

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

14 December 2020 at 1100 hours

held digitally via Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor Brackenridge (Chair)

Councillor Iqbal (Vice Chair)

Councillors Barrie, Barlow, Dehar, Edwards, Gill, Hogarth, Miller, Miks, Spence, Young and Walsh

Mr G Singh Josan (Representative of the Police and Crime Commissioner)

Professor S Brake, co-opted member – health

Maurice Carter (Unison), Steve Price Hunt (Fire Brigade's Union), and Richard Merker (Fire Officers' Association).

46/20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Cooper and Jenkins, Mr M Ager, Independent Member and S Middleton, co-opted member – business.

47/20 Declarations of Interest

The Chair and Councillor Edwards declared a personal non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 Monitoring of Finances, due to being members of the Firefighters Pension Scheme(s).

48/20 **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting of the full Fire Authority.

The Chair noted that discussions were ongoing regarding the implementation of lateral flow testing.

It was noted that a regional meeting was due to be held later this week to discuss the council tax precept. The Chair noted that he would be asking for flexibility regarding support for the fire sector.

The Authority had received a letter from the Fire Minister with regard to funding going forward. The Chair advised that the Authority had replied to the letter setting out the position of the Authority including the fact that the Authority (as per other Fire and Rescue Authorities) no longer received any capital funding.

It was noted that the Authority welcomed and congratulated Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council in their decision to install sprinkler systems in high-rise buildings.

49/20 **Chief Fire Officer's Announcements**

The Chief Fire Officer welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

The Annual Brigade Christmas Carol Service had been held on the 13 December and had been broadcast via YouTube. The Chief Fire Officer thanked Alison Newis and the team in corporate communications for making this possible.

It was noted that the number of Covid 19 cases recorded within the Service had stabilised with only a small number of cases of individuals self-isolating.

It was noted that the Service welcomed the decision by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to install sprinkler systems in high-rise buildings.

In answer to a Members' question the Chief Fire Officer advised in light of the loosening of restrictions over the festive period, the Service continued to maintain high levels of infection prevention

control. However, it was acknowledged that the Service was limited in what it could do regarding what people could and couldn't do outside of the work environment.

A Member noted that the behaviours demonstrated by staff over the previous nine months had been very good and a high level of compliance had been observed resulting in low levels of cross infection. This had been supported by the high levels of surveillance that had been put in place by supervisors. The levels of protection put in place by the Service had proved very effective and should ensure resilience going forward.

The Chair noted that the introduction of the scientific cell had proved a critical addition and the additional guidance and information provided to staff via Mesh had been outstanding.

50/20 Minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority 5 October 2020

Resolved that the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 5 October 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

51/20 Review of the Constitution

The Clerk to the Authority provided an overview of the report. The report had been submitted to provide further detail to support the process of recruitment of Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer roles as approved at the meeting of the Fire Authority on 5 October 2020.

The explanatory wording aligned to Matters for Authority, Article 6, section 6.2.4 (of the Fire Authority Constitution) had been amended in accordance with the outcomes of the meeting of the Fire Authority on 5 October. This proposed wording (3.4.1 to 3.4.5) was put forward to Members for their consideration and approval.

Additionally, the flowchart outlining the recruitment process within Appendix 1 of the report would also be included within the Constitution.

Resolved

Members approved the proposed explanatory notes for inclusion in the Fire Authority Constitution.

Members approved that the Clerk make any further consequential amendments to the Constitution in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair, and the opposition Leader.

52/20 Monitoring of Finances

The Treasurer to the Authority, provided an overview of the report which dealt with the monitoring of the finances of the Authority in the current financial year and covered revenue expenditure and the Capital Programme.

Appendix A of the report compared the revenue budgeted to the end of November 2020 with the actuals to that date. The actual spend to November 2020 including commitments was £63.709 million compared to a projected budget of £63.850 million, an overall favourable variance of £0.141 million. It was noted that Appendix A showed the current impact on finances as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Appendix B provided statistical data relating to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

Appendix C provided an overview of the capital expenditure. The Authority's approved capital programme for 2020/21 was £7.679 million. Expenditure to the end of November 2020 was shown as £1.462 million. It was noted that the main forecast variance with the capital programme related to the vehicle replacement programme and the re-phased replacement of windows and doors at seven fire stations. Delays in both cases were as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

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

- The delay in the replacement of the Command Support Vehicle had not had any affect upon operational capacity

including how the Service responded and dealt with high-rise incidents.

