
Report to Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

26 March 2021

Priority Programme Update

Report by Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

This report provides an overview of the priority programmes of work during Quarter 3 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.

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.
- 1.2 Officers were required to submit an update to HMICFRS on 18 December 2020 on progress against the Causes of Concern.
- 1.3 HMICFRS revisited the service in February 2021 to review progress against the Causes of Concern.
- 1.4 HMICFRS round two inspection for West Sussex Fire & Rescue (WSFRS) is likely to commence in Autumn 2021/22.

2 Cause of Concern 1 - Preventing Fire and Other Risks

- 2.1 Only two outstanding actions remain in relation to this Cause of Concern with considerable work having been undertaken to enable us to recommence the activity as COVID restrictions lift.
- 2.2 The delivery of Safe and Well Visits (SWVs) and safeguarding training has been evaluated using observed visits, this is to assure the service of the quality of visits. Volunteers will furthermore be surveying a sample over the telephone in Quarter 4.
- 2.3 Operational fire crews have not been undertaking community safety events as they would normally due to Covid restrictions. The reduction in community events has partly contributed to the reduction in requests for a SWV which means the Service is not going to meet its SWV annual target of 4,000 visits. If requests for visits continue at the same rate, it is currently anticipated achieving 95% of the target by year end.
- 2.4 The Service has worked hard to increase the number of SWVs delivered. This has been done by phoning people visited previously and offering SWVs at the same time as carrying out welfare checks and delivering food parcels. To date this has generated almost 100 additional requests for a visit.
- 2.5 Leaflets promoting SWVs have been distributed in all emergency food parcels (over 6,000) for vulnerable people, at food banks, vaccination centres, and GP practices, fire safety awareness training has been delivered to social care and Primary Care Trust staff. SWVs were also recently promoted in the Council's newsletter which is sent to 200,000 homes.
- 2.6 In the 2018 report the HMICFRS observed that in reference to the Volunteer group '*The Service could develop this group more and increase its capacity to do prevention work*'. This comment is being addressed through the volunteer development plan, with one element being to increase volunteer numbers. Training programmes have been written and delivered to develop and upskill existing volunteers so they can undertake a broader range of prevention work. This is supported by a clear operating procedure, volunteer induction development and a skills audit to ensure that the Service is mindful of the volunteer's skills and training to offer and engage them in appropriate and meaningful activities.
- 2.7 Volunteer recruitment has been delayed, following approval through the organisational governance until Spring 2021. Volunteers have largely been self-isolating through the pandemic which has proved a challenge with existing volunteers. Recruiting new volunteers at the present time could result in them feeling disengaged through a lack of community engagement or station contact due to COVID restrictions.

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

- 3.1 All actions have been undertaken with regards to this Cause of Concern and considerable work has been undertaken to enable the Service to recommence the activity as COVID restrictions lift.
- 3.2 As outlined in the Fire Safety Enforcement Strategy, each inspector is subject to quality assurance audits carried out by their line manager and through the central quality audit team. The results of these quality audits will be used

to improve individual and team performance. With a target of three per inspector per annum. A report can be created on the feedback from these audits to provide assurance to the Strategic Performance Board.

- 3.3 A clear approach has been agreed in relation to the attraction and retention of staff. This structure has a better balance of the number of Green and Grey Book posts and it provides a better career path for both employee groups.
- 3.4 Utilising the apprenticeship levy, will allow WSFRS to offer an entry route into WSFRS, for those wishing to deliver fire safety/fire engineering which has been a positive addition to the team structure to be implemented by April 2021.

4 IT system for Prevention & Protection

- 4.1 The Farynor implementation project is now coming to a closure and will be presented to HMICFRS in the visit in February 2021.
- 4.2 The Prevention team went live with Farynor on 7 October 2020, Protection went live on 19 November 2020 and Response followed on the 7 December 2020.
- 4.3 The development of the Premises Risk Management module continues with delivery planned in Quarter one 2021/22.
- 4.4 The legacy system, Terian, will be fully decommissioned by 31 March 2021 when the contract ends demonstrating efficiency and delivery of the project objectives.

