

## **Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee**

30 September 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 Barling (left at 12.28 after item 6 (Priority Programme Update)), Cllr Arculus, Cllr Edwards and Cllr Smytherman

Apologies were received from Cllr Pendleton

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow

### **7. Declarations of Interest**

7.1 In accordance with the code of conduct the following interest was declared: -

- Cllr Smytherman in respect of item 6 (Priority Programme Update) as the manager of a block of flats in Worthing

### **8. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee**

8.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2020 are approved as a correct record and are signed by the Chairman.

### **9. Urgent Matters**

9.1 The Chairman reported that former Committee member, Cllr Michael Jones, had written to him expressing his disappointment that his Group (Labour) was no longer represented on the Committee. The Chairman said that he would forward the letter to the Governance Committee for its consideration.

### **10. Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

10.1 There were no items in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions relating to the Committee's portfolio.

### **11. Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Performance Report Quarter 1 2020**

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report was first introduced by Cllr Crow, Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities who told the Committee: -

- The Performance and Assurance Framework (PAF) measures had been acted upon with deficiencies being picked-up
- There had been challenges in the first quarter of the year due to Covid-19

- West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) had shown flexibility during the lockdown by taking on tasks outside of its normal duties
- Target CM6 (the number of safe and well visits carried out) had not been met due to lockdown restrictions, but this was now being addressed
- The target for first appliance attendance had been met for three quarters in a row – this was partly due to county crewing and the availability of retained fire fighters who were working from home during lockdown

11.2 Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Chief Fire Officer, added the following: -

- Some safe and well visits had been carried out by phone or video
- The pent-up backlog had been cleared thanks to extra investment in the protection teams
- There were only 13 fire safety audits outstanding which would be cleared as soon as possible
- The increased availability of retained fire fighters had helped response times – it was hoped that this would continue
- Operation resilience was the service's top priority

11.1 Summary of responses to committee members comments and questions: -

- Although face to face safe and well visits could not take place for many people during lockdown, safety equipment was still delivered where necessary and phone/video visits were undertaken. These were not closed at this point but were followed up with in-person visits
- The number of 999 calls not answered within seven seconds mainly related to multiple calls reporting the same incident so did not affect fire engines arriving at the incident in time, as indicated by the response times being met
- Reporting the time taken to answer the first call for an incident would give a better reflection of the service's performance
- Response times were measured from the time a call was received to the time an appliance arrived on scene
- False alarm calls had a knock-on effect for call handling times
- Response times were affected by calls for road traffic accidents and animal rescues as locations for these were often imprecise
- The service was working on a pre-alert system whereby several stations would be put on standby immediately a call came in meaning the right one, when known, would be able to respond more quickly
- The figures reported for target CM14 (time taken by the joint control centre to answer 999 calls) were for West Sussex only – this would be made clearer in future
- Inspections of unsatisfactory premises had been hindered during lockdown as many were closed - this had now been addressed
- Response times of first appliances to critical fires was improving overall thanks to various innovations and the availability of retained fire fighters although response times to high risk areas

- had reduced – **ACTION:** Sabrina Cohen-Hatton to provide the reasons why response times for the high level had reduced
- The number of retained fire fighters has increased in the service, resilience and flexibility were built into the service to cope with any change in circumstances should numbers reduce
  - There was a query around local response times – the Chief Fire Officer offered to provide these to any councillor that requested them
  - WSFRS resources were now managed centrally helping determine where they would be most effective
  - Retained Liaison Officers helped the retention of retained fire fighters, the numbers of which might increase with more people continuing to work from home
  - Vacancy rates for retained fire fighters had reduced - **ACTION:** Sabrina Cohen-Hatton to provide the exact figures
  - Consideration would be given to a range of measures to increase retained firefighter recruitment, including extending the four-minute response time to five minutes, but this could not be done before the new Integrated Risk Management Plan had been developed
  - The Crewing Optimisation Group had kept an engine available 176 times
  - County crewing gave retained fire fighters the chance to do shifts in other stations and had stopped engines being unavailable on 202 occasions

11.4 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Welcomes the work that has been undertaken concerning safe and well visits in the current situation
- ii. Notes the concerns regarding the joint control room, and reemphasised that a Task & Finish Group would examine this in further detail in January 2021
- iii. Congratulates the Fire and Rescue Service for its significant improvement in response times and will continue to monitor this to ensure this improvement continues

## 12. Priority Programme Update

12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report was first introduced by Cllr Crow, Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities who reminded the Committee that the inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) had concentrated on prevention & protection improvements and clearing backlogs.

