

Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee

17 June 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 Chowdhury and Cllr Patel

Apologies were received from Cllr Duncton and Cllr Joy

Absent:

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow

1. Election of Chairman

- 1.1 Cllr Boram was proposed as Chairman by Cllr Pendleton and seconded by Cllr Patel. There were no other nominations.
- 1.2 Resolved – that Cllr Boram is elected Chairman of the Committee for the year.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

- 2.1 Cllr Pendleton was proposed as Vice Chairman by Cllr Boram and seconded by Cllr Patel. There were no other nominations.
- 2.2 Resolved – that Cllr Pendleton is elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the year.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 No declarations were made.

4. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

- 4.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2024 are approved as a correct record and are signed by the Chairman.

5. Responses to Recommendations

- 5.1 Resolved – that the Committee: -
 - i. Requests an annual review of sickness to occur informally between Chief Fire Officer and Chairman of the Committee
 - ii. Notes the responses to recommendations

6. West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Estates Improvement Plan Progress Update

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

6.2 Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- To choose the four stations to be included in the first tranche of the improvement programme, a vigorous internal process took place to establish those most in need of updating that matched the programme's priorities and whose update would provide value for money
- The project has been set-up along similar lines to the Horsham Fire Station and Training Centre development with a dedicated project manager and a dedicated Estates Improvement Station Manager. This ensures open and transparent lines of communication between the Council and Fire & Rescue Service (FRS)
- The project follows Royal Institute of British Architects processes and best practice
- It is anticipated that stations will function as normal during works with the possible exception of Littlehampton where a different approach may be necessary when detailed plans for the station are known
- No stations will be moved or expanded
- Bognor Regis station covers a large footprint and will have a training facility that can be used by the community when not needed by the FRS
- Decarbonisation work on stations will take place separately from the improvement programme unless there are instances where the two can be combined
- There was a query about the number of staff that had undertaken equality & diversity training in last 12 months – **ACTION:** Chief Fire Officer to provide figures

6.3 Resolved – that the Committee welcomes the progress of the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Estates Improvement Programme.

7. **West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Annual Statement of Assurance 2023/24**

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

7.2 Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- The FRS has increased the percentage on unsatisfactory audits on last year by 25% and increased the number of audits undertaken
- The FRS takes enforcement action against any premises that have unsatisfactory audits
- To promote a more diverse workforce, the FRS has Equality & Diversity Inclusion Champions and an Equality & Diversity Inclusion Group. One aspect being looked at is uniforms for female officers, including those suitable as maternity wear.
- The Estates Improvement Plan should also help increase the diversity of the workforce
- The FRS is challenging perceived ideas of what a firefighter role involves in order to attract more people

- Positive action will be taken to get all groups to the same starting point with all recruitment based on merit
- Some of the time saved not attending false alarms can be spent attending community events promoting the FRS
- The FRS has increased the diversity of junior officers who work in the community (providing 3000 extra hours) and has a Diversity Inclusion Manager to increase the diversity knowledge of staff
- It was noted that one of the major incidents this year involved the safeguarding of a key substation from flooding. The Committee asked about the role and responsibilities of the Fire & Rescue Service in dealing with such instances. The Chief Fire Officer responded that Fire & Rescue Services does not have a specific responsibility and that the guidance from the Government has been requested but not received.

7.3 Resolved – that the Committee endorses the draft Statement of Assurance and congratulates the Cabinet Member and Chief Fire Officer and all staff in the Fire and Rescue Service on the excellent work of the previous year.

8. Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Performance Report Quarter 4

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

8.2 Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- The main cause of accidental dwelling fires is cooking, very few are attributed to batteries
- Critical special service incidents are reported to the Committee
- Of the small number of safeguarding issues not reported within 24 hours, some are only 30 minutes late – this is often because they are not reported till the next duty shift
- Although there has been an increase in retained duty system crewing availability it is not as good as the FRS would like, but a new project has been launched that is hoped will improve availability

8.3 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Formally congratulates the Targeted Education Team which was presented with a recognition award from the High Sheriff of West Sussex
- ii. Asks the Service to continue to ensure that work reflecting its rescue element is included in the annual Statement of Assurance

9. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 4 2023/24

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

9.2 Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- The underspend in the training budget was due to the training centre only coming online part way through the year – this underspend will not be repeated
- The time a firefighter spends on scene depends on the type of incident
- The FRS has vehicles that have facilities for handwashing, toilets and workstations
- Resource levels are set taking into account how many fire engines and firefighters are needed, response times and the number and size of significant incidents that might be expected at any one time
- Training is provided so that firefighters know what to do with contaminated equipment – nothing contaminated is allowed in a fire engine cab or a fire station and is professionally cleaned
- Fire stations have colour co-ordinated zones to show which areas are 'clean'
- Uptake of contamination training is good, and the Service also supports other fire services in the southeast in this area
- Corporate Risk 50 on Health & Safety is not part of the Fire & Rescue Service portfolio

9.3 Resolved – that the Committee asks Democratic Services to ensure it is clear which risks/key performance indicators are relevant for this meeting within the papers

10. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

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

11. Work Programme

11.1 Resolved – that the Committee notes its draft work programme.

12. Date of Next Meeting

12.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 26 September 2024 at 2.30pm.

The meeting ended at 12.05 pm

Chairman