

# **FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 27 May 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.**

## **PRESENT**

Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair)    Cllr Brian Tipper  
Cllr Mark Mackenzie-        Cllr Pam Tracey MBE  
Charrington  
Cllr Wendy Thomas

## **Substitutes:**

**Apologies:**                    Cllr Bernard Fisher and Cllr Vernon Smith

**In Attendance:**            Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer (GFRS)  
Cllr Dave Norman, Cabinet Member for Fire, Community Safety and Libraries (GCC)  
James Greirson, Head of Logistics and Resources (GFRS)  
Adam Godding, Fleet Operations Manager (GCC)  
Mark Hanson, Service Director (Edge Public Solutions)

## **41. APOLOGIES**

Cllrs Bernie Fisher and Vernon Smith were absent from the meeting.

## **42. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

## **43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

## **44. PROPOSALS FOR THE SHARED USE OF NEWENT AND DURSLEY COMMUNITY FIRE STATIONS**

Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, introduced the report on proposals for the shared use of Newent and Dursley community fire stations with Gloucestershire Police, highlighting that this was one of their areas of focus for joint collaborative working.

James Grierson, Head of Logistics and Resources, GFRS, explained that the following 6 community fire stations had been considered for use by Gloucestershire Police: Dursley, Stroud, Stow, Cirencester, Newent and Winchcombe.

Members noted that interest had been shown by the police in Dursley, Winchcombe and Newent stations. However, having met with the police at Dursley Fire Station

for a second time, and looked at costings, it was felt that the station did not provide the space needed for the police to operate.

It was understood that the current preference was to use Newent Fire Station and that the next stage would be looking into the details with the police for its shared use.

It was explained that there would be no cost implications for GCC or GFRS for the shared use of Newent Fire Station; there would be no change of identity to the fire station; and no impact on operations for GFRS from the station. The shared use of the premises would also generate an income from the police.

The Cabinet Member for Fire, Community Safety and Libraries gave his support to the shared use of Newent Fire Station. He explained that the station had been shared with the ambulance service in the past and therefore with minor works an area of the station could be made fit for purpose for use by the constabulary. He added that Newent had suffered since the closure of its police station, with the police currently based in the library, and therefore it would be appropriate to proceed as a good facility for the police and to further fire and police collaboration.

One member requested that the full assessments for each station be provided.

Another member asked whether there were any plans to share the use of any more stations, and asked what happens with the capital money saved from the closing down of local police stations?

In response it was explained that the police contributed full capital investment to make an area in a fire station suitable for their use. It was added that discussions with police were ongoing on the use of further shared premises however each station would need to be explored regarding its suitability for use by the constabulary.

The member continued to ask whether it was important to be proactive, rather than reactive, with the development of joint premises?

In response, it was explained that as part of the Fire Cover Review, there would be an analysis on fire station locations. Should it be discovered that locations were in the wrong places, conversations would be held with partners on the location of stations going forward and as to their collaborative use.

Another member asked for further detail as to why Dursley Fire Station was no longer being considered for use by the constabulary? In response it was explained that since the report to this Committee was written, the costings and space at the station had been assessed, and it was decided that there was not enough space to accommodate the police vehicles at the station. The costings and space were now being assessed at Newent Fire Station, where the police would be using the area previously accommodated by the ambulance service. It was also understood that Winchcombe Fire Station was being considered for use as a police point, accommodated by one police officer and one vehicle.

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One member queried what the next stage was for these projects and requested confirmation that there would be no need for a secure unit at these fire stations for use by the police.

It was explained, in response, that there were no plans for secure units, and that the police were keen to progress with Newent Fire Station sooner rather than later.

It was requested that progress with the shared use of Newent and Winchcombe Fire Stations be presented to the Committee in six months' time.

One member commented that at Cirencester, the police would be needing a new base, and queried whether the fire station on the ring road could become a blue light constabulary base?

It was explained, in response, that Cirencester Fire Station had been considered by the police for the second time in the last six months, however it was determined that it would not accommodate the amount of staff and vehicles required, and would require redevelopment. They were therefore considering other options first.

Another member expressed the view that Newent Fire Station would be an ideal place for collaborative use and asked whether it would be a flagship station?

In response it was stated that it would not be. Previously the police had shared the use of Lydney Fire Station before finding an alternative premise.

It was queried whether the police would contribute to the payment of utilities. In response it was agreed that they would, just as the ambulance service at Dursley Fire Station pay GFRS lease as well. It was added that Audit would expect a clear outline of costs to each service using a joint facility.

