

**Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee**  
**4 December 2023**

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

**Present:** Councillor Lloyd (Chair), Councillor Miks, Councillor Atwal,  
Councillor Barrie  
**Virtual:** Councillor Dehar  
**Officers:** Richard Stanton, Kelly Harding, Karen Gowreesunker,  
Chandni Patel

09/23      **Apologies**

No Apologies were received.

10/23      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

11/23      **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11  
September 2023**

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11  
September 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

12/23      **Scrutiny Review of Training and Development**

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, provided an update on the report. As per the report, in item 3.1 in April 2023, members agreed on terms of reference for Scrutiny Review of Training and Development which set out aims for the review which are provided in more detail within the report.

At the same time that this review was being developed, the service has been undertaking an internal review of our Distributed Training Model. The DTM review is aimed at understanding the benefits and disbenefits of the existing model and developing a training model which delivers the

most efficient and effective development to our staff across the suite of core competencies.

Karen Gowreesunkar provided further updates on section 6 of the report, Recommendations, and further considerations.

Item 6.3.1 provides a recommendation on investment in training equipment.

Following concerns Richard Stanton, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, advised the recommendations provided are based on the feedback provided by the committee and from individuals within the organisation. There is a risk of missing opportunities on how we can improve if we are to reduce the number of recommendations we include.

Councillor Miks raised a concern about labelling and ensuring all groups are represented. This organisation does ensure equality and representation are at the forefront of everything we do, therefore the recommendation feels like a criticism rather than a recommendation.

Resolved

1. Within items 6.3.4 and 6.3.5, add further information reflecting on how the service is progressing and improvements made to date.

Regarding recommendation 6.4.3, steps to improve team bonding for trainees, this is an area for further consideration.

Following queries, Karen Gowreesunkar advised that at the beginning of the training programme, there may be an opportunity to incorporate exercises and change the environment so the individuals can bond more within that 12-week programme.

Resolved

1. To alter this recommendation to include a day of team bonding exercises before the trainee course officially begins.

Item 6.5.1, recommended we have a specific focus on progression into supervisory and middle manager posts for underrepresented groups.

Councillor Ward advised that he found one of the barriers to progress is that they have additional learning needs. We will need to ensure that it is reviewed.

Richard Stanton informed members we have a number of stakeholder groups which allow individuals to provide support and provide assistance.

Richard Stanton informed members that Julie Faruggia won the award for Neurodiversity at the WMFS Rewards and Rewards event. At the Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards in London, she won yet another award as the Neurodiversity champion.

Councillor Lloyd informed members that item 6.6.1 has a section on neurodiversity alone and is being constantly monitored by the organisation.

Following concerns, Kelly Harding informed members that from an internal perspective, there is support for people going through promotion processes. From an external perspective, we are considering whether we want to publish elements of the Plan and the Strategy in languages other than English to reach other communities.

Regarding recommendation 6.6.2: Collect data on unsuccessful candidates from underrepresented groups, Councillor Miks expressed concern about candidates not receiving any feedback which then does not provide any relevant data. It would be beneficial for us to have this data, especially from those who have applied multiple times.

An external company 'Thinkology' is being used to capture a lot of the data for us. We have seen from the data those who are less likely to succeed than others. For example, the dropout numbers for female candidates are significantly higher in comparison to male candidates.

For Female candidates, support is provided to ensure they are prepared for the physical elements of the test. This includes building their confidence.

We could speak with Thinkology to see if we can get a generic breakdown of what they could do to improve. This could be included as part of the summary if they are not successful.

Resolved

1. To identify and provide data as to the specific groups who are not successful through the entry programme.

All recommendations, following changes are approved.

These papers will be circulated to all members of Scrutiny.

13/23

### **Scrutiny Committee Reviews 2024-25**

Karen Gowreesunker provided an update on this report. This report is for the Scrutiny Committee to consider the next themes for review to commence in 2024.

Item 4 within the report, asks for areas for the next review. As per 4.3 recent discussions which have taken place during Collaboration and Transformation Committee meetings regarding Blue Light Collaboration could also be considered for scrutiny review.

Members of the Committee may also want to consider re-engaging through an additional discussion with the Fire Authority during 2024, to consider refreshed themes for future scrutiny reviews.

Councillor Miks suggested the information be fed from Scrutiny to other members of the authority as it will benefit them.

Resolved.

1. To provide a verbal update within MEF to inform members/officers of items that are brought into Scrutiny and any recommendations that may be of use to them.

Resolved.

1. To include Grievance and Discipline (policy) review as one of the themes to consider.
2. To include this item in the Work Programme.

14/23

### **Dispute Resolution Report**

This report recommends that the contents of the Dispute Resolution Report for the period of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (3-month period) are agreed.

Kelly Harding provided an update on this report and informed members that during this period we have had 4 grievances from individuals and 2 collective grievances.

Regarding grievance 19, this grievance was raised alleging that an organisational recruitment process did not cater for an individual's neuro-diverse needs with no reasonable adjustments made. This grievance was fully upheld.

