

Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee

10 July 2019 – At a meeting of the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr Barrett-Miles (Chairman)

Mr S J Oakley, Arrived at 10.47 am	Mr Jones	Mr Purchase
Mr Barling	Mr Jupp	Dr Walsh
Mr Barnard	Mr McDonald	
Lt Col Barton	Mr R J Oakley	

Apologies were received from Mrs Bridges

Absent:

Also in attendance: Ms Goldsmith and Ms Kennard

Part I

104. Declarations of Interest

104.1 None declared

105. Urgent Matters

105.1 None

106. Responses to Recommendations

106.1 The Committee noted the Cabinet Member's Response to the Committee's Recommendations on the Guidance on Parking at New Developments.

107. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' Inspection Report and the Improvement Plan

107.1 Before the report by the Chief Fire Officer (Acting) was considered by the Committee, Dr Walsh and Mr Purchase raised a Point of Order regarding the lateness of receipt of the email from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services which was dated 18 June 2019.

The Chairman agreed that this should have been sent to all members of the Committee on 9 July and asked that the Chief Fire Officer (Acting) investigate and reports back on why this was the case.

107.2 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (Acting) (copy appended to the signed minutes).

- 107.3 Neil Stocker, Chief Fire Officer (Acting) introduced the report with a presentation (copy of slides appended to the signed minutes), which set the context for the Inspection Report and the proposed Improvement Plan and highlighted some of the issues that had arisen and the areas for improvement. The last full inspection took place in 1998 although a number of peer reviews have taken place during the intervening years.
- 107.4 The Chairman invited verbal evidence from representatives of the four unions and this invitation was accepted by Antony Walker on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union and Dan Sartin on behalf of Unison. Apologies were received from the Fire Officer Association and the Fire and Rescue Services Association.
- 107.5 The Fire Brigades Union representative expressed concern that a culture of budget cuts had affected the service and that the move to closer integration with the County Council had caused a loss of identity for Fire and Rescue Service staff who do not “buy into” the West Sussex County Council values. He also asked about why there is no one from the staff representative bodies on the Improvement Board. He thought that the Integrated Risk Management Plan was under-resourced and felt that all decisions should be risk based and risk led.
- 107.6 The UNISON representative thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak and also cited budget cuts and poor staff morale as issues. There is a disconnect between Fire and Rescue staff and the West Sussex County Council values which has caused an erosion of trust. These are not just confined to the Fire and Rescue Service but are seen more widely in the organisation. Equalities issues had not been properly considered since the abolition of the Staff Joint Committee. He had no evidence of bullying at junior grades, although it had handled five complaints at a senior level. Then went on to highlight particularly the lack of engagement with staff representative bodies in production of the Improvement Plan as a concern and asked whether the Committee were happy about this lack of engagement with the unions.
- 107.7 The Chief Executive responded by saying that it is essential that we worked together with staff representative bodies, and that the values were a core set which took on an actual meaning dependent upon which specific area of the Council staff worked within. He also spoke of the importance of being able to evidence progress in implementing the Improvement Plan by the date of the September visit.
- 107.8 The Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities was asked to address the Committee and confirmed that she accepts the findings in the report and reiterated that work is already taking place to address some of the issues raised in the inspection report.
- 107.9 The Committee made comments including those that follow. It:

- Noted the report and welcomed the opportunity to seek a positive way forward including receiving input from the staff representative bodies. It stressed that it recognises the commitment of staff within the Fire and Rescue Service and fully supports the great work that is carried out throughout the Service.
- Raised concerns that the staff representative bodies had not been engaged with the process at the earliest opportunity and asked that all four unions are invited to attend the next Select Committee on 20 September 2019.
- Recognised the issues around recruitment and retention of “on-call” firefighters and acknowledged that this needs to be part of a wider discussion nationally about how a retained service is managed in the future.
- Was pleased to hear from the Leader that additional funds have been made available but stressed that the County Council must be realistic about the significant challenges ahead for the Service to be able to make the necessary improvements.
- Raised concerns that the Cabinet Member was not a member of the Improvement Panel and that it was being chaired by the Chief Executive when this should have the political driver that the Cabinet Member brings. It was reassured by the Leader that she had wanted to hear the views of the Committee before deciding on the final membership of the Improvement Panel. The Leader agreed that the Cabinet Member and Advisor would both be on the Improvement Board.
- Raised concerns that some of the issues highlighted in the Inspection Report were long standing and asked why the Committee had not been made aware of these earlier and whether these would have been discussed in more depth if there was a standing panel of the Select Committee for the Fire and Rescue Service.
- Raised concerns that the post of Chief Fire Officer is being advertised without requiring specific fire and rescue service experience. It was explained that there is a requirement for the successful candidate to have significant emergency services experience and that it was felt that we should not excluded someone with this experience just because it was not in a fire and rescue setting.

