

# FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 12 November 2021 commencing at 10.00 am at the Members' Room - Shire Hall, Gloucester.**

## **PRESENT**

Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair)    Cllr Brian Tipper  
Cllr Wendy Thomas            Cllr Pam Tracey MBE

**Substitutes:**            Cllr David Brown  
                                 Cllr Dr Andrew Miller

**Apologies:**            Cllr Bernard Fisher, Cllr Nick Housden and Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington

**In Attendance:**        Cllr David Norman, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Parking and Libraries  
                                 Mark Preece, Interim Chief Fire Officer, GFRS

## **16. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Bernie Fisher, Nick Housden and Mark Mackenzie-Charrington. Cllr David Brown substituted at the meeting for Cllr Fisher. Cllr Andrew Miller substituted at the meeting for Cllr Housden.

## **17. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

Mark Preece, Interim Chief Fire Officer (CFO), updated the Committee as to when the Government's consultative white paper on fire services reform was expected to be published. It was understood that the Committee would be notified as soon as the paper was released, and an additional Committee meeting may need to be arranged to consider it.

Following a query about the CFO's and Lead Cabinet Member's quarterly meetings with the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC), it was recognised that unless the Committee needed to be made aware of any specific projects or concerns, there was no need for notes from that meeting to be shared with the Committee.

Clarification was also sought regarding the priorities for collaborative work between Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) and the PCC, as well as with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST).

## **18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

## **19. RECRUITMENT WITHIN THE FIRE SERVICE**

Mark Preece presented the GFRS Recruitment and Selection Review report to the Committee.

Members noted that the report provided a review of the Service's recent whole time firefighter recruitment process, which took place between January and May 2021.

Members were informed that a new recruitment strategy had been introduced, which included having a process that was strengths based, taking into account an individual's values and behaviours.

Members were advised that positive action for the recruitment campaign had been hindered by the pandemic, however in order to improve focus in this area, GFRS and GCC had now appointed a Culture and Inclusion Manager who started with the Service in October 2021.

969 applications were received in response to the recruitment campaign, which, following a postcode sift, pre-sift and full sift, was reduced to 198 applications. Following evaluation days, the activities of which were detailed in the report, 80 applicants were put through fitness testing and final interviews. On completion of this process, 18 candidates were offered an immediate job and 22 were offered a position in a succession pool.

It was explained to members that the recruitment process had been thoroughly evaluated and a few improvements had been flagged, including the need to improve the information available on their website.

A breakdown of candidate statistics had been produced following the recruitment process. In particular, it was noted that 40 percent of the successful applicants were women, 15 percent were mixed race/minority ethnic, 20 percent identified as LGBT+, and 13 percent had a disability.

The Committee discussed the report and the information they had been presented with.

One member queried whether the percentage of female applicants increased as the process went along because they were more likely to take their application seriously? In response, it was explained that female applicants had a wide range of interpersonal skills to offer the role of being a firefighter as well as being able to pass the fitness tests.

It was clarified, following a query, that all successful candidates passed the same fitness and entry tests. Should a candidate fail a fitness test marginally, they were offered the chance to take the test again.

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

Another member queried whether the Service had learned lessons from the data and had since considered the way it advertised its posts to attract a wider audience? They also commented that it would have been helpful to have data on the percentage of the various different communities within the general population for comparison.

In response, the CFO explained that going forward they were keen to work with the new Inclusion Manager to address this issue in order to be able to engage with a wider audience during the recruitment process.

In response to a question as to what was being done to address the culture of the fire service, it was explained that an action plan had been developed with a range of activities, including engaging with a company on conscious bias training which would be rolled out to middle managers, engaging with the local mosque and friendship café to develop local relationships, and training two champions to focus on the issue.

Cllr Dave Norman, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Parking and Libraries, informed members that he had taken on the role of the Local Government Association Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champion on behalf of GCC and GFRS. He explained that of 45 fire authorities in the UK, sadly only 22 were represented on that network. He also queried whether progression opportunities for those from the BAME community in the Service needed to be looked at?

There was a query as to whether there needed to be a continual recruitment process? In response, it was understood that the recruitment process was resource intensive as there was not a dedicated team for recruitment. Having a succession pool meant that they could respond to staff turnover.

It was noted that the retention of firefighters needed to be monitored. It was suggested that an update providing an overview of the expectations for GFRS recruitment and retention over the next five years be provided to the Committee.

## **20. THE FINANCIAL HEALTH OF GFRS**

Mark Preece updated the Committee on the financial health of the GFRS. The written update was contained within the Performance Data report.

Members were informed that the revenue budget shows an overspend of £89k, all of which was related to Covid-19 issues. Excluding Covid-19 the outturn position was on-target, however this included full use of the top-up reserve for on-call training.

The Service had received in-year funding totalling £587k to off-set staff turnover and training. Taking this into consideration, the bid for next year's budget would be £987k.

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For 2021/22, the capital budget for GFRS had been split to fund new breathing apparatus, mobile data terminals, fire appliances and equipment, light vehicles and the mobilising system upgrade.

The Committee was also advised that a paper had been taken to Cabinet to request additional funding for an aerial appliance.

## **21. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA**

Mark Preece provided the Committee with the latest GFRS performance data.

In particular, members were made aware that the timeliness of responding to accidental dwelling fires was within tolerance of target in Quarter 2, with performance marginally better than the comparator group. Furthermore, the number of accidental dwelling fires were reducing, with work undertaken to explore any risk factors, such as age or location.

Additionally, performance relating to the rate of Safe and Well visits was continuing to improve, and GFRS continued to reach the most vulnerable in the County with 83 percent of Safe and Well visits undertaken being to people in vulnerable groups.

Members were advised that the risk relating to insufficient workforce capacity remained rated as moderate, however the risk score had increased. This was being addressed through in-year and MTFS bids.

The Committee was informed, in an update on the Portfolio Management Board, that there was a risk to the Service as a result of the new driving national standard for emergency driving because there were low numbers of training hours available due to the two instructors being part time.

There was a query regarding the need to replace current radios. In response, it was explained that funding to replace the radios would be included in the MTFS bid. It was clarified that all current equipment was tested for safety, and that defective radios were currently repaired where possible.

Members were advised that funds from the Grenfell Infrastructure Grant were beginning to be spent, however national issues relating to course availability had slowed the Service's spending.

In an update on the HMICFRS Inspection, informal feedback would be given to the CFO and the Lead Cabinet Member on 1 December 2021.

Finally, an update on progress with the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-25 would be provided to the Committee at a later meeting.

One member queried whether there had been an increase in the number of visits to houses with large batteries? It was explained, in response, that this was not a risk

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GFRS was frequently experiencing; however with the increase in the number of electric vehicles, this may be an emerging risk in the future.

## **22. WORK PLAN 2021/22**

At its next meeting on 14 January 2022, the Committee would consider:

- The GFRS budget 2022/23;
- A report from the PCC and Chief Fire Officer on blue light collaboration in Gloucestershire; and
- The GFRS Statement of Assurance 2020/21.

## **23. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The future meeting dates were noted.

## **CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 11.20 am

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