

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

**24 February 2020 at 10:30 a.m.**  
**at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**  
**B7 4HW**

**Present:** Councillor Spence (Chair)  
Councillors Barlow, Barrie, Gill and Young

**Apologies:** Councillors Dehar and Jenkins  
S Middleton

**Observer:** Nil

1/20 **Declarations of Interest in contracts or other matters**

There were no declarations of interest.

2/20 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 4 November 2019**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 be approved as a correct record.

3/20 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2019**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2019 be approved as a correct record.

4/20 **Scrutiny Committee Briefing – Overview of Water Related Incidents**

As a result of Members' request at the last meeting of the Committee, a briefing was provided to the Committee on

water related incidents. Mark Flanagan, Station Commander, Organisational Learning and People Development, provided an overview of the report:

Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (FRS Act 2004), Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) had a legal duty to provide a fire and rescue service that meets the needs of the local community. Authorities were responsible for providing, training and equipping a fire and rescue service capable of undertaking the core functions within the FRS Act 2004:

- Fire safety
- Fire fighting
- Road traffic collisions
- Other emergency rescue activities

Under the FRS Act 2004, FRAs had the power to respond to other eventualities, which water related incidents were classed as. However, there was no statutory duty for a FRA to do so.

An overview was provided of a variety of legislation and guidance that applied to the Authority including:

- Responsibilities of category one responders in accordance with the Civil Contingency Act 2004
- The role and responsibilities of Local Resilience Forums including the development of specific flood plans and a multi-agency flood plan
- A detailed capability assessment of flood emergency planning and preparedness undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- The Pitt Review – an appraisal of all aspects of flood risk management in England
- The Defra Flood Rescue Concept of Operations and the Flood Rescue National Asset Register

It was noted that the Service's Technical Rescue capability was included on the Flood Rescue National Asset Register with the ability to respond nationally.

Water related incidents could involve rescues from rivers, lakes, canals and waterways, or involve flooding. West Midlands Fire Service (the Service) crews responded to incidents within the West Midlands and could be called upon nationally to support major incidents elsewhere in the country

Firefighters within the Service were trained to six different levels:

- Level 1 – Water awareness
- Level 2 – Water rescue first responder
- Level 3 – Water rescue technician
- Level 4 – Water rescue power boat operator
- Level 5 – Water incident management
- Level 6 – Subject matter advisors

All firefighters were trained to level 1 which enabled a land-based rescue to be carried out. Additionally, firefighters were able to carry out a voluntary water rescue swimmer assessment meaning that they could enter the water to conduct a rescue swim.

Firefighters trained to level 2 were deployed to wading water incidents where people could be led to safety in shallow water. There were currently four stations trained to this level: Coventry, Perry Barr, Sheldon, and Woodgate Valley. These were supplemented by the two Technical Rescue Units at Bickenhill and Wednesbury stations.

Levels 3 to 6 were undertaken by Technical Rescue.

An overview of the equipment available within the Service was provided. There were three levels and these resources were located across the Service area in accordance with the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

There had been 1941 water related incidents between April 2016 and March 2019. The incidents were broken down to incident types (according to special service charge sub-group).

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) conducted a drowning prevention and water safety campaign entitled 'Be Water Aware', which aimed to raise awareness of the risk of accidental drowning. The NFCC issued a campaign toolkit to participating fire and rescue services to support the 'Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week', which included information on key messages for raising awareness with key focus groups.

The Service provided information on its website about water safety including sections about open water, flooding and boat safety. Additionally, the Safe and Well booklet contained information on water safety.

Safeside Eastside delivered the programme 'Smart Choices' for primary schools which included a section on water safety with a focus on cold water shock, helping others and how to get help in an emergency.

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

- In the event that Service personnel were deployed to support a national situation, funding was undertaken in accordance with the Bellwin Scheme which allowed for expenses to be claimed back
- Only personnel who had received the appropriate training were able to enter water. At least one voluntary rescue swimmer was encouraged for each watch. Voluntary rescue swimmers would enter the water with the appropriate personal protective equipment, personal floatation device, and attached to a line.
- Fire Control check if a voluntary rescue swimmer is on duty at the start of each shift and would mobilise accordingly in the event of such an incident.

5/20 **An Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance against 'Our Plan' – Quarter Three 2019/20**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, provided an overview of the report:

It was noted that there were no significant issues regarding corporate risk or the quarterly financial update to bring to the attention of the Committee.

PI 1 'The risk-based attendance standard', the median attendance time to high risk (category one incidents) was 4 minutes 46 seconds, an eight second increase compared to quarter two, although in line with expected seasonal trends. Attendance times for category two, three and four incidents were not available due to technical difficulties, but the Committee were assured that performance across the incident types would be within or below the tolerance levels.

