

AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

28 November 2013

Present:-

Councillors Radford (Chairman), Brazil, Burridge-Clayton, Edmunds, Gribble and Woodman (vice Healey).

Apologies:-

Councillors Healey and Horsfall.

***APRC/14. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2013 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/15. Audit Committee Update**

The Committee received for information a report prepared by Grant Thornton, which set out the progress made with the delivery of its responsibilities as the Authority's external auditor. David Bray was in attendance at the meeting and he highlighted the main issues, including the work that had been carried out in respect of the 2012/13 financial accounts – the Annual Audit Letter was submitted for consideration as a separate item on the agenda (**Minute *APRC/16 below refers**) – and an initial approach for the 2014/15 accounts had already been discussed with the Finance Team. Interim audit testing was due to commence in January 2014.

The report also set out details of emerging issues and developments, notably:

- information in respect of property, plant and equipment revaluations;
- simplifying and streamlining the presentation of local authority financial statements,
- a consultation on the Local Authorities Code of Practice for 2014/15, and
- the potential risk of procurement fraud.

The auditor had raised a number of challenge questions for the Authority to consider in the document circulated and suggested that it may be appropriate for these to be set down into a tracker document for the benefit of the Committee. The Treasurer advised that he would be happy to do this and to bring this back to the Committee setting out the action taken for information in due course.

Mr Bray drew attention to an audit consultation event that had been organised by Grant Thornton which would be held in Exeter on 8 February 2014 and he encouraged the Service to attend.

***APRC/16. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority Annual Audit Letter for the Year Ended 31 March 2013**

The Committee received for information the Annual Audit Letter for 2012/13 as prepared by Grant Thornton, the Authority's external auditor.

Mr Bray referred to the work that had been undertaken with the Authority during 2012/13, including the Statement of Accounts, for which an unqualified opinion had been given, together with the Value for Money opinion which had also been unqualified.

At this point, Mr Bray informed the Committee that he would not be working with the Authority in future as he had been moved to another account and he thanked both Members and Officers for the support that he had received during his time on Authority business. In return, the Committee thanked Mr Bray for the work that he had undertaken over the years.

NB. MINUTE *APRC/15 ABOVE ALSO REFERS.

***APRC/17. Audit and Review 2013-14: Progress Report**

The Committee considered a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/13/13) that set out the combined work that had been undertaken by the Devon Audit Partnership and the Audit and Review team to date as measured against the internal Audit Plan. The report also highlighted additional work that had been completed to date, together with the key findings in respect of the audits of:

- Fleet Development; and
- Protection.

The Audit and Review Manager drew attention to paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the report that referred to the Audit Plan and the amendments required in light of the recent organisational restructure and the subsequent removal of the Process Management review. It was noted that it was proposed to switch the 10 day allocation to complete a review of firefighter safety which would support the Operational Peer Assessment that was scheduled for 2014.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the proposed change to the 2013-14 Internal Audit Plan as set out within paragraph 4.2 of report APCR/13/13 is approved; and
- (b) That subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

***APRC/18. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report: April to September 2013**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Operations (APRC/13/14) that set out Service performance for the period 1 April to 30 September 2013 against those measures contained within the approved Corporate Plan for 2013/14 to 2015/16.

In particular, the following points were highlighted:

- Measure 1 (fire deaths where people live): there had been 6 fire fatalities recorded to the end of September 2013 which meant that there was a slightly increasing trend since 2007/08.

Additionally, since the report had been prepared, a further fire fatality had occurred involving an 85 year old lady who had tried to extinguish a fire caused by a cigarette but had failed and died as a result. The lady had no smoke alarm in place at the property and there was no care package in place with appropriate agencies. This had prompted the Service to raise the issue of smoke alarms again and a fire fatality review would be held to discuss this case with appropriate agencies.

The Area Manager – Community Safety – advised that the Service had hit a stumbling block in its efforts to promote the maintenance of smoke alarms with care commissioners and sought the support of the Committee in influencing this if possible. He indicated that the Service would like to see the maintenance of smoke alarms included within the job specification for care commissioners to ensure that they were tested on a regular basis where vulnerable people were involved. Councillor Brazil commented that the lack of willingness to undertake this role may be as a result of potential liability issues and he suggested that the Service may need to consider taking on training the staff involved to overcome this.

It was noted that the Service was working actively to identify whether there were any further steps that could be taken to prevent further fire fatalities from occurring.

- Measure 2 (fire injuries where people live): there had been 43 injuries occurring between 1 April and 30 September 2013 as compared with 23 in the same period in 2012/13. 8 of these were deliberate fires (with a total of 11 injuries), the other 28 being accidental (with a total of 32 injuries).

Whilst there was an overall trend for a reduction in fires, the number of injuries was increasing and more analysis had been undertaken to try to understand the reasons behind this. It had been identified that the new Incident Recording System (IRS) had resulted in an overly cautious approach to incident reporting and therefore there had been an increase in the number of incidents reported combined with limited quality control. On further investigation it had been found that Firefighters at an incident had been applying a risk averse approach and therefore an ambulance was called if there was any doubt in respect of a potential casualty at the scene. If an ambulance was called but the person did not require it, this was still recorded as an injury, however. It was accepted that there was a need to record the precautionary checks to be more accurate with the data but staff needed further training in respect of what and how to record these incidents. This may, however, result in the statistics being higher than may have previously been the case.

- Measure 3 (incidents where people live): there had been a slight increase in the number of fires to 525 in April to September 2013 which represented an increase of 6 incidents as compared with the same period in 2012/13 although overall this measure was still showing a downward trend since combination in 2007/08.
- Measure 4 (fire deaths where people work): there had 2 deaths occurring at places where people work and visit in 2013/14, one of which was an outdoor fire and the other a vehicle fire. This measure had showed a downward trend since combination in 2007/08. Reference was made to work that had been undertaken by Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service in respect of deaths involving self immolation (the act of setting oneself on fire) and it had been demonstrated that getting involved with these people at a very early stage did have an influence.

- Measure 5 (fire injuries where people work): the statistics for April to September 2013 showed an increase to 28 injuries in comparison to the same period in 2012/13 which had 9 recorded injuries. This was linked to the issues associated with the IRS recording as mentioned above and the Service was working through this.
- Measure 6 (incidents where people work): there had been an increase in the number of incidents reported in April to September 2013 to 779 as compared with 723 in the same period in 2012/13, with deliberate fires down by 8 incidents and accidental fires up by 64. This was attributable largely to the long spells of hot, dry weather that had been experienced this year. The increase in other fires (notably grassland fires) was potentially also attributable to this. It was noted that there had also been a spike in the regional statistics in this area as a result.
- Measures 7 & 8 (emergency response standards): The performance on both of these measures had improved during the period April to September 2013 with a performance at 66.93% for 1st attendance within 10 minutes and 75.28% for 1st attendance within 15 minutes for a road traffic collision.

Reference was made to the number of retained stations that may be off the run at any time and what percentage this may be of the total number of stations. It was noted that the Service was undertaking research into this area presently and that this information would be reported back to the Committee in due course.

- Measures 9, 10 and 11 – an update on progress on these measures was set out within the report for information.

In terms of sickness, it was reported that the level of absence had dropped below 8 days or shifts per person in the last 10 months which was very encouraging and that short term sickness had also reduced. In terms of benchmarking data, the Service was slightly higher than other organisations but compared well with the public sector as a whole. The Service continued to monitor the trend on sickness absence and to work towards improving performance in this area.

*** DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The meeting started at 14:00hours and finished at 15:20hours.