

FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 17 November 2023 commencing at 9.30 am at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

Cllr Bernard Fisher

Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair)

Substitutes: Cllr Dr David Drew, Cllr Andrew Gravells MBE, Cllr Alan Preest

Cabinet Member: Cllr Dave Norman MBE (Cabinet Member for Fire, Community Safety and Libraries)

Apologies: Cllr Tim Harman, Cllr Brian Tipper, Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington, Cllr Pam Tracey MBE and Cllr Steve Robinson

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 15th September 2023 were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. FIRE SAFETY BRIEFING

4.1 The Chair invited Richard Humphrey, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) Protection Manager, to give a presentation on current Fire Safety Legislation. The following key points were highlighted:

- The GFRS Protection Department was created to ensure compliance with Fire Safety Legislation. It was stated that they also were in charge of enforcing and educating the county on Fire Safety Legislation. Currently the team was made up of three Managers, eight Inspectors, a Data Analyst, an Administrator, and the Operational Risk Team.
- The Officer gave an insight into all the current Fire Safety Legislation which included The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, Fire Safety Act 2021, Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022, Building Safety Act 2022 (Building Safety Regulator), The Higher Risk Buildings (England) Regulation 2023, Grenfell Tower Inquiry future phases.

- It was stated that in Gloucestershire, there were ten High-Rise Residential Buildings (HRRB) – two in Stroud, three in Cheltenham and five in Gloucester. It was confirmed that whilst each of these were inspected on a regular basis, GFRS had no major concerns.

Questions

- 4.2 A Member asked about whether GFRS were required to undertake fire safety tests with businesses, the Officer confirmed that it was the responsibility of the business to make sure that they were up to date with their fire safety training. However, he confirmed that the service did speak to businesses about their training.
- 4.3 Responding to a Member's question, the Officer stated that they had a set program to inspect the High-Rise Residential Buildings in Gloucestershire. He confirmed that all ten buildings had been inspected this year and due to there being no major concerns, it was stated that they would not be visited again until the third year of the program. It was stated that the Government Building Safety Regulator would be taking over the inspection of High-Rise Residential Buildings from next year.
- 4.4 A Member asked about how many building prohibition notices had been issued by GFRS in the last twelve months, the Officer confirmed that three prohibition notices had been issued and six enforcement notices.
- 4.5 A Member raised concern about the lack of Government legislation for the enforcement of sprinkler systems in multi-storey car parks. It was confirmed that the Government did not enforce that all new buildings were required to install a sprinkler system. Therefore, GFRS could only promote the use of sprinklers rather than enforce it. However, it was stated that in some cases, sprinklers systems were not the most effective system for example with electric vehicles.
- 4.6 Answering a question about GFRS building prohibition enforcement, it was confirmed that the last prosecution in Gloucestershire was in 2016. It was stated that nationally the prosecution figure was low largely due to the range of escalations that could be used. It was confirmed that businesses often work with GFRS to change their practices rather than being prosecuted.
- 4.7 A Member asked about whether all shops' fire safety measures were inspected, the Officer stated that GFRS did conduct site visits to all shops and stated that they could visit at any time within the business' working hours.

5. FUTURE TRAINING PROVISION UPDATE

5.1 The Chair invited Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, to give an update on the future training provision plan for Gloucestershire. The following points were highlighted:

- The GFRS training centre contract is due to end in March 2028. The paper outlined the four different options for GFRS' training facilities once this contract ended. These were:
 1. Taking no action
 2. Renewing the existing arrangements once Avon FRS took over the 25-year-old Severn Park Training Centre
 3. Outsourcing all training to another provider
 4. Creating five strategic sites at existing fire stations and a new-build training facility within Gloucestershire
- It was confirmed that the Property Board supported number four which was the preferred option because it would be more accessible to crews within Gloucestershire, as each crew would be no more than a thirty-minute drive away from a training site.
- It was stated that GFRS would develop a detailed capital bid and business plan to be submitted in 2024/2025.

Questions

5.2 A Member questioned which sites had been chosen to become training sites, the Officer confirmed that he could not remember all five sites.

ACTION – CFO to confirm the five proposed training sites.

5.3 A Member asked about the cost of the new training stations, the Officer confirmed that whilst they had a rough figure for the cost of building the new training provision, it was too early to confirm it publicly.

5.4 A Member raised concern about the increase in the training budget and the quality of the training that could be provided, the Officer reassured the Member that the authority invested £250000 two years ago into on-call training to make sure that the right training was being provided. He explained that this move to an in-county training provision would make training accessible to every staff member every time they were on-call compared to the current Severn Park Training Centre where crews could not be on-call and also attend training.

6. GLOUCESTERSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT BOARD PROGRESS REPORT

6.1 Mark Preece gave an update on the GFRS Improvement Board Progress. He highlighted the following points:

- Following Steve Mawson's departure, Pete Bungard, Chief Executive of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) had taken over as Chair of the GFRS Improvement Board.
- Of the improvement actions, 76% (105 had been completed) which was a 4.5% increase since the last meeting, but it was stated that they were still behind on 3% of the actions.

Questions

6.2 As part of GFRS's His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services' inspection which began on the week of the 13th of November, the CFO had completed a self-assessment form. A Member asked if this form could be shared, and the CFO agreed to send it to the Committee.

ACTION – CFO Mark Preece

6.3 Responding to a Member's question about whether the culture at GFRS had changed since the HMICFRS had placed the Service into 'Engage', the CFO confirmed that he believed it had changed and would continue to improve through the continuous improvement plan. It was explained that the plan would be monitored by a team of five employees who would focus on change and improvement within GFRS even after they had exited the HMICFRS 'Engagement' process.

7. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2022-2023

7.1 This item was taken as read and Mark Astle, Area Manager Business Planning and Performance, answered questions. He was assisted by Donna Potts, Prevention Manager and Head of Safeguarding.

7.2 A Member asked for an explanation of the difference between 'On-call' and 'Retained' firefighters in the report, the Officer confirmed that 'On-call Firefighter' was the correct term and he confirmed he would amend this before the final document was published.

ACTION – Mark Astle

8. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA UPDATE

8.1 The Chair invited Mark Astle to present the Performance Data for Quarter 2 2023/2024. The following findings were highlighted:

- The response times for GFRS was 9.17 minutes in September 2023 compared to their target response times of 9.0 minutes but it was stated that this had continued to be within tolerance for the last two and a half years except in March 2023 and December 2022.
- In the prevention chart, it was highlighted that GFRS had failed to reach the target number of Safe and Well visits to those residents in high-risk groups. It was stated that more work needed to be done on mapping those who were most at risk, but it was highlighted that GFRS had completed their highest rate of Safe and Well visits since March 2020. It was confirmed that GFRS were collaborating with health and social care teams, General Practices (GPs) and housing agencies to identify those most at risk.

Questions

8.2 A Member asked if GFRS were informed of road closures and flooding, the Officer confirmed that GFRS were only informed of large road closures. Whereas for smaller road closures and utilities, GFRS were not informed.

8.3 Responding to a Member's question about whether GFRS used data from private energy suppliers on residents who were at high risk of having their energy turned off, the Officers confirmed that they had built a relationship with energy suppliers, and they had created a channel for them to notify GFRS of residents who were at risk.

9. CAUSES OF ACCIDENTAL DWELLING FIRES

9.1 The Chair invited Donna Potts to present a report on the causes of accidental dwelling fires. The following themes were highlighted:

- There had been an improvement in the number of dwelling fires within Gloucestershire which was replicated throughout England.
- There had been a national Home Office campaign as well as local campaigns. The local campaigns had tried to target those at high risk of accidental dwelling fires.
- It was emphasised that identifying who was most at risk had become a multiagency aim with GFRS contacting health and social care teams and GPs to not only identify those who needed Safe and Well visits but to also use other teams to encourage residents to answer the door to GFRS visits.

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

- The Officer asked the Members to make referrals for residents they knew were vulnerable.

Questions

9.2 Responding to a Member's question about if GFRS struggled to get some residents to undertake a Safe and Well visit, the Officer confirmed that they had struggled but had focused on educating their staff on trauma awareness and compassion training.

9.3 A Member asked about what the Committee could do to promote Safe and Well Visits in their areas, the Officer confirmed that she always welcomed the involvement of the local councillors in GFRS' community events. She suggested that the Members were the best people to encourage their residents to answer the targeted Safe and Well visits and to identify how to reach those who were most vulnerable and most at risk of an accidental dwelling fire.

10. WORK PLAN

10.1 The CFO gave a short update on the September meeting's action sheet. He stated that for Action 1, the bid for the development of the abandoned warehouse experience at SkillZONE had been made to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The bid had been for £20000, however they were given £15000 but they were advised that they could improve their bid and reapply for the full amount.

10.2 Regarding Action 2 which was to confirm if the Global Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) had been contacted about supporting SkillZONE. The CFO stated that GCHQ had given support to various SkillZONE projects through a third party who supported them with working with the community.

10.3 It was decided that the CFO would give an update on the action sheet in the 'Minutes of the Previous Meeting' item at January's meeting.

ACTION – Democratic Services

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 11.21am.