

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

29 September 2010

Present:-

Councillors Dyke (Chairman), Burridge-Clayton, Gribble, Mills, Radford, Viney and Way

***APRC/9. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2010 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/10. Declarations of Interest**

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

No interests were declared.

***APRC/11. Performance Report: April to June 2010**

The Committee received for information a report of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (APRC/10/7) that detailed the performance and progress made by the Service as measured against the Corporate Plan goals, activities and targets for the first quarter of the year (April to June 2010).

The report highlighted the top level summary of performance against the goals, activities and targets and identified areas of specific focus as determined by the Service Improvement Group (SIG) namely:

- Barn fires;
- Workplace accidents;
- Sickness;
- Progress against the Equality Standards.

In terms of barn fires, there had been an increase in numbers in 2009/10 as highlighted in the Annual Performance Report and positive action had been needed to address this in view of the point that these were very resource intensive for a relatively small number of fires. The cost associated was £420,000 as most barn fires tended to occur in areas covered by the retained duty system so work was in hand to reduce the numbers as even a small reduction could result in significant savings for the Service.

It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of workplace accidents (Level 2 Moderate Workplace Accidents) from 8 to 15 but this may be due to the positive action taken to encourage the reporting of incidents. The Health and Safety Team worked closely with officers to encourage a continuing proactive management and monitoring of systems of work and compliance with policies.

For the first quarter of 2010/11, the Service had recorded 1.82 days/shifts lost per person due to sickness which was well within the target of 2.24 days for this period. Sickness absence was also being broken down into rates for each team/section of the organisation which allowed the Service to compare rates across the organisation and also to target potential problem areas as trends arose.

The Service was making good progress against the Equality Standards. In June 2010, the Service completed a mock self assessment exercise against the "achieving" level of the new Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework (FRSEF) which replaced the Equality Standard. The assessment was carried out with other FRS in the south west with the aim of identifying common areas for improvement. In summary, the assessment concluded that DSFRS was at the "achieving" level of FRSEF but some areas needed to be strengthened, the main improvements required in the area of employment and training. An action plan had been developed to address the areas identified as needing improvement, the longer term goal being to achieve "excellent" level by 2014.

***APRC/12. Audit Progress Report**

The Committee received for information an Audit Progress Summary (to 10 September 2010) as prepared by the Audit Commission.

The Summary report included details of two letters issued to the Authority since the previous meeting, including:

- Letter to audited bodies dated 9 August 2010 about the change in approach to Value for Money work and the impact upon fees;
- Letter to audited bodies dated 19 August 2010 confirming no immediate change to audit arrangements following the Government's announcement of its plans to introduce legislation to abolish the Audit Commission.

***APRC/13. Interim Audit Report 2009/10**

The Committee received for information a report prepared by the Audit Commission that set out the results from its interim audit review, covering the control environment and material systems at Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority.

***APRC/14. Annual Governance Report 2009/10, including Draft Opinion on the 2009/10 Statement of 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 2009/10 Statement of Accounts, amended in the light of the Annual Governance Report, together with a copy of the proposed Letter of Representation.

Alun Williams, representing the Audit Commission, outlined the purpose of the documents circulated which covered:

- the report on financial statements for 2009/10 and in particular the amendment of non material errors within the accounts, namely to change depreciation on plant/equipment depreciation by £203,000, the incorrectly applied revaluations to two fixed assets resulting in a net understatement of £158,000 and the omission of Torbay and Plymouth Councils from collecting fund accounting;
- the Value for Money (VFM) conclusion 2009/10;
- 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.

Steven Brown stated that the Service had a statutory responsibility to publish its accounts by 30 September 2010 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 the statement of accounts for 2009/10.

The Treasurer 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 as the accounts were becoming more complex each year.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the amended Statement of Accounts for 2009/10 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 24 of the Annual Governance Report for 2009/10, 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.

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

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.13hours.