

FIRE AND RESCUE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Fire and Rescue Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 13 January 2023 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT

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

Substitutes:

Apologies: Cllr Pam Tracey MBE

74. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Pam Tracey.

75. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2022 were approved with the addition of Cllr Dave Norman's apologies.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

77. UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE GFRS IMPROVEMENT BOARD

77.1 Steve Mawson, Chair of the GFRS Improvement Board, presented a report on the Board's progress. There had been a recent Board meeting to discuss possible slippage of certain dates and targets. In the discussion it was agreed that certain targets such as improvements in culture would take longer than anticipated and it would be better to take a slower approach and fulfil the changes the Improvement Board had been created to achieve rather than rushing to meet targets with only a superficial change in culture.

77.2 It was also reported that a critical aspect of the work was its assurance framework which would ensure that the changes that Improvement Board implemented were translating into the targeted improvements. Part of this would come from two groups that reported to the board, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group, as well as the Service Improvement Group. Representatives from both these groups had been invited to attend Improvement Board meetings.

77.3 A recent difficult issue had been the establishment of a zero tolerance policy. The Zero Tolerance Policy that had been proposed had not been accepted by workers within the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service. For the time being, the zero tolerance policy had been removed with a temporary statement in place until a policy could be agreed upon by all members of the service. A member asked officers if they could clarify what the issue had been. The officers reported that the reaction to the Zero Tolerance Policy had been unexpected but their understanding was that the concern arose from the fact that the Zero Tolerance Policy had been drafted too quickly without enough consultation from the team. The solution was not to remove the statement altogether but it would be brought back with more detail and a slower rollout. It was added that the Workplace Charter would eventually supersede the Zero Tolerance Policy.

77.4 It was also explained that as part of the survey that asked for feedback about how improvements were going, there was feedback on the service outside of the remit of the Improvement Board's Causes for Concern. Those concerns raised could then be flagged with the Chief Fire Officer for long-term improvement. The Improvement Board were also reported to have explored how best to communicate changes and investments with members of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue.

77.5 Steve Mawson also updated members with the development of the programme team. Three positions had been filled with one position that had an interview scheduled shortly and another position planned to start at the end of March.

77.6 In response to concern raised over whether focus was being drawn away from day-to-day fire training to concentrate on cultural training it was explained that £178,000 had been invested in command and competency training for recently appointed officers. There was a sizeable portion of funding going into additional training for on-call staff including an extra hour a week of training.

77.7 A member asked officers if they could clarify what the issue was around the zero tolerance policy. The officers reported that the reaction to the Zero Tolerance Policy had been unexpected but their understanding was that the concern arose from the fact that the Zero Tolerance Policy had been drafted too quickly without enough consultation from the team. The solution was not to remove the statement altogether but it would be brought back with more detail and a slower rollout. It was added that the Workplace Charter would eventually supersede the Zero Tolerance Policy.

77.8 Concern was raised by members over the progress and timeline of the Improvement Board as many projects were listed as behind target. There was concern over how much there was to do this coming year. Officers explained that one of the obstacles to progress had been due to a lack of capacity. They had recently made good progress hiring for the programme team and this was expected to improve the rate at which progress could be made.

77.9 Following a question about inspectors, officers explained that inspectors recognised why particular target dates had been slipping. A report on a follow up

inspection from HMI was planned for the coming week as well as a full report planned over the summer. Officers also explained that the initial plan had been made twelve months ago, that the reality had proven progress would take longer than expected, and that they did not want aspects like cultural change to be rushed.

77.10 It was asked whether officers could promise no further target timeline slippage once the programme team had been fully assembled. Officers explained that they could never promise that but would always evaluate why slippage was occurring as and when it occurred.

77.11 Members highlighted concerns raised in the report by members of the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue team over quality and quantity of staff kit. Officers explained that there was an issue particularly with having enough uniforms of the right sizes as staff come and go. Uniform was managed in house and cleaning was performed by a specialist laundry firm. The arrangement with the laundry firm was already under review. In the last year £3.6 million had been invested into new appliances so significant investment was being made into equipment but it would take time for all this investment to be seen on the ground. It was also highlighted that whilst equipment and uniforms were a concern for the service, it was not one of the areas of concern as highlighted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service in their report which the Improvement Board was meant to focus on.

ACTION – A report to be prepared for the 26th May meeting covering Staff uniforms and equipment – DSU to liaise with Mark Preece

78. GFRS'S SERVICE PLAN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE DRAFT BUDGET 2023/24

78.1 It was explained by Steve Mawson, Deputy Chief Executive, that it was not in the remit of this committee to suggest adjustments to the budget, but it could be reviewed with regards to the service implications of the budget.

78.2 Cabinet Member Cllr Dave Norman summarised the updates in the service plan. The administration was increasing the revenue budget by over £3million. This would support the community safety directorate. This additional funding had been allocated for additional staffing to ensure continued progress against the Community Risk Management plan and the HMI improvement plan. £400,000 was proposed for essential training, £175,000 for courses and £225,000 for an additional training hour per week for on-call staff. £25,000 had been allocated to annual fitness tests. £174,000 had been provided to help ease the pressure of cost-of-living related increases in contract costs. £416,000 had been allocated to improvements to Stroud Community Station, providing treadmills, fleet charging systems, and new equipment. £3.7 million had been allocated for PPE and light vehicles. There were no savings or requirements for efficiency savings.

