

Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

13 January 2022 – At a meeting of the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at Virtual meeting with restricted public access.

Present: Cllr Boram (Chairman)

Cllr Chowdhury, Cllr Dunn, Cllr Milne and Cllr Richardson

Apologies were received from Cllr Pendleton and Cllr Charles

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Sabrina Cohen-Hatton (Chief Fire Officer), Mark Andrews (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Peter Rickard (Assistant Chief Fire Officer) and Jon Simpson (Area Manager, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service)

25. Declarations of Interest

25.1 There were no declarations.

26. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

26.1 Resolved – that the Committee agrees the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2021.

27. Responses to Recommendations

27.1 Resolved – that the Committee notes the responses to the recommendations.

28. Priority Programme Update

28.1 The Committee scrutinised a report by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

28.2 Summary of responses to members questions and comments: -

- The activity associated with addressing the first two causes of concern have been completed, updates on the remaining two will come to the next meeting
- People-related themes applied to all fire services and were tied into National Fire Chiefs Council workstreams
- Recruitment advertising began six months ago
- There were almost 1,000 applicants (16% female) for 24 positions, which have been filled
- The Service has a pool of applicants (20% female) who are suitable and can be called upon if vacancies arise
- The Service has all the volunteers it needs, but is always ready to accept more
- The Service is trying to improve the representation of the workforce in order to better reflect the communities served
- In Crawley the Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire & Rescue ensured the recruitment campaign had high visibility

including talking to community groups and the Crawley Observer to help publicise the recruitment campaign to diverse groups

- The Service had specific personal protective equipment for male and female firefighters
- The Service and manufacturers carried out impact assessments on all new equipment, so it was suitable for all firefighters
- The Service was working with three other fire services to replace breathing apparatus so that each had the same equipment – this would bring about cost efficiencies and help with joint training

28.3 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Welcomes the steps being taken by the Fire & Rescue Service regarding increasing diversity of staff and the steps being taken towards mitigating the other key areas of concern
- ii. Requests better financial data looking at the Budget and any key variations from it

29. Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Performance Report Quarter 2

29.1 The Committee scrutinised a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

29.2 Summary of responses to members questions and comments: -

- Covid had been a factor in performance and the 'new normal' had not yet been established as people were still having to isolate
- The Service was working hard to maintain its statutory duty which meant some other duties could not be carried out as well as they were before the pandemic
- The Service prioritised home fire safety visits for the most vulnerable and worked with partners that went into peoples' homes who could then make referrals on fire safety issues to the Service, which then gave telephone advice, following-up in person when possible
- Despite difficult circumstances, the Service had continued with large projects such as the new Horsham Fire Station and the Joint Fire Control Centre (JFCC)
- Fire crews had been very resilient throughout the pandemic with the Service providing additional wellbeing support
- Clear degradation plans existed in case of staff shortages, but these had not yet been needed during the pandemic
- Covid restrictions remained in workplaces for the protection of staff
- The Service was aware of the national Public Emergency Call Service (PECS) code of practice measure, but delayed adopting it till East Sussex joined the JFCC so all partners would have the same performance targets and reporting - this won't change the recording of how quickly calls are answered
- A lot of work went into making sure emergency services worked well together although locating some incidents can be difficult for callers who may not know their exact location to pass to JFCC
- The JFCC has extra staff with East Sussex joining, which should help improve response times, dealing with major incidents, efficiency and be better for the public and fire fighters

- The ability of the Merseyside call centre to cover in event of failure of the JFCC was part of a risk assessment undertaken. There is also a fall-back control centre in Surrey that the JFCC can move to if necessary

29.3 Resolved – that the Committee

- Requests further analysis of the performance recording of retained firefighters
- Notes the alignment with the Public Emergency Call Service standard and that the Fire and Rescue Service will continue to respond as quickly as possible
- Notes that discussions are taking place to improve the way information is handed over from the Police and Ambulance Service to the Fire & Rescue Service

30. Community Risk Management Plan Consultation Briefing

30.1 The Committee scrutinised a report by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

30.2 Summary of responses to members questions and comments: -

- The Service has an engagement strategy to make businesses aware that they need to keep their fire alarms maintained to reduce the risk of unwanted false alarms
- There would be a staged introduction in the new way the Service would respond to automated alarm calls from businesses
- The Service prosecutes businesses that don't meet fire safety standards - false alarms could be an indication of standards not being met
- The Service can charge for callouts to false alarms
- The review of emergency response standards recognises national work and how the Service responds – it is important be aligned with national standards that might affect what the Service does
- If a change in national policy meant changes locally, public consultation would take place before implementation

30.3 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- Note the issues in respect of retained firefighters and the real important service that they provide particularly in rural locations
- Notes the impact of false alarms on the Fire Service welcomes the engagement strategy to make businesses aware of the change in policy
- Notes the national changes in community risk methodology that may lead to proposed changes in performance measures and
- Requests that the Chairman be updated on the results of the consultation before the next Cabinet meeting

31. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

- 31.1 The Committee considered its work programme and decided that it wanted to look at the Covid-19 Recovery Plan for the Fire & Rescue Service separate to the Council's overall Covid-19 Recovery Plan and schedule a visit for the members of the Committee and Cabinet Member to the Joint Fire Control Centre ahead of the next meeting of the Committee, if appropriate due to the current health guidance.

32. Date of Next Meeting

- 32.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 4 March 2022.

The meeting ended at 1.03 pm

Chairman