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## **Fire Service Improvement Programme: Progress Report – July 2020**

### **Introduction**

- 1** I am writing with a further update to all members to correspond with the County Council meeting on 17 July. I wish to pay tribute to our staff, who have remained committed to maintaining our fire and rescue service in unprecedented times. Because of their dedication, they have still progressed with the service's improvement work, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, in a proportionate and meaningful way.
- 2** Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) revisited West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service in December 2019 and found that the Service had made tangible improvements to mitigate the risk to public safety. They noted an accelerated pace in improvement activity since October 2019 and that staff reported that they felt supported.

### **Background**

- 3** West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service was initially inspected by the HMICFRS in 2018. The inspectorate identified four causes of concern, as well as ten additional specific areas for improvement that they expected the service to address. An improvement plan was developed to address these areas and is being delivered alongside the existing statutory Integrated Risk Management Plan. The Inspectorate identified ten serious 'Causes of Concern' nationally, of which, four were present in West Sussex. These, along with an additional ten Areas for Improvement remain the core focus, in particular those that have implications for public safety in the areas of prevention and protection. Progress also continues against activity relating to the People area of the inspection and in particular how the service develops and looks after staff. This improvement area has now been fully developed into a People Programme given the extent of the work involved and the crucial nature of the outcomes required.

### **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Plan Review**

- 4** Operating efficiently is crucial in making the best use of resources. The Service recognises that the scale of improvement required is significant and therefore the way this activity is planned and accounted for, in addition to core activity, is an important factor in determining success. The service introduced a Programme Management Office with support from the County Council Transformation Program Office. This has enabled the Service to implement a programme management approach. The published improvement plan has been reviewed at length with input from the teams responsible for delivering against the actions and a revised plan has been published. Revised timelines required a revision to the resourcing of the plan. This has been maintained within the overall three-year allocation of the improvement funding. The review identified further work required, which included further steps to build operational resilience and to improve the supporting structures to deliver this, such as training and risk management. The inspectorate noted the progress and recognised the impact of the programmatic approach in terms of improving the efficiency of the delivery of the plan and the realistic expectations and resource requirements.
- 5** Oversight of the improvement plan is monitored through the Fire & Rescue Services Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer. An Independent

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Advisory Board has also been established, which includes membership from the Local Government Association and National Fire Chiefs Council. This is providing independent advice, support and challenge during the services improvement journey.

## **Protection Activity**

- 6** The Protection department is responsible for enforcing Fire Safety legislation, a statutory function of the Fire and Rescue Service. This area was deemed as inadequate in the 2018 inspection. Since then, significant improvement work has been undertaken. The department restructured in November 2019, increasing the capacity of the department by 22% and strengthening the resilience of the team. Two training positions were introduced which will enable the service to respond to the increased competency requirements resulting from recommendations arising from reviews of the sector following Grenfell. The backlog of fire safety audits was cleared in November 2019 and a quality assurance process is now in place to prevent a reoccurrence of the issues identified in the inspection. The investment into the department has increased the resilience of the team, which has enabled the team to respond flexibly throughout the COVID-19 crises. As such, a provision to respond to serious fire safety concerns, twenty-four hours a day, has been maintained throughout.
- 7** A new Fire Safety Enforcement Strategy identifies the risk criteria to prioritise audits. At their revisit, HMICFRS found evidence that the service is making greater use of enforcement powers. This is a positive result of having more capacity within the department. The staff in the Protection team reported to the inspectorate that the service is supportive and have noticed faster progress since October with the appointment of new staff and a greater focus of activity against risk.
- 8** The Service introduced an improved IT risk management system to replace the current ageing database. This investment in a new Fire and Rescue Service specific, tried and tested risk management system and mobile application will improve service effectiveness and efficiency and result in reduced risk and improved public protection.

## **Prevention of Fire and other Risks**

- 9** The HMICFRS found that prevention activity did not always align with a risk identified in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Safe and Well Visits were not being carried out in a timely manner and there was a backlog of 552 high risk checks. The Prevention Team commenced a restructure in November 2019 following £278,980 investment, which has increased capacity of the department by 33%, and strengthened the resilience of the team.
- 10** A new Prevention strategy ensures that the Safe and Well Visits (SWVs) are targeting those most at risk as identified by the IRMP. New procedures with additional monitoring and trigger points prevents a backlog occurring again unexpectedly. The backlog of SWVs was eliminated back in March last year and an additional 6.5 posts have all now been filled significantly increasing capacity of the department.
- 11** Similar to Protection, the new IT solution will also replace an interim recording and monitoring system to manage the allocation and completion of all SWVs. This

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will also provide the service with better performance information and will enable robust quality assurance.