5 People Action Plan

- 5.1 The People Action Plan has been able to continue to keep its momentum despite the pandemic and some key fundamental changes have been implemented to support the service with its improvement. The staff engagement and the cultural change aspects will take longer to achieve the required level of change, in order to deliver this successfully the Service has ensured that the plan allows time for the appropriate staff engagement. There have been some positive steps towards the future state as demonstrated in the closure of the Independent Advisory Panel.
- 5.2 The Causes of Concern are addressed below, and a significant level of progress has been achieved.

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

- 6.1 The Service's values and behaviours have now been linked to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) framework and embedded in all staff appraisals. This is supported by examples of acceptable, those that exceed and unacceptable behaviours. The appraisal process also enables the Service to ensure that individuals have had objectives set and regular conversations are being undertaken. This has been further evidenced that of 100 randomly sampled staff, 71% feel that the discussions that are being held are meaningful. This will continue to be monitored by the Service to ensure that this trend continues.
- 6.2 There have been twelve appraisal briefing sessions delivered between August to November 2020 to brief managers on the new appraisal process, respond to queries and embed understanding of how appraisals and individual performance is intrinsically linked to the Service's vision, mission and values.

- 6.3 The Service refreshed its vision and mission, a mission provides the organization with a clear and effective guide for making decisions, while the vision ensures that all the decisions made are properly aligned with what the organization hopes to achieve and how it links to the Service's values. Heads of Service have role modelled this through individually sharing what the vision and mission means to them.
- 6.4 Eight Mental Health Awareness Workshops have been delivered in November and December 2020. Due to popularity, further workshops are planned to be delivered in February and March 2021. Mental Health Knowledge Training, which consists of a series of online modules has been commissioned by West Sussex County Council and is to be rolled out by end of March 2021 and will be compulsory for all FRS managers.
- 6.5 A Wellbeing & Inclusion site was launched on 10 October 2020, which is easily accessible for staff that contains information and guidelines on Mental Health, Wellbeing information, Guidance on Bullying & Harassment, as well as information on Diversity & Inclusion.
- 6.6 Nine WSFRS staff to commence Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) training in March 2021 and will be qualified by the end of April 2021. There are already two qualified MHFAs within the service.
- 6.7 A review of the provisions for managing stress continues to ensure that the appropriate tools and guidance is provided for managers to ensure they are well equipped to support their staff effectively. Appropriate guidance will also be developed for staff to self-serve.

7 Cause for Concern 4 - Ensuring Fairness and Promoting Diversity

- 7.1 Fifteen diversity champions have volunteered across the service, and bi-monthly meetings are being held to ensure momentum continues. A clear role profile for the diversity champions has been created including the appropriate training for all champions which will continue as the role evolves.
- 7.2 A Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group has been developed made up of representatives from across the service, to set the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategic direction, support the Diversity Champions and hold the People & Organisational Development team accountable for delivery of EDI objectives. The Board will be chaired by Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the inaugural meeting was held on 16 March 2021.
- 7.3 Recognising Racism webinars have been undertaken for all middle managers, to raise awareness and create understanding of impact of unacceptable behaviour and language.
- 7.4 To ensure fairness a full review of how the service staff movements and transfers to ensure that it is fair and consistent process including how the Staff Control Group (SCG) operates.
- 7.5 A full review of the Promotions Board process has been undertaken, to ensure that staff are promoted in a fair and consistent manner. The Promotions Board has been replaced with Assessment Centres. The Service undertook Crew and Watch Manager Assessment Centres in December 2020.

