
Report to Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

8 January 2021

Priority Programme Update

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Summary

This report provides an overview of the priority programmes of work during Quarter 2 of 2020/2021. This includes progress against the People Action Plan, the Improvement Plan and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Action Plan.

This is a standing item on the Work Programme for the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Committee is asked to review the progress reported in relation to the priority programmes, which include the IRMP Action Plan, the Improvement Plan and the People Action Plan and provide any comments to the Cabinet Member for Fire & Rescue and Communities.

Proposal

1. Background and context

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Improvement Plan

- 1.1 The Inspectorate identified four 'causes of concern', as well as ten additional specific areas for improvement that the Service needed to address.

2. Cause of Concern 1 - Preventing Fire and Other Risks

- 2.1 HMICFRS found that prevention activity did not always align with the risk identified in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). This included HMICFRS finding that the Service had a backlog of safe and well visits which officers have subsequently cleared.
- 2.2 Much of the improvement plan for this Cause of Concern has been completed and further assured through the Independent Advisory Panel but two areas of activity are still left to complete. These are the adoption of a Quality Assurance Process review and further recruitment of volunteers to assist with this crucial public safety work.

2.3 Despite the COVID restrictions, the additional resources added to the team and changes to working practices has meant the Service was able to respond to the pent-up demand of safe and well visits and get these visits up to date.

2.4 During this Quarter the Service was able to return to face to face visits in a controlled and safe manner which has resulted in this month exceeding the quarterly target of 1000 visits.

3. Cause of Concern 2 - Protecting the Public Through Fire Regulation

3.1 The inspectorate noted that the Service does not have a robust methodology for the risk-based inspection programme that identifies its highest risk premises.

3.2 The government is bringing forward changes that will improve building and fire safety. The proposed changes may have a significant impact to the Service's protection activity with an increase of buildings falling under the new regulation.

3.3 Much of the improvement plan for this cause for concern has been completed and assured through the Independent Advisory Panel. The one area of activity left to complete is the adoption of a Quality Assurance Process review.

3.4 Despite the COVID restrictions, the additional resources added to the team and changes to working practices has meant officers were able to respond to the pent-up demand of fire safety audits. The service adapted its approach by carrying out desktop audits and phone call reviews in order to ensure risk reduction activity continued throughout the pandemic.

3.5 The new IT system, Farynor, in Protection will further improve the efficiency and management of the Risk Based Inspection Programme by supporting remote working and providing real time inspection date. Therefore, implementation of this new system has been a priority.

4. IT system for Prevention & Protection

4.1 The old database that used to manage information in prevention and protection was unreliable, which affected the accuracy of the information.

4.2 The Prevention Team has now gone live with Farynor and has found it to be a vast improvement on the system it replaced. It enables the team to keep accurate and secure records and evidence the way it is supporting residents to remain safe and well in their homes.

4.3 Farynor is now also live in Protection which is a major step forward and will lead to new ways of working and efficiencies. The team will now be able to use mobile technology to locate premises and carry out the audits with the corporate mobile devices from the Council.

4.4 The service has successfully transferred the desktops on stations to Windows 10 devices, which was a key part of response going live with the Farynor system.

4.5 With the introduction of the new IT system, this will enable more robust data handling and accurate reporting, which in turn will allow the service to demonstrate more timely and reliable detailed performance reports.

5. People Action Plan

- 5.1 HMICFRS identified considerable areas of improvement required in relation to how well the Service looked after its people. The improvement activity in relation to this area has been enhanced and escalated into a separate priority programme of work.
- 5.2 The People Action Plan addresses concerns raised by the inspection report and is fully aligned to the Council's People Strategy. Key activity in this quarter relating to the two people related 'causes of concern' which are outlined in detail in below.

