

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

12 September 2018 at 11:00 a.m.
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham B7
4HW

Present: Councillor Spence (Vice Chair),
Councillors Barlow, Barrie, Brackenridge and Jenkins

Apologies: Councillors Tranter (Chair) and Young.
S Middleton.

Observer: Nil

Note: The meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on 5 September was adjourned as it was not quorate. Subsequently, this extra meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled.

21/18 Declarations of Interest in contracts or other matters

There were no declarations of interest.

22/18 Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 04 June 2018

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on the 04 June 2018 be approved as a correct record.

23/18 Review of Safeguarding – Progress Update

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Gary Taylor, Director Service Delivery, presented a report on the review of safeguarding. It was noted that following the submission of the scoping document at the June 2018 meeting, a formal report had been provided to establish the approach to the review and the confirm the membership of the Scrutiny working group.

Andrea Simmonds, Partnerships Manager, and Pete Wilson, Group Manager Prevention, provided a presentation to the Committee (as detailed in appendix 1 of the report).

The presentation covered the following:

- The purpose of the review
- Intended outcomes
- What informed the scope and intended outcomes
- Recommendations for undertaking the review
- Anticipated costs and benefits of external professional
- Timescales

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) had published a self-assessment toolkit in June 2018. It was noted that the intended outcomes of the review mirrored the toolkit quite closely.

It was noted that there was no single individual in the Service who had a full understanding of the subject of safeguarding. It was proposed that an external professional who possessed the overall skills and knowledge was to be appointed to support, guide and implement the review. In addition, an external professional could also offer subjective analysis.

The external professional and Scrutiny working group would be supported by an internal working group comprising Middle Managers. The internal working group would also implement the recommendations of the review with peer support from the NFCC National Safeguarding Group, the West Midlands Metropolitan Emergency Services Safeguarding Adults Group, and local safeguarding children partners.

There were financial implications with the appointment of an external professional. Costs were approximately £4,800 to £8,000.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- It was agreed that safeguarding applied to the 'rescue' element of the Service as well as to 'fire'.
- The financial costs quoted within the report were indicative and were provided to assist Members in their consideration of the recommendations as laid out within the report.
- It was acknowledged that the advice provided by consultants had to be carefully considered, particularly in situations where an organisation may not have the sufficient skills and knowledge to challenge. The Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (the Hackitt Review) had also highlighted the possible risks involving the use of consultants and the potential for conflicts of interest to arise.
- The Service could consider the training of an officer to become a safeguarding expert, or to appoint an existing safeguarding officer. It was noted that this could prove to be a recommendation of the review but it was important to not pre-empt the outcomes of the review.
- The Service would be striving for a layer of skills, for example, to not only provide training for staff delivering services but to also provide organisational assurance.
- The Service was conscious of key national events and that the NFCC self-assessment toolkit had been issued prior to the Hackitt Review.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee approved the Scrutiny working group to take the review of safeguarding forward.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee confirmed the membership of the Scrutiny working group, as follows:

- Councillor Barlow
- Councillor Jenkins
- Councillor Tranter (Lead Member of working group)

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee approved the appointment of an external independent professional to support the review.

24/18 Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against The Plan Quarter One 2018-19

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Gary Taylor, Director Service Delivery, and Area Commander Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler People Support Services, provided an overview of the report:

Performance Indicator (PI) 1 – The risk based attendance standard: at 4 minutes and 43 seconds a 10 second decrease had been observed during quarter one. The Service continued to significantly over-perform with regard to category 2, 3 and 4 four incident types, which allowed resources to be changed.

PI 2 – The number of accidental dwelling fires: performance was within the tolerance levels but the number of incidents had increased. This was in line with an increase in incidents which had been observed nationally, a trend which the West Midlands were on the tail end of (a sign of the prevention work undertaken by the Service considering larger increases in areas with lower levels of vulnerability than the West Midlands).

It was noted that PI 3 – Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings, and PI 4 – The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires, were linked. A slight increase in the number of fires had been observed but the severity of such incidents had reduced. In turn, lower severity potentially resulted in fewer injuries and fatalities.

PI 5 - The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners: performance was just below the lower tolerance level. The target had been increased gradually over the years. The Service was confident that the target of 55% would be met for the year.

PI 6 – The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Brigade: performance was above the upper tolerance level and reflected positive performance.

PI 7 – The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions: the data for the current year was not

available at the time of the meeting (it was noted that the Service were not the custodians of the data). The issues surrounding road safety were often complicated and difficult to tackle but the number of fatalities was higher than the number recorded due to fire. It was frustrating that there were delays in receiving data which delayed timely analysis.

Positive performance had been observed across the PIs related to deliberate fires (PI 8 to PI 12) with all PIs reflecting performance within the tolerance levels or over-performance. This reflected the renewed focus that had been applied to managing deliberate fires. The number of incidents had reduced and would continue to be monitored to ensure that, in the eventuality that the number of incidents had bottomed out, that a subsequent increase was not experienced.

It was noted that the term arson had been changed to deliberate; this was to ensure alignment with the Police and the Home Office.

