

FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 11 November 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

Cllr Bernard Fisher Cllr Brian Tipper
Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair) Cllr Pam Tracey MBE
Cllr Mark Mackenzie-
Charrington (Vice-Chair)

Substitutes: Cllr John Bloxsom
 Cllr Alan Preest

Apologies: Cllr Vernon Smith and Cllr Wendy Thomas

In Attendance

63. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Wendy Thomas and Vernon Smith. Cllr John Bloxsom substituted at the meeting for Cllr Thomas, and Cllr Alan Preest substituted at the meeting for Cllr Smith.

64. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2022 were approved.

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

66. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington was elected as Vice-Chair of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee.

67. UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH GFRS AND CONSTABULARY/PCC COLLABORATION

Nick Evans, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), delivered a verbal update on progress with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) and Gloucestershire Constabulary collaboration.

Members were informed that the Emergency Services Collaboration Board had now met on several occasions, at which GFRS, Gloucestershire Constabulary and, at

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the most recent meeting, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST) were represented.

Members noted that GFRS and the Constabulary had been working together as part of the Safer Streets programme, which included fire officers taking part in holistic anti-social behaviour training, and both partners working together operationally, alongside landlords and local authorities, to identify and target the issues.

GFRS and the Constabulary had also been working together to provide preventative education to communities on fire safety and prevention of crime, ensuring the coordination of information provided.

Collaboration on road safety was ongoing. It was understood that education was critical in preventing deaths and serious injury on roads. A new Road Safety Coordinator had been employed by GFRS to coordinate the 'What If' programme, which was delivered to schools, joint with the Constabulary.

GFRS and the Constabulary had been collaborating on table-top exercises to ensure lessons were learnt from other areas on dealing with major incidents, and fire officers had attended a local police search management course to enable them to support the police in finding missing people.

In terms of leadership, the Committee was informed that GFRS colleagues had attended leadership courses run by the Constabulary, and that both partners had been involved in each other's recruitment processes for senior officers.

It was announced, in terms of collaboration on the estates programme, that agreement had been reached for Newent and Winchcombe Fire Stations to become joint Police and Fire Stations. Nick Evans welcomed this opportunity for increased joint working, which would improve the safety and security of local residents, provide increased visibility, and increase the security of stations.

Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, echoed the comments on the strong relationship between GFRS, the Constabulary and the OPCC, particularly in terms of their joint working operationally, on leadership, and on community safety.

Several members praised the collaborative work being undertaken by GFRS and the Constabulary.

One member asked how the public could be made aware of the joint Police and Fire Stations.

Nick Evans replied that police vehicles would be visible at the stations, as well as signage, and police officers would be more visible in the local communities.

One member sought reassurance that there would not be secure custody suites within the joint stations.

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In response, it was understood that the only secure custody suite available within Gloucestershire was located at the police headquarters. This was due to legal requirements and the need to provide a range of support to those taken into custody, such as mental health support, and drug and alcohol support.

Reassurance was also provided, in response to a further question, that the joint stations would retain their community aspects.

One member asked for advice relating to a policing issue within their division. Nick Evans agreed to discuss the matter with the member outside of the meeting.

It was queried whether the Constabulary had considered the joint use of Cheltenham West Fire Station. Nick Evans agreed to take away and consider this suggestion.

One member sought reassurance that the policing element within the communities where the joint stations would be located would be retained. In response, it was explained that the joint stations would enable police officers to be based within the communities rather than elsewhere, and that police officer visibility would therefore increase in these areas. The joint stations would also provide the opportunity to expand the use of the special constabulary and volunteers in these communities.

Clarification was sought as to the grade of fire officers attending the leadership courses provided by the Police at the Sabrina Centre in Berkeley. In response it was understood that it was generally middle managers that attended the courses, and that the courses taught general leadership skills rather than job specific.

It was requested that a short briefing note be produced summarising the verbal update that had been provided at this meeting to enable members to effectively scrutinise the information.

It was also requested that a further update on progress with collaboration between blue light services be provided in a few months' time at a future Committee meeting.

68. MOTION 901 - ROAD SAFETY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Philip Williams, Assistant Director of Traffic and Transport, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), presented the report on recent road collisions and their causations within the County. The report was attached as a supplementary to the agenda for this meeting.

The report had been requested as part of Motion 901 – Road Safety in Gloucestershire, which was agreed by full Council at its meeting on 18 May 2022. Full details of the motion were included on the agenda for this meeting.

Members were presented with the key findings following an analysis of data on road collisions in Gloucestershire over the last ten years. Members were reminded that each of the statistics represented a person affected in some way by a collision.

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It was understood that data from the ten years up to 2022 indicated only a marginal fall in fatalities, however a significant increase in people seriously injured in road collisions. On average, 25 people a year died on Gloucestershire roads, whilst almost 300 were seriously injured, and a further 842 on average slightly injured per year.

It was noted that a high proportion of deaths occurred on trunk roads, such as the A417. 48% of fatalities were on single carriageway roads with a 60mph speed limit, with the highest proportion of people killed in the Cotswold district in Gloucestershire between 2019 and 2021. However, the highest proportion of pedestrian and cyclists killed or seriously injured (KSI's) occurred in Gloucester and Cheltenham. These figures reflected the need for a differentiated road safety strategy for Gloucestershire that would encompass the high proportion of car users within rural areas, as well as the significant numbers of people travelling by walking or cycling in urban areas.