78.3 Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, added that the budgetary allocations were focusing on the objectives outlined on p47 as well as to respond to the HMI Causes for Concern. £1.28 million had been budgeted in for pay inflation but the final pay

offer was yet to be finalised. A 5% pay rise offer had been made nationally but that had been rejected.

78.4 A member asked where the details on road safety spending were. It was explained that £1.8 million had been allocated to road safety but specific spends within road safety had not been itemised in the budget. There was also discussion over how aspects of road safety fell under the responsibility of Highways and Maintenance, Police and Crime, and Fire and Rescue. The Cabinet Member explained there was ongoing discussion with the Police and Crime Commissioner as to whether income from speed cameras should go to the Fire and Rescue Service for the development of educational programmes. Cllr Dave Norman said he was happy to bring up concerns to do with road safety from members in his next Collaboration Board Meeting.

78.5 In response to questions over the £80,000 budgeted for treadmills, it was explained that these were necessary specifically for yearly fitness and medical assessments and that calibrated treadmills were not available at all Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service locations. The plan meant that staff would no longer have to travel for their yearly tests. The treadmills were planned to be bought in phases with an initial phase where the department purchased some treadmills. Up-take would then be evaluated with further rollout dependent on sufficient use. It was also explained that the most cost effective option of renting or buying would be evaluated.

78.6 There was also a question raised over what was being charged by the investment in charging points. It was explained that certain vehicles in the GFRS fleet were becoming electric and that certain equipment was now electric. The officer explained that charging electrically powered tools or equipment would drain the appliance battery if the vehicles did not receive a trickle charge whilst parked in the appliance room.

79. MOTION 901 - ROAD SAFETY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

79.1 Mark Preece, Chief Fire Officer, gave a summary of the report. Road deaths were reported at 25 per year, serious injuries at 300 per year, and all injuries at 800 per year. 4000 children had been through a Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service education programme in the past year and 100% of teachers surveyed felt the programme would change the children's behaviour. Younger drivers and older drivers were being specifically targeted through tailored educational programmes to help them understand the risks of driving and to encourage sensible behaviours on the road. Outside of education, improvements were also being made to fire station response to road traffic accidents. All crews were equipped with rescue equipment and at Cheltenham Community Fire and Rescue Stations they were equipped with heavy and large rescue capabilities.

79.2 In response to a question on whether there was more that could be done to combat road accidents, it was explained that Skillzone was a significant asset that most other Fire and Rescue Services did not have access to. GFRS were also innovating with new approaches that used virtual reality as part of the education

programme and there was already a plan for further rollout. Members were invited to visit Skillzone so they could see how training and education was being implemented.

79.3 Members asked what was being done to address the middle group between young and old drivers. Officers explained that that audience was particularly difficult to target and that usually they were targeted at the point of having been caught speeding. In those cases, people were enrolled on speed awareness courses. Most deaths had been occurring in younger drivers so fixing those behaviours at that stage was the best route of investment for minimising accidents.

79.4 It was also explained that young drivers were targeted through schools, local businesses, Gloucester University, colleges and army barracks. The national focus on drink driving was also highlighted.

79.5 Equestrian, cycling, scooters and reducing speed were noted as having been missed from the report. It was also suggested that young drivers could be targeted through insurance companies. There was also discussion over e-scooters and officers explained that there was currently no real training for them. E-scooters were being continuously evaluated by the Road Safety Co-ordinator and was on the agenda for 2023/24.

ACTION – The discussion of this report would be reflected as part of the regular update to full council - DSU

80. GFRS PERFORMANCE DATA AND UPDATES

80.1 A summary of this report was presented by Ian Tonner, Area Manager Prevention and Protection for Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service. It was explained that 6000 Safe and Well visits had been carried out in the previous year. Each visit was taking longer (90 minutes rather than much shorter visits historically). The officer explained that those longer sessions had decrease the reported output but would drive better outcomes for fire safety.

80.2 The operational crews had also been occupied with a series of wild fires and this had drawn capacity away from Safe and Well visits. Two new members of staff had also joined the core prevention team and this would help deliver more Safe and Well visits.

80.3 A risk based inspection programme for commercial properties had been developed this last year. This inspection was supported by an algorithm that used location fire safety score to determine regularity of return visits. In 2019 there was a cause for concern for Protection but the HMI has said that they had improved so this cause for concern had been resolved. There had been a drop-off in Q2 inspection performance as a series of new staff had been recruited. It was explained that this would only be temporary.

80.4 In terms of Prevention, the GFRS were promoting Online Home Fire Safety checks. The service had also invested in one hundred slow cookers which would be

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

given to families that had been identified as needing the most support. These had been deemed as very safe cooking equipment that ran with a lower electricity cost than typical ovens. A Cost-of-Living leaflet had been developed and just under 5000 were ready to be distributed to the public. The service were also evaluating their supply of carbon monoxide detectors and target those where most necessary.

80.5 Members asked if the Cost-of-Living leaflet could be circulated amongst the committee

ACTION – DSU to circulate leaflet PDF and hard copies

81. FIRE AND POLICE COLLABORATION WRITTEN BRIEF

81.1 This brief was taken for note rather than discussion

82. WORK PLAN 2023

It was suggested that the following adjustments be made to the action plan:
Items added to future meetings:

- Kit and Equipment report (Quality, spares, contracts) (Mark Preece) (26th May)
- Update on Community Risk Management Programme (26th May)
- Skillzone development and funding report (15th September)
- GFRS Improvement Board Progress Report (15th September)
- Complete GFRS Improvement Board Progress Report (January 2023)

83. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12:00