

Environment Communities and Fire Scrutiny Committee
13th January 2020
West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services HMICFRS Improvement Plan Progress Report
Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

The Committee is aware that West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service have responded to the recommendations of the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection report, published on 20th June 2019, demonstrated by implementing the HMICFRS Improvement Plan.

The Committee will be updated on the progress made to date, ensuring that the Fire and Rescue Service is fully prepared for the HMICFRS Inspecting Officers re-visit in January 2020. This will continue to provide confidence within the communities of West Sussex that ongoing improvement to the Service is of the highest priority.

Focus for Scrutiny:

The Committee is asked to:

- Comment on the improvement progress made to date ahead of the HMICFRS re-visit in January 2020.
- Comment on the successful implementation of the Fire Control project and the post Go Live objectives.
- Comment on the progress made around the 'People' causes of concern raised by the HMICFRS inspection.
- Comment on the task and finish group findings for the retained/on-call work stream.
- Comment on the new scrutiny arrangements for WSFRS and member development opportunities.

1. Introduction

The HMICFRS will revisit West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS) in January 2020. The purpose of the re-visit is not to conduct a full re-inspection but will focus on specific areas highlighted as causes of concerns. Specifically, the re-visit will look at improvements made in our prevention and protection activities since the last full inspection. Feedback from this re-visit will be published by HMICFRS, however this will not change the judgement grading received from the original inspection.

2. Readiness for the HMICFRS Revisit - Part A

2.1 Prevention

The published HMICFRS report identified a cause of concern relating to Safe and Well Visits not being carried out in a timely manner with recommendations being made to resolve this and target activity to those who are most at risk. The Prevention team have introduced a new interim Safe and Well Visit data capture process and performance dashboard for all stations. This has been supported by communications and training to the relevant staff who are responsible for conducting these visits. This ensures that we can manage our prevention activity in a timely manner and keep accurate records of the Safe and Well Visits referred to us and when they are completed.

The Inspectorate highlighted a backlog of Safe and Well Visits in the inspection report; this was cleared in March 2019 and is closely monitored through our performance management framework by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer. A Prevention Strategy and new revised Safe and Well Standard Operating Procedure has been published, that details the performance criteria for visits and how we target activity to support those who are most vulnerable. This more efficient process will ensure people who are at risk from fire receive Safe and Well visits in an appropriate time frame, and will prevent a backlog from occurring in the future.

2.2 Protection

Protection is the team who enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 on behalf of WSCC and WSFRS. The HMICFRS identified a backlog on fire safety audits as well as an inadequate fire safety database as causes for concern.

As part of the HMICFRS improvement plan presented in September 2019 an Area Manager Protection role was created to increase strategic capacity and oversight. The Area Manager Protection has the lead in addressing these causes for concern.

As a priority, the backlog of 833 fire safety audits was cleared that had built up. The service is now up to date with all enforcement activity. The backlog was cleared by the introduction of a robust performance management system and will be maintained with an increase of staff and new team structure.

The service has produced a draft Fire Safety Enforcement Strategy to clearly define how we will address the fire safety risks within West Sussex. This strategy articulates how the service allocates available resources to target high risk areas and reduce risk.

A Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge of Protection took place in December. This was focused on the operational delivery of Fire Safety within West Sussex. The findings will be used to further refine our delivery model for Protection.

As a service we need to be prepared to overcome any changes in legislation. The service has designed a new structure for the Protection team to be flexible enough to address outcomes from the Grenfell enquiry and other changes to statutory legislation.

2.3 Prevention and Protection Risk Management IT Systems

The inspection report identified issues with the IT system used for Protection and Prevention. It was noted that the service required effective and robust systems to manage its protection activities for risk-based inspections. It was also noted that our existing systems were unable to identify the highest risk premises as the computer system was not robust enough and often lost data. The HMICFRS stated "the service relies on a computer system that hinders its protection and prevention work and relies too much on paper".

The service is currently procuring a modern computer system called Farynor that is already in use by the London Fire Brigade. A key feature is that it will facilitate mobile working, reducing the time required to travel to and from working locations and provide a reporting function to monitor performance.

2.4 Improvement Plan Development

Resources have been provided by WSCC Transformation Office to develop, co-ordinate and monitor our improvement activity. This includes utilising the Transformation Office experience in coordination, development and management of a detailed plan to ensure the outcomes are delivered. This will be addressed as a program and include the IRMP and other ongoing activity across the service to enable prioritisation activity and allocate resource appropriately. The service will use national best practise to benchmark performance to ensure WSFRS is progressing from in needs of improvement to good and beyond. A key part of any improvement program is to monitor the benefits of each area of work, the Transformation and Insights team have developed performance criteria to create a reporting framework to capture benefit realisation.

3.0 Fire Control Project

On the 23rd January 2019 the Cabinet Member for the Fire and Rescue Service approved the key decision paper to develop a collaboration programme with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to deliver our future mobilising arrangements.

During early 2019 the programme moved into the delivery phase. The programme included a wider IT strategy for the Fire Service with the new mobilisation system at its core ensuring all our IT systems are integrated.

The fire service working with County Council teams has delivered a tried and tested mobilisation system, integrated with a new resilient resource management provision and a cost-effective resilient home office approved incident reporting and data visualisation system.

The programme has also addressed many of the Fire and Rescue Service's ways of working by introducing innovative solutions in partnership with the County Council which has streamlined many of our processes driving forward efficient and effective ways of working.

The new mobilisation system and wider IT strategy went live at 11am on the 4th December 2019, when Surrey Fire and Rescue Services started mobilising WSFRS emergency resources.