PI 2 'The number of accidental dwelling fires', there had been 1218 incidents year to date, 16 above target but within the tolerance levels. It was noted that the performance observed by the Service was bucking the national trend which had witnessed an increase in incidents.

PI 3 'Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings', there had been 9 injuries during quarter three, 46 injuries year to date (above target and above the upper tolerance level). The highest number of casualties were younger males and 35% of injuries were caused by individuals attempting to tackle the fire. As a result, the Service was revisiting its safety messages with a view to reduce the number of such injuries going forward.

PI 4 'The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires', there had been ten fatalities year to date.

PI 5 'The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners', performance was 37.6%, below the target of 40%. Performance during the previous quarters had been significantly below the target but an increase had been observed. It was noted that for the first time it had been possible to obtain reliable figures from the Tymly system used in Black Country South Command and the figures indicated that 75% of such Safe and Well visits were a result of partner referrals. If these were included within the overall figures, the overall average would increase to 42.5%, which was above the quarterly target.

PI 6 'The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Brigade', 177,886 points had been achieved year to date. It was noted that the Safe and Well visits and points accrued via the Tymly system were not included within the figures. If they were to be added, the total figure would be closer to the target.

PI 7 'The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions', there had been 588 people killed or seriously injured year to date (25 fatalities and 563 seriously injured). The figures had plateaued nationally and locally, although remained significantly higher than fire related injuries and fatalities. It was noted that 80% of fatalities were pedestrians, 80% of whom were male, and that this was an area that the Service would focus on.

PI 8 'The number of deliberate fires in buildings', there had been 158 incidents year to date, four below the target and within the tolerance levels. It was noted that such incidents were arguably some of the most serious types of incident. The Service continued to work with partners including the Police with regard to these types of incident.

PI 9 'The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises', there had been 105 incidents year to date, 27 below target and below the lower tolerance level.

PI 10 'The number of deliberate vehicle fires', there had been 532 incidents year to date, 87 incidents below target and within the tolerance levels. Deliberate vehicle fires had been an issue 12 months ago but a number of interventions had been implemented and the number of incidents had decreased.

PI 11 'The number of deliberate rubbish fires', there had been 1275 incidents year to date, 117 below target and below the lower tolerance level. 270 incidents had been recorded during quarter three which was the second lowest total for a quarter on record.

PI 12 'The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings', there had been 104 incidents year to date, above target and

above the upper tolerance level. It was noted that the number of incidents had started to increase significantly and that there were clear geographical areas where increases were being observed, with incidents concentrated within specific Local Authority areas. Officers within those areas were aware of the increases in incidents and were working with partners to identify and target harden premises.

PI 13 'The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises', there had been 327 incidents year to date which was 16 over target but within the tolerance levels.

PI 14 'The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises', there had been 4572 incidents year to date which was above the target but within the tolerance levels.

It was noted that at over 4,500 incidents, such calls represented the largest demand on the Service. However, over 90% of false alarm calls were a waste of resources, tying up crews and appliances. It was noted that many fire and rescue services were in a similar position and there was the consideration if services respond to such calls or charged for attendance. This was a subject that would feature as part of the public consultation on the IRMP which was scheduled to be carried out later this year.

Helen Sherlock, Senior Business Partner, People Support Services, provided an overview of the People Support Services and Safety, Health and Environment performance indicators:

PI 15 'The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status', 95.2% of staff had declared their disability status. 3.5% of staff had declared that they did have a disability. Targeted conversations were being held with those who had not declared their status although it was accepted that some would not wish to declare and therefore, the option was available for staff to state as such. The workplace adjustment passport had been launched which supported and enabled conversations with line managers. Additionally, line managers were being upskilled to identify neuro diverse disabilities.

PI 16 'The number of female uniformed staff', there were 138 female uniformed staff, representing 10.2% of operational staff. The national average was 6.4%. The Service continued to attract high numbers of females although performance remained below target.

The recruitment programme for females had been reviewed and evaluated and an annual plan had been developed.

PI 17 'The percentage of all staff from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities', at 11.9% performance was just below target but within the tolerance levels. However, performance was higher than previously experienced.

Pre-recruitment courses had started to be held for BME candidates and the course had been reviewed and evaluated.

A further update on the recruitment programmes would be provided to the Committee as part of the next quarterly performance update.

PI 17 'The percentage of all staff from BME communities', performance was 11.7%, below the target of 12.5% and below the lower tolerance level. It was noted that a concentrated effort was being taken to improve performance.