- 7.6 An Assessment Centre candidate feedback survey was sent out after these and 92% of respondents strongly agreed that the Assessment Centres were operated in a fair and consistent manner. This directly addresses staff concerns raised as part of the listening groups and provides assurance that the changes implemented are making a difference for those undertaking assessment centres.
- 7.7 In preparation for the Assessment Centres, interviewee skills workshops have been developed to support staff attending. Eight workshops have been delivered to date and 75% of Assessment Centre candidates strongly agreed that the workshop helped them to understand the process.
- 7.8 A Dignity and Respect Framework is in development, which is aimed at outlining the expectations of staff, managers and senior leaders. This is to be reviewed by the diversity champions in March 2021. To further support this there are plans to develop half day dignity and respect workshops for managers.
- 7.9 As part of the listening groups, one area that was highlighted was the loss of Fire and Rescue Service identity. New workwear was been agreed at Service Executive Board (SEB) in October 2020 following a consultation with staff and preferred uniform selected. The order of workwear is to be completed by March 2021.
- 7.10 A Shadow Board has been implemented, aimed at improving the connection and engagement between staff and the principal officers. It will also enable the SEB members to hear directly from employees about the impact of decisions made on operational and support staff, including hearing voices of those with lived experience of being in underrepresented groups. Nine staff have expressed interest in becoming members, and the chair and vice-chair of the board have been elected. The first meeting is scheduled for Monday 22 March 2021.
- 7.11 A review of the current recruitment attraction methods used for WSFRS new recruits has been undertaken and has been embedded into the new fire fighter recruitment process launched on 5 March 2021. The success of the changes will not be known until after the recruitment process ends in October 2021.

8 Areas for Improvements updates

- 8.1 Local risk management plans have progressed well, with some activity having required adaptation due to the current pandemic. There has been a challenge with some resources to undertake the updates to the community risk data which is being addressed. Engagement sessions with appropriate members is to be planned once restrictions lift.
- 8.2 Responding to false alarms is an unnecessary demand on the service, reducing the overall effectiveness, which was highlighted by HMICFRS as an area for improvement. A major cause of this demand is the Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS), that are generated by the Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) installed to protect many non-domestic properties. In West Sussex, this unnecessary demand equated to approximately 4,800 hours per year which could be used more effectively for activities such as training and prevention. The Service's approach is to:

- 8.2.1 Reduce demand through advice and enforcement by implementing policy changes to advice and enforcement to include greater engagement with occupiers by front line crews.
- 8.2.2 Reduce impact through call filtering by initiating business engagement to review UwFS attendance levels and reinforce robust call filtering protocols at Joint Fire Control.
- 8.2.3 We will explore options to further reduce demand through call charging, in the development of the 2022 Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) including assessing and consulting on options for levying a charge under the Localism Act.

9 Integrated Risk Management Plan 2018-22 (IRMP)

- 9.1 The Service's 12 Tonne Fire Engine project was closed in February 2021. WSFRS determined to upgrade its fleet with two sizes of fire engine - 18 tonne Super Rescue Pump (SRP) and 12 tonne Medium Rescue Pump (MRP) vehicles. All fire engines are fully deployed and now in service and will be managed, reviewed and monitored under warranty, as part of the WSFRS fleet/vehicle maintenance cycle.
- 9.2 The Prevention 2020 project was created to restructure the Prevention Team and broaden the community safety offer beyond fire and road safety. The Prevention 2020 closure report was approved in November 2020 on schedule. As reported in the Cause of Concern 1 previously, there were six additional posts, funded through the improvement plan added within the Prevention Team. The structure was revised and implemented to incorporate the new roles as well as the activity within the Prevention 2020 project. This included delivery of benefits such as increased prevention capacity, upskilling of the Service's operational crews, as well as consistency across prevention delivery.
- 9.3 IRMP 2022 development has moved into delivery phase and a strategic steering group has been developed to ensure the appropriate momentum is applied to the risk analysis and associated staff and public engagement. This includes forward planning for the required scrutiny and governance for its approval and publication.

10 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 10.1 Updates 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 agreed WSFRS budget is invested in frontline services including firefighting, rescue operations and community safety activity. This is summarised as the following:

- 12.1.1 Firefighting and rescue operations: £22,011,154

12.1.2 Community Fire Safety: £4,352,772

12.1.3 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.

Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, **Chief Fire Officer**.
sabrina.cohen-hatton@westsussex.gov.uk

Appendices: None

Background papers: None