The new mobilising system and wider IT strategy was delivered two months early and within the agreed program delivery budget. The year-on-year costs are calculated to be in line with the predicted annual costs contained within the business case and realise significant year on year savings.

We will continue to identify and deliver collaboration opportunities with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service through 2020. Some have already been identified through the joint governance arrangement that will improve the way our officers gather incident data to provide informed decision making remotely from incidents. The Program will continue to provide value for money and improve public and fire safety across the County of West Sussex.

4.0 Progress and Implementing the Improvement Plan Part B

People

The HMICFRS identified two Causes of Concern in relation to people; the first was that staff sometimes act in ways that go against the core values which was leading to bullying in the workplace.

Following the publication of the inspection report workshops have been facilitated across the service which have focused on raising awareness of the values and the underpinning behaviours. Values and behaviours are now an integral part of new job descriptions and training on values-based interviewing is scheduled to be rolled out to officers in January and February. Training for investigating managers is also being delivered to ensure that where there are issues of potential misconduct these are investigated and managed fairly and effectively. Work is ongoing to explore opportunities to fully embed the values within existing processes and practices.

In order to understand perceptions of working for the Service, and to give staff an opportunity to discuss their experiences, 26 listening groups were held at a range of locations between 25th September and 14th November 2019. The information gathered has been collated into a report, with key findings and recommendations, and shared directly with the Chief Fire Officer. The Service will be engaging with staff in the coming weeks to develop an action plan based on the findings.

The second Cause for Concern was that WSFRS does not engage with or seek feedback from staff to understand their needs. This was found to especially be the case with some under-represented groups and the report stated that when staff raise issues and concerns the Service doesn't respond quickly enough.

The Service has worked closely with the Comms, HR and OD teams to develop a Communication and Engagement Plan which has been in place since July 2019 and is reviewed and updated regularly. On the 8th November the Fire and Rescue Service held its first ever Annual Staff Conference. This

was well attended by staff across the Service and was webcast to ensure that staff on duty could participate. The feedback was very positive with the majority of staff saying that they would attend a future conference. A key part of the day was a live Q and A session with the Senior Leadership Team, during which staff had the opportunity to ask questions and hear directly from senior leaders.

Other recent engagement activity has included raising awareness of WSCC staff awards, launching the 'Big Ideas' platform on the WSFRS page of the Big Exchange so staff can contribute ideas and suggestions for service improvements and creating a WSFRS-specific engagement survey, which was launched on 6th December 2019 and closes on 6th January 2020.

The Service has also been working with colleagues in Organisational Development to improve induction processes for new starters and to create a leadership development programme which supports leadership development at all levels of the organisation.

Operational Resilience

The HMICFRS recommended that "WSFRS is not making best use of its resources; fire engine availability is low and is struggling to recruit and maintain On-Call firefighters". Availability of fire engines directly impacts on response times and the service we provide to the public.

By addressing this recommendation, the service will focus on recruitment and retention of On-Call fire fighters and how we support all the On-Call fire stations to increase fire engine availability based on risk across our county.

The HMICFRS also recommended "the service should improve how it allocates its resources to align more closely with its priorities outlined in the IRMP". The recommendation is being delivered by the introduction of a new Service Delivery Centre. (SDC) The SDC will make significant improvements through the central coordination of all physical resources that are required to maximise fire engine availability whilst coordinating Prevention and Protection activity in holistic service wide activity. It will reduce the pressures placed on both Whole Time (WT) and Retained Duty System (RDS) managers, allowing them to focus on core responsibilities such as the maintenance of operational competence and the coordinated delivery of safety critical prevention and protection activities across our county.

The reinstatement of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer will improve the service we provide to the public through closer scrutiny and management of Prevention, Protection and Response activity. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer will deliver strategic priorities based on the risk identified in the IRMP and the recommendations contained in the HMICFRS report.

The reinstatement of this role will support public and fire fighter safety by increasing resilience at Principal Officer level during operational incidents and in the management of day to day strategic operational activity ensuring statutory duty is maintained in line with the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

Retained/On-Call Report

In 2018 the Environment Communities and Fire Select Committee commissioned a member led task and finish group to look at the recruitment and retention of Retained/On-Call firefighters.

The task and finish group highlighted four areas for initial work streams which are as follows:

1. Trial implementation of County Crewing – this uses Retained/On-Call staff to provide positive hours (Paid time above the On-Call allowances) to enhance fire engine availability in key risk areas. This will be coordinated by the new Service Delivery Centre. A business case has been presented and approved and is now being implemented.
2. Explore the feasibility of increasing the catchment area around fire stations by expanding the 4-minute catchment area to 6 minutes and 8 minutes where there's a tangible benefit to fire engine availability. This will be risk data driven and will be initially run as a pilot. The research has now been completed using response time modelling and is now being implemented where there are tangible benefits are expected.
3. Develop a new flexible contract for On-Call fire fighters to address a perceived lack of flexibility in the current contractual arrangements. This work will be assessed in 2020 for a strategic direction to be set in the second half of the year.
4. Develop and maintain a planned and targeted On-Call recruitment campaign utilising the additional 3 On-Call Liaison Officers to support On-Call station leaders. This has now been approved and the service are currently recruiting the staff that will work within the new Service delivery Centre.

5.0 Scrutiny Support and Member development

The County Council has recognised the specialist nature of work the Fire and Rescue Service undertakes and that dedicated Challenge and Scrutiny arrangements will assist the FRS in undertaking its improvement journey. The introduction of these new arrangements will be supported by specific tailored training for the committee members to increase their knowledge and understanding of the work the Fire Service undertakes.

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