PI 18 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – all staff', an average of 2.13 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during quarter three, just above target and within the tolerance levels. This represented a 9% decrease compared to the same period in 2018/19.

An average of 5.97 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness year to date, above the target of 5.52 days although representing a 1.6% decrease compared to the same period in 2018/19.

Work was ongoing regarding the delivery of attendance management workshops to staff which would include



guidance on the requirements for recording sickness absence and return to work information.

PI 19 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed and Fire Control staff', an average of 1.88 days / shifts were lost due to sickness during quarter three, below target and below the lower tolerance level.

It was noted that a high level of sickness had been observed in Fire Control and a targeted approach would be taken to deal with this.

1366 days / shifts were lost through restricted duties during quarter three. Joint work continued between Service Delivery, the Business Partners and Occupational Health to identify how best to manage the length of time that an individual remained on restricted duties.

Missing data regarding attendance management continued. However, the system had been updated within the quarter which should allow targeted intervention and line manager support.

Development sessions on attendance management had been delivered to every watch on every station to increase awareness. These were being rolled out to support staff during quarter four.

PI 20 'The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed staff', an average of 2.97 working days / shifts were lost due to sickness during quarter three, above target and above the upper tolerance level. This represented a 9% increase compared to the same period in 2018/19. However, the year to date figure of 6.78 was above the respective target but represented a 2.9% decrease compared to the same period in 2018/19.

PI 21 'The total number of injuries', 26 injuries were reported during quarter three, below the quarterly target of 31.5. 115 injuries had been reported year to date, above the target of 95, and above the upper tolerance level. This was because a

high number of injuries had been reported in quarters one and two. A full breakdown of the injuries by type was provided in the report.

A high number of injuries (reddening of the skin) had been reported in quarter two involving tactical ventilation training. All 15 injuries had been attributed to heat. A number of interventions had been implemented including amending fire loading and not burning two rooms simultaneously. Additionally, there was a continued focus on the training of heat reduction techniques. A decrease in such injuries had been observed. Monitoring would continue to ensure that similar injuries did not reoccur.

40 near hit reports were received during the quarter, the lowest number year to date. It was noted that less than ten of the reports were genuine near hits.

The number of violence reports had reduced with 15 reports recorded. All reports were incident related, and none resulted in injuries.

PI 22 'The total number of RIDDOR injuries', there had been one RIDDOR report during quarter three, and 13 reports year to date. Performance year to date was above target and above the upper tolerance level. None of the reports had been incident related and none had been followed up by the Health and Safety Executive.

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

- Securing premises was a method of reducing the number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings. However, the location of some premises could make this difficult, for example a premises had been the location of multiple incidents but its location close to two canals meant it had been difficult to adequately secure the premises.
- With a regard to a spate of bin fires in a ward, the Local Authority had worked closely with the Service, leafleted residents to raise awareness, and installed a camera to monitor the area. It was confirmed that the Service

were not aware of any further incidents in the area. However, the Service had raised the issue nationally. Officers would be asked to provide an update for Cllr Young.

- Mental health was the top reason for sickness absence across all staff groups during quarter three. However, it was not necessarily a common denominator with analysis carried out over the last 12 months indicating that a variety of reasons were provided, and that mental health was a mixture of work and home issues. It was agreed that a further update would be provided as part of the next quarterly performance update and would include a breakdown of the figures.
- It was noted that the Service was looking to introduce a sub-category to identify reasons for mental health related absences.
- The Service had joined up with an external company who were supporting the Service's Wellbeing Strategy. Staff were being encouraged to look after their mental health wellbeing, physical wellbeing, and financial wellbeing. The Wellbeing Strategy had been launched in February and a number of staff had been trained to be Mental Health Advocates who were able to recognise wellbeing issues and signpost people to the relevant support. Additionally, more staff were being encouraged to become Mental Health Advocates.
- Two of the new recruits had resigned. Additionally, some individuals may not have passed the initial eight-week training course. Exit interviews were held with individuals leaving the Service to understand reasons why.

It was agreed that the following information would be provided when the report 'Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against Our Plan – Quarter Four' would be submitted to the Committee:

- An update on the female recruitment programme and annual plan
- An update on the BME recruitment programme

- Further information regarding sickness absence due to mental health reasons including a breakdown of the figures

6/20 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2019/20**

The Committee noted the Work Programme for 2019/20 and progress to date.

Karen Gowreesunker, Clerk to the Authority, noted that a report would be submitted at the next meeting of the Committee to enable Members to consider the topics previously raised for review.

The meeting finished at 11:33am.

Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington  
Strategic Hub  
West Midlands Fire Service  
0121 380 6680