

FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 10 September 2021 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

Cllr Bernard Fisher Cllr Wendy Thomas
Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair) Cllr Brian Tipper
Cllr Mark Mackenzie-
Charrington

Substitutes:

Apologies: Cllr Nick Housden and Cllr Pam Tracey MBE

In Attendance: Cllr David Norman, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Parking and Libraries
Mark Preece, Interim Chief Fire Officer, GFRS
Clive Webber, Head of Business Planning and Performance, GFRS

8. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Nick Housden and Pam Tracey MBE.

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

11. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

Mark Preece, Interim Chief Fire Officer, provided the Committee with a presentation on the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-25.

The Committee was informed that the Fire and Rescue National Framework determined that a key priority for fire and rescue authorities in England was to develop a CRMP. A number of standards were expected of GFRS when developing their CRMP, including evidence-based decision making, and ensuring transparency in the planning process.

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Members understood that work to develop the draft CRMP 2022-25 began in June 2020, and that this included carrying out an evidence-based risk profile methodology for Prevention, Protection and Response activities; workshops with the Senior Leadership Team and Senior Managers to inform different elements of the CRMP; a pre-engagement consultation with the public, staff and businesses before the first draft; and the production of an Equality Impact Assessment.

It was explained that the draft CRMP outlined the 8 objectives, which had been agreed by the GFRS Senior Leadership Team, and which would be delivered by GFRS across the three-year life of the plan. The draft CRMP objectives were detailed in the report attached to the agenda.

One member asked a question, in terms of asset management, as to whether it was felt that GFRS had what it needed to deliver a professional service.

In response, the interim CFO explained that they were making a business case as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to ensure they had the right equipment, and that he felt they were getting into a good position with this.

Another member asked whether GFRS had enough staff, with the right people in the right places, and whether staff had an input into the development of the draft CRMP?

In response, it was explained that Objective 4 of the draft CRMP looked to ensure that GFRS had the required number of resources, with the right people and equipment, at the right time, in the right location. Additionally, the consultation process for the draft CRMP fully involved staff and trade union representatives, and responses would be anonymous.

It was requested that the Committee receive feedback on the public consultation, which would run between 1 October and 26 November 2021.

Following a query, it was clarified that engagement with the public would likely take place through online events and meetings. The communication plan for the public consultation was detailed in the report attached to the agenda.

The Committee noted that Cabinet was recommended, at this stage, to accept the developed draft CRMP 2022-25 and associated documentation for submission through the governance process and public consultation. This was particularly important as the development of the draft CRMP had already been delayed by a year due to Covid-19.

The Committee noted that a pre-draft CRMP consultation had taken place in February 2021 through which 264 responses had been received. Of these respondents, 25 percent had been employees of GFRS, and 75 percent of all the respondents had indicated that they felt either fairly or very confident that GFRS provided an effective service overall.

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The timeline for the draft CRMP 2022-25 was outlined to the Committee, with the final draft proceeding to Cabinet for final sign-off and publication in April 2022. Progress against the CRMP objectives would then be monitored by the Portfolio Management Board, and through this scrutiny committee.

Clarification was sought as to the reasoning behind the removal of data from the draft CRMP. In response, it was explained that a separate Risk Profile document would be produced that would be publically available, encompassing the data that informed the draft CRMP. This document would be shared with Committee members for their information.

Several members advised on how the formatting and presentation of the draft CRMP could be improved to make it more reader-friendly.

One member asked why the current minimum response time was higher than it had been previously? In response it was explained that response standards had changed, as had the usage of roads and vehicles over time.

Following a member query, members were advised that benchmarking of data with other services, particular similar services, did take place, and that this information would be publically available so that the people could understand how GFRS was performing.

Following a further member query, consideration would be given as to detailing distances in the draft CRMP in both imperial and metric measurements.

The Chair suggested that the Committee use the timeline for the delivery of the CRMP over its three-year life as a focus for the Committee's work plan.

The Committee supported the draft CRMP 2022-25 and recommended that Cabinet accept the draft document and recommend it for public consultation.

12. HMICFRS UPDATE

Mark Preece provided the Committee with a presentation on the HMICFRS inspection process, in addition to an update on the GFRS response to the findings of its 2019 inspection.

Members were informed of the HMICFRS inspection criteria, and it was explained that Good is the expected graded judgement for all fire and rescue services. Following its full HMICFRS inspection in 2019, GFRS received two 'causes for concern' or areas where performance was deemed inadequate, and was judged as requiring improvement in 9 other areas. The two 'causes for concern' were related to the values of GFRS, and also its Business Fire Safety strategy.

