

## **Fire & Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee**

2 December 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 (Left at 11:50am), Cllr Chowdhury (Left at 11:54am), Cllr Duncton and Cllr Patel

Absent: Cllr Markwell

Also in attendance: Cllr Crow, Gary Ball, Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Matt Cook and Sabrina Pennington-Down

### **22. Declarations of Interest**

22.1 None declared.

### **23. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee**

23.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024 are as approved as a correct record and are signed by the Chairman.

### **24. Urgent Matters**

24.1 No urgent matters were raised.

### **25. Responses to Recommendations**

25.1 Resolved – That the Committee notes the responses to recommendations from previous meetings.

### **26. Performance Report Quarter 2**

#### **Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Performance Report – Quarter 2**

26.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the strategic performance report that gives context to the Performance and Assurance Framework (copy appended to the signed minutes).

26.2 A summary of responses to the committee members' comments and questions are below.

26.3 Concern was raised that the seasonal work done by the prevention team is not publicised enough and need to raise its profile. There was an emphasis on communication with vulnerable people for seasonal work. There are seasonal campaigns done by the National Fire Chiefs Council ("NFCC") that the Fire and Rescue Service support, and scheduling by the

NFCC that is used. Also, messages are sent out based on the weather.  
**ACTION:** Chief Fire Officer will reflect the seasonality in the Annual Statement of Assurance.

26.4 The Committee highlighted the importance of home visits, especially with older residents. Ensuring the safety of their residence supports the stay-at-home policy from Adult Social Care.

26.5 A question was raised over the figure for Core Measure 10 (year 24/25). **ACTION:** Clarification to be given to the Committee.

26.6 The highest risk buildings are the one that are inspected for the fire audits. Core Measurement 11 is looking at the risk programme and there would be too many buildings that comply to measure. Questions were raised whether CM11 could show the decrease in high-risk buildings if they start to comply after a fire audit. **ACTION:** CM11 will be discussed as part of work programme planning.

26.7 It is important that referrals from other organisations for safeguarding are effectively being responded to. Core Measure 19, 20 and 23 will remain a priority for the council and will be monitored.

26.8 A variation of factors can cause a slight delay in response times. The Fire and Rescue Service resources are spread across the county to prevent this and all calls are always responded to. Parking is a challenge with responding to calls and there are crews promoting parking arrangements to help ease this issue.

26.9 There are two systems in place to alert retained firefighters. A call comes into the control room and the control room operators will page the firefighters. There is an expected 4 to 5 minutes response time to the fire station. Assurance was given that the pagers were reliable, and that Core Measure 16 monitors the response to 999 calls.

## **Performance and Resources Report – Quarter 2**

26.10 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the performance and resources report that sets out the corporate performance, finance, workforce, risk, and capital programme positions as at the end of September 2024 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

26.11 A summary of responses to the committee members' comments and questions are below.

26.12 There is a standard fitness level that must be met and maintained during the training for new firefighters. The training also includes competency assessments. There is no regulatory body specifically for the training of firefighters, but there is NFCC guidance, and it is assessed during inspections.

26.13 Concern was raised over the cyber threats and significant security issues for the Fire and Rescue Service. An inspectorate will run an inspection based on cyber threat to test the services security.

26.14 Resolved – That the Committee: -

1. Requests that reference to the seasonal schedule regarding prevention as promoted by the NFCC be considered in reporting by the service. NB: there is already reference to this in the Community Risk Management Plan.
2. Requests that the figure in Core Measure 11 is to be discussed further as part of work programme planning outside of the Committee.
3. Requests that the figure in Core Measure 10 be checked to clarify why the final column in 24/25 is zero.
4. Notes the awareness of the potential for cyber threats as a risk for the Committee.

## **27. Council Plan and Draft Budget Proposals 2025/26**

27.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the draft budget report that details West Sussex County Council's budget pressures, reductions, and Capital Programme (copy appended to the signed minutes).

27.2 A summary of responses to the committee members' comments and questions are below.

27.3 Concern was raised over the National Insurance rise for employers, the council settlement, and the impact of the recent government budget on West Sussex County Council. The full impact of the National Insurance rise is unknown as well as how the impact will be covered or disputed. There is a potential white paper on devolution. Council tax cannot be raised more than 4.99% and this will have an effect on the County Council and district councils as well.

27.4 The Fire and Rescue Service is running at £41 per person in West Sussex which is below the national average of £46 per person. The service is lean and efficient.

27.5 Resolved – That the Committee: -

1. Raised concern over National Insurance changes, inflation, and the potential of the financial settlement due in December 2024.

## **28. HM Inspection Report**

28.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the inspection report that summarises the inspections findings, grades and recommendations (copy appended to the signed minutes).

28.2 Cllr Crow adds that the grading system has changed from the last report. There is now an additional grade of 'adequate' that sits above 'needs improvement' and below 'good'.

28.2 A summary of responses to the committee members' comments and questions are below.

28.3 The Committee acknowledges the hard work that has gone into the service to improve it. There are significant improvements in the culture and the psychological safety of the service. The 8 areas of potential improvement will be focused on. The Committee notes that the service is on a pathway for continuous improvement, and changes in communities will require continuous monitoring and adjustments within and by the service.

28.4 The inclusive recruitment targets underrepresented groups and groups that might not have considered it, alongside everyone else. Once people are recruited, they are judged equally based on a common criteria. The aim is to help people to the starting line, but once they are there, everyone is equal.

28.5 Resolved – That the Committee: -

1. Formally congratulates the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service and Cabinet Members, including support from wider West Sussex County Council colleagues, for an excellent inspection.

## **29. Community Risk Management Plan Update**

29.1 The Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue, Cllr Crow, introduced the Community Risk Management Plan update report that provides an update on the delivery of the plan (copy appended to the signed minutes).

29.2 A summary of responses to the committee members' comments and questions are below.

29.3 The local risk management plan helps drive the corporate goals into the stations. This shows how individual actions feed into the bigger picture. The Committee recognises that the Community Risk Management Plan show how their work affect the local stations.

29.4 The Committee recognises the work that goes into training for the safe and effective implementation of new equipment and thanks the service for ensuring the safety of their teams and the public.

## **30. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny**

31.1 The Committee requests a separate report for the lessons learnt from Grenfell and the industrial estate fire to be added to the statement of assurance. The policy that are affected by these incidents may need to be reflected on.

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

### **31. Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

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

### **32. Requests for Call-in**

32.1 There have been no requests for call-in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

### **33. Date of Next Meeting**

33.1 The next meeting of the Committee will take place on 6 March 2025 at 2:30 pm.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Chairman