

AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

14 January 2016

Present:-

Councillors Radford (Chair), Edmunds, Healey, Randall Johnson and Singh

Apologies:-

Councillors Horsfall and Way

***APRC/19. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2015 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/20. Update by Grant Thornton (External Auditor)**

The Committee received for information a report submitted by the Authority's external auditor, Grant Thornton, setting out the progress made in delivering its audit responsibilities to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority up to 18 December 2015. The report also covered emerging issues and developments, including guidance on devolution as set out in the Grant Thornton publication "Making Devolution Work: a practical guide for local leaders", Supporting Members in Governance and the National Audit Office Report, amongst others.

***APRC/21. Grant Thornton Annual Audit Letter for the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority for the Year Ended 31 March 2015**

The Committee received for information the Authority's Annual Audit Letter for the year ended 31 March 2015 as submitted by the Authority's external auditor, Grant Thornton. Peter Barber, representing Grant Thornton, drew attention to the work that had been undertaken with the Authority during the year, including the Statement of Accounts and the Value for Money conclusion, both of which had received an unqualified opinion.

***APRC/22. Audit & Review 2015-16 Progress Report**

The Committee received for information a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/16/01) that set out the details of the work that had been undertaken by the Service's Audit and Review Team in conjunction with the Devon Audit Partnership to provide assurance in respect of the audits completed to date.

The Audit and Review Manager stated that audit activity was focussed on three key areas, namely strategic reviews, compliance reviews and health checks. He indicated that the Service had made good progress in each of these areas. The audit tracker showed that there were 51 high or high/medium internal audit recommendations outstanding as at December 2015 and the Audit and Review Manager indicated that work was being undertaken as a management priority to bring this down. The audit tracking process had been aligned to the Corporate Plan process to ensure that outstanding recommendations were reviewed regularly alongside departmental plans and the position was monitored by the Service Leadership Team. Overall, the Audit and Review Manager advised that the Service was maintaining a good level of internal control, albeit that there was a risk associated with the management of change moving forwards.

The Committee drew attention to the compliance review undertaken in respect of the Gartan system and enquired as to whether this was an issue for the Service. The Audit and Review Manager replied that this system provided a double check that payments made to retained staff were accurate and this action could not be undertaken whilst the system was offline. The Area Manager (Community Safety) advised that, although this additional check system was not working currently, the payment claims were checked by local managers as part of the authorisation process to ensure that they were appropriate and any discrepancy was challenged at that stage. The Director of Corporate Services advised that additional resources had been brought in to ensure that priority development work on key IT systems could be completed within agreed timeframes. The Committee was keen to see such systems providing value for money and the Director of Corporate Services undertook to report back to Members on this in due course.

In terms of sickness, the Committee noted that the Service continued to work towards reducing the level of absence in line with an action plan that had been instigated. The Chief Fire Officer commented that this had to be considered in the context of the point that the organisation was undergoing significant change and there was less staff to deliver the service due to the current financial constraints. The Service was looking carefully at the impact of this on sickness absence levels in the organisation. On this point, it was noted that the benchmarking information set out within the report circulated showed that other organisations within both the public and private sectors had seen a rise in sickness absence levels in the past 12 months.

The Head of Human Resources advised the Committee that the audit had been undertaken prior to the launch of the new version of the sickness portal in July 2015. It was envisaged, therefore, that improvements in the data would be seen in the next reporting period. The Director of Corporate Services advised that a report would be submitted to the next meeting setting out the position in respect of the number of sickness days that may have been attributed to incorrect data being input on the sickness portal and also detailing the progress made with validating absence levels reported via the new portal.

***APRC/23. Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Performance Report Quarter 2 2015**

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (APRC/16/02) that's set out the Service's performance for the period October 2014 to September 2015 as measured against the indicators in the current Strategic Plan "Our Plan: 2015 to 2020".

The report set out a new performance measurement system, namely:

- Green represented normal performance;
- Amber represented the need for monitoring; and,
- Red represented performance that required investigation.

An executive summary was included within the report to provide clearer information in respect of saves, injuries and deaths. The key message set out within the report included:

Measure 1 – deaths as a result of fires where people live - there had been 10 deaths in the period to September 2015 which was a 24% increase on the previous 12 month period. There had not been any fire related deaths in Quarter 2 of 2015, however (July to September).

Measure 2 – injuries as a result of fires where people live – red rating – there had been 81 injuries in the period October 2014 to September 2015 which was a 59% increase on the previous 12 months. Of these injuries, 71 were due to accidental fires and 10 were due to deliberate fires. In quarter 2, however, there had only been 18 injuries of this type which was a 10% reduction on the same quarter in 2014. This measure was showing a negative upward trend, however, and would be monitored carefully.

Measure 3 – fires where people live – there had been 989 fires where people live which was a 1% increase on the previous 12 months. Of these, 930 were accidental fires and 59 were deliberate (6 % reduction).

Measure 4 – fire related deaths where people work and visit – there had not been any fire related deaths in the 12 months to September 2015 where people work and visit. The long, medium and short term trends for this measure were all positive.

Measure 5 – fire related injuries where people work and visit – there had been 37 injuries in places where people work and visit which was an increase of 28% on the previous 12 months.

Measure 6 – fires where people work and visit – there had been 1286 fires where people work and visit in the 12 months to September 2015 which was a 7% reduction on the previous 12 months.

Measures 7 – Emergency Response Standards (first attendance within 10 minutes and full attendance within 13 minutes) – the performance in respect of first attendance to fires where people lived within 10 minutes had decreased by 3% to 68% of incidents compared to the previous 12 month period, with full attendance showing a 1% reduction to 57%.

Measure 8 – Emergency Response Standards (attendance at road traffic collisions) – there had been a decline in performance by 3% in the 12 months to September 2015 with performance at 68%.

In terms of absence, it was noted that the benchmarking data showed that sickness had risen in all services in the country during 2014/15. The issue of sickness absence was discussed in more depth under Minute *APRC/22 above.

*** DENOTED DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.37hours