1 The role of the retained fire fighter

Following the findings of the Sickness Absence in the Fire and Rescue Service Task Group members had requested further information on the role of the retained fire fighter. We were pleased to welcome Derek Cross and Chris Martin, Station Manager of Lydney Fire Station, to provide members with that overview. Members were told about the difficulty in establishing a work/life balance with retained fire fighters having to be 5 minutes away from the station when on call up to 120 hours a week.

It is important that the work undertaken by the retained fire service is recognised and that employers and the public have a greater understanding of the work they do. The committee has recommended that the retained fire service is promoted to all members of the council by setting up a display on the landing on a full council day. Similarly we recognise the importance of promoting within districts and work is being done to set up further presentations at district councils.

There was much discussion over 8 minute response times and the challenge of meeting this when retained fire fighters were 5 minutes away from the station. We have asked to receive details of fire fighters response times. We were also informed of alternative ways of co-responding with a trial at Chipping Camden where fire fighters are taking a first response vehicle home so they could go straight to any incident. The committee is interested in knowing how this project is progressing and have asked to receive a report on this in 6 months time.

2 Policing in the 21st Century: reconnecting police and people

The committee had a discussion around how it should respond to the proposals made in the Home Office consultation document. Andy Champness, Chief Executive of Gloucestershire Police Authority, provided a police authority perspective on the proposed changes.

While we noted the questions raised throughout the discussion, we recognise that it is important to consider how the proposals would be workable within Gloucestershire.

Members were given details around the proposed police and crime panels that would be established in each force area to scrutinise the proposed new commissioner with its principle role to:

- Advise the commissioner on the proposed policing plans and budget
- Trigger a referendum on the policing precept, if required
• Hold confirmation hearings for the post of Chief Constable and for other appointments made by the commissioner to his or her staff;
• Appoint interim commissioners, when required

It was suggested by some members that the Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with extended responsibility, would be able to take on this role. The committee already has wide representation and we suggest that it would be the most appropriate forum for this examination. Lead members met on 7 September to put together a response to the consultation document which included this suggestion.

3 Community safety partnerships – understanding their role and funding
We were pleased to receive the report of the task group in advance of Cabinet on 14 September. This scrutiny work has been undertaken at a time of fast moving change with radical new proposals from the coalition government and unprecedented pressure on public sector finances. With such uncertainty about national policies regarding community safety the task group has not tried to make detailed recommendations, but have given useful suggestions on the best way forward. The task group believed that further work could be undertaken in making responsibilities clear, streamlining structures, making the best use of limited resources and getting the message across that Gloucestershire is a safe place to live.

4 Performance monitoring
We received reports to allow us to monitor budget and performance information for the Safer and Stronger Communities’ Thematic Partnership and the Community Safety Directorate for quarter 1 2010-11. The committee noted that the local area agreement target for road safety was unlikely to be met but that Gloucestershire’s performance was still good. It was expected that there would be a lag in any change in performance due to the grant reduction.

The committee once again reiterated its concerns over the FireControl project with it being behind schedule nationally. In the performance data the committee has received we noted the risk of there being a failure to mobilise due to the delays in the move to the regional control centre. Mobilisation equipment should have been updated but failures are now being patched up utilising old equipment as there is a cost to updating hardware and software. Jon Hall, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, informed us that it would be 2 to 3 years before the need to update was critical.

5 New scrutiny structure one year on
The committee received the report inviting members to put forward their views on the new scrutiny structure - what had gone well and what could be improved on in the context of the new financial reality? While we understand that these comments will be included within the report being made to full council on 24 November, below are some brief points brought up in discussion:
The importance of joint arrangements allowing district members to gain valuable insight into the county council and for information to be exchanged.

Scrutiny had an important role in ensuring that the people of Gloucestershire are provided with the best services possible in the face of a difficult financial future.

The value of the ‘one page strategy’ was discussed; it helped to ensure that scrutiny was narrow, deep and focussed.

There were concerns that by going to OSMC to ask to set up a task group there was a delay in the process.

There was some discussion over the value of OSMC, with some members stating that while there was a need to ensure there was no duplication of work, this need not be done by a committee.

The committee believes that it still needs to receive detailed service based performance information to ensure there is no delay in picking up issues.

Members value the officer support ensuring that members are provided with up to date accurate information. It was felt that officer support, particularly from Democratic Services, was vitally important.

The committee recognised the need to have an ongoing balance between looking at county council and partnership issues.

Cllr Kathy Williams
Chair