

FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 4 March 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

Cllr Bernard Fisher	Cllr Mark Mackenzie-Charrington
Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Chair)	Cllr Wendy Thomas
Cllr Nick Housden (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Pam Tracey MBE

Substitutes:

Apologies: Cllr Brian Tipper

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
Derek McCullough, SWAST

33. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Brian Tipper.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

36. GFRS COLLABORATION WITH SWAST

Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), presented the report by Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) on collaboration with South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST).

Members were advised that GFRS first started collaborating with the ambulance service in the form of co-responding in 2006, which had since been followed by cardiac response, Concern for Safety, use of GFRS station facilities and Operation Braidwood in 2020.

Members understood that GFRS co-responders were used when they were the closest medical asset to the incident, with protocols mobilising an ambulance in

tandem. However, this could take some time given the rural nature of Gloucestershire. There were 11 stations co-responding and two co-responding models operating in the County.

It was noted that in 2021, GFRS attended 732 co-responding incidents on behalf of SWAST, and there were a further 403 incidents that GFRS could not attend for several reasons. Members were advised that the statutory responsibilities of GFRS always came first and therefore a co-responder would not be mobilised if it would have a detrimental effect on these responsibilities. All staff costs were re-charged to SWAST.

In terms of cardiac care, which involved a full appliance being mobilised from wholtime stations to persons with cardiac issues, the Committee was informed that GFRS attended 51 incidents in 2021, with a further 62 not attended. This was for a number of reasons including that cardiac care was not part of the firefighter's national role, and therefore not all staff were comfortable to undertake the activity. It was noted that there was a regular challenge through trade unions for this service to not be provided.

Members were informed of the Concern for Safety initiative between GFRS, SWAST and the Police whereby GFRS took on the responsibility for gaining access to a locked property when requested by SWAST if there was a concern for a person's welfare. The benefits of this collaborative work included better outcomes for patients.

Finally, it was explained that four fire stations in Gloucestershire were used by SWAST for welfare facilities, and a further two for change of shift and storage.

Derek McCullough, SWAST, introduced the report from SWAST on its collaboration with GFRS, focusing particularly on Operation Braidwood. Operation Braidwood was introduced in response to Covid-19 and involved the dual crewing of a number of SWAST ambulances with a member of SWAST and a firefighter from one of the 5 fire services in the South West, including GFRS.

Members were informed that the model adopted was for firefighters to undertake emergency driving and provide support to the SWAST member of staff. It was noted that this project was a good example of partnership working, with agreement for the project being established within just two weeks and enabling patients to receive the care they needed throughout the pandemic.

The Committee was informed that initially, firefighters were crewed with Emergency Care Assistants and tasked to low acuity patients, however as demand increased as the pandemic progressed, firefighters were despatched alongside a paramedic to all categories of calls. It was noted that 182 episodes of cardiac arrest were attended through Operation Braidwood between November 2020 and mid-February 2022, which had potentially resulted in the saving of these lives.

An example of the benefits of this collaborative work was provided to the Committee, whereby a firefighter attending an incident alongside a SWAST

member had identified that the patient was hard of hearing and therefore arranged for a vibrating fire alarm to be fitted.

It was also noted that ambulance staff welcomed working alongside firefighters, as it provided an opportunity to learn new skills, as well as helping to relieve pressures.

One member queried how the ambulance service coped when the fire service was unable to co-respond? In response it was explained that the call would default back to the ambulance service. Clarification was also sought as to how the single response model of co-responding worked.

Several members commented on the positive outcomes of this collaborative project and hoped it would continue even after the pandemic. In response to queries relating to this, it was understood that consideration was being given as to how Operation Braidwood could be established on a permanent basis. Members were reminded that firefighters could not be enforced to provide this support, however it was hoped more would volunteer going forward to increase capacity.

In response to a query, it was understood that currently only wholetime firefighters could be involved with Operation Braidwood. One member suggested that allowing on-call firefighters to volunteer to take part could help with the recruitment and retention of these firefighters by providing them with an additional opportunities to help the community.

A question was asked as to the benefits of collaborative working for individual firefighters and paramedics. In response, the CFO explained that firefighters felt they were contributing to the community and were able to develop transferable skills. Derek McCullough added that a number of retained firefighters had changed employment to join the ambulance service, and ambulance staff welcomed working alongside the expertise of firefighters, which led to better outcomes for patients.

