

AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

5 February 2009

Present:-

Councillors Wallace (Chair), Button, Clatworthy, Hannon, Lewis and Mrs. Nicholson.

Apologies:-

Councillors Mochnacz

***APRC/19. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2008 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/20. Declarations of Interest**

Members of the Committee were invited to consider whether they had any **personal/personal and prejudicial interests** in items as set out on the agenda for the meeting and declare any such interests at this time.

Councillor Wallace declared a **personal** (but not prejudicial) interest in relation to item on Performance Report April 2008 to December 2008 by virtue of his Membership of Somerset County Council and its partnership in South West One (a service provider to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service).

***APRC/21. Performance Report: April 2008 to December 2008**

(NOTE: Councillor Wallace declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in this item by virtue of his Membership of Somerset County Council and its partnership in South West One (a service provider to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service)).

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Service Planning and Review (APRC/09/1) giving an overview of the performance of the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service from 1 April to 31 December 2008 as against those goals, priorities, activities and targets as identified in the approved Corporate Plan 2008/09 to 2010/11.

The report highlighted particular good performance in relation to sickness absence, with a 16% reduction in absence levels being recorded for the period when compared to the same period last year. The Service continued to progress the production of quality absence management data and more robust absence management procedures and at present there was every indication that the target of a reduction in sickness absence levels, by 2010, to the regional average of 9 days/shifts lost per person would be met.

The report also indicated, however, the following four areas where improvement was required:-

- improving the Service approach to equality and diversity;
- reducing accidental dwelling fires;

- smoke alarm activation; and
- reducing malicious false alarms attended.

The report detailed, for each of these areas, measures either undertaken or proposed to improve performance.

In debating the report, Members commented on the following issues:-

- the increase in December of long-term sickness for retained duty system (RDS), which replicated a similar position in the previous year. In responding, it was stated that this could be as a result of a number of factors but that it was hoped that the introduction of a new availability system, scheduled for the summer of this year, would assist in providing more accurate data on actual availability for duty;
- the need to improve performance in relation to equality and diversity. The Service had adopted “stretch” targets in relation to the recruitment of female and black and ethnic minority (BME) staff and was in the process of developing its single equality scheme – “Making the Connections” – setting out strategies aimed at meeting the Corporate Plan target of achieving Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard in 2008/09 and 2009/10. It was accepted, however, that there were some intrinsic difficulties in meeting certain targets e.g. a low staff turnover reduced recruitment opportunities;
- the need to link in national campaigns (e.g. the fitting of smoke alarms) with local prevention/safety initiatives;
- the current situation in relation to the fire safety enforcement target. The enforcement regime had changed some two years ago with the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order. The targets set at that time were based on best estimates of performance. The Service was actively considering how performance in this area might be improved by the correct alignment of resources to realistically achieve targets.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

***APRC/22. Comprehensive Area Assessment**

The Committee received for information a presentation by the Head of Service Planning and Review on the introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and its implications for the Authority. The presentation covered, amongst other things:-

- the two elements of the CAA – an Area Assessment and an Organisational Assessment (which in turn would encompass four themes: managing finances; governance; resource management; and performance management);
- the use of a National Indicator Set (198 Performance Indicators replacing the existing 1,200 Best Value Performance Indicators) to inform both the Area and Organisational Assessments;
- a shift in focus away from assessing how government expectations have been met to assessing the impact that local services are having on improving outcomes for citizens.

***APRC/23. Audit Commission: Audit Progress Report**

(Steve Brown and Angela Hull, representing the Audit Commission, in attendance for this item).

The Committee received for information a progress report prepared by the Audit Commission setting out:-

- details of the reports finalised and action plans agreed since the last meeting of the Committee;
- work completed and to be reported to a future meeting in the 2007/08 Annual Audit letter;
- work currently in progress (including audit planning for 2009/10 and a refresh of 2008/09 planning); and
- recent national reports (including “Rising to the Challenge” – the national study on fire and rescue service modernisation) and upcoming events.

(SEE ALSO MINUTES *APRC/24 AND *APRC/25 BELOW).

***APRC/24. Review Of Control Environment And Material Systems 2007/08**

The Committee received for information the final report prepared by the Audit Commission following its review in 2007/08 of Control Environment and Material Systems for the Authority. The objective of the review had been to assess the risk of material misstatement from the information systems in place at the Authority. An action plan to address during the current financial year those areas identified in the review as requiring attention had been produced and was appended to the report.

***APRC/25. Audit of Financial Statements 2007/08**

The Committee received for information the final report prepared by the Audit Commission following its review of the Authority’s 2007/08 financial statements. The report summarised the key themes arising from the audit of the Authority’s Statement of Accounts for 207/08 on which an unqualified opinion had been issued in September 2008.

Appended to the report was an action plan developed by the Authority of measures to be undertaken during the current financial year to address those recommendations as contained in the Audit Commission report.

(SEE ALSO MINUTE *APRC/23 ABOVE)

***APRC/26. Direction of Travel and Use of Resources Assessment 2008**

The Committee received for information a copy of the Audit Commission’s report on its most recent Use of Resources assessment for the Authority (the last to be undertaken under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment – CPA – framework).

The report detailed the findings for each of the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) (Financial Reporting; Financial Management; Financial Standing; Internal Control; and Value for Money) and concluded that the Authority had secured an overall score of 3 (consistently above minimum requirements – performing well) from the following scale used for Use of Resource judgements:-

4	Well above minimum requirements – performing strongly
3	Consistently above minimum requirements – performing well
2	at only minimum requirements – adequate performance
1	Below minimum requirements – inadequate performance

The Direction of Travel report was currently subject to an embargo but would be published on 12 February 2009. Both the Direction of Travel and Use of Resources reports would be reported to a future meeting of the Authority.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.20hours.