

# **FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 14 July 2023 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.**

## **PRESENT**

Cllr Tim Harman  
Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair)  
Cllr Mark Mackenzie-  
Charrington (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steve Robinson

**Substitutes:** Cllr Ben Evans (Online)

**Apologies:** Cllr Bernard Fisher, Cllr Brian Tipper and Cllr Pam Tracey MBE

**Cabinet members:** Cllr Dave Norman MBE

## **2. MINUTES**

2.1 An error was noted in the action on page 5 of the minutes. It was clarified that the report to be brought to this Committee was regarding the Government's response to the White Paper on reforming the Fire and Rescue service, not on the Government's response to the Her Majesty's Inspectorate Spotlight Report.

2.2 A spelling error was also noted.

2.3 With these amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2023 were accepted by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

## **4. MOVE OF GFRS STAFF TO GCC QUAYSIDE**

4.1 Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, gave a summary of the report. He re-iterated the rationale behind the planned move of GFRS staff out of Waterwells HQ and into GCC (Gloucestershire County Council), Quayside. He explained the business case for the move had been presented to the Finance, Performance and Risk meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and the decision was made to progress with the move. Since then there had been significant staff engagement for the staff leaving Waterwells HQ and those staying behind. Staff concerns and questions were being taken into account when planning for the move. The officer invited Committee members to see the new service headquarters once ready.

4.2 A member asked how many people were going to be relocated. The officer explained that Waterwells HQ's capacity was currently 130 and Quayside would

have capacity for 60. The officer also explained that currently there were only 20-30 staff in the office at any one time.

4.3 A member raised concern about the staff feedback that GFRS identity might get lost in the move. The officer confirmed that branding of the Quayside office space was considered as part of the move and would be clear and prominent once the move was complete. He also explained that there would be dedicated gold and silver rooms in fire control at Waterwells to make sure there would always be available space near fire control for officers to work and co-ordinate emergency response.

4.4 In response to a question about car parking at Quayside, the officer explained that 7 dedicated spaces were available for immediate response officers by Quayside House. Service vehicles would also require dedicated parking and the officer had been assured that there would be sufficient general parking for the expected number of staff in the office at any one time.

4.5 In response to a question about what would happen to the top floor at Waterwells HQ, Nathaniel Hooton, Deputy Fire Chief, explained that there was an ongoing conversation about how to configure the remaining space at Waterwells.

4.6 A member asked about parking availability if the top floor, for example, were let out to another company and an emergency in Gloucestershire required senior officers to get to Waterwells HQ. The Deputy Fire Chief explained that they were satisfied there would be sufficient provision.

## **5. FIRE COVER REVIEW FOR HIGH RISE BUILDINGS**

5.1 Mark Preece summarised the report. He explained that, following the Grenfell disaster, the Government provided Fire and Rescue Services with grants. These grants funded tactical plans for high rise buildings and training for tackling fires in high rise buildings. GFRS (Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Services) had also commissioned a detailed analysis of fire cover in the County. He explained the results of that report would be brought to a future Committee meeting. The officer explained that there had been 2 exercises in May to evaluate gaps between current operational policy and the new policy being recommended by the National Operational Guidance. They had established that 10 premises in the county fell within the classification of high-rise buildings. All staff were trained in how to deal with high-rise emergencies. The officer also highlighted efforts being made to understand the cladding material that had been used in these high-rise buildings.

5.2 A member asked about high-rise buildings that weren't fitted with sprinklers. The Deputy Fire Officer explained that legislation was focusing on regular inspection to help with prevention. Sprinklers did reduce damage once an emergency had occurred, but were not in place everywhere.

5.3 A member asked whether high rise buildings that were not residential would be included as part of this report. Officers explained that those buildings were outside the scope of this report but reassured members that ongoing inspections would identify commercial high rise buildings that were at risk.

5.4 A member asked about the frequency of inspection for the high rise residential buildings and asked what advices could be given to building owners to minimise fire risk. The CFO explained that the risk based inspection programme determined how regularly buildings were visited based on risk. Buildings like those in the report would be inspected yearly and powers of intervention were more wide reaching since the Building Safety Act 2022 had come into force.

5.5 A member asked for clarification over when an aerial appliance would be sent to an emergency. The CFO explained that an aerial appliance would be sent out immediately if an incident was reported by a person (i.e. not by an automatic fire alarm) in a high rise building.

