

REPORT TO THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW & AUDIT COMMITTEE

DATE: 16TH FEBRUARY 2009

SUBJECT: PRAC TASK & FINISH GROUPS – SCRUTINY OF DEPARTMENTAL PLANS

SUMMARY:

Members of the Committee will recall at their meeting of 6th October 2008, Members resolved to set up further Task and Finish Groups to scrutinise individual Departmental Business Plans. This work forms part of the Committee's overall scrutiny work for this coming year.

The meetings were held in October and November 2008. This report summarises the outcomes of the meetings.

OBJECTIVES		IMPLICATIONS	
Trusted & Respect	✓	Operational Risk Management	✓
More than Emergencies	✓	Community Risk Reduction	✓
Saving Lives, Protecting Communities	✓	Training & Development	✓
Managing within Budget	✓	Civil Contingencies	✓
Improving Efficiency	✓	Finance & Procurement	✓
Resources to Priorities	✓	H.R.	✓
Alternative Resources	✓	ICT	✓
Managing People	✓	Corporate Services	✓
Risk Reduction Planning	✓	Transport	✓
Partnership Working	✓	Health & Safety	✓
Effective & Empowered People	✓	Premises	✓
Sustainability & the Environment	✓	Welsh Language	✓
Governance	✓	Legal	✓

COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Members note and consider the outcomes from the departmental plan scrutiny carried out in the task & finish groups.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT: PRAC Task & Finish Group notes held October and November 2008.

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Members of the Committee will recall at their meeting of 6th October 2008, Members resolved to set up further Task and Finish Groups to scrutinise individual Departmental Business Plans. This work forms part of the Committee's overall scrutiny work for this coming year.

The meetings were facilitated by the Head of Operational Risk Management, Corporate Communications & Member Support department and the Strategic Planning & Performance Department. Members resolved to scrutinise six business plans. The meetings were arranged as follows:

20 th October 2008	Ceredigion County Command	attended by Cllr P James and Cllr J Holmes
14 th November 2008	Neath & Port Talbot County Command	attended by Cllr J Dudley
17 th November 2008	Water Department	attended by Cllr C Philpott, Cllr P James and Cllr R Lewis
17 th November 2008	Estates Department	attended by Cllr J Dudley and Cllr J Holmes
18 th November 2008	Civil Contingencies and Resilience Department	attended by Cllr C Philpott, Cllr P James and Cllr C Morgan
18 th November 2008	Corporate Risk Department	attended by Cllr R Lewis, Cllr C Morgan and Cllr C Philpott

Members will be aware that the Performance Review & Audit Committee has been split into subgroups to evaluate sample business plans. The business plans underpin everything that the Authority sets out to achieve and the methodology that underlines the sample being evaluated should be applied consistently throughout the organisation.

The role of scrutiny is to evaluate all areas of performance to determine how well the Authority is performing in delivering its key aims and objectives. As a key element of the Modernisation Agenda, the development, monitoring and reviewing of Authority policies will assist in speeding up decision making processes and ensure that the Authority is being held to account.

The 'key success factors' of scrutiny are:

- Genuine Officer and Member commitment, involvement and participation – to ensure Members work together in a consensual and constructive way.
- Focusing on the right things – support received from Officers to highlight topics that will have the most impact on the organisation.
- Independent and objective perspectives to obtain a balanced view.
- Learning and development – to draw on best practice and experience of Authorities.
- Getting the right outcomes and impact – ensuring that outcomes are measurable and that the recommendations emanating from the group are practical.

Ceredigion County Command

This Task & Finish Group was attended by Cllr P James and Cllr J Holmes on the 20th October 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

The RTC target has been set for 10, which has already been achieved. It was noted that the target is likely to double next year.

Members enquired as to the future plans for the Borth fire station. The Ceredigion County Commander informed Members that the Service has supplied the station with a vehicle but the station has no other facilities. The volunteer firefighters are receiving training to retained staff standards. At present 3-4 grants have been secured and planning permission for new station facilities has been approved. Councillor J Holmes mentioned that it might be a good idea to consider Community Safety Partnerships to help progress this matter.