6. Cause for Concern 3 - Promoting the Right Values and Culture

- 6.1 The Inspectorate reported that West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS) staff sometimes act in ways that go against its core values. This was leading to bullying in the workplace.
- 6.2 A dedicated review of the feedback of the latest staff pulse survey has been undertaken to ensure that the areas of concern are addressed by the People Action Plan, and where gaps are identified, put into place initiatives to address areas of concern.
- 6.3 Bi-monthly People Surgeries continue for operational and support staff on a rolling basis, specifically aimed at providing the opportunity to discuss concerns around health, wellbeing, performance or any other issues relating to people services. The first was in October 2020 and a clear forward plan of these outcomes has been completed.
- 6.4 The Core Behaviour Framework and appraisal form have been reviewed and indicators of leadership/management behaviours established. This has ensured a clear foundation, upon which staff are clear of expectations, what is unacceptable and also how to meet or exceed expectations. It clearly sets out expectations in terms of operational practices and leadership behaviours and has been incorporated into the WSFRS Induction Process.
- 6.5 To further strengthen the staff understanding of values the Service has integrated the National Fire Chiefs Council Leadership Framework into its appraisal process. Each of the Service's values is described as a behaviour and to further support staff comprehension, examples of unacceptable behaviours, expected behaviours and those that exceed expectations have been included. This will also act as a framework tool to support managers to have meaningful discussions around standards and expectations.
- 6.6 In alignment with the Council, Mental Health Knowledge Training will be compulsory for all managers which commenced in December 2020.
- 6.7 Seven Mental Health First Aiders have been identified following expressions of interest to be trained in 2021 to support both the wider wellbeing approach in the Service and more directly to support staff experiencing mental health matters, providing guidance and signposting to forums and organisations that offer expert help.
- 6.8 Wellbeing and Mental Health sessions for managers have also been rolled out virtually on recognising the signs of stress and how to have a meaningful discussion with team members about their mental health. Dates and times of sessions will include evening and weekend slots to ensure that the varied

working hours of the workforce are met. These sessions are hosted by the Service's Health and Wellbeing Manager and Diversity & Inclusion Adviser.

- 6.9 A wellbeing seminar has been planned with a focus on mental health for all staff to attend. The purpose of the wellbeing seminar is to raise awareness of mental health issues and the impact that this can have on individuals, particularly if they are unable to discuss with managers. The seminar will take place in summer 2021 and an annual Wellbeing Seminar on an ongoing basis.

7. Cause for Concern 4 - Ensuring Fairness and Promoting Diversity

- 7.1 The inspectorate found that WSFRS did not engage with or seek feedback from staff to understand their needs. It reported this to especially be the case with some under-represented groups. When staff raised issues and concerns the Service did not respond quickly enough.
- 7.2 Communications between staff and senior managers have improved through the use of the Big Exchange app, video briefings, online open question and answer 'surgeries' with Heads of Service for all staff, as well as back to the shop floor activity. This has been adapted from face to face engagement to virtual contact throughout the Covid-19 period to ensure that continuity is maintained.
- 7.3 A Fire and Rescue Service pulse survey has been undertaken during the quarter which was focussed on individuals job role, wellbeing of staff, how your role fits within the service and impacts of Covid-19.
- 7.4 A dignity and respect framework is in development by the Diversity and Inclusion Adviser, that is aimed at further outlining the expectations of staff, managers and senior leaders. It will detail how we work with our communities, as well as the benefits for WSFRS in meeting the expectations outlined.
- 7.5 This will be further supported with a newly designed half day dignity and respect workshop for managers. The workshop will focus on:
- Ensuring staff understanding of dignity and respect and ensuring that this is embedded within teams;
 - Recognising and addressing subtle forms of behaviour and language which is disrespectful;
 - The benefits for WSFRS, the team and individuals;
 - What is inclusion, and how dignity and respect is the starting point in creating an inclusive environment.
- 7.6 The Service has established a forum of volunteer Diversity Champions, we have eight staff that came forward and they will receive appropriate training and development to undertake the role. Our champions meet with the Diversity and Inclusion Adviser monthly and Chief Fire Officer on a six monthly basis to ensure that the service is fully inclusive.
- 7.7 A shadow board is planned for introduction in early 2021. This board will work alongside the Service Executive Board (SEB) and will be formed of a diverse group of staff with representation from across the Service. The idea is to promote engagement and provide opportunities to colleagues to take a greater

part in the decision-making process of the Service where they might not ordinarily have the chance to do so.

- 7.8 The Service has secured funding to address property-based issues with facilities for all genders, and to undertake remedial work to reduce the potential impact of contaminants. An indicative capital amount of £5m has been allocated, and an in-depth survey of all station facilities is being carried out which will inform the improvements required. The site surveys have been impacted by Covid-19 as the Service is unable to have individuals on station unnecessarily. This is monitored throughout the Business Continuity Action Team meeting and will be resumed as soon as the pandemic allows.