107.10 Resolved – That the Committee:-

1. Notes the positive progress made to date to address issues raised by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in its report.
2. Supports the Improvement Plan and the need to resource this adequately, in both the short and long-term.

3. Recommends that the unions should be more closely involved in the Improvement Plan through inclusion in the Improvement Board and in future development of the Fire Service
4. Recommends that the Improvement Board should include political leadership. Consideration should also be given to whether the Board should be led by the Chief Executive.
5. Recommends that the Cabinet Member and Chief Fire Officer lobby Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services for fire and rescue services to be risk-driven.
6. Recommends further work by the service to look at its future structure.
7. Recommends that Governance Committee should consider how additional scrutiny of the Fire and Rescue Service can be achieved through a standing panel of the Select Committee.
8. Recommends that the Fire and Rescue Service brings a progress report to the September meeting of the Committee, to which all four unions will again be invited to give evidence.

107.11 Mr Jones asked the Committee to consider further recommendations and asked for a recorded vote on these under Standing Order 3.36.

107.12 Recommendation 1 – That given the significant issues that the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is facing that the Cabinet Member completely withdraws any cuts to WSFRS proposed for 2019/20 that were put on hold for one year, and prioritise the recruitment of additional firefighters to replace those cut since 2010.

For the recommendation – 3

Mr Jones, Mr Purchase and Dr Walsh

Against the recommendation – 8

Mr Barling, Mr Barnard, Mr Barrett-Miles, Lt Col Barton, Mr Jupp, Mr McDonald, Mr RJ Oakley and Mr SJ Oakley.

Abstentions – 0

The recommendation was lost.

107.13 Recommendation 2 – That this Committee requests that the recruitment for the next Chief Fire Officer only selects from applicants who come from the ranks of senior Fire and Rescue Officers with significant operational experience of firefighting at the highest levels.

For the recommendation – 3

Mr Jones, Mr Purchase and Dr Walsh

Against the recommendation – 8

Mr Barling, Mr Barnard, Mr Barrett-Miles, Lt Col Barton, Mr Jupp, Mr McDonald, Mr RJ Oakley and Mr SJ Oakley.

Abstentions – 0

The recommendation was lost.

107.14 Recommendation 3 – Ensure as soon as possible that the Fire and Rescue Service launches an anti-bullying campaign to stamp out any instances of bullying and harassment, which will finally carry out advice that was given to WSFRS following the results of a staff survey as long ago as 2017.

For the recommendation – 3

Mr Jones, Mr Purchase and Dr Walsh

Against the recommendation – 8

Mr Barling, Mr Barnard, Mr Barrett-Miles, Lt Col Barton, Mr Jupp, Mr McDonald, Mr RJ Oakley and Mr SJ Oakley.

Abstentions – 0

The recommendation was lost.

107.15 Recommendation 4 – Request that the Fire and Rescue Service takes immediate steps to increase the diversity of the workforce, particularly in respect of more female firefighters and more from the BAME communities, and to work with councillors and other bodies across the county to reach out to local people from these minority groups to encourage them to consider becoming both wholetime and on-call firefighters.

For the recommendation – 3

Mr Jones, Mr Purchase and Dr Walsh

Against the recommendation – 8

Mr Barling, Mr Barnard, Mr Barrett-Miles, Lt Col Barton, Mr Jupp, Mr McDonald, Mr RJ Oakley and Mr SJ Oakley.

Abstentions – 0

The recommendation was lost.

107.16 Recommendation 5 – Request that the Cabinet Member, or Leader if appropriate, commissions a review, led by an independent person external to this Council, to determine whether alternative

governance arrangements for WSFRS may be necessary, given the findings for the inspection report.

The review would investigate whether it is still in the best interests of the service for current governance to continue if the County Council, squeezed by continuing Conservative national Government cuts, concludes that it cannot afford to meet its duty to resource the service to the level required to protect the residents of West Sussex with acceptable levels of service and performance. The terms of reference for this review to be drawn up with all relevant parties in WSFRS, and to include their employees' trade union representatives.

For the recommendation – 3

Mr Jones, Mr Purchase and Dr Walsh

Against the recommendation – 8

Mr Barling, Mr Barnard, Mr Barrett-Miles, Lt Col Barton, Mr Jupp, Mr McDonald, Mr RJ Oakley and Mr SJ Oakley.

Abstentions – 0

The recommendation was lost.

108. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

108.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan dated 5 July 2019 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

108.2 Resolved – That the Forward Plan be noted and that there are currently no further items to be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

109. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

109.1 Items for further scrutiny were discussed at the meeting on 20 June 2019 and no further items to be discussed was raised.

110. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that its next scheduled meeting will take place on 20 September 2019 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 2.00 pm

Chairman