

## **AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

21 November 2008

### Present:-

Councillors Clatworthy, Hannon, Lewis, Mochnacz and Wallace

### Apologies:-

Councillors Button and Mrs. Nicholson

#### **\*APRC/16. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2008 be signed as a correct record.

#### **\*APRC/17. 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.

No interests were declared.

#### **\*APRC/18. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report: April 2008 - September 2008**

The Committee received for information a report of the Head Of Service Planning and Review (APRC/08/05) that detailed the performance of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service for the first six months of the year (1 April 2008 to 30 September 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 and those in which obstacles had been encountered in making progress and action needed to be taken to effect an improved performance. The areas where the service had performed well included:

- A reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fire casualties by 21%(as compared with the same period last year);
- A reduction in deliberate primary fires (excluding vehicles) of 14.3% (as compared with the same period last year);
- A reduction in the number or shifts lost due to sickness absence (14% decrease on the same period last year).

The target for a reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fire casualties was for a reduction of 13% for the next three years, which was challenging for the service. The reductions to date had been achieved through a combination of preventative programmes, with contributions from Home Fire Safety Checks and education. Additional checks and balances had been instigated to ensure that incidents were more consistently and robustly reported. Reference was made to the inclusion of data in terms of the type of dwelling and the Head of Service Planning and Review indicated that this could be submitted in future. It was noted, in addition, that the Regional Performance Benchmarking Group had appointed a new regional officer recently who was due to start on 1 January 2009 on a 12 month contract.

The target on Deliberate Primary Fires (excluding vehicles) had shown a particularly good overall performance, although there had been peaks in October and early November as a result of bonfire night celebrations. This target incorporated the Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets. Work continued to be undertaken in this area in conjunction with communities and key partners. It was suggested that the figures on the difference between commercial and domestic premises could be reflected together with information in respect of whether any casualties were associated with this area. The Head of Service Planning and Review replied that there were only very small numbers of casualties involved in this type of fire but suggested that the Committee may wish to explore these figures further at a future meeting.

The Head of Human Resources Management and Development advised that the Human Resources Management and Development Committee had reviewed the position in respect of sickness absence in depth at its meeting on 14 November 2008. This was a positive position as there had been a significant improvement in performance in the first half of 2008/09 and this continued to be progressed with the continuation of absence management policies and procedures. She referred to the positive action being taken to address performance in this area including the introduction of new policies on sickness absence management and the training of all staff involved in the management of this area of work. The point was raised as to whether there had been an increase in uniformed staff long-term sickness absence compared with the same period last year. The Head of Service Planning and Review indicated that efforts would be made to provide this information at future meetings.

The service was facing challenges in the following areas:

- Increasing the number of Home Fire Safety Visits;
- Increasing the number of fire safety audits;
- Reducing calls to Automatic Fire Alarms.

In terms of Home Fire Safety Visits, there had been a new recording system implemented recently. This was an area of performance which had been highlighted with Area Commanders. There had been research undertaken that suggested there was a positive correlation with home fire safety visits and performance in other areas such as reducing the number of accidental dwelling fire casualties. The work of the Community Safety Action Teams on areas would also start to impact on the number of visits undertaken in the future. The point was made that this target had been set without the benefit of previous benchmarking data and there was a need to re-examine this issue.

The target for Fire Safety Audits was not being achieved. There was activity being undertaken in this area which included developing the workforce through training for fire protection officers and additionally, procuring a training provider to instigate a nationally recognised qualification for staff.

It was anticipated that the previously reported long-term trend for a reduction in the number of responses to Automatic Fire Alarms would continue albeit that on this occasion a short-term increase had been recorded, partly as a result of a change in Service policy on attendance and partly as a result of more detailed analysis identifying an increase in false alarms from domestic premises. The Unwanted Calls Manager advised the Committee of action being taken to address this increase and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that performance was improving and it was anticipated that unwanted calls would further reduce as a result of the action being taken. The Head of Service Planning and Review added that a new Incident Recording System would be in place by 31 March 2009 and this would provide more information on which to monitor the position.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 12.00hours