12.2 Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Chief Fire Officer, told the Committee: -

- A huge amount of work had been carried out in prevention and protection following the inspection by HMICFRS with increased capacity in each area pivotal to the service's response to Covid-19
- Some work was still to be done around quality assurance processes and delivering training, but the key areas around

these had been completed e.g. agreement to provide a training centre at the new fire station planned for Horsham

- The cultural change of the service would take some time beginning with the People Action Plan
- The aim was for the service to be more than not discriminatory, it was to be anti-discriminatory

### 12.3 Summary of responses to committee members' comments and questions: -

- There were eight extra community safety posts focussing on fire safety at home, youth engagement, road safety and local risk management
- The retained liaison officers focus on recruitment and worked from fire stations so that they could provide cover, including as incident commanders, if necessary
- Inclusion officers would make sure that the service's policies and processes were not discriminatory with help from diversity champions
- The Committee heard that the Value for Money project was red. The Chief Fire Officer outlined how it had been completed initially, but was now being revisited as the Service had changed greatly. Given the additional work it was decided to reflect this within the same project, rather than closing, which was why the project status is reported as red
- The Business Safety Team would raise awareness of fire safety in high risk areas such as takeaways
- In light of new legislation following the Grenfell fire, the service has been liaising with the three buildings in West Sussex that had Aluminium Composite Material cladding and had plans to deal with blocks of flats that had other sub-standard cladding – **ACTION:** The Chief Fire Officer to provide details to the Committee on buildings with sub-standard cladding in the county
- Government funding had been used to employ two officers to help act upon the new legislation and pay for smoke hoods which will be carried on all engines
- WSFRS met regularly with three other fire and rescue services to work on collaborative projects such as joint procurement, integrated transport functions with the police and further work in ongoing to find collaborative opportunities for the training facilities in Horsham

### 12.4 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Is assured of the progress going forward based on the evidence received at this meeting
- ii. Notes significant improvement in all areas of concern raised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection
- iii. Notes that changes in the culture of the service takes time but that positive progress is being made
- iv. Notes that the customer-centred value for money project red rating was raised and a satisfactory explanation was provided

- v. Notes the change to the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service responsibilities resulting from the Grenfell tragedy were highlighted, including concerns regarding inflammable cladding

### **13. Statement of Assurance and Annual Report**

13.1 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 Statement of Assurance focussed on five key areas and covered the period from April 2019 to March 2020
- The Annual Report sat behind the Statement of Assurance providing details of what the service had achieved

13.2 Summary of responses to committee members' comments and questions: -

- Some WSFRS sites such as training facilities at Horley and Worthing would be surplus to requirements once the new training centre in Horsham was open
- The Committee felt that the Statement of Assurance showed a stark contrast between where the service was eighteen months ago and where it was now. It also felt that the Annual Report informed residents of the wide variety of things the service had done in the past year

13.3 Resolved – that the Committee recommends to Cabinet the adoption of the Statement of Assurance and the Annual Report and notes that substantial progress has been made that will be highlighted in the following year's report.

### **14. Work Programme Planning**

14.1 The Committee understood that the item 'Inspection Preparedness Report' scheduled for the next meeting would be presented at an appropriate time dependent on the date of the inspection being confirmed.

14.2 Resolved - that the Committee notes its work programme.

### **15. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny**

15.1 The Fire Safety Bill was suggested as an item for future scrutiny and would be added to the work programme to be considered at the appropriate time.

### **16. Date of Next Meeting**

16.1 The Chairman informed the Committee that the meeting scheduled for 27 November 2020 will now take place on 8 January 2021 and the meeting scheduled for 10 March 2021 will now take place on 26 March 2021. This is to fit in with the Strategic Performance Board meetings.

The meeting ended at 12.52 pm

Chairman