There was a further query as to whether consideration had been given to other examples of collaboration between fire and ambulance services in other countries. In response, members were advised that other models had not been explored further in Gloucestershire, with any change to models requiring a paramedic on a fire appliance requiring national consideration.

The Committee thanked both the CFO and Derek McCullough for their presentations and commended and supported the continued partnership working.

37. UPDATE ON THE COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

The CFO introduced the update on progress with the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), thanking the team responsible for its development for their work.

Clive Webber, Head of Business Planning and Performance, GFRS, explained that feedback from the public consultation had been incorporated into the document, which had resulted in an additional objective being included. It was understood that

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

the document was still in its draft format as it was still being developed by the GCC design team.

The Committee was informed that the document would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 30 March and subject to approval, would be publicly available from 5 April.

One member suggested that a version of the CRMP that would be accessible to the visually impaired or non-readers should be developed.

Referring to the project to combine GCC and GFRS ICT systems, one member queried whether GFRS would be resilient to cyber incidents. In response, the CFO explained that whilst they could integrate with GCC in some areas, some systems would remain separate. He also provided assurance that cyber security was under constant review and monitoring.

One member suggested that potential GFRS recruits should be signposted to the CRMP, given the depth of information it contained, as part of the recruitment process.

A member queried the role of GFRS in contributing to GCC's net zero carbon target and suggested that this should be addressed within the CRMP. The CFO explained in response that they currently had a mixed fleet; however green fire appliances were currently cost prohibitive. Clive Webber added that GFRS was moving towards a combined fleet unit with GCC and therefore the exploration of fuelling alternatives would be considered more holistically moving forward.

Another member cautioned against setting time limits within the CRMP relating to the net zero carbon target, particularly given the current cost of living crisis and global events.

It was suggested that an annual update be provided to the Committee on GFRS progress towards the net zero carbon target, and that an initial report be brought to the next Committee meeting.

There was a further query as to whether the targets set in the CRMP were achievable. In response officers recognised that they were ambitious but advised that a number of projects were already underway and that additional funding through the budget for additional posts would help to increase capacity.

38. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA AND UPDATES

Clive Webber presented the Committee with the latest GFRS performance data, highlighting that half of all indicators were better than target in Quarter 3; the number of accidental dwelling fires had continued reducing; the timeliness of responding to accidental fire dwellings was better than target; the rate of Safe and Well visits saw a marginal improvement for the second quarter; 78% of Safe and Well visits were undertaken to people in vulnerable groups; work was continuing to ensure all service areas had up to date business continuity plans in place; and

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MTFS bids were currently progressing to cover additional resources, development and training.

A member queried whether an increase in the number of residential fires was anticipated as people explored the use of alternative fuels to heat their homes as result of the increase in fuel bills. In response, it was explained that changes to the legislation relating to carbon producers in the home had resulted in log burners becoming unfashionable, and that people would be prevented using calor gas heaters as it cost the same as natural gas. Nevertheless, this situation would be monitored.

Clarification was sought as to what a pre-alert was and how it would help to improve response times.

There was a query as to the impact of Brexit on supplies and related costs. In response, officers explained that production delays had resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic rather than Brexit, with the time between ordering and receiving appliances extending to up to 2 years.

Further clarification was sought as to whether GFRS had its own maintenance team, and whether parts could be stocked in advance.

39. WORK PLAN 2022

At its next meeting on 27 May 2022, the Committee would consider:

- Proposals for the shared use of Newent and Dursley Community Fire Stations.
- How GFRS will achieve the target of net zero carbon.
- An update on progress to address the two causes of concern identified during the HMICFRS inspection.

The following items were added to the work plan for future consideration by the Committee:

- Review of Severn Park Joint Training Centre (November)
- Emergency Services Network Programme (September)
- HMICFRS Inspection Feedback (July)
- The future of the Tri-Service Centre (July)
- An additional meeting to be arranged to consider the white paper on fire services reform
- Visits to Severn Park/ vehicle workshops at Waterwells.

40. FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.

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CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 11.30 am