

## **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**

**23 January 2023**

Conducted as a public meeting at Headquarters and digitally via Microsoft Teams

- Present:** Councillor Spence (Chair), Councillor Atwal (Vice-Chair), Councillor Barrie, and Councillor Hussain
- Virtual:** Councillor Dehar, Councillor Waters, Sarah Middleton, Co-Optee.
- Officers:** Simon Barry, Kamla Devi-Ahir, Tom Embury, Kirsty Tuffin, Kelly Whitmore, Pete Wilson (virtual).

01/23      **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Young.

02/23      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

03/23      **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 07 November 2022**

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 07 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings subject to Councillor Hussain's attendance being added.

04/23      **Scrutiny Review Option**

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority, presented the Scrutiny Review Option report that outlined proposed options for the next Scrutiny Review.

The Committee were advised that the last Scrutiny Review on Safe and Well had concluded in November 2022.

Following discussions with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, it was proposed that the next Scrutiny Review

focused upon the services training and career development. It would be intended that progression and development into leadership and management roles within the service, with specific focus upon underrepresented employees, would be reviewed. The Chair of the Committee emphasised the desire for the review to consider opportunities to allow employees to reach the required educational levels for management roles.

The Committee were also advised that the Collaboration and Transformation Committee on Monday 12 December 2022, referred the topic of blue light collaboration between West Midlands Fire Service and West Midlands Ambulance Service for review. Following discussions with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee, it was recommended that this be reviewed in the next municipal year 2023-2024.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the proposed topics for the second scrutiny review be noted.
2. That it be agreed that a scrutiny review of the services training and development, and specifically in areas identified in the terms of reference once developed, be approved.
3. That it be agreed to defer a scrutiny review of blue light collaboration with the Ambulance Service to 2023-2024 Municipal Year, be approved.

05/23

### **Fire Control Performance Report Update – Quarter 3 2022-23**

Kelly Whitmore, Group Commander – Fire Control, presented the Fire Control Performance Report – Quarter 3 2022-23, that outlined the operational performance of Fire Control over a three-month period.

The Committee were advised that as per the report, a total of 17,749 emergency calls were received between 1 October 2022 and 31 December 2022 across both West Midlands and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services.

13,096 (74%) were the for West Midlands and 4,178 (24%) were for Staffordshire. A total of 2% of calls had been taken

on behalf of other services. Of the total number of calls received, Fire Control mobilised to 51% of the incidents for the West Midlands and 52% for Staffordshire. The mobilisation ratio of calls had been dependent upon the following:

- Call challenging automated fire alarms (AFAs)
- Call challenging special service calls that were deemed non-emergency
- Repeat 999 calls
- Use of 999eye footage/imagery

During Qtr. 3 the median call handling time by Fire Control had increased to 101 seconds compared to Qtr. 2. The increase in time handling had been a result of the number of new entrants that joined the Fire Control team, the introduction of Vision 4, a new command and control system, and enhanced questioning to support proportionate and appropriate mobilising of resources.

The Committee were advised that 999eye, which assists Fire Control with intelligence led mobilisation and resource management, had been used a total of 1,954 times during Qtr. 3. This system allowed Fire Control to receive images/footage from an incident and share it with responding personnel to assist early decision making.

Following queries on comparison data available for other Fire Services, Kelly advised that services used different systems and varied approaches across different control rooms so although comparison data could be collected, it would reflect a great difference in comparison. Members were also reassured that there had been a process in place for nuisance calls and the term 'repeat calls' referred to multiple calls for one incident. The Chair of the Committee praised the 999eye system.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Fire Control performance update for Quarter 3 2022-23, be noted.

06/23

**Dispute Resolution Report 1 Jan – 30 June 2022**

Kamla Devi-Ahir, Senior Business Partner, presented the Dispute Resolution Report that outlined the number, type and outcomes of discipline, grievance hearings and other dispute resolution including Employment Tribunal activity that has occurred during a six-month period 01 July 2022 to 31 December 2022.

The Committee were advised that 10 grievances were received and three disciplinary cases, all of which were gross misconduct, were received during the six-month period. Following analysis of the equality data there had been no impact on any specific group in regard to grievances and disciplinaries.

Five employment tribunal cases were due to take place over the upcoming 12 months, as per the report. The Committee were advised that the 'unfair dismissal/age discrimination' hearing had taken place and awaiting the outcome on 6 February. The 'unfair dismissal/disability discrimination' would be taking place on 13 February 2023 and finished 10 March 2023.

Following queries around the outcome of cases, specifically those that result in reviews of policies, it was agreed this information would be included in reports moving forward. Following queries around DBS checks, Simon Barry, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, re-assured members that members of staff that worked with vulnerable people completed an enhanced DBS check upon their appointment. The NFCC had been working on strengthening the pre/during employment checks on employees. It was agreed that an update would be brought to a future Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the Dispute Resolution Report be noted.
2. That it be agreed that information on the outcome of cases, specifically those that result in reviews of policies, would be included in reports moving forward.

3. It was agreed that an update on the work conducted with the NFCC on DBS checks would be brought to a future Scrutiny Committee.

07/23

### **Business Continuity Arrangements (Verbal Update)**

Simon Barry, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, provided a verbal update on the position of the service with Business Continuity Arrangements.

The Committee were advised that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) ballot on potential strike action would conclude on 31 January 2023. The service believed it was highly likely they would vote in favour of strike and therefore, had begun advancing the service's business continuity arrangements. It was highlighted that although it had been a different governance set up compared to the West Midlands, the London Fire Commissioner had offered an 11% pay rise (6% in 2022/23 and 5% in 2023/24), over the duration of two years for its employees.

Tom Embury advised the Committee that although the ballot would end on 31 January, an urgent meeting with the FBU and National Joint Council (NJC) would take place after the ballot had ended (Feb 8 2023). No announcement of strike action would be announced until this meeting had taken place.

Simon Barry emphasised the importance of the upcoming weeks for the service. Employees had been contacted again, following the feedback from Scrutiny Committee in November, on their intentions to strike but again had received a small number of responses. It was anticipated that should a strike happen, the service would have around 10 vehicles available, compared to its usual compliment of 60. A statement had been issued by the Chief Fire Officer, asking employees to respect each other during this difficult time and acknowledged employee's rights to take strike action.

The Chair of the Committee advised that she had a lot of respect for firefighters and did not feel a potential strike would take place. Simon Barry re-confirmed to members that the dispute had been a national issue. It was agreed that

should a strike take place; a report would be brought back to Scrutiny Committee on the level of resources the service had been able to obtain during the striking period. The Chair of the Authority and Chief Fire Officer would also be updated regularly with a future report into Fire Authority, if required.

Resolved:

1. That it be agreed that the verbal update be noted.
2. That it be agreed that should a strike take place, a report would be brought back to Scrutiny Committee on the level of resources the service had been able to obtain during the striking period.

08/23

**Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022-2023**

Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority, presented the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2022-2023.

The Committee were advised that the Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference and Industrial action update would be added to the next Scrutiny Committee, due to take place in April 2023.

Resolved:

1. That the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan for 2022-2023, be approved.

The meeting finished at 11:07 hours.

Kirsty Tuffin Strategic Hub 0121 380 6906
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