

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

26 February 2018 at 10:30 p.m.
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Tranter (Chair),
Councillors Barlow (substitute), Barrie, Brackenridge,
Hogarth, Male, Miks, Spence and Young

Apologies:

Nil

Observer:

Nil

01/18 **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

02/18 **Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2017**

In answer to Members' questions, as a result of the minutes, the following points were raised:

- New entrants were subject to specific national fire standards such as fitness standards. However, the Service could choose to opt out of some national standards such as the level of education required for a new entrant, and around standards of dress. However, guidance regarding facial hair was subject to Health and Safety requirements, for example to ensure a breathing apparatus facemask seal test was met.

- The 'Fire Out' campaign was progressing well. Crew Commander Stephen Riddell was working closely with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Birmingham and exploring how the Service could participate in Birmingham Pride. Work was also ongoing exploring how awareness could be raised within LGBT communities that the Service was an employer of choice.
- Cllr Male had requested a breakdown of the proportionately of incidents by deliberate and non-deliberate cause. The information had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting and it was noted that of the 4140 incidents (primary and secondary fires) year to date, the split was approximately 50/50.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2017, be approved as a correct record.

03/18 **Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance against The Plan Quarter Three 2017/18**

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

PI 1 The Risk Based Attendance Standard: the mean response time for category one incidents during quarter three was four minutes forty-eight seconds, which represented an increase of ten seconds compared to the previous quarter and in line with seasonal trends.

PI 2 The number of accidental dwelling fires: performance was below target and bucking national trends, which was a testament to the Safe and Well work.

PI 3 Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings (taken to hospital): performance was below target and within the tolerance levels. The number of injuries during quarter three was low despite the number of accidental dwelling fires being relatively normal.

PI 4 The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires: six fatalities represented the lowest figure for a number of years, although one fatality would always be one too many.

PI 5 The percentage of safe and well visits referred by our partners: the target had been increased from 40% to 50%. Although performance remained below the target and lower tolerance level, good progress continued and the Service was confident that the target would be met in due course.

PI 6 The number of safe and well points achieved by the brigade: performance was below target and the lower tolerance level, in part due to the reduction in the number of safe and well visits referred by partners. Falls response and back home safe and well equated to on average 12 to 15 safe and well points, against an average of eight points achieved per safe and well visit.

PI 7 The number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions: the Service continued to work with partners in this area. It was noted that the number of fatalities as a result of road traffic collisions was double the number of fatalities as a result of accidental dwelling fires, and along with the number of people suffering serious and life changing injuries, represented a significant impact upon communities. The Service was undertaking more multi-agency initiatives and a blended approach including enforcement, first strike, and education.

The arson reduction plan had been implemented and would be reviewed for evaluation purposes.

PI 8 The number of arson fires in dwellings: performance was over target and above the upper tolerance level. The Service was taking a legislative approach to arson fires in dwellings, working closely with the Police.

PI 9 The number of arson fires in non-domestic premises: performance was over target and above the upper tolerance level. This performance indicator was impacted upon by the number of incidents occurring in HMP Birmingham. It had been forecast that the number of fires in the prison would decrease with the

introduction of a smoking ban but this had not proved to be the case.

PI 10 The number of arson vehicle fires: performance was just four incidents above target and within the tolerance levels. The number of incidents had reduced in recent quarters, following a period where the number of incidents had continually increased.

PI 11 The number of arson rubbish fires: performance was over target and above the upper tolerance level, in part due to seasonal impacts. It was noted that there had been no impact upon the number of incidents due to the bin strike within Birmingham.

PI 12 The number of arson fires in derelict buildings: performance was two incidents below target and within the tolerance levels. Following a number of interventions by the Service, the number of such incidents had reduced.

PI 13 The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels. A positive response to these type of incidents had been experienced as a result of engagement with Fire Safety Officers.

PI 14 The number of false alarm calls due to fire alarm equipment in dwellings and non-domestic premises: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels. It was noted that there had been over 4000 incidents year to date, the vast majority of which represented wasted journeys. However, progress continued to be made within this area, and the number of incidents continued to decrease.