A target of 1400 Home Fire Safety Checks has been set for the year. The Command are currently working with outside agencies to achieve this. County Carers are now undertaking HFSCs and approximately 30 social services Personnel are being trained to undertake Home Safety work. The HFSC target has been reduced from 1600 to 1400, resulting in 912 checks having been completed so far. The reduction on the target is due to additional work being undertaken in operational intelligence gathering procedures.

It was noted that there is scope for a Young Fire fighter Scheme in the Cardigan area, however there is no budget for YFF Instructors at present. The Service Manager Technical Services clarified to Members that there is at least one YFF Scheme in every Command, and Swansea and Neath Port Talbot has as many as three in their areas. It was advised that the County Commander should pursue this issue to see if resources can be secured to fund a YFF unit in Cardigan.

A sum of £10,000 has been obtained from grant schemes / third parties to enable provision of additional services beyond co-responder income.

Members asked for an update on the youth activities currently being undertaken in the Command area. 40 schools are to be visited along with brownies/scouts/beavers. Students at the university also have a talk to highlight the danger in the kitchen. Approximately 3000 students have been notified this year of danger in the home & kitchen. It was briefly noted that universities are now putting alarms on kitchen doors that activate after 20 seconds to remind students to close the door.

Councillor Paul James mentioned that he would like to have a stall at the Eisteddfod for the Crucial Crew. This would cost £2500 from the budget. It was suggested that the Command may be able to raise money by having the Crucial Crew circulating with buckets with appropriate message to help raise money for the future.

Councillor Paul-James clarified with the Ceredigion County Commander that the Budget of £5.5k remain the same for next year.

Neath & Port Talbot County Command

This Task & Finish Group was attended by attended by Cllr J Dudley on the 14th November 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

Members noted that staff have now been educated with the use of the CorVu System and this has been a great success. Risk Critical Training is one of the training events currently being progressed, together with Station Risk Profile training. The respective skill matrix will be maintained to ensure that all the training needs of all the personnel within departments are identified and met. A rating of '0' for risk critical needs is to be achieved by 31st March 2009.

Members enquired as to the difficulties Officers were experiencing with regards to reaching specific groups within the communities. Councillor Dudley was concerned for the age group between 15-25 who are very vulnerable, and would like to see further help to reduce the risk from fire. The Neath & Port Talbot County Commander stated that they will continue to maintain current Young Firefighter schemes at Severn Sisters and Cymmer, but also plan to implement a scheme at Port Talbot.

It was mentioned that the Command will engage with high-risk groups and implement a risk reduction strategy in order to reduce risk within the community.

Officers have had great success in securing funding from various grant schemes. Funding has been secured for the Severn Sisters Community Room and Cymmer Station is currently undergoing an upgrade.

The Neath & Port Talbot County Commander informed Councillor Dudley that their aim is to make Neath Port Talbot a much safer environment. To achieve this they will undertake a minimum of 4,150 HFSCs, along with 3 chip pan demonstrations in each of the 14 high audience events throughout the Command. The aim is also to engage with partners, attend relevant meetings community initiatives, along with entering into prevention and reduction initiatives.

There has been success in publicity campaigns, including an advert being placed on the radio regarding Arson. Members suggested that the Command place bullet boards in stations in order to display thank you notes that have been received.

Overall, the Command are very happy with the results so far this year, and it was made aware that culture is changing in the community. Sickness trend is improving tremendously in Neath, and aiming for even better results next year.

Water Department

This Task & Finish Group was attended by Cllr C Philpott, Cllr P James and Cllr R Lewis on the 17th November 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

Members were provided with an overview of the contractual relationship detailed in the Service Level Agreements between the MAWWFRS and both Severn Trent Water PLC and Dwr Cymru / Welsh Water (DC/WW).

Following questions from Members, a detailed explanation of the current levels of mains water supplies and was provided as well as a general overview of operational firefighting capability and implications for failure of water supplies.

Councillor James questioned the number and disposition of water bowsers in the Service area and if there was a potential need for more. The Service Manager Technical Services explained the locations of the three tankers and that as 4 years had elapsed since the last review this may need to be looked at again.

