

Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

1 March 2024 – At a meeting of the Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Boram (Chairman)

Cllr Pendleton, Cllr Bence, Cllr Duncton, Cllr Joy (left at 12.11) and Cllr Patel

Apologies were received from Cllr Chowdhury and Sabrina Cohen-Hatton (Chief Fire Officer)

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Mark Andrews (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Peter Rickard (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Gary Ball (Area Manager)

30. Declarations of Interest

30.1 No interests were declared.

31. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

31.1 Resolved – that the Committee agrees the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2023 and that they be signed by the Chairman.

32. Responses to Recommendations

32.1 Resolved – that the Committee notes the responses.

33. Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Performance Report Quarter 3

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

33.2 Summary of responses to members' questions and comments: -

- There is no pattern to the recent accidental dwelling fires – targeted advice and broader communication campaigns are carried out by the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) to reduce these incidents which are carefully monitored to spot trends which would then influence future prevention advice or targeted safe and well activity
- There were no occasions where the FRS managed an unwanted fire signal that turned out to be a fire or other more serious incident
- Close monitoring of the impact of the unwanted fire signal policy and call challenging protocols are in place to ensure any such occurrence could be analysed and any lessons learned that were necessary
- There are no identified practices or activities within the FRS that evidence that Musculo-skeletal or mental ill-health exacerbate absences from work

- Intervention by the FRS prevented 30,000 people in Bognor Regis losing their electricity supply during a recent storm
- Although there was no measure that showed the reduction of properties with unsatisfactory fire safety audits, actions by the FRS (including audits, education and possible enforcement) had led to fewer incidents
- An advantage of the FRS being part of the County Council is that it and Adults' Services work closely together, with the FRS reporting safeguarding issues to Adults' Services and Adults' Services advising the FRS where safe & well visits are required
- Both full time and retained staff are trained in recognising safeguarding issues
- An internal report showed that the Joint Fire Control (JFC) performance has improved, but the same audit report also identified that there is no process for ensuring or providing assurance of performance data and no independent assurance over the operation of the JFC including IT systems. It was noted that these matters are being discussed with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service
- The FRS has people and human resources data that helps it identify areas for targeted recruitment campaigns for RDS and wholetime staff
- A shortfall in the number of retained fire fighters does not affect the adequate crewing of frontline engines
- There was a query on the breakdown of causes of sickness absence – **ACTION:** The FRS to consider if the Committee can be provided with figures separated into sickness due to work related and non-work related sickness, including those who left service on ill health grounds, providing no individuals could be identified by doing this

33.3 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Thanks the service for the work undertaken at the Bognor Regis substation incident saving the electricity of 30,000 people in that area
- ii. Requests further information on whether the increase in fire safety audits leads to an increase of unsatisfactory fire safety audits
- iii. Welcomes the work on safeguarding referrals with Adults' Services, noting how well this relationship works with both being under the same organisation
- iv. Notes that the actual figure for full shifts where there is adequate crewing on all immediate response frontline fire engines is likely to be higher due to issues with internal reporting mechanisms
- v. Requests a breakdown of areas within West Sussex so the service can target recruitment for retained staff
- vi. Asks the service to consider if sickness due to work related and non work related sickness, including those who have left the service on ill health, can be considered jointly with Reporting of Incidents, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) figures without identifying individuals
- vii. Asks that the service reviews the RIDDOR key performance indicator to one that reflects RIDDOR incidents

34. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 3 2023/24

34.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

34.2 Summary of members' comments: -

- The FRS is not included in the Corporate Risk Register as a mitigation against climate change as this is a service risk rather than corporate one
- The FRS takes great care of personal data
- The Committee questioned whether it has the information to look at whether the service delivers value for money

34.3 Resolved – that the Committee asks the service to consider how it can look at value for money going forward, possibly on an annual basis

35. Retained Duty System Task and Finish Group Progress Update

35.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Fire Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes).

35.2 Summary of responses to members' questions and comments: -

- The FRS receives an average of 40 enquiries a quarter about becoming retained fire fighters
- In the latest quarter, 22 had passed the physical test, seven more than needed
- The FRS supports retained staff that fail the test they need to pass to become full time to further develop their skills so they have a better chance of passing in future
- Whilst staff can move from being retained to full time, it is hoped that some that do also keep their retained duties
- There has been a 20% increase in female retained staff
- Retained staff want an improved structure for claiming for the work they do

35.3 Resolved – that the Committee

- i. Welcomes the additional performance measure proposed for this area
- ii. Will further assess this work through the reporting of the delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan and agreed to close the Task & Finish Group

36. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

36.1 Resolved – that the Committee notes the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

37. Work Programme

37.1 Resolved - that the Committee agrees its Work Programme.

38. Date of Next Meeting

38.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 17 June 2024 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Chairman