
Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

18 June 2021

Priority Programme Update

Report by Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Summary

This report provides an overview of the priority programmes of work during Quarter 4 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 HMICFRS revisited the service in February 2021 to review progress against the Causes of Concern and latest revisit letter from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services was published on 21 May 2021.
- 1.3 The focus of the revisit was the causes of concern that were reported after their inspection of West Sussex FRS in November 2018. The inspectors said they continue to see 'significant' improvement in areas where the service needed to improve.
- 1.4 HMICFRS round two inspection for West Sussex Fire & Rescue is still forecast to commence in Autumn 2021/22.

2 Cause of Concern 1 - Preventing Fire and Other Risks

- 2.1 Only one outstanding action remains in relation to this Cause of Concern with considerable work having been undertaken to enable the service to recommence the activity as COVID restrictions lift.
- 2.2 The delivery of Safe and Well Visits (SWV) and Safeguarding training has been evaluated using observed visits, this is to assure the service of the quality of the visits. Volunteers have been surveying a sample over the telephone in Quarter 4.
- 2.3 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 Volunteers' skills and training to offer and engage them in appropriate and meaningful activities.
- 2.4 Volunteer Recruitment, as previously highlighted, has been delayed until Spring 2021. Volunteers have largely been self-isolating through the pandemic which has proved a challenge with existing volunteers as they understandably are being more cautious in the community engagement, as well as limited opportunities for them to undertake community work.
- 2.5 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. Volunteer recruitment will commence in May 2021 with a soft launch, and in June 2021 there will be a more widely publicised campaign.

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 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. This balance is key to ensure the service maximises the resources to the work requirements based on the required skills across the role maps.
- 3.3 Utilising the apprenticeship levy will allow WSFRS to offer an entry route into the service 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. This has also been further strengthened with further government funding which has been allocated to support protection activity.

4 IT system for Prevention & Protection

- 4.1 The Farynor implementation project is now closed and the system now in place to be used under business as usual.

- 4.2 The Prevention Team went live with Farynor on 7 October 2020, Protection went live on the 19 November 2020 and Response followed on the 7 December 2020.
- 4.3 The development of the Premises Risk Management module continues with delivery on track to be completed in Quarter 1 2021/22. All future development will be undertaken through the Information & Systems group.
- 4.4 The legacy system, Terian was fully decommissioned by 31 March 2021 when the contract ended demonstrating efficiency and delivery of the project objectives.
- 4.5 As part of the ongoing improvements, all underpinning IT systems are being reviewed to ensure that the service is replacing and upgrading these in a timely manner.

5 People Action Plan

- 5.1 Our 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.
- 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 Values and behaviours have now been linked to National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) framework and embedded in all staff appraisals.
- 6.2 Further Mental Health Awareness Workshops were 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 on track to be rolled out and will be compulsory for all WSFRS managers.
- 6.3 WSFRS staff commenced Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) training in Quarter 4 and will be qualified by the end of Quarter 1 2021/22. The service currently, in addition to the above, have two qualified MHFAs within the service.
- 6.4 There is strong leadership at all levels of the organisation and the service promotes strong values in terms of learning, support, listening and development. The service is striving for a culture that promotes psychological safety, that supports difference and seeks to promote talent in a way that recognises different skills, experience and encourages change and adaptability. The service also knows that it needs to help prepare its leaders in a way that will ensure it can work across multiple disciplines and expand their knowledge in readiness for future changes to the organisation.
- 6.5 The service has reviewed senior leadership positions in order to underline its commitment to continuous improvement, career opportunity and operational preparedness. This review has resulted in some Area and Group Manager moves ensuring greater resilience and shared learning for the service.

- 6.6 These changes allow for future flexibility between roles and responsibilities, to ensure colleagues are genuinely able to work across disciplines and across the service and to create a greater awareness between teams. It also clearly signals the intent to further invest in identification of the support and development provided to these moves and the firm commitment the service has made to all colleagues to enhance and support personal development whatever role they undertake as part of the organisation.

7 Cause for Concern 4 - Ensuring Fairness and Promoting Diversity

- 7.1 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 inaugural meeting was held on 16 March 2021.
- 7.2 A full review of the Promotions Board Process has been undertaken, following the listening group feedback which highlighted staff dissatisfaction in the fairness of the current process. This has been implemented to ensure that staff are promoted in a fair and consistent manner. The promotions Board has been replaced with Assessment Centres to which 92% of respondents confirmed was a fairer and more transparent process. The service is currently undertaking a Station Manager Assessment Centre to ensure succession planning and creating a talent pool for future leadership roles.
- 7.3 A Dignity and Respect Framework is in development, which is aimed at outlining the expectations of staff, managers and senior leaders, the roll out is being supported in conjunction with the County Council.
- 7.4 A Shadow Board has been implemented, aimed at improving the connection and engagement between staff and the principal officers. It will also enable the Service Executive Board (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 underrepresented in the service. The first meeting was held on 22 March 2021, this has been positively received by staff on the board as well as other FRS recognising this and wanting to adopt this approach in its services.
- 7.5 A review of the current recruitment and attraction methods for WSFRS new recruits has been undertaken and has been embedded into the new firefighter recruitment process launched on 5 March 2021. The success of the changes will be known 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 and progress is now being made. Engagement sessions with appropriate members is to be planned once restrictions lift. This is a really key activity when it comes to developing the IRMP.
- 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.

- 8.3 This quarter has seen a considerable amount of work being undertaken in relation to a variety of special appliances that are planned within the capital programme for replacement ahead of the next IRMP. This includes consideration of options appraisal, the associated risks, vehicle location and ensuring that the operational functionality is future proofed.

9 Integrated Risk Management Plan 2018-22 (IRMP)

- 9.1 In strengthening the collaborative approach for the 4 Fire (4F programme) the service has led and implemented an Operational Alignment board in order to generate a specific focus on the key operational/interoperability benefits between Kent, East Sussex (ESFRS) and Surrey Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS). This will be a significant benefit as the service adds ESFRS as an additional partner to the Joint Fire Control later this year.
- 9.2 A considerable amount of work has been undertaken with regards to ensuring that the specialist vehicles that the service has are fully reviewed to ensure they still meet the risk in the county. This review specifically included the High Volume Pump; 4x4 capability; Aerial Ladder Platforms and Bulk Water Carriers.

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 WSFRS's £26.8 million 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.

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Appendices: None

Background papers: None