- 12** The inspectorate noted the difficulties in ensuring all operational staff fully understand how to conduct Safe & Well Visits and ensuring the quality is consistent. Two prevention training officers have been introduced who have started to address this and will ensure that all residents receive a consistently high quality SWV. During the re-visit Prevention staff told inspectors that they felt supported by the Service, which was encouraging given that the initial inspection was clear that the Service needed to do more in this area. The inspectors noted positively the Service's progress in terms of the publication of the revised processes, the appointment of new staff and the decision to procure the above-mentioned replacement IT system with a clear deliverable timeline to reach full implementation.

### **People and Culture Improvements**

- 13** The HMICFRS had several fundamental concerns about how well the service looks after its people. At the time, the HMICFRS noted that the service was not doing enough to ensure fairness and diversity. There was also little engagement with staff groups, particularly with those from under-represented groups, and in particular, was not doing enough to improve the experiences of women and people with disabilities. Also, the links between staff appraisals, development planning and the service's wider aims and goals was not clear.
- 14** The Service have focused activity relating to the workforce plan into a 'People Programme' which is now a service priority. A restructure of the service has created a position for a strategic lead in this area. This has increased capacity and ensures that cultural change and people aspects are not just considered, rather they are the foundation of our business processes.
- 15** The service's improvement activity in this area is focused around people. It aims to make the service an employer of choice, offering a fantastic work culture and environment that attracts and retains dedicated employees, championing inclusion and supporting continuous development through creative and innovative learning solutions. The plan aims to build effective leadership at all levels and to improve the employee experience and wellbeing from the first day of service through to retirement.
- 16** Plans are in place to improve performance and development ensuring staff have the knowledge and skills to perform well, and access to development activities. The Service aims to retain and nurture talent by ensuring that all employees are given the opportunity to progress in their career, talent is developed and supported, there are clearly defined career pathways, and processes around promotions are transparent and consistent.
- 17** Twenty-Eight values workshops have since been held to embed the values and establish barriers to their adoption and to inform the ongoing work in the People Programme. Clear guidance has been issued on what constitutes bullying and how complaints will be dealt with. This is a feature in our drafted Core Behaviours documentations and future appraisal expectations.
- 18** 'Back to the shop floor day' engagements have been introduced as the HMICFRS described a lack of visible leadership. All our management levels will return to the

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'shop floor' of their departments to help build relationships between all staff groups and reverse mentoring opportunities are being explored. Listening groups have been completed and a report has been published to the service. Consequently, staff were then invited to form a working group to develop plans for change as a result. This is moving along at pace.

- 19** Recognising that the organisation is underrepresented by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups and female staff, the Service did not receive a diverse range of job applicants for vacant positions. As a starting point WSFRS decided to appoint a Diversity & Inclusion Adviser to support managers to promote diversity and inclusion and give advice on appropriate actions to take to improve the diversity profile of the workforce, including attraction. This includes working with teams who engage with the community to ensure that all groups are involved in events, are consulted with and given the opportunity to contribute. The Service's Diversity & Inclusion Adviser is now a member of the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Executive Leadership Team, helping to gather and share best practice on a national basis.
- 20** We understand that supporting Health & Wellbeing in the most effective way requires direction and input from a Wellbeing professional. As a result of this the Service created a Health & Wellbeing Manager post, and successfully recruited to this position in June 2020. The Health & Wellbeing Manager will be responsible for managing the Physical Education Officer, ensuring an aligned approach to the physical, mental and emotional health of employees.
- 21** The HMICFRS reported that managers find it difficult to deliver meaningful appraisals and challenge unacceptable behaviour. The Service will be rolling out a wider programme as part of our People Priorities to support managers to challenge effectively, have difficult discussions and to manage situations such as bullying and or harassment in their team. The Service has developed and published Bullying & Harassment guidance that managers are able to use as a reference guide. The Service's Diversity & Inclusion Adviser is working with colleagues in WSCC as part of a bullying & harassment task group to undertake a review of the provisions in place to support staff experiencing bullying and or harassment, and staff who are accused of bullying and or harassing others.
- 22** A key requirement on the service is to prepare firefighters for dealing with each of the risks assessed in the Integrated Risk Management Plan so that these can be reasonably foreseen. Investing in the training of staff is crucial to meeting statutory obligations and ensuring that the Service responds effectively when emergencies happen. The current IRMP has already identified key areas for improvement including live fire training, fire fighter safety, adequate training of firefighters and development of their specialist skills in addition to a lack of provision for an inclusive and diverse workforce. These concerns were echoed by the recent inspection report and are a key focus of the Service's improvement activity. Staff reported they were concerned that they did not have adequate opportunities to practice their skills, which has a secondary impact on culture. The report stated there was an over-reliance on e-learning to deliver changes in operational procedures. This was an issue confounded by limited training facilities and a lack of live fire and high-rise training facilities within the county. The proposal for a new training facility at Horsham is capable of addressing these issues, providing leading edge technology which will set it apart as a centre of excellence in live fire training in the south of the country.

