



MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE held on Wednesday 14 March 2012 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillors D Topping(Chair), D Brickhill, B Crowe, J Joyce, J Leather, G Merry, R Polhill, L Redhead, T Sherlock and C Thorley

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Lisa Randall and Parmjit Kaur, representatives from RSM Tenon

PART 1 – MATTERS CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received

B DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members interests.

C MINUTES OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED: That

the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Committee held on 25 January 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

D NOTES OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD

RESOLVED: That

the notes of the meeting of the Risk Management Board held on 9 March 2012 be received, for information.

2 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2012 – 13 TO 2013 - 14

The Corporate Intelligence Unit Manager introduced this item to Members and explained that the purpose of the report was to present the draft Internal Audit Strategy for Internal Audit 2012–13 to 2013-14 for Members consideration and approval.

The Strategy was developed using the Service's risk profile and objectives as a starting point and the Corporate Intelligence Unit Manager explained that she worked with both senior managers and RSM Tenon to identify the priority areas of coverage for internal audit for the next year and options for the subsequent year. She also explained to Members how the Service acted upon the findings from the Internal Audits.

Lisa Randall, Head of Internal Audit and Parmjit Kaur, lead Internal Auditor for the Fire Authority were the Internal Audit representatives from RSM Tenon in attendance at the meeting to present the draft strategy to Members.

The Head of Internal Audit presented the report to Members and explained that the Strategy set out the approach that the internal auditors had taken to develop the Authority's internal audit plan for 2012/13. This provided the Authority with a Strategy for the next two years and a more detailed plan for 2012/13.

Members' attention was drawn to the considerations set out for the Committee in the draft Strategy. They were asked to consider whether the Strategy covered the organisation's key risks and also that the detailed audit plan for 2012/13 reflected the areas which should be covered as a priority. Members were also asked to note that the plan was flexible and that areas identified for 2012/13 in the plan could change to reflect factors that could emerge over the coming year.

Members discussed the draft strategy and a number of comments and queries were raised. A Member commented that it made sense that the overall strategy focused on areas where there had been significant policy changes but queried whether it would be beneficial to spend a smaller portion of time in carrying out random audits on existing policies. The Head of Internal Audit responded that there was a rolling programme of operational station visits which audited existing policies and procedures on Stations to ensure they were being adhered to but Internal Audit did not do stop checks across the range of existing policies and procedures. The Corporate Intelligence Unit Manager added that the starting point for identifying areas for audit was the Service's Risk Register to ensure that areas with the greatest risks were audited. There were a range of other regular audit arrangements in place for the majority of the Service's key policies and critical functions.

A Member queried what effect the changes to the Audit Commission's provision would have on the Internal Audit service. The Head of Internal Audit explained that RSM Tenon would work with the firm appointed to carry out the Service's External Audit function under agreed CIPFA protocols.

RESOLVED: That

the Strategy for Internal Audit 2012-13 to 2013-14 be approved.

3 RE-ORGANISATION, REDEPLOYMENT AND REDUNDANCY POLICIES

The Director of People and Organisational Development presented the report which sought Members approval to the revised policies in relation to re-organisation, redeployment and redundancy. He explained that the Service currently had three separate policies linked to organisational change; however these policies did not address the employer responsibilities around the subject of redundancies. Two of the existing policies had been combined to produce one policy covering Reorganisation and Redeployment and a Redundancy Policy had been developed. He informed Members that the content of the policies had not been changed but they had been developed to provide more guidance and procedures to assist the employer. It was noted that guides had also been developed to assist employees through the process too.

The Director of People and Organisational Development drew Members attention to the differences in the application of the Redundancy Policy between support staff (Green and White Book) and operational staff (Grey and Gold Book). Under the Equality Act 2010 employers were permitted to use the statutory redundancy matrix to offer enhanced redundancy payments for staff employed under Green and White Book conditions and the Redundancy Policy contained the redundancy payments agreed by the Authority for support staff. The provisions of the Equality Act could not be applied to operational staff (Grey and Gold Book) as the Fire Authority did not have the power to authorise enhanced redundancy payments. Communities and Local Government were aware of this anomaly and were currently reviewing the issue. The Service would also be reviewing the process locally.

A number of comments were made by Members in respect of the policies and clarification was sought on some of the issues raised.

A Member commented on the importance of equality when considering voluntary redundancy and how the Service would demonstrate this. The Director of People and Organisation explained that there was specific selection criteria although this was more complex on the operational side but there would always be a robust audit trail.

A Member asked if there were any specific changes to Service policy that Members were required to consider. The Director of People and Organisational Development confirmed that there was no specific changes to policy and the changes were to the presentation of the policies and the additional guidance for the employer. It was important that these had current Member approval as they would be significant aids to the employer given the economic climate and the potential implications that were likely to flow from the Service reviews currently being undertaken.

Members thanked the Director of People and Organisational Development for his work on these policies and also, as this was his last meeting at the Authority, thanked him for the work he had carried out over the past 12 months which was much appreciated.

RESOLVED: That

the revised policies be approved prior to consultation with the Representative Bodies

4 REVIEW OF UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS POLICY

The Head of Community Fire Protection presented the report to Members which contained details of proposals for a change to the existing Service policy in relation to unwanted fire signals (UwFS). This was an issue that Members had already considered at Planning Days and Members were invited to make recommendations to the Fire Authority in respect of the approval of the revised policy. There were various changes proposed to current policy which included changes to the pre-determined attendance sent to automatic fire alarms and the introduction of agreements with alarm receiving centres.

The Head of Community Fire Protection provided information on the statistics in relation to the Service's attendance at UwFS. In 2010/11 the Service attended a total of 3304 UwFS's with only 1.1% confirmed fires on arrival and only 0.4% requiring firefighter action. He also explained that the issue of UwFS was included in the Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2012/13 and the responses received as part of the IRMP consultation had been considered when developing the paper.

He summarised the revisions being proposed which were detailed in the report and Members discussed these proposals.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer commented that the key points for Members to note were that firefighters cannot be in two places at once and the Service was not making the best use of its resources with the existing policy.

Members discussed the report and a number of points of clarification were sought. A query was raised on the call challenge procedure and the Chief Fire Officer explained that all calls were recorded and Control Room staff were already proficient in the call challenge process.

Members also discussed the information stored by the Service in respect of properties and whether they were un-occupied. A Member suggested that the Service might be able to link into CCTV in premises to determine whether attendance was required. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service did keep information on whether properties were occupied or not but this information was difficult to keep up to date. In respect of the use of CCTV he would ask the Service Premises Risk Information Group to review this.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the current position with respect to UwFS reduction in the area covered by the Service and nationally be noted;

[2] the Head of Community Fire Protection be authorised to make the following revisions to the current Unwanted Fire Signals Policy:

- (a) The introduction of a call challenge procedure when an Automatic Fire Alarm is received by the Control Room in the circumstances set out in the report (the procedure to be secured by entering into agreements with Alarm Receiving Centres),**
- (b) A change to the pre-determined attendance to Automatic Fire Alarms as set out in Paragraph 26 of the report,**
- (c) The enhancement of the advice given in response to single UwFS,**
- (d) The implementation of more robust ways of managing the Service's relationship with the parties responsible for premises with unacceptably high levels of UwFS;**

[3] it was accepted that the Service should not include provisions relating to charging for UwFS at this time, but keep the issue under review; and

[4] the submission of a report (including the revised policy) for approval to the Fire Authority, along with an Equality Risk Assessment, be agreed.

PART 2 – BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

NONE