

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

29 September 2008

Present:-

Councillors Hannon (Vice Chair) (in the Chair), Button, Clatworthy, Healey (vice Wallace), Lewis, Mochnacz and Mrs. Nicholson

Apologies:-

Councillor Wallace

***APRC/11. Minutes**

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment to Minute *APRC/5 by the deletion of the last sentence in the fourth paragraph on page 2 (beginning "The Chief Fire Officer advised that on 19 June 2008"), the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2008 were signed as a correct record.

***APRC/12. Declarations of Interest**

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any personal/personal and prejudicial interests they may have in any items to be considered at the current meeting in accordance with the Authority's approved Code of Conduct.

Councillor Mochnacz declared a **personal but non-prejudicial** interest in respect of the item on Performance (Minute *APRC/13 below refers) in view of his involvement with South West One as a member of Somerset County Council.

***APRC/13. Devon And Somerset Fire And Rescue Service Performance Report: April To July 2008**

(Councillor Mochnacz declared a **personal but non-prejudicial** interest in respect of this item in view of his involvement with South West One as a member of Somerset County Council).

The Committee received for information a report of the Head of Service Planning and Review (APRC/08/4) that detailed the performance of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service for the first five months of the year (1 April 2008 to 31 August 2008).as against those indicators and actions contained within the approved Corporate Plan for 2008/09 to 2010/11.

The report highlighted the areas in which the service had performed well, including:

- Reducing accidental dwelling fires casualties (42% - 43 to 25 casualties);
- Reducing deliberate fires (showing a decrease form 200 fires in 2007 to 136 for the same period this year);
- Reducing sickness (showing a 12% decrease for the first four months of 2008/09).

The report also set out an area which the service needed to address, namely smoke alarm activation which was a challenge to the service at this time and referred to measures which were being taken to improve the performance in this area.

Members of the Committee were encouraged by the position, specifically the improvements in reducing sickness absence. This was an area in which the Committee indicated it wished to continue to see regular updates to include details of the costs and a breakdown in respect of the types of long term absence. The point was made that the information provided needed to be consistent so that it was comparable from report to report. Reference was also made to the target for casualties at accidental dwelling fires, where there had been some issues in terms of how officers recorded the nature of a "casualty". The Committee also asked that more information be provided in the future in respect of data collection and quality and how the service varied from others in the region in this area.

***APRC/14. Comprehensive Area Assessment**

The Committee received for information a presentation from the Head of Service Planning and Review on the move from Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to the proposed new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The presentation addressed the following areas:

- that CAA was primarily about the area and not the organisation;
- that, while there was a focus on Local Area Agreements (LAA), other matters would also be assessed as part of the CAA process;
- CAA would involve two elements, both an area and an operational assessment for fire;
- The operational assessment was split into four areas, namely managing finances, governing the business, managing resources and managing performance;
- CAA was an annual process;
- There would be continuous proportional assessment as part of this process. The timetable for the annual area assessment was due to begin in April 2009.

***APRC/15. Annual Governance Report, including Draft Opinion on the 2007/08 Accounts**

The Committee considered the Annual Governance Report for Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service as submitted by the Audit Commission setting out the auditors' opinion, in accordance with statutory requirements, on:

- a. the Authority's financial statements and;
- b. whether the Authority had made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

In addition, the Committee also considered a revised copy of the 2007/08 Statement of Accounts, amended in the light of the Annual Governance Report, together with a copy of the proposed Letter of Representation.

Steven Brown, representing the Audit Commission, outlined the purpose of the documents circulated which covered:

- the report on financial statements for 2007/08 and in particular the material amendment of the accounts to remove £17.126m of balance received from Somerset Fire;
- the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion 2007/08 (under the overall heading of Use of Resources)
- Matters arising from the audit, including details of unadjusted and adjusted misstatements in the accounts and various other governance matters
- The proposed draft audit opinion and VFM conclusion

Steven Brown stated that the Service had a statutory responsibility to publish its accounts by 30 September 2008 and that it was felt that the Service had worked well with the auditors in overcoming the issues raised. He stated that the Authority would be issued with an unqualified opinion on both the statement of accounts for 2007/08 and on the Use of Resources as a result.

The Treasurer and Head of Financial Management advised the Committee that a significant amount of effort had gone in to ensuring completion of the work required to inform the audit in the timescale set.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the amended Statement of Accounts for 2007/08 be approved;
- (b) that the amended Financial Statements and Annual Governance Statement as set out in the Annual Governance Report be approved;
- (c) that the Letter of Representation be approved and the Treasurer authorised to submit it to the Audit Commission;
- (d) that the proposed Action Plan, as set out on page 21 of the Annual Governance Report for 2007/08, be approved;
- (e) that the appreciation of the Committee for the work undertaken by the Treasurer and Head of Financial Management and his staff on this matter be placed on record.

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