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## Response

- 23** Understanding risk is important in order for the service to recognise how to reduce this risk and keep people safe. This is done at a county level through our Integrated Risk Management Plan. It is important for the Service to understand how this risk is nuanced at a local level, and also know that staff who work directly in the communities they are protecting are well placed to understand how practical solutions can be found. The Service have developed Local Risk Management Plans for each local fire station community, transforming paper-based static station profiles into an easily accessible community risk database for each geographical fire station locality that can be easily interrogated and filtered. This will allow local fire crews to have direct dialogue with the communities they serve to ensure that station-based planning identifies and reduces local community risk through the local targeting of resources and activities.
- 24** The Service works hard to prevent emergencies from happening, although sadly it is known that incidents still occur. When they do, it is important that the Service are able to get there quickly in order to help. The IRMP sets out the Service's commitments in relation to the standard of emergency response, i.e. how quickly the Service will get to the incident. Meeting these standards has been difficult over recent years and one of our priorities is to build the operational resilience of the service to meet the commitment made, according to the risks within the County. The reduction in the availability of retained firefighters and a complicated group crewing system for wholetime firefighters have made it difficult to ensure the Service is making the most of resources as efficiently as possible. The Service have introduced a 'Service Delivery Centre' (SDC) to address this by centrally co-ordinating and targeting resources to keep as many fire engines fully crewed as possible. They also target interventions to improve the availability of retained firefighters, and to allocate resources to the areas where they are needed the most. This is also aimed at reducing the administrative burden placed on supervisory officers of fire crews, allowing them to focus more on core activity and training. This has begun to make significant improvements allowing the service to maximise the availability of appliances and will enable the most efficient use of crewing resources in support of core prevention and protection activities.
- 25** Completion of transition to Surrey Fire & Rescue Service in a Fire Control partnership arrangement, based at Surrey FRS HQ went live on 4 December 2019. This has been established under a Fire and Rescue Services Act Section 16 agreement which details its governance, performance and funding. This project is now transitioning back from a project environment into Business as usual. Some future collaboration work being discussed with Surrey to continue to make ongoing improvements to ensure that the nearest and quickest most appropriate resource is sent to every incident on West Sussex improving our emergency response standards.

## Member Development and Performance and Assurance Framework

- 26** The Service recognises the legislative and national context that emergency services, like the fire and rescue service, operate in is complex and specific. In order to strengthen governance and scrutiny arrangement WSCC now has a dedicated Fire and Rescue Scrutiny committee, ensuring that members have the time and space to fully scrutinise the activity and performance of the Fire and Rescue Service. This has been combined with a new development program for members which commenced on 26 February 2020, helping to support those

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charged with scrutiny and governance. The day was well attended and feedback from members was extremely positive. Further scrutiny training was delivered virtually due to lockdown restrictions, prior to the inaugural meeting. This training links into a new Performance and Assurance Framework for Fire and Rescue, which will focus on strategic objectives and outcomes for residents and service users addressing a gap noted by the inspectorate in terms of a lack of clear performance management within the service.

**For information**

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