8. Areas for Improvements updates

- 8.1 The dedicated Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny committee has now met twice, during which time it considered the Performance and Assurance Framework (PAF) for Fire and Rescue which focused on strategic objectives and outcomes for residents and service users. Additionally, the scrutiny committee scrutinises areas in greater depth through Task and Finish Groups. The Fire Authority made a decision to invest in a new fire station and training centre in Horsham on 28 August 2020 and a further Task and Finish Group is planned for January 2021 to focus on the performance of the Joint Control Centre, following a year of the new arrangements.
- 8.2 Opportunities have been actively explored to engage Members at all levels, ranging from inclusion of Cabinet Member on the improvement board to provide assurance of progress, to a more local level where the service is seeking to involve local Members in the development of Local Risk Management Plans.
- 8.3 The service has fully embedded a PAF which enables the monitoring and active management of performance against statutory responsibilities from a local level (including links to appraisal objectives) through to public reporting through the scrutiny process. This is a continuing process with the key activity focussed on the communication to all staff using an illustration to ensure wider understanding of its purpose and their contribution to it.
- 8.4 Local Risk Management data and plans have been introduced for each station area, which translates service objectives into community activity.
- 8.5 The Service Delivery Centre has focussed on ensuring operational resources are prioritised in the most efficient way. This has improved the availability of operational assets and reduced the burden on operational response managers of organising logistics, enabling them to focus on core activity such as training, prevention and protection work. This has been a useful asset during Covid-19 to ensure that availability is accurately forecast and any gaps filled in an efficient manner.
- 8.6 The Service has started to put measures in place to improve the availability of retained appliances, including investment in Retained Liaison Officers to support recruitment and retention, county crewing to utilise off-duty retained staff to cover shortfalls and acquiring new training facilities with an operating model that will guarantee access to retained firefighters at times that reduce the impact on their primary employment.

- 8.7 The improvement plan provides a useful roadmap, officers are focussed on the work on the current improvement plan whilst also recognising how this provides direction on to the next IRMP for 2022.

9. Integrated Risk Management Plan 2018-22 (IRMP)

- 9.1 The IRMP action plan sets out the Service's progress against the commitments made in the IRMP. The Year 3 annual review for the IRMP Action Plan has taken place.
- 9.2 The new 12 tonne fire engines have all been delivered to their new stations and firefighters have been provided with extra time to train and exercise on them, to ensure they are familiar with their new and improved functionality. All seven vehicles are now on fire stations and have been in use since 1 October 2020.
- 9.3 The Prevention 2020 project was created to restructure the prevention team and broaden the community safety offer beyond fire and road safety. The team focuses on working with the highest risk and most vulnerable groups in relation to core fire and rescue service activity. Continuing our work with children who have a potentially dangerous fascination with fire (Firewise), safeguarding, the delivery of Safe and Well Visits (SWV) to residents who are most at risk and have a high likelihood of fire in their home. It also includes existing work with victims of domestic violence, and contributions to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.
- 9.4 The team will be extending its delivery to include the highest risk individuals and communities across the county to reflect the risks identified in the IRMP. These individuals and communities will be identified through risk profiling using multiple sources of information. They include the elderly and people with mental and physical health issues, people who live in rented social accommodation or Houses of Multiple Occupation, those who are carers, smokers, or those with dependencies, in addition to consideration of cultural risk factors. This project has now been closed and activity returned to business as usual with a key benefit achieved of a 33% increase in capacity within prevention which has demonstrated its value in the current pandemic and the addressing of the pent-up demand in a timely way.
- 9.5 The Technical Rescue Unit (TRU) is a dedicated team which provides mission critical, specialist operational capabilities to WSFRS that meets the community risk within West Sussex, in an efficient, effective way that supports the wellbeing of WSFRS staff. This project been prompted by the withdrawal of £457,000 Home Office Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) grant funding by government.
- 9.6 The loss of this National Asset is significant for the Service, however the team remains committed and fulfils a crucial function for the Service in delivering a range of other capabilities, which are important to the delivery of the IRMP and the safety of crews and the public.
- 9.7 These capabilities include animal rescue; swift water rescue and boats; advanced rope rescue, confined space rescues, including silos and trenches; heavy rescue with advanced cutting equipment.

10. Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

10.1 Updated on priority programmes are agreed through the Work Programme of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee at each meeting.

11. Consultation, engagement and advice

11.1 Continuous consultation with staff and Members on the work of the Fire and Rescue Service Priority Programmes, including discussion at each meeting of the Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee.

12. Finance

12.1 Most of the Council's £26.8m WSFRS budget is invested in frontline services including firefighting, rescue operations and community safety activity. This is summarised as the following:

- Firefighting and rescue operations: £22,011,154
- Community Fire Safety: £4,352,772
- Fire Service Emergency Planning and Civil Resilience: £390,071

13 Risk implications and mitigations

13.1 Further information on risk for the Fire and Rescue Service is contained in the [Integrated Risk Management Plan](#).

14 Policy alignment and compliance

14.1 This report has positive implications for the community, and it supports the benefits of an effective Fire and Rescue Service to all residents in West Sussex.

14.2 In terms of environmental sustainability, the IRMP makes clear the Authority's commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its operations and provides an indication of work done to date.

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Appendices: None

Background papers: None