

AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)

28 September 2015

Present:-

Councillors Radford (Chair), Dyke (vice Singh), Edmunds, Healey, Horsfall, Randall Johnson and Way

***APRC/9. Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2015 be signed as a correct record.

***APRC/10. Audit Findings for the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority for the year ended 31 March 2015**

The Committee considered a document prepared by Grant Thornton, the Authority's external auditor, on its findings and opinion on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2015. The Committee also considered the Authority's draft Statement of Accounts for 2014-15 and additionally, was asked to approve a draft Letter of Representation to accompany the Audit Findings and Statement of Accounts for 2014-15.

In presenting his findings to the Committee, Peter Barber, representing Grant Thornton, reported on the work undertaken in respect of the audit findings. He stated that the standard of the financial statements and the supporting working papers showed a significant improvement on the previous year. He drew attention to one material adjustment, however, that had been made post consideration of the draft financial statement, namely:

- that the Pension Ombudsman's determination on the calculation of pensioners' lump sum amounts on commutation since 1998 was not based on the correct actuarial data, although it was recognised that this was a national issue and was beyond the control of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority.

It was noted that this adjustment had been made in the final version of the financial statements presented to the Committee and there was no impact on the reported outturn.

Reference was made to the position for this and other local authorities in respect of the Authority's strategic financial planning. This was the only area scored under the assessment of Value for Money as "amber" in view of the significant savings required to bridge the gap between Service expenditure and Government funding for this and future years. The Treasurer responded that the Authority had a robust Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in place for the next five years, although it was recognised that this was based on some financial assumptions such as the level of grant settlement to be received from Government in the future.

Based on the work undertaken, Mr Barber reported that he anticipated issuing an unqualified opinion on both the financial statements and Value for Money conclusion and indicated that this would be issued to the Authority in the near future.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Treasurer and his team for their efforts in preparing the statement of accounts. He also thanked the auditors for the clear and comprehensive report that had been submitted.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Audit Findings 2014-15 be approved;
- (b) That the revised Statement of Accounts 2014-15 containing the financial statements on which the Audit Findings were based be approved, and;
- (c) That the Letter of Representation also enclosed with the agenda for this meeting be approved and the Treasurer be authorised to sign it on behalf of the Authority.

***APRC/11. 2014-15 Annual Statement of Assurance**

The Committee considered a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/15/10) on the Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance for 2014-15 prepared to satisfy the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 and the current version of the Fire and Rescue Authority National Framework. The document set out issues of financial, governance and operational assurance and included an action plan to address any issues identified.

RESOLVED that that the final Annual Governance Statement - required to accompany the 2014/15 final accounts – be approved and published on the Authority's website.

***APRC/12. Audit and Review 2015-16 Progress Report**

The Committee received for information a report of the Audit and Review Manager (APRC/15/11) set out details of the work that had been undertaken by the Service's Audit and Review Team in conjunction with the Devon Audit Partnership to provide assurance in respect of the audits completed to date.

Reference was made to compliance reviews that had been undertaken and specifically, one in respect of the Gartan Payroll Module. The Committee expressed concern that this system had not been in operation for some months and that there had been issues with the sickness absence portal additionally and sought an assurance that the Information & Communications Technology (ICT) Department had measures in hand to deal with this. The Director of Corporate Services advised that the ICT Department was a small team seeking to deliver a number of large, significant projects (such as the Networked Fire Control Partnership System). This required effective and efficient prioritisation. He added that the issues with the sickness absence portal had not been due to the software but had been as a result of a field not being marked as "mandatory" for completion.

The Committee asked a number of questions on the sickness absence reporting issues, including:

- When the error on the portal came to light?
- What the period in time was between the error being identified and the rectification being made to the system?
- Whether the Service had captured this information retrospectively?
- Whether it was possible to make the adjustments to the data now?

Councillor Randall Johnson **MOVED** (seconded by Councillor Dyke):

“that the information outlined above be collated and a report thereon be submitted to this Committee at its next meeting”.

The motion was put to the vote and **CARRIED** unanimously whereupon it was

RESOLVED

- (a) That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee covering the questions raised in respect of the sickness absence portal as above; and,
- (b) Subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

***APRC/13. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report: July 2014 to June 2015**

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (APRC/15/12) that set out the performance data for the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service for the period July 2014 to June 2015. This report was in the new style, focussing on whether any changes seen in the performance were normal, looking at the number of standard deviations that the data was away from the mean and therefore, whether a change in performance was a cause for concern.

The report also included an executive summary for the first time setting out the total number of calls handled within the reporting period together with the number of calls attended and not attended as a result. It was noted that, for July 2014 to June 2015, the Service received 20,329 calls, of which 2990 (15%) did not result in attendance at an incident and 17,339 (85%) resulted in attendance. This was broken down into the types of incidents attended and provided valuable information to gauge the outcomes of the action taken to meet the priorities within the Service's Corporate Plan, notably to increase public safety.

In terms of the performance measures, the following points were noted:

- Measures 1 (deaths which occurred where people lived) – in the period July 2014 to June 2015, there had been 11 fire deaths, with 4 occurring in the period April to June 2015;
- Measure 2 (injuries which occurred where people lived) – there had been 68 injuries in the 12 month period July 2014 to June 2015, with 20 occurring in the period April to June 2015, showing an increasing trend;
- Measure 3 (incidents which occurred where people lived) – there were 1000 dwelling fires in the period July 2014 to June 2015 with 258 occurring in the period April to June 2015
- Measure 4 (deaths which occurred where people worked and visited) – there was 1 fire death in the 12 months July 2014 to June 2015 but no fire deaths in the period April to June 2015;
- Measure 5 (injuries which occurred where people worked or visited) – there were 32 injuries in the period July 2014 to June 2015 but only 5 in the period April to June 2015;
- Measure 6 (incidents which occurred where people worked and visited) – the number of incidents, including both deliberate and accidental fires, in the period July 2014 to June 2015 was 1316 with 334 occurring between April to June 2015;

- Measures 7 and 8 (emergency response standards) – this was showing first attendance in 10 minutes of 69% in the 12 months July 2014 to June 2015 although this had increased in the first quarter of 2015 to 71%. There had been a slight decrease on first attendance within 15 minutes to road traffic collisions to 69% in the period July 2014 to June 2015 although this had increased to 71% in the first quarter of 2015.

The Human Resources Manager provided an update on sickness absence management. He commented that, whilst sickness absence levels were increasing, the Service had already instigated measures to address this, as reported to the Human Resources Management & Development Committee on 16 September 2015. In terms of the benchmarking data presented, the Committee requested that comparative data be sourced for both Devon & Cornwall and Avon & Somerset Police Forces.

The Committee commended the Service on the production of this report which it considered to be an excellent step forward.

*** DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WOTH POWER TO ACT**

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 11.55hours