

MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE



Held on Thursday 17 December 2009

Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4FS

Those present: Councillor Chris Bowring (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor John Lenton (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Alan Ward (Member, Fire Authority)

In Attendance: Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant)
Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison) (*part meeting*)
Dan Maycock (RSM Bentley Jennison) (*part meeting*)
Nicholas Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review)
Caroline Redzikowska (Clerk and Monitoring Officer)
Phil Sharman (Audit Commission) (*part meeting*)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)
Graham West (Audit Commission) (*part meeting*)

Action

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Iain McCracken (Member, Fire Authority) (Chairman), Councillor Mohammed Rasib (Member, Fire Authority) and Councillor Raja Zarait (Member, Fire Authority).

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Chris Bowring, took the Chair.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Councillors relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct. There were no declarations of interest received from Officers.

17. MINUTES OF THE AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2009

Resolved:

- a) That the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Review Committee meeting held on 28 September 2009 be Approved for signing by the Vice-Chairman.

18. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

Resolved:

- a) That it be noted that no matters had been properly referred to the Committee for decision.

19. RESPONSES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY, MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OR OTHER COMMITTEES TO REPORTS OF THE AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Resolved:

- a) That it be noted that there had been no responses received.

20. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER AND USE OF RESOURCES REPORT

The Authority Treasurer introduced Phil Sharman and Graham West from the Audit Commission.

The Committee received the Audit Commission's Annual Audit Letter and Use of Resources Report.

Phil Sharman provided an overview of the presented report, and he referred specifically to the findings of the Audit Commission's 2008/09 audit report into the Fire Authority's financial statements and the results of the work undertaken by the Audit Committee to assess the Authority's arrangements to secure Value for Money in its Use of Resources, which had realised a Level 2 assessment score. He also referred Members to the Recommendations contained at page 16 of the presented report, the Data Quality Spot Check, and the economic downturn and pressures on the public sector.

Phil Sharman advised, as published as of 17 December 2009, that only 30% of other Fire Authorities had achieved a Level 3 score, with 60% realising Level 2, and 10% Level 1. He confirmed that no Fire Authority had attained a Level 4.

In response to Members' concerns regarding the assessment score rating given (Level 2), Phil Sharman reminded Members that the Use of Resources assessment for 2008/09 was new, and that it should be recognised that the assessment framework was harder, and, therefore, comparisons to previous years assessments should not, at this stage, be made. He also reassured Members that this assessment score could be improved in future years if the Fire Authority demonstrated clear evidence of outputs and outcomes from its arrangements which were effective and had the intended impact for local people, which might include evidence of effective partnership working. The Group Manager (Performance Review) stated that the innovative partnership and community safety work being conducted could be incorporated within this. The Authority Treasurer confirmed that the Authority's aspiration was to improve on the 2008/09 assessment score and that work was being conducted to realise this, including a re-evaluation of the Strategy Review.

In response to Councillor Alan Ward's concerns regarding autonomy, Phil Sharman noted his concerns, however reassured him that the Audit Commission was entirely independent and that Commissioners were appointed by the Government.

Graham West referred to the Audit Commission's publication entitled 'Protecting the Public Purse' and he made available a copy to each Member (*copy also available from the Committee Manager*). The Authority Treasurer reported that Bentley Jennison would be conducting some advisory work on anti-fraud.

Phil Sharman conveyed his thanks to the Officers for the work concluded during the 2008/09 period.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be Noted.

Phil Sharman and Graham West retired from the meeting.

21. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee was advised of the progress with the internal Audit Plan for 2009/10.

Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison) drew the Committee's attention to the key findings from the internal audit work, which included 5 significant recommendations raised with the Absence Management report, and which had been accepted by the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Management. She also referred to the work in progress or planned, as detailed in the presented report, and confirmed that it had been agreed that identified reviews, as agreed with Management, would be completed by March 2010.

In response to Members' points of clarity, Deborah Cripps confirmed that if the relevant recommendations were implemented, Key Performance Indicators and sickness performance levels could be improved.

Deborah Cripps reported that RSM Bentley Jennison would be merging with Tenon Group PLC on 30 December 2009, and that there were no planned changes to the current Audit Team members.

Resolved:

- a) That the Internal Audit Progress Report be Noted.

Deborah Cripps and Dan Maycock retired from the meeting.

22. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORTS

The Committee received an overview and review of performance against an independently selected performance indicator, namely BV209 suite (activation of smoke alarms in dwelling fires). The Group Manager (Performance Review) (GM, PR) demonstrated the scorecards showing performance to the end of November 2009.

The Group Manager (Performance Review) reported that although there was an overall improvement to the performance related to smoke alarms in dwellings, it was, at times, problematic to engage with specific community groups to enable home fire risk assessments to be carried out in, for example, high risk areas. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred to the Polish community, as an example, which was often apprehensive about uniformed services, and to the work being conducted to alleviate any uncertainties within this community by one of the Brigade's firefighters who was Polish.

The Group Manager (Performance Review) confirmed, in response to Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound, that currently it was not possible to follow up on the reasons why smoke alarms might not have activated in fire incidents. However it was hoped that the Brigade's new recording system could provide an improved evaluation of this.

Resolved:

- a) That the Performance Indicator report be Noted.

23. PROCUREMENT DOCTOR PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee was advised of the progress made against the Procurement Doctor Report, and to the actions taken by Officers to progress the recommendations as contained within the health check report.

Resolved:

- a) That the Procurement Doctor progress report be Noted.

24. ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE RISK REGISTER

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred the Committee to the Risk Register and presented an example Risk Assessment Form (Industrial Relations).

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer in referring to the Risk Register, agreed to circulate example copies of the Brigade's risks on the Risk Register to the Committee's Members, and he suggested that the Committee might then wish to assess which of the Risk Assessments were worth considering in relation to the management action being taken to reduce or mitigate the risks to the Brigade and Fire Authority, for subsequent inclusion within the Committee's Work Programme. He confirmed that implementation plans would be formulated in response Audit report recommendations.

The Authority Treasurer reported that Strategic Risk was being reviewed by the Brigade's Risk Management Group.

Resolved:

- a) That the Capital Monitoring reports presented to the Strategic Asset Management Committee be reviewed at the next meeting.
- b) That Committee Members receive risk management training at the meeting on 24 May 2010.

25. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Resolved:

- a) That the Committee's Terms of Reference be reviewed at the next meeting.

26. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 15 March 2010 at 6.30pm in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Councillor Alan Ward conveyed his apologies for the meeting on 15 March 2010.

ACFO

ACFO / AT

Agenda
15.03.10

GM (PR) / CFO

Agenda
24.05.10

Agenda
15.03.10