

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

24 November 2014

Present:-

Councillors Radford (Chair), Edmunds, Healey and Horsfall.

Apologies:-

Received from Councillors Ball and Singh.

***APRC/12. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2014 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/13. Audit Committee Update**

Peter Barber and David Bray, representing the Authority's external auditor, Grant Thornton, attended the meeting to report on progress in delivering its audit responsibilities to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority.

The Committee noted that the 2013-14 audit work had now been completed and that work on the 2014-15 audit would commence in February 2015. Grant Thornton had also submitted the Annual Audit Letter for 2013-14 which was considered in conjunction with Minute *APRC/14 below.

***APRC/14. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority Annual Audit Letter for the Year Ended 31 March 2014**

The Committee received for information the Annual Audit Letter for 2013/14 as prepared by Grant Thornton, the Authority's external auditors. Peter Barber 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.

A list of key issues and recommendations made during the 2013-14 audit was set out at Appendix A to the Annual Audit Letter and it was requested that the action taken to implement the 3 significant recommendations made should be reported back to the Committee at its next meeting. The Clerk reported that the Authority already had an audit tracker in place and that this would be reported back to the Committee as requested.

***APRC/15. External Audit - Proposed Work Programme and Scale of Fees for 2015-16: Consultation**

The Committee considered a report of the Treasurer and Clerk to the Authority (APRC/14/9) that set out details of a consultation exercise that was being carried out by the Audit Commission in respect of its proposed work programme and scale of fees for 2015-16 for local government and police bodies. The report also set out a proposed response to the consultation for consideration by the Committee.

Reference was made to the reduction in the scale of fees for 2015-16 to £33,820 (from £45,093 in 2014-15) and clarification was sought as to whether this was a one off reduction. Peter Barber of Grant Thornton stated that the Audit Commission had reported an excess balance in its accounts as at 31 March 2015 and as a result, it had been decided that local authorities would be offered a one off rebate to subsidise the audit fees in 2015-16. He confirmed that there would not be any reduction in the service provided by Grant Thornton as a result of this.

RESOLVED that the draft response to the Audit Commission consultation on the proposed work programme and scale of fees for 2015-16, as set out at paragraph 3.1 of report APRC/14/9, be approved for submission to the Audit Commission.

***APRC/16. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report: April to September 2014**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Operations (APRC/14/10) that detailed the Service's performance for the period April to September 2014 against the measures set out within the Corporate Plan for 2013/14 to 2014/15.

In terms of the performance to date this year, the Committee noted that:

- Measures 1 (deaths which occurred where people lived) – there had been 2 fire deaths to September 2014 as compared with 6 in the same period in 2013-14 which was a welcome decrease;
- Measure 2 (injuries which occurred where people lived) – there had been a significant reduction in dwelling fire injuries to 16 from 53 in the same period in 2013-14 and there had also not been any deliberate fires in this period;
- Measure 3 (incidents which occurred where people lived) – there were 445 dwelling fires between April and September 2014 as compared with 525 in 2013-14 which continued the overall downward trend that had occurred almost year on year since 2007 with the exception of 2013-14;
- Measure 4 (deaths which occurred where people worked and visited) – there were 2 fire deaths between April and September 2014 which was the same as in 2013/14, although the long term trend was downwards;
- Measure 5 (injuries which occurred where people worked or visited) – there was a decrease of 30% in the number of injuries recorded in April to September 2014, together with a 17% reduction in the number of fires causing injuries. This was a reflection of the national trend;
- Measure 6 (incidents which occurred where people worked and visited) – the number of incidents, including both deliberate and accidental fires, had decreased from 782 to 768 in April to September 2014 when compared with the same period in 2013/14;

- Measures 7 and 8 (emergency response standards) – Measure 7 was still showing an improvement to September 2014 with a performance of 70.49% for first attendance in 10 minutes. For Measure 8, there had been a slight decrease on first attendance within 15 minutes to road traffic collisions to 75.58% from 73.25% to September 2014. It was noted that each command was receiving a detailed breakdown on the emergency response performance so that the Area Commanders could address the issues.
- Sickness absence – the average number of days sickness lost per person per shift/day had increased to 4.6 days in April to September 2014, caused partly by an increase in long term sickness. This matter was the subject of a more detailed report to the Human Resources Management and Development Committee on 26 November 2014.

The question was asked as to whether the Service was aware if there was a correlation between fire deaths and the type of premises such as private rented or owner occupied. The Director of Operations reported that this data was collected but the Service did not report against it currently. He added that the Service could look into this with a view to reporting back at a future meeting.

The Committee also received a presentation given by the Director of Operations in respect of the proposed changes to the reporting of performance data in the future. This was centred on the need for the Service to consider “leading” measures rather than “lagging” measures so that the Service was able to respond proactively to risk rather than being reactive after events had happened. This would also encourage issues to be dealt with at a much lower level within the organisation rather than being escalated up to senior management. A copy of the slides presented was circulated to members of the Committee for reference.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the proposed changes in respect of the presentation of performance data in future be noted at this stage and that a more detailed report thereon be submitted to the Committee in due course; and,
- (b) Subject to (a) above, the Performance Report for the period April to September 2014 be noted.

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

The meeting started at 10:00hours and finished at 11:47hours