- There was no intention currently to undertake any borrowing to complete the capital programme. It was intended that costs would be met predominantly using ear-marked reserves. The reduced use of ear-marked reserves this year would assist with funding next year.

The Chair noted that the Authority no longer received a central government grant for capital so there was a need to be careful with regards to funding such expenditure. The Covid 19 pandemic had complicated issues during what were already challenging times.

Resolved

Members noted the report on the monitoring of finances.

53/20 An Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance Against 'Our Plan' – Quarter Two 2020/21

The Chief Fire Officer provided an overview of the report which outlined an analysis of the organisation's performance against 'Our Plan' for 2020-2023.

Appendix 1 of the report contained a breakdown of the corporate performance indicators across the areas of response, prevention and protection, as well as 'other' which covered performance indicators relating to the areas of people, health and safety, and facilities. Each performance indicator comprised a summary and performance against the respective tolerance level.

Key points included:

- Performance against the risk-based attendance standards continued to remain very high. Average attendance times for category 1 incident (the most critical and important of the four categories of incident) were 4 minutes 32 seconds during quarter two, below the target of 5 minutes. Average attendance times for category 2, 3 and 4 incident types remained well within the respective targets.

- Of the 12 performance indicators for prevention, only two, PI5 the percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners and PI6 the number of Safe and Well points achieved by the brigade, recorded under-performance against the tolerance levels. It was noted that the delivery of Safe and Well visits had been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic, and although performance had dipped, the Service continued to engage with the most vulnerable within our communities.
- There were two performance indicators within the area of Protection. PI 13 the number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises had demonstrated performance above the upper tolerance level, and PI 14 the number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises had demonstrated performance within the tolerance levels.
- With regard to the performance indicators for people support services, PI 20 the average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness (non-uniformed employees) had demonstrated over performance against the tolerance levels. However, PI 15 the percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status, PI 16 the number of female uniformed staff, and PI 19 the average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness (uniformed and Fire Control staff) demonstrated under performance against their respective tolerance levels.
- PI 21 the total number of injuries demonstrated performance within the tolerance levels. PI 22 the total number of RIDDOR injuries demonstrated under performance against the tolerance levels. It was noted however that the number of RIDDOR injuries was very low even if above target.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and wished to thank all staff across the Service for their continued commitment and hard work.

A Member asked what the Service was looking to do regarding improving female recruitment. The Chief Fire Officer advised that

the targets that had been set were targets that would be achieved over a matter of time. The Covid 19 pandemic had affected this area and thrown performance slightly off track in terms of engagement. The Service had found that it generally had more success in recruiting when it was able to engage with these groups face to face. Additionally, the focus was not just on recruitment but also on progression within the organisation including the use of positive action. It was known that decision making was more informed when it included a variety of protected characteristics and neuro diversity.

The Chair noted that the targets set regarding the recruitment of females were stretch targets, and it was only right that the Authority set challenging targets. The Authority was very pro-active in the recruitment of under-represented groups and would continue explore these areas and have these conversations as part of the education around such issues. It was noted that the Authority was within the top 50 inclusive employers and had been recognised by the Guardian, winning an award for its recruitment.

It was noted that the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been invited by the Local Government Association Diversity Group to provide a presentation on equality and diversity. In preparing for the presentation, it was observed that the Service was ahead of many fire and rescue services in areas such as recruitment, progression, retention, and related national and community issues with the intention of removing / understanding unconscious bias.

It was noted that the report demonstrated that performance was generally positive across the corporate performance indicators with a few bespoke areas that required further development.

Resolved

Members noted the status of the Service's key performance indicators in the second quarter of 2020/21.

Members noted the progress made in delivering the three strategic priorities contained in 'Our Plan' 2020-23.

54/20 Minutes of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee held on 21 September 2020

The minutes of the Appointments, Standards and Appeals Committee held on 21 September 2020 were approved.

55/20 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 26 October 2020

The minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 26 October 2020 were received.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee wished to thank members of the committee, the internal and external auditors, and all officers for their continued contributions and support. Additionally, a special note of thanks to the Pension Board and Paul Gwynn, the Payroll and Pensions Manager.

The meeting ended at 12.01 hours.

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