

Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

3 June 2020 – At a meeting of the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at Virtual meeting with restricted public access.

Present: Cllr Waight (Chairman)

Cllr Barnard, Cllr Arculus, Cllr Edwards, Cllr M Jones, Cllr Pendleton and Cllr Smytherman

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow

1. Declarations of Interest

1.1 No interests were declared.

2. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

2.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions and noted that a joint Task & Finish Group with members of the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee consisting of Cllr Waight, Cllr Joy Dennis, Cllr Kitchen, Cllr Smytherman and Cllr Michael Jones would meet to scrutinise the decision regarding Horsham Fire Station and Fire and Rescue Training Centre.

2.2 Resolved – that the Committee notes the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

3. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection report and revisit

3.1 The Committee considered the inspection report and letter by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (copies appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Cllr Crow, Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities who told the Committee: -

- The HMICFRS inspection report found that West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) required improvement in relation to effectiveness and efficiency and was inadequate in how well it looked after its people
- The Service had responded well and made good progress
- A letter from HMICFRS referring to an inspection re-visit in January 2020 acknowledged 'tangible progress' against previously expressed concerns over the 'safe and well' visits and the risk-based inspection programme
- In the letter it was acknowledged that the WSFRS governance and scrutiny arrangements were changing to become more effective and that an independent advisory board had been established
- Appointments had been made so there was capacity to increase the pace of improvement
- The backlog of fire safety audits had been cleared and a new IT system was being rolled out over summer
- The letter concluded that improvements had been made

3.2 The Chief Fire Officer told the Committee: -

- The report made difficult reading, but a lot of work had been done in a short space of time - a plan had been developed and staff were now telling HMICFRS that they felt more supported than before
- There was more to do, but it was important to be realistic and not risk quality at the expense of speed
- WSFRS welcomed the financial investment by the Council

3.3 Summary of responses to members' questions and comments: -

- Cllr Michael Jones proposed that a representative of the Fire Brigades Union be co-opted to the committee in a non-voting capacity – the proposal was not seconded and therefore failed – the Chairman assured Cllr Jones that union representatives would be invited to committee meetings when there were relevant items on the agenda
- 'Safe and well' visits were carried out by community safety teams and WSFRS crews – an extra workstream had been added to the improvement plan to focus on the operational assurance of these visits
- Three years of improvement activity were planned using the financial investment from the Council, but it was acknowledged that the impact of Covid-19 was bound to mean that all Council budgets would be reviewed
- Cllr Crow acknowledged the impact of previous savings on the service and the improvements the recent investment had made
- Implications of future changes in resourcing would be brought to the Committee
- Any implications to WSFRS due to the Fire Safety Bill would be brought to the Committee
- Covid-19 had impacted on 'safe and well' visits with only the most urgent being carried out physically using personal protection equipment – the Service was confident that demand for visits would be met quickly once social distancing rules were relaxed

3.4 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Confirms the priorities for scrutiny and service outcomes it wishes to focus on as those in the conclusion of the Inspection Report and the latest Improvement Plan
- ii. Agrees that committee members obtained assurance as to the effectiveness of measures taken or planned to address the areas of improvement, through the Performance and Assurance Framework and evidence through reviewing the Fire & Rescue Service Improvement Plan
- iii. Agrees the addition of two Task and Finish Groups to its Work Programme, namely Horsham Fire Station and the joint call centre

4. Fire and Rescue Performance and Assurance Framework

4.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Cllr Crow, Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities who told the Committee the Performance & Assurance Framework (PAF) was a useful

tool for the service and councillors that identified issues so there were no surprises and fed information throughout the organisation.

4.2 Dave Etheridge, Director - Greston Associates Ltd, told the Committee: -

- The PAF enabled the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) to get timely information and make decisions so that councillors could be assured of the Service's direction of travel
- The PAF reported on the four key areas of service provision, corporate health, priority programmes and risk (including corporate risk) and was supported currently by 29 core measures reflecting the strategic direction set by the Cabinet – further measures were being worked on
- The core measures tied in with statutory functions and some were heavily linked to fire prevention and would capture any impact of Covid-19
- The core measures also covered protection, operational response, the joint control centre with Surrey and feedback from Human Resources Learning & Development (staff accounted for 80% of the WSFRS budget)
- The PAF captured priority programmes and risk, including to the delivery of the strategic directive
- The PAF was supported by monthly meetings and the quarterly Strategic Performance Board (SPB)
- The SPB produced a quarterly report on the 29 core measures which was sent to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee to determine whether any issues needed to be looked at by the Committee

4.3 Summary of responses to members' questions and comments: -

- There were separate measures for fatalities and casualties. If casualties died of injuries, figures were moved from the casualties' measure to the fatalities measure so there is no 'double counting'
- The target of zero fatalities was aspirational
- The number of fatalities could be used as a guide as to whether or not fire prevention work needed examining to ensure continued organisational improvement
- The Service was working on more core measures to capture information on all deaths including non-accidental deaths
- Any impact on the Service of the Hackett report, including financial, would not be known until the report was published
- The Fire Safety Team received a small amount of funding from national government and was flexible enough to respond to any changes as a result of the Hackett report – extra resources would be considered if appropriate
- Target setting was based on risk as set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan which sets the strategic direction and objectives that had been approved by councillors and would be reviewed in 2021 (at which time crewing levels could be scrutinised)
- Targets were measured against a variance of 10% as a starting position to steer initial thoughts. Some targets had no variation, such as the performance of the joint control room

- Information on deliberate fires would be captured outside of targets and reported to the Committee
- Staffing levels at the Surrey/West Sussex Joint Fire Control Room were as a result of an agreement with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service which had consulted with unions – levels would be revisited if East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service also shared the control room
- Response times of second appliances were not included in the current measures as not prioritised by HMICFRS but were recorded elsewhere. Members of the committee felt it was important to include these for scrutiny and the Cabinet Member/CFO agreed the time for the first and second pump would be presented for all incidents to ensure a complete picture.
- Secondary fires could be very small incidents hence the high number in the target which was based on the previous year's figures
- Fire safety audits were inspections of premises the frequency of which was decided by the services risk-based audit program and focusses on high risk premises
- Adequate crewing on retained frontline pumping appliances was based on the average for all stations, but individual station figures were available as service measures
- Information and recording on eligible operational staff successfully completing fitness tests would be available in time for the next meeting of the Committee

4.4 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Supports the adoption of the Performance & Assurance Framework for the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service for Scrutiny Committee purposes
- ii. Agrees the core measures/indicators designed to provide assurance concerning the delivery of the statutory functions of the Fire Authority including response times for second appliance
- iii. Supports the adoption of quarterly reporting of the core measures to the Committee via a quarterly strategic performance report

5. Work Programme Planning

5.1 The Committee considered its draft Work Programme (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Rachel Allan, Senior Advisor, who asked for any additional suggestions for the programme to be sent to either the Chairman or Vice Chairman by email.

5.2 Resolved – that Committee agrees the draft Work Programme.

6. Date of Next Meeting

6.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 30 September 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.17 pm

Chairman