Members were made aware of the financial implications of the current backlog of outstanding repairs with DC/WW, these are currently subject to an extensive review and re-evaluation of need.

Councillor Lewis queried the cost of the provision of fire hydrants on new developments. The Water Officer explained the protocol in use by water company design engineers, and that costs were included in the infrastructure charge to the developer.

The provision of strategic hydrants was explained and their use with water tankers and high volume pumps was discussed in detail. Councillor Philpott queried the risk assessment criteria utilised to prioritise the installation of new strategic fire hydrants. The Water Officer clarified that schools were a main priority along with other high risk premises.

Councillor Lewis questioned the maximum distance hose was able to deliver water to a fire ground. The Head of Technical Services explained the capabilities of the high volume pumps and that 3km was possible.

The Service Manager Strategic Planning and Performance explained CORVU and how it identifies performance criteria for the Water Section. The Water Officer explained the various indicators and discussed them with Members.

Members were provided with detailed documentation and spreadsheets detailing current and future financial commitments and copies of the National Agreement of the Supply of Water for firefighting.

Councillor Philpott suggested giving all Fire Authority members a briefing on the availabilities of water supplies for firefighting and the Service's relationship with the water companies.

Estates Department

This Task & Finish Group was attended by Cllr J Dudley and Cllr J Holmes on the 17th November 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

The Estates Manager provided an overview of the Estates function within the Service, namely to provide a facilities management service for building occupiers, as well as the management of minor works and major capital projects. The department consists of three admin staff and two maintenance staff.

Members were provided an overview of the Llandrindod Wells project, covering land purchase, feasibility, stakeholders and ecology. The Estates Manager explained the scope of works and the ongoing investment into station facilities to improve the Equality and Diversity of the Service workforce. Various completed projects were also mentioned such as Caldey Island, Welshpool YFF, Newtown plus the current project at Builth Wells.

The helipad was discussed and the various benefits associated. Procurement issues were also raised, namely European Tender Notices.

Reference was made to underground fuel tanks. Members were informed that the majority of fuel is purchased from supermarket forecourts. Key locations within the Service also have fuel supplies.

A discussion ensued on the progress of the Safer Valleys Project. Councillor Dudley questioned whether the preferred site achieved the turnout shortfall previously experienced. The Estates Manager stated that the site had been tested via the FSEC model and achieved the required response times. The Project Manager for the Safer Valleys Project presented a PowerPoint presentation detailing the site selection process and the methodology of selection. Further meetings are programmed with NPTCBC to negotiate the terms and conditions of the land acquisition via a lease agreement.

The various Service contracts were discussed namely, asbestos management, legionella, heating systems, the portable appliance testing contract was discussed and the use of Sell4Wales. The Estates Manager stated that these were advancing, however other pressures had delayed some contracts.

Green Dragon 3 had been stipulated as a minimum for the Service and the Estates department are liaising with the Corporate Risk team to develop a plan.

Councillor Holmes was informed that good dialogue between other Emergency Services had been developed. The various good and bad experiences were discussed, the Ambulance Service situation was mentioned, namely it has been difficult to get commitment to existing and new projects, such as Llandrindod Wells and the Safer Valleys projects.

Asset management planning was discussed and it was clarified that lack of resources and other work pressures were delaying its progress. Councillor Holmes stated that re-inventing such plans would not be a good use of time and that the use of larger organisations to learn from their experiences would be more beneficial for such a small department.

Civil Contingencies and Resilience Department

This Task & Finish Group was attended by Cllr C Philpott, Cllr P James and Cllr C Morgan on the 18th November 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

The Head of Civil Contingencies and Resilience gave an overview of the Civil Contingencies and Resilience department. An A3 sheet was provided to Members to explain how the WAG FRS Framework 2008-2011 affects the work of the MAWWFRS CCR Department.

Members were informed that the Head of CCR had improved interoperability amongst team members and that many staff within the department are cross trained to a level to cope with sickness and leave in the event of a major incident. e.g. pandemic

Councillor C Morgan asked how budget cutbacks have affected the department. The Head of Civil Contingencies and Resilience clarified that the department have cut back on non essential courses and are utilising interdepartmental working to make the budget go further; this also strengthened links between the departments.

