

AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE
(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

7 May 2014

Present:-

Councillors Radford (Chairman), Brazil, Edmunds, Gribble, Horsfall and Woodman (vice Healey).

Apologies:-

Received from Councillor Healey.

***APRC/20. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2013 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/21. Grant Thornton items:**

The Authority's external auditor, Grant Thornton, submitted, for information, a report on progress in delivering its audit responsibilities to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority together with a letter setting out the planned audit fee for 2014/15.

Peter Barber, Associate Director for Grant Thornton and the new Fire Lead for the South West, attended the meeting. He outlined his background for the benefit of the Committee and explained that he looked forward to working with the Service and to continue to build the good working relationship that had been established by his predecessors.

In terms of the reports circulated, he indicated that the Audit Plan for 2014/15 would be submitted to the July meeting of the Committee as Grant Thornton wished to complete its interim work with the Service first. He added that this was slightly behind schedule but that the audit team would be on site on 9 June 2014 to undertake further work. The audit fee for 2014-15 was £45093 in accordance with the fee schedule set by the Audit Commission in 2012-13 for five years. Following this period, the Service would have the opportunity to undertake a process to appoint its own auditors and this would need to be considered in due course.

***APRC/22. 2013-14 Internal Audit Year End Report**

The Committee received for information a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/14/1) that set out the progress made against the 2013-14 Internal Audit Plan and provided assurance statements for the audits completed.

Anne Parsons, representing the Devon Audit Partnership (DAP), attended the meeting and gave an update on the position in respect of audits that DAP had completed but were not set out within the report circulated. These included:

- Payroll - **** High Standard
- ICT Organisational Controls - ** Improvement Required
- Strategic Fire Control - **** High Standard.

The Committee commented that there appeared to be a lot of audits showing “improvements required”. The Audit and Review Manager replied that the role of the Audit Team was to help the organisation to improve continuously and that the audits provided a way of conducting this in an organised and transparent way. He added that, based on the work that had been undertaken in 2013-14 and from work undertaken in previous years, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service demonstrated a good level of internal control overall.

Reference was made at this point to the contract that was in place with Expotel for bookings for rail fares and hotel accommodation and whether the Service was getting value for money from this. It was suggested and agreed that this matter would be considered in conjunction with the item on the 2014-15 Internal Audit Plan (Minute *APRC/23 below refers).

***APRC/23. 2014-15 Internal Audit Plan**

The Committee considered a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/14/2) that set out the proposed scope of the combined internal audit work to be completed in 2014-15 by the Service’s Audit and Review team and the Devon Audit Partnership.

In terms of the additional work to look specifically at the Expotel contract (Minute *APRC/22 above refers), there was a discussion surrounding whether or not the proposed Audit Plan could accommodate this. The Audit Manager advised that the Plan was instigated on the basis of a risk based approach but he felt that this additional work could be accommodated. Councillor Horsfall **MOVED** (and was seconded by Councillor Gribble):

“that the 2014-15 Internal Audit Plan be approved subject to the inclusion of the additional work to look at the value for money provided by the Expotel contract”.

Upon a vote (6 for, 0 against), the motion was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of the additional work to look at the value for money provided by the Expotel contract, the 2014-15 Internal Audit Plan be approved.

***APRC/24. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Performance report: April 2013 to March 2014**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Operations (APRC/14/3) that set out Service performance for the period 1 April to 31 March 2014 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 an increase in fire fatalities in 2013/14 to 12 as compared with 10 in 2012/13. This was an increasing trend for the third successive year and as a result, the Service had undertaken a critical review of its prevention activities.

A revised Prevention Strategy and Action Plan had been implemented which would deliver, amongst other things, a change in focus on Home Fire Safety Visits to target the available resources more carefully together with an aspirational target to deliver 30,000 in a 12 month period. It was stated that to achieve this figure on an annual basis would take time.

- Measure 2 (fire injuries where people live): there had been 84 injuries occurring in 2013/14 as compared with 54 in 2012/13 which was a significant rise at 64%.

It had been identified that the detail entered into the Incident Recording System (IRS) had resulted in an under recording of less serious injuries (where an individual received on scene assessment). It had also been identified that other regional Fire and Rescue Services had identified a similar under recording. In response to this, a quality assurance process had been instigated and this had been applied retrospectively to all incidents that had occurred in 2013/14 resulting in the significant increase in injuries as above.

The 2013/14 figures would now be used as a baseline for future years. It was noted, however, that the problem of increasing injuries against a backdrop of reducing fires was not unique to this Service. A national project was being led by Kent Fire and Rescue Service with Greenwich University to try to understand how human behaviour in fire has changed.

- Measure 3 (incidents where people live): there had been a slight increase in the number of fires to 1058 in 2013/14 9 more than 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 an overall downward trend since combination in 2007/08.
- Measure 5 (fire injuries where people work): the statistics showed an increase to 38 injuries in 2013/14 in comparison to 2012/13 which had 15 recorded injuries. This was linked to the issues associated with the IRS recording as mentioned above.
- Measure 6 (incidents where people work): there had been an increase in the number of incidents reported to 1392 in 2013/14 as compared with 1323 in 2012/13, with both deliberate and accidental fires increasing. This was attributable largely to the long spells of hot, dry weather that had been experienced last year. The increase in other fires (notably grassland fires) was potentially also attributable to this.
- Measures 7 & 8 (emergency response standards): The Service continued to see an improvement in performance with 69.93% for 1st attendance within 10 minutes and 75.51% for 1st attendance within 15 minutes for a road traffic collision. This was an area of performance that was continually monitored.
- 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 from 7.79 days or shifts per person in in 2012/13 to 7.06 in 2013/14. This represented a continued downward trend since the Service combined in 2007. A new electronic sickness reporting process was also in place. The Committee commended Officers for achieving this year on year decrease which had been the subject of a lot of intervention activity and focus during recent years.

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

The meeting started at 10:00hours and finished at 11.150hours.