5.6 In response to a question about support given to staff in commercial high rise buildings, officers explained that it was Fire Service's role to make sure standards were being met in terms of risk assessments and staff training. GFRS would also support the building owner if those requirements were not being met.

5.7 A member asked about appliance turnout specifically for Gloucester Cathedral or Gloucester Royal Hospital. The CFO said that he would estimate that at least 4 appliances would be turned out but would be able to check the specific pre-determined plan. Officers assured members that risks specific to the hospital and the cathedral were accounted for.

**ACTION – Mark Preece to confirm appliance turnout for fires at Gloucester Royal Hospital and Gloucester Cathedral**

**6. IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON GLOUCESTERSHIRE FIRE SERVICES**

6.1 Nathaniel Hooton gave this presentation going through the potential risks to firefighting as climate change affected Gloucestershire. He explained that significant planning work was being done to ensure GFRS had the right equipment and training required to handle more frequent and more severe fire and flooding emergencies.

6.2 A member asked about flooding and wildfire incidences as indicated on a diagram in the presentation. Officers explained that fluvial flooding was harder to predict and the intention was to future proof GFRS to be able to respond to those unpredictable flooding risks. They also explained that wildfire risk was highest in Cheltenham and Gloucester even though they would have expected it to be highest in more rural areas. Work was being done to understand this. They also explained that they were working with landowners to prepare for high risk fire events. This

included creating natural fire breaks in tree planting, using prediction models to understand risk, and equipping staff with the most suitable equipment (such as PPE – personal protective equipment) to handle extreme wild fires when they arose. They were also co-ordinating with the National Fire Chief's Council to explore provision of more specialist firefighting appliances when required.

6.3 In response to a question about learning from international Fire Authorities that were already tackling the extreme weather conditions that were being predicted for the UK, the CFO explained that work was already underway and experts from abroad were feeding in their expertise to inform on best practise. Fire breaks through controlled burning was given as an example of a technique being implemented successfully in hotter countries.

6.4 A member asked whether GFRS were co-ordinating with Highways, Environment Agencies and/or sewage companies to direct the provision of resilience in Gloucestershire roads and countryside to be able to absorb heavy downpours of rain. The officer explained that weather predictions were accurate enough to allow for GFRS to set up a Silver or Gold Room meeting to plan for flooding. This was harder for less predictable pluvial flooding. Whether drains were cleared or not would, in theory, make a difference to how this flooding could be absorbed, and the CFO believed drains and gullies were being sufficiently cleared by GCC to achieve this. That said, he did highlight the increased amount of concreted or fake grass gardens as a contributing factor to the volume of water needing to be removed by the drainage system.

6.5 In response to a question about disposable BBQs being a fire risk, the deputy CFO explained there were national campaigns to encourage people to use disposable BBQs carefully and to dispose of them properly. He suggested more could be done to educate young people in particular, and that there was a wider responsibility in schools and communities to promote careful use and disposal.

6.6 A member raised concern around older fire appliances and vehicles being moved out to more rural stations once new appliances were brought in. The deputy CFO explained that it was important to get value for money out of vehicles given the considerable investment that goes into them. Efforts were being made to refresh the fleet with more environmentally friendly vehicles but they also needed to maximise the life cycle of the old vehicles.

6.7 In response to a question about receiving support from other fire services during emergencies, the CFO explained that last year there had been an unprecedented 14 major incidents declared in the UK at the same time. The primary reason why major incidents were declared was because a county had no available fire engines left. There was a national framework in place to resource counties in these scenarios but when emergencies coincided, resources become stretched. Merseyside Fire Service co-ordinated the National Resilience Assets to ensure local areas had the assets they would require to handle changing weather.

*Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting*

## **7. WORK PLAN**

7.1 The Committee discussed the following changes to the work plan:

- An item covering the Government Response to the White Paper to be planned for September or November
- An overview of the Risk Based Inspection programme (which would cover non-residential high rise buildings) to be added to the Building Safety Act presentation in the November meeting
- The Committee to visit the new Quayside offices after the Committee meeting in September
- The visit to Waterwells HQ coming the following Monday

**ACTION – DSU to make the above changes to the work plan**

For a full overview of this meeting, please use the following link to access the recording <https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>

## **CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 11.16