the fact that ICT audits very often led to partial assurances and he suggested that the Shadow Board receive a presentation so that it could understand the ICT risks involved in setting up Combined Authority.

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26.6 With reference to the Payroll and Pensions audit, it was noted that this audit report had not been finalised as yet but would be reported to a later meeting. Any significant findings would be highlighted.

Resolved

27.1 That the progress in completing the Annual Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15 be noted.

27.2 That the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16 be approved.

27.3 That the Chairman would write to the previous Audit Manager as set out in minute 26.2 above.

Professional Standards Internal Audit Progress for 2014/15 and Proposed Plan for 2015/16

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which detailed progress against the Professional Standards Internal Audit Plan 2014/15 and proposed Professional Standards Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16.

28.2 The Head of Projects and Standards reported on the current status of internal audits. Audits were expected to be completed by the end of the quarter although some capacity issues had been experienced due to industrial action. The South West Audit Partnership had agreed the proposed plan for 2015/16 and, in view of the Combination work, audits had been prioritised in order of importance.

28.3 With regard to what sanctions the National Resilience Assurance Team might use should the Fire Authority's equipment not be maintained, it was explained that they had sampled the Authority's equipment and procedures and identified some areas for improvement. A plan to resolve these issues was in place. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer said he was satisfied with the steps being taken to address the issues which were not major.

Resolved

29.1 That the progress to date for 2014/15 be noted.

29.2 That the Professional Standards Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16 be approved.

Corporate Risk Register

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer which provided an overview of the method of managing risk and which set out the strategic risks within the Corporate Risk Register. The status of the Corporate Risk Register was reported six monthly and was reflected within the Annual Statement of Assurance.

30.2 The Head of Corporate Planning explained that as a result of the strength of processes the Fire Authority had in place, internal and external auditors had not highlighted any significant areas for a number of years. He summarised that of the eleven risks identified within the Risk Register six had remained at the same level, four had reduced and one had slightly increased. The Committee noted that discussions were on-going with Wiltshire Fire Authority with regard to risk methodology in readiness for the Combination.

30.3 With regard to Risk Number 184 (lack of (a) clarity nationally over vision for fire and rescue services in England and (b) lack of clarity over vision and strategic direction of DFRS), members had difficulty in distinguishing between the two and it was agreed that in future these would be reported separately,

Resolved

31.1 That the risks contained within the Corporate Risk Register be approved.

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31.2 That in future Risk Number 184 be reported separately as set out in minute 30.3 above.

Financial Performance Reporting

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer in response to concerns expressed about the content of the summary financial statement reported to the Dorset Fire Authority on 10 February 2015 which showed no budget variances compared to the revised budget. The report sought to explain the reasons for this and to assure members that the financial management and reporting arrangements remained sound. Members were provided with colour copies of the report.

32.2 The Head of Financial Services explained that financial reporting followed common practice for local authorities, fire authorities and the police and had remained the same over a number of years. He referred to revenue budget summaries for 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 explaining that no significant budget variances had been expected and that if there were, these would have been brought to members' attention as part of the quarterly reporting process. He added that South West Audit Partnership through their internal audit work could look at reporting processes to provide assurance about financial control and management. He then referred to the table showing the end of January 2015 financial position where an additional column had been added to highlight any changes and confirmed that this format would be used in future reporting.

32.3 Members found the report to be helpful and asked that the additional column be continued to the bottom of the page.

Resolved

34. That the revised format for the financial summary as amended in minute 32.3 above be adopted.

Questions

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

Meeting duration - 10.00am – 12:30pm