Members enquired as to what impact the Freedom of Information Act has had on the department. The Department are keen to strengthen FOI request processing and are in discussion with internal stakeholders to make improvements where an assessment of who should be allowed to view the information relating to the CCR department is underway. The Head of Civil Contingencies and Resilience explained that all requests have to be acknowledged within the MAWWFRS response timeframe, and that an agreement is in place with the Carmarthenshire County Council if legal advice is required.

Members were informed that two of the posts within the department are funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. It was anticipated that WAG would only fund 50% of one of the posts in the future. The consequence of this might be that WAG will want 50% of an employee's time, which will affect such a small department. It was also noted that, as the New Dimensions Officer's role was 100% WAG funded, this post may be relocated to South Wales and the department could lose another human resource.

Members were advised that WAG currently own and fund the New Dimensions Assets e.g. HVP and that WAG are keen to transfer these to the Service's ownership in the future. The precise mechanism to do this is being considered as part of LTCM discussions but whatever ownership / maintenance model is put in place it will be properly funded in line with WAG commitments detailed in the framework.

Members agreed that the main outcomes of the process were:

- Failing to have sufficient funding and identifying the alternatives for the CCR team, and
- Members need to be briefed about CCR
- That these issues be brought to the attention of the full Committee.

Corporate Risk Department

This Task & Finish Group was attended by attended by Cllr R Lewis, Cllr C Morgan and Cllr C Philpott on the 18th November 2008.

The key points from the meeting were as follows:

It was noted that the Service had the lowest accident rate in 2007 since records commenced and is recognised by the HSC as the best practice case study for Effective Director Health & Safety Leadership.

Personnel training competencies were discussed and Members were informed that H&S training will be included in the review of training programmes for the Service. Members were informed who would receive the training, what the level and nature of the training would be.

The Service undertook its Insurance Combined Liability renewal process in Autumn/Winter of 2007 for the 2008/09 year, which resulted in a significant premium saving for the Fire Authority against market predictions. A culmination of tender negotiations resulted in a direct net saving for the Fire Authority in excess of £1.3 million for the duration of the 5 year LTA.

Members were informed that the Service have become smarter at claim handling and the claim defence rate has evolved significantly over the last five years.

The department have set up Business Risk management Group meetings to deal with Business Risk matters, the minutes of which are reported to PRAC. A framework has been established for identifying, reporting and recording 'Business Risk'.

The department have carried out a 3 month gap analysis in order to develop a new Policy and supporting framework, including a 5 year plan which is near completion. A number of projects have been proposed, including Energy Management, Recycling, Carbon Management and Waste Management Control. The roll out is planned for spring 2009.

Health and Safety Audits are being undertaken and remedial action reports are sent to County Commanders / Departmental Heads where required, with regular monitoring.

A 5 year Sustainable Environment strategy with supporting policies is being compiled for the Service and its issue is scheduled for spring 2009.

Councillor Philpott suggested that the Department pursue the Wales Excellence Award to recognise the good work being undertaken.

Overall, Members were very complimentary as to the performance and management of the Department and felt that the Department should highlight its achievements on a wider scale.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

1. Members were satisfied overall with the business and strategic planning and performance framework.
2. Members reviewed the departmental business plans and confirmed that the departments which were scrutinised have followed the strategic planning and performance management framework.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS EMANATING FROM THE TASK & FINISH GROUPS

1. That a presentation be made to a future meeting on the structure and funding of the CCR department.
2. That all Fire Authority Members receive a briefing on the availability of water supplies for firefighting and the Service's relationship with the Water companies.
3. That clarification be sought on the Service's Young Firefighter scheme rollout and where specifically Ceredigion County Command fits into the plan.
4. That enquiries be made by Ceredigion County Command as to the feasibility of establishing a Crucial Crew stand at the Eisteddfod.
5. That the Corporate Risk Department pursue the Wales Excellence Award to recognise the good work being undertaken
6. That Members receive regular updates on the Safer Valleys Project.
7. Neath & Port Talbot County Command implement a risk reduction strategy in order to target high risk groups and to reduce risk within the community, this will initially be achieved through the running of a partnership workshop and seminar planned for early 2009.