Details as to how GFRS had been working to improve its culture were provided. Strategies included developing a Cultural Action Plan; launching new Service Core Values through 44 staff engagement sessions; and developing a new Promotion and Progression Policy in consultation with staff.

Following a member query, it was clarified that temporary promotions were now used only where necessary, such as for maternity cover or long-term sick leave.

Another member asked questions regarding the level of staff turnover and the mental health support available to staff.

The Interim CFO explained that over the next 3 to 5 years, there would be a significant number of staff retiring, with 30 to 40 percent of staff in development. It was noted that this problem was not unique to Gloucestershire, and this year's MTFs bid requested funds to provide additional training to staff in order to address this.

It was also explained, with regards to the mental health and wellbeing of GFRS staff, that they had access to occupational health support through Gloucestershire County Council, and crew members who had attended a significant incident were attended to by officers to see how they could be supported.

One member highlighted the growing problem with tyre burning on commercial premises. It was noted, in response, that the Environment Agency was responsible for dealing with this issue.

The Interim CFO continued with the presentation to explain the strategies that GFRS had introduced to improve the other 'cause for concern' relating to business fire safety. Actions included developing a new Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) and a policy for Business Fire Safety; recruiting additional team members to the Fire Safety Team; employing a Fire Safety Data Coordinator; and ensuring the Business Fire Safety Team received regular update training to support the RBIP.

Clarification was sought regarding the public register for business fire safety. It was requested that a report on the Fire Cover Review be brought to the Committee, and it was noted that it would be useful for members to have an understanding of the high-risk buildings within the County.

Further clarification was sought from members regarding the process for business inspection and whether businesses were obliged to send annual updates to GFRS regarding the business they carried out and the materials used on their premises.

In response, members were advised that businesses should update their own risk assessments so that when GFRS carried out their audits, it would be up to date. It was understood that high risk premises would be audited on an annual or three-yearly basis.

There was a further member question regarding the requirement of sprinklers in buildings. In response, the member was advised that the Service could recommend this for new build planning applications, however they could not mandate this in England.

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The Committee noted the presentation, and understood that further updates on the GFRS response to the findings of its 2019 inspection would be presented at future meetings.

13. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA AND UPDATES

Clive Webber, Head of Business Planning and Performance, GFRS, provided the Committee with the latest GFRS performance data.

In particular, members were made aware that performance within community safety had been impacted by the forecast number of accidental dwelling fires being higher than expected. However, the timeliness of responding to these fires had improved in Quarter 1 2021/22. It was queried whether this increase in the number of fires was as a result of more people working from home.

Performance relating to the rate of Safe and Well visits had continued to see small signs of recovery, although this still remained below target as a result of the impact of Covid-19 on the ability to carry out visits.

Members were reminded of the additional roles GFRS had carried out during the pandemic, supporting a number of partners.

Members noted that there had been no further update on the Home Secretary's consultative white paper on the governance of Fire and Rescue Services, which was expected in the autumn.

Following an update on the Portfolio Management Board, it was queried whether the papers for these meetings were publically available. In response it was determined that whilst the papers were not publically available, a one page summary of these meetings could be provided to Committee members .

The Committee was informed that HMICFRS had requested 62 document areas for review in preparation for their inspection of GFRS the week commencing 27 September 2021. Additionally, a self-assessment had been prepared for the inspection. This would be circulated with Committee members in confidence.

It was also understood that initial feedback on the inspection would be provided to the CFO and Cllr Dave Norman as Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Parking and Libraries, on 1 December 2021.

Following a query, it was understood that the inspection would be well scheduled with a timetable, with members of staff being encouraged to be open and honest with the inspection team about the performance of the Service.

Members also noted that the mutual aid agreement with South Western Ambulance was to continue until the end of March 2022; GFRS had undertaken a peer assessment of its Business Fire Safety arrangements through which informal feedback indicated that there had been improvement since the last inspection

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although there were some areas that could still be improved on; and that the GFRS revenue budget forecast indicated an overspend of £2k, excluding Covid-19 related expenditure.

Following a query, the Committee was advised that some in-year funding to support additional GFRS roles had been received.

Following a brief discussion on the collaboration of blue light services, including the use of shared premises, it was suggested that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss collaboration.

14. WORK PLAN 2021/22

The Committee agreed to add the following items to its work plan:

- A presentation from the PCC and CFO on blue light collaboration (early 2022);
- An update on the CRMP (March 2022 meeting); and
- An update from SWASFT on blue light collaboration as a future item in the work plan.

At its next meeting on 12 November 2021, the Committee would consider:

- Recruitment issues within the Fire Services, particularly relating to BAME; and
- An overview of the financial health of GFRS, including any pressures.

15. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the future meeting dates.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.05 pm