Members were informed that, based on evidence collected at the scene of collisions, 48% of collisions were related to speed in Gloucestershire, which was similar to the national picture. It was explained that as cars had become larger, it had become easier for people to drive faster without realising. This was particularly a concern for younger and older drivers who were more vulnerable in terms of their perception of risk.

Philip Williams continued to explain that this data had informed the Council's draft road safety policy. A public consultation on the draft policy was launched in Summer 2022, which received over 500 responses. Cabinet would be considering a report to adopt the draft policy at its meeting on 23 November 2022.

Members noted that this year the Council had launched the Community Speed Watch Fund, in collaboration with the OPCC, as well as the Community Approaches to Road Safety toolkit.

The Committee was provided with an overview of the Vision Zero and Safe System approach, which informed the draft road safety policy. The aspiration was for there to be zero, or as close to zero, fatalities or serious injuries on Gloucestershire's roads by 2050, with the aim for the number of KSI's to be reduced by half by 2032.

Members were informed of the collaborative approach to road safety in the County, with the refresh of the Gloucestershire Strategic Road Safety Partnership.

Members also noted the identification of hotspots for collisions within the County, which would be regularly reviewed to inform a programme of engineering works.

It was requested that an item on GFRS's approach to road safety, such as in education, prevention and responding to collisions, be included on the agenda for the next Committee meeting.

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One member commented that it would be useful to have sight of the data for the number of vehicles registered in Gloucestershire and the population for the County for 2020/21, to provide the context for the road collision data. They also asked how partners were collaborating to provide education on road safety.

It was explained, in response, that GFRS, the Constabulary and the OPCC collaborated on the delivery of the 'What If' programme for schools. It was also understood that the road safety partnership would bring teams together to focus on and address priorities for road safety.

It was requested that Committee members be provided with an overview of the hotspot locations in Gloucestershire.

One member expressed the view that technology was not being used as effectively as it could to address road safety issues in the County.

Another member stated that there needed to be a sufficient budget for partners to address road safety in Gloucestershire, particularly in relation to enforcement.

In response, Philip Williams explained that it was for officers to advise regarding the development of budgets. He felt that more funding would be useful for road safety, however, it was also important to consider how to use current resources more efficiently.

In relation to enforcement, Nick Evans added that mobile camera vans were dispatched to hotspot locations, and that the police were looking into investing in an enforcement unit and into increasing the numbers of speed cameras on the roads.

One member queried the process for the introduction of reduced speed limits. They also suggested that road safety statistics be collected more comprehensively to include near misses or damage to property.

In response, Philip Williams assured the member that he would be happy to discuss the process for lowering speed limits with them. He also explained that when it came to collecting data, the priority was for statistics relating to life and injury.

Another member commented on the dangers of mobility scooters being used on the roads. They added that planning for schools should include drop off and pick up facilities for parents.

Nick Evans advised, in response, that neighbourhood police officers regularly attended schools to ensure that parents were parking appropriately, and that children at some schools were involved in advising parents on parking.

69. IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

Mark Preece provided the Committee with an update on progress against the GFRS Improvement Plan.

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It was noted that 54 of the 105 action points relating to the Causes of Concern had been progressed to date. The remaining 51 actions would be commenced over the three year period agreed to address them.

Members were reminded that progress against the Improvement Plan was being monitored by the Improvement Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of GCC, which met every 6 weeks.

Reassurance was sought as to whether there were sufficient resources to ensure the actions would be completed within the four year period.

In response, the CFO explained that GFRS had been successful in securing 38 additional posts through the MTFS process, and a programme management team had been established to prioritise and structure the work to address the plan.

Another member asked whether HMICFRS was happy with the timescales determined within the Improvement Plan.

It was understood, in response, that HMICFRS had not raised any issues with the timescales. A representative from HMICFRS was included on the Improvement Board where they could raise any concerns should they arise.

70. EMERGENCY SERVICES NETWORK PROGRAMME

Mark Preece introduced the report on the Emergency Service Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP), which would replace the current airwave system used by emergency services in the UK.

Members were informed that the programme had been delayed, in particular by a challenge over the provision of the network. However, GFRS had continued to put plans in place so that it would be ready to transfer to the ESMCP when it was rolled out, including establishing a team to deal with the transition, and ensuring that new vehicles were compatible for both the current and new system.

Clarification was sought as to the reasons for the delay to the ESMCP roll-out. In response, it was explained that currently only one network provider, EE, could deliver the programme, which was being challenged.

It was noted that GFRS was incurring costs due to the need to replace current airwave system components as a result of age.

It was requested that a progress report on the ESMCP be provided at a future Committee meeting.

71. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA AND UPDATES

Members were presented with the Quarter 2 2022/23 performance data.

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One member observed that only two fifths of GFRS staff were up to date with their appraisals, and asked what was being done to address this.

The CFO explained that appraisals were taking place, however not all managers had access to the recording system, which therefore impacted the figures in the performance report.

72. WORK PLAN 2023

It was suggested that an update on proposals for the fire budget for 2023/24 be included on the agenda for the January Committee meeting.

It was agreed that progress updates on the shared use of Newent and Winchcombe Fire Stations, and on GFRS Net Zero Carbon, be moved to the March 2023 meeting.

An report on GFRS's approach to road safety would be added to the January agenda.

73. FUTURE MEETINGS

It was requested that the November 2023 meeting date be rescheduled in order to avoid a clash with any Remembrance Day events.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.30 pm