One member suggested that it could be useful to organise a visit to the fire stations.

The report was noted by the Committee.

#### **45. GFRS NET ZERO CARBON REPORT**

Mark Hanson, Service Director, Edge Public Solutions, and Adam Godding, Fleet Operations Manager, GCC, introduced the GFRS Net Zero Carbon report, which had been written in collaboration with John Townsend, Corporate Fleet Unit Manager, GCC.

Mark Hanson explained that as a starting point, an assessment of the current GFRS fleet was carried out and a plan was developed which set out at what point a vehicle would need replacing, which would enable financial forward planning.

It was understood that of the GFRS light vehicle fleet, half were Euro 6, which were less polluting, and half were older vehicles, which were more polluting. These would

be the focus of immediate replacement, ideally with electric vehicles, however this would be dependent on charging infrastructure.

In terms of the heavy vehicle fleet, it was explained that current opportunities to use electric vehicles would be extremely expensive, and that battery technology improvements over the next five years would provide more of an opportunity for these types of vehicles to be considered in the future.

Members' attention was drawn to table 5.4 in the report which detailed the current fleet and proposals for their replacement and how much this would save in CO2 emissions.

It was understood that GCC had started to consider the use of greener fuels, such as Hydro Treated Vegetable Oil (HVO). Vehicles would need to be Euro 6 in order to use this type of fuel. As this type of fuel was not in the mainstream, consideration would need to be given as to where it could be stored for use. It was hoped that a further update on this project could be provided to the Committee in six months' time.

Members were also advised of GCC's plans for offsetting, as well looking into the use of hydrogen technology, which could be an option for the heavy vehicles. However, it was explained that this would not be available in the short term as the infrastructure was not currently available.

GFRS was currently trialling the use of solar supplementary panels fitted to a vehicle. The results so far seemed promising in terms of reducing emissions and increasing battery life.

Another option being considered was the location of vehicles, such as by spreading pool car use around the County, which would make them more efficient in their use.

It was requested that the total savings on carbon emissions on all vehicles be included in the next progress report.

One member queried whether the use of HVO would save money? In response it was explained that the focus was currently purely on carbon emissions, however at this stage the costs appeared broadly similar, with a caveat on storage and infrastructure.

One member commented on the conundrum being faced by the Council in terms of reducing carbon emissions whilst also being mindful of money.

Another member suggested that as technology advances, the cost of carbon neutral energy production should be cost effective.

A further member stated that a new rolling procurement programme had begun at Cotswold District Council on refuse trucks which would ensure they would be able to get the latest technology in terms of carbon and operationally.

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One member sought clarification on one of the statistics in Appendix One of the report, relating to the age of vehicles. In response it was understood that 46 percent of vehicles were over 10 years old.

The Chief Fire Officer added that whilst additional money had been secured from Cabinet to replace fleet vehicles, due to the pandemic and the crisis in Ukraine, delivery on new vehicles could take a significant amount of time.

One member highlighted the importance of 'yard sticks' to check progress was being made in terms of carbon reduction.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to the Committee that agreement had been given to implement a new fleet management system which would bring GFRS and GCC up to date, and would provide correct CO2 measurements. Additionally, the new asset management plan, which was to be agreed by Council, would be key in dictating the replacement years for vehicles.

The Lead Cabinet Member added that whilst some of the GFRS vehicles were getting on in age, they were incredibly well maintained, noting that the aerial platform GFRS donated to the Ukraine was 20 years old but looked brand new. He gave credit to the in-house servicing team.

One member commented that whilst the report had looked at GFRS vehicles, it did not consider the carbon emissions of other equipment used by GFRS, such as pumps, as well as energy use. It was requested that these be included in the next progress report to the Committee.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **46. HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE**

Mark Preece delivered a presentation to the Committee, updating members on the HMICFRS Inspection. It was understood that a full discussion on the inspection results would be held by scrutiny at a later meeting.

Members were informed that at a hot debrief in December 2021, the Lead Cabinet Member and CFO were notified that two causes for concern had been identified. This had then triggered a number of actions in response.

A resourcing plan process was agreed with the Chief Executive and an additional resourcing summary produced, which identified 39 new posts to be recruited over 2 years. It was noted though that recruiting to these roles would take time.

The types of roles which would be recruited to were explained to members. They included a dedicated role for dealing with Freedom of Information requests, as well as for civic events.