The two protection PIs, PI 13 The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises, and PI 14 The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises, were both rated as performing with the tolerance levels, although slightly above target. There had been some concern as to whether the performance observed to date could be maintained (forecasting indicated potential increases) and it was reassuring to see that it had been and the Service was confident it could be maintained going forward.

PI 15 – The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status: the disclosure rate had remained constant. Business Partners in People Support Services were liaising with line managers to explore why individuals were not declaring and to understand any potential barriers.

It was noted that staff declaring their disabled status and other protected characteristics helped the Service to understand its workforce better and to implement support measures.

It was noted that overall, the rate of declaring protected characteristics across the Service was good, for example, declarations around sexuality and ethnicity were also both high.

PI 16 – The number of female uniformed staff: to date, 32% of new recruits for this year were female. The Service had set a target of 40% for the year and it was confident that this would be met.

In terms of progression, 27% of female staff in uniformed positions held the role of Crew Commander or above. This represented a slight decrease compared to the previous quarter but remained a significant improvement on the figure of 14% reported in 2012.

PI 17 - The percentage of all staff from BME communities: performance was within the tolerance levels with a slight increase observed from 10.6% in quarter four to 10.8% in quarter one.

PI 17a – The percentage of uniformed staff from BME communities: performance was within the tolerance levels. Of those firefighters recruited during the first quarter, six (27%) were BME. The Service's target for the whole year is 35% and whilst the figure was currently slightly below the target, the Service was confident that it would be met by the end of the year.

In terms of progression, 27% of BME uniformed staff held the position of Crew Commander or above. A lower rate of progression had been observed amongst BME staff (particularly uniformed staff) and People Support Services and the Inspire Group would be exploring this in more detail.

PI 18 – The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – all staff: performance was within the tolerance levels although it did represent a 12.9% increase compared to the same period in 2017/18.

PI 19 – The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed and Fire Control staff: performance was within the tolerance levels although an increase had

been observed. The figure represented a 12.9% increase compared to the same period in the previous year, but it was noted that the figures for that period were particularly low.

Work was ongoing with regard to restricted duties and there was positive direction of travel in the reduction in the number of days individuals were on restricted duties.

PI 20 – The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed staff: Performance was above the upper tolerance level and represented a 35.4% increase compared to the same period in the previous year.

PI 21 - The total number of injuries: performance was above the upper tolerance level but it was noted that the actual number of injuries continued to be low considering the number of staff and visitors.

PI 22 – The total number of RIDDOR injuries: performance was marginally above the upper tolerance level. It was noted that the reporting figures were very low.

Members recognised and applauded the high levels of performance and the hard work of all staff within the Service.

In answer to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The pre-alert system would go live at the same time as the Vision 4 mobilising system (before October / November). Significant time savings were anticipated.
- It was agreed that an overview of the pre-alert system would be provided to the Committee and that a subsequent update detailing its impact and effectiveness would be provided following its initial implementation.
- A national campaign, a National Fire Chiefs Council Campaign, and local campaigns had been carried out regarding the fire risk of battery chargers for electronic cigarettes / 'vapes'.
- The input from volunteers, community workers and members of the community was invaluable in gaining local intelligence. It was such intelligence that enabled

the Service to identify vulnerable individuals who were 'off the radar'. Invariably, individuals referred to the Service by partners were already in the system and were in contact / engaged with one or more agencies.

- All Fire Officers were trained in fire investigation. The Service had a team of Fire Investigation Officers (the Fire Investigation and Prevention Section) who had enhanced fire investigation training and skills. This also included a full time Fire Investigation Dog handler. The team could assist at incidents where the cause of a fire could not be determined by Fire Officers in attendance. The team were experts within their field and supported Fire and Rescue Services both locally and nationally, as well as other agencies including the Police.
- It was agreed that a presentation on the work of the Fire Investigation and Prevention Section would be delivered to all Members of the Authority as part of the Member Development Programme.
- With regard to staff disclosing protected characteristics, Members understood the potential sensitivities surrounding declaring such information and the use of anonymous declarations were suggested as a means to increase the disclosure rate.
- The retention rates for female new recruits was currently 100%.
- Occupational Health provided support and welfare arrangements for potential mental health issues including mental health triage.
- It was noted that local stations worked with communities to increase awareness of and to reduce instances of violence (verbal / physical).

Noted

- The status of the Service's key performance indicators in the first quarter of 2018/2019 (Appendix 1).
- The progress made in delivering the three strategic priorities contained in 'The Plan' 2018-2021 (Appendix 1).
- The update on the performance information system detailed in section 5 of this report

It was agreed that

- An overview of the pre-alert system would be submitted to the Committee.
- An update on the pre-alert system detailing the impact and its effectiveness would be submitted to the Committee following its initial implementation.
- A presentation on the work of the Fire Investigation and Prevention Section would be delivered to all Members of the Authority as part of the Member Development Programme
- A presentation on the Service's approach to positive action would be provided at the November meeting of the Committee, when the next report on the review of positive action and firefighter recruitment would be submitted

25/18 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee noted the Work Programme for 2018/19.

The meeting finished at 12:35pm.

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