Regarding disciplinarys there were 16 disciplinary cases in total for this 3-month reporting period. 11 were gross misconduct and 5 were misconduct. 3 resulted in a written warning and 1 retired halfway through the process. All 3 were issued for the same disciplinary.

Following analysis of the equality data, unlike previous reporting periods there is evidence that higher proportion of females than males have undergone disciplinary proceedings. Females make up 26% of the workforce and 56% of all disciplinarys. Therefore, this could be perceived as a significant proportion in comparison to male employees. Of the females identified within this reporting period, approximately one-third fall under a sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

We have 4 successful Employment Tribunal outcomes. We've had positive news linked to Employment Tribunals claims against the Authority, we have had 2 dismissed, 1 claim that was withdrawn and 1 that was resolved internally. There were no unsuccessful Employment Tribunals claim outcomes within that 3-month period.

A new disciplinary process was implemented and feedback from that has been positive. This will be monitored over the year.

Following queries, Kelly Harding informed members that those raising grievances are between the ages of 40-50. We have provided the safety to individuals to feel confident enough to raise concerns which will open us to various issues, but we are handling this the correct way. We will move people around to ensure we backfill any spaces.

Richard Stanton advised that themes are starting to emerge and are aware of them. We are keen to ensure preventative measures are in place.

All recommendations are approved.

15/23

### **HMICFRS Spotlight Report Update [Verbal Report]**

Richard Stanton, provided an update on the HMICFRS spotlight report recommendations. A presentation was shared with members of the meeting.

Richard Stanton advised that there are a total of 35 recommendations, and these have been RAG-rated (Red, Amber and Green) to indicate progress. WMFS have achieved 11 recommendations and there are 7 which are currently in progress. There are 2 that we have not made any progress against as this is linked to the Fire Standards. There are 15 that are linked to Fire and rescue services.

There is progress being made against those considerations in Amber. We are anticipating that by the next Scrutiny meeting they will be delivered against and marked as Green.

Following concerns, Richard Stanton informed members that different Fire and Rescue services may respond to different areas if they are the nearest or neighbouring brigade. We may need to send resources ourselves.

There are 2 mentioned that are listed as Red and are specifically not due for delivery until early March 2024. They currently sit with Fire Standards; it hasn't been amended to reflect that as of yet.

Tom Embury advised that it has been requested that we bring details of those Fire Standards to the Member Engagement Forum and will be coming into future authority meetings.

16/23

### **Fire Control Performance Report Q2 2023-2024**

Kelly Whitmore provided an update on this report. This report is submitted to provide the committee with an update of the operational performance of Fire Control. The report covers a 3-month period for the months of July, August and September.

Regarding Calls received (item 3.1) there was 29% decrease in the number of calls received from the same quarter in 22/23. This is because of a reduction in severe weather-related incidents than the period than the previous year when extreme heat conditions were experienced.

The number of calls received for Q2 23/24 was split 15,049 calls for the West Midlands (75.5%), 4,304 calls for Staffordshire (21.6%) and 568 calls from outside of service areas (2.8%). This ratio continues to be consistent with the previous reporting periods. This is consistent with all of our previous reporting periods with some minor fluctuations.

Call challenge continues to be applied across Staffordshire and West Midlands.

Regarding 3.2 A key performance indicator for Fire Control is the length of time from answering a 999 call to mobilising appliances to category 1 (life and property) incidents. The median call handling for the reporting period was 92 seconds. We have seen a 3-second improvement from the previous report period.

In August the call handling average was 89 seconds which is the lowest it has been since May 2022. Whilst we are above target, we are also making some tangible improvements.

Regarding 3.3 Emergency call ring time demonstrates the reactivity and responsiveness of Fire Control when answering emergency calls. Q2 has seen the average call

ring time increase from 8.87 seconds in Q1 to 11.32, which is a 22% increase.

In Q2 23/24 Fire Control used 999eye 4,705 times, this was for 23.6% of all calls received (including repeat calls). This is slightly down from 5,350 in Q1 which is due to a combination of fewer calls this quarter, and some variance on the incident types within those calls.

A total of 4,660 AFA calls were received for the reporting period. This equates to 31% of all emergency calls received for the quarter for WMFS. There is work carried out with the protection teams to ensure calls are appropriately managed before going to Fire Control.

Following queries regarding duplication of calls, Kelly Whitmore advised that this is taken into account within the total number of calls received. That is then broken down further into a number of incidents we mobilise to.

Following queries, Richard Stanton advised members that there is legislation Regulatory Reform Order- Fire Safety Act 2025 says that business owners and responsible persons must have properly maintained equipment to notify people of a fire alarm going off.

Councillor Miks passed thanks to the call handlers at Fire Control.

17/23

### **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

Karan Gowreesunker provided an update on the work programme. This has been updated to reflect the terms of reference.

Key Performance Indicators report will usually provide data on absence/sickness levels. Some details will be mentioned in the next Fire Authority meeting next week.

18/23

### **Date of Next Meeting**

To note the date of next meeting is to be held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April.



Meeting closed 12.09