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One member queried whether there would be a Deputy Chief Fire Officer post, in addition to two Assistant Chief Fire Officer posts? It was clarified, in response, that the principal officer team would consist of a Chief Fire Officer, a Deputy Chief Fire Officer and one Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

A further question was asked regarding the ratio between operational and support staff. In response it was estimated that just under 500 staff were employed by GFRS, 40 of which were support staff, however the numbers recruited to these types of post would increase. The majority of staff were operational given the nature of the service, with 120 whole-time firefighters.

Members were advised that more resilience would be provided to the Business Planning and Performance Team, with recruitment to Green Book posts to support the CRMP and health and safety. There would be an increase to the number of trainers within the Organisational Development and Transformation Team to increase the delivery of training on national and other guidance. Additional community safety advisors would be recruited, as well as a Road Safety Coordinator. Four dedicated station managers would be recruited. There would also be a role focussed on pensions.

One member queried the number of officers in post who would have gold command. In response it was explained that there were three qualified officers, and there would always be a principal officer available.

The CFO continued on to explain the causes for concern that had been identified. The first one outlined that the service had not done enough since the last inspection to embed its values and associated behaviours, and promote a positive workplace culture. The second determined that the service had not done enough since the last inspection to improve understanding of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and remove barriers to establishing EDI in the service.

In response to these causes for concern, an action plan was produced by GFRS by 28 February 2022, setting out how the service was going to address the issues identified. As part of developing this action plan, the National Fire Chiefs Council was engaged with on best practice, and a peer to peer dialogue was established with the leadership team at West Sussex Fire Service as to how they had addressed issues with culture previously.

Members were advised that next steps included station visits to all locations and departments, briefing the wider service and staff, and setting up an account for staff to email anonymously to raise issues.

One member sought clarification as to how emails could be sent anonymously, whilst another sought clarification as to the focus of the HMICFRS inspection.

The Lead Cabinet Member stressed that there was nothing in the debrief or previous inspection report which indicted the public would not receive the service it expected. However, he acknowledged that the service had suffered over the past 5

or so years to build up that back office support, and this had been identified by the inspections. He believed the service was on a significant transformation journey.

One member commented that the service needed to be looked at as a whole.

Another member stated that the Committee's role was to scrutinise the CFO and Lead Cabinet Member to ensure a continued upwards trajectory.

One member queried the efforts being made to ensure staff were participating with the action plan, particularly underrepresented staff. In response, the CFO explained that as GFRS had responded to the causes for concern and created the action plan, more staff had been engaged with and the plan could be updated as a living document. The EDI group and other groups would also be engaged with to ensure they had that challenging and constructive feedback.

He continued to assert that the Council recognised the value of GFRS and would help the service get to where it needed to be. It could take 5 years to address the finance and culture of the service but he was committed to that challenge.

#### **47. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA AND UPDATES**

Mark Preece provided the Committee with an update on the latest performance data.

It was noted that the rate of Safe and Well visits remained below target and therefore this was an area of focus. However, a high proportion of the visits carried out were with the most vulnerable, which was better than target. It was understood that the expectation was for whole time stations to carry out 15 visits per watch per month, however this was difficult as visits had become complex and longer, often resulting in referrals to other partners.

Members were informed that the timeliness of responding to accidental dwelling fires had increased, however remained within tolerance of target. It was noted that the service always mobilised as soon as possible, however response times depended on the location of the fire and traffic. A pre-alert system was being used so that as soon as the geographical area of a fire had been identified, firefighters could mobilise whilst fire control gathered further information.

Members noted that the percent of operational incident commanders within 2 yearly requalification target remained within tolerance of target, and that 5 members of staff whose qualifications were due to expire would be booked on to a course as soon as possible.

Attention was drawn to performance relating to strategic risk, which would improve in the future.

One member asked a question regarding the benchmarking report, in terms of whether retained firefighters were being relied on too heavily, causing stress and

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strain? In response it was explained that the fire cover analysis would commence this year which would look at the crew and models for optimum ways of working. Proposals would be brought back to this Committee.

In response to a further question, it was understood that a balance needed to be struck between operational response and prevention. It was also noted that whilst a comparison could be made between safe and well visits carried out by different fire services, not all safe and well visits were carried out the same by each area.

One member suggested it would be useful to understand who the comparator services were that were used for the benchmarking report.

#### **48. WORK PLAN 2022**

The following items were added to the work plan for future consideration by the Committee:

- An update on the shared use of Newent and Winchcombe stations;
- An update on GRFS plans for net zero carbon, to include wider aspects such as energy use and equipment; and
- Motion 901 – Road Safety in Gloucestershire.

#### **49. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The dates of future meetings were noted.

### **CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 12.20 pm