Sarah Warnes, Strategic Enabler People Support Services, provided an overview of the performance indicators for People Support Services and Facilities Management:

PI 15 The percentage of employees that have disclosed their disabled status: performance remained within the tolerance level with a disclosure rate of 93.5%. Declaration rates across all of the protected characteristics remained high.

PI 16 The number of female staff: performance remained on target at 75. Progress had been made over recent months, with 48% of new recruits on course 1/18 being female. The composition of the next recruits' course will be between 25% and 30% female, demonstrating that the selection process was working for the Service. In addition, progression within the Service was improving and work was ongoing to ensure support was provided for under-represented groups.

In 2017, 14% of new recruits identified themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT). 10% of attendees on new recruits' courses in 2018 to date have identified themselves as LGBT.

The results of the Stonewall assessment had been released, and the Service had been ranked 352 (out of 434 organisations).

PI 17 The percentage of all staff from Black, Minority, Ethnic (BME) communities: performance remained constant at 10.2%, and within the tolerance levels. 31% of the new recruits due to attend the March 2018 course identified themselves as from a BME background. The challenge would be to ensure such success continued.

The Service continued to work closely with the Fire Service College and Thinkology, targeting potential applicants from BME backgrounds via social media, an approach that was proving to be successful. The Service would continue to work with applicants, helping them to prepare and be ready for the selection process.

Three members of the Service had received awards at the annual Asian Fire Service Association Awards.

The Service continued to work with the equality forums including Affinity and Aspire.

PI 18 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – all staff, and PI 20 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – non-uniformed staff: performance was over target and above the upper tolerance level.

PI 19 The average number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness – uniformed and Fire Control staff: performance was above target but within the tolerance levels.

Sickness impacted upon staffing and the ridership factor, which had reduced. The direction of travel was positive, with a focus continuing on attendance management including the provision of support and guidance by business partners to ensure the policy was applied correctly.

PI 21 The total number of injuries: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels. The Service continued to have a good health and safety record, with any small trends acted upon once identified. There was also a focus on near hit reporting and the reporting of acts of violence, which were broken down into specific incidents to examine for any potential trends. When reports of violence were made, the appropriate action would always be taken, with the issue dealt with by the crews in attendance at the time, and the relevant station commander. Local communities would also be liaised with to raise awareness. Organisationally, the data would be broken down to provide an overview.

PI 22 The total number of RIDDOR injuries: performance was below target and the lower tolerance level.

PI 24 To reduce gas use of Fire Authority premises: performance was below target and within the tolerance levels.

PI 25 To reduce electricity use of Fire Authority premises: performance was below target and the lower tolerance level.

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

- Response times measured for PI 1 The Risk Based Attendance Standard were based on the time firefighters were mobilised by Fire Control to the time that firefighters booked in attendance at an incident. Call handling times were not included in the response times and was recorded and monitored separately as a sub-

performance indicator. Call handling times had been approximately 90 seconds which had been reduced to an average of 80 seconds. Current performance indicated an average call handling time of 77 seconds. It was envisaged that the forthcoming pre-alert system would allow appliance mobilisation times to reduce further. The pre-alert system would be implemented following the go live of the Vision 4 mobilising system (due summer 2018).

- Cooking and smoking remained the most common causes of accidental dwelling fires. New risks were monitored as they emerged, for example, working with trading standards regarding illicit fake cigarettes and running education campaigns highlighting the risks surrounding mobile phone and e-cigarette (vape) chargers.
- Falls response attended people who were most vulnerable to fires.
- Incidents involving rescue from water were not recorded separately (normally recorded as a special service call). Separate reporting could be considered, although the Fire Service was not always the first agency to be called for such an incident.
- All fires that occurred within prisons were normally confined to within one cubic metre.
- Legislation introduced in Wales required automatic fire suppression systems (sprinkler systems) in new and converted houses and flats. Sprinkler systems were also required in public buildings.
- Case studies were readily available regarding the use and benefits of sprinkler systems, including the evidence that water damage from a sprinkler system actuating was less than that from water used by the Fire Service fighting a fire.
- The WMFRA position on sprinklers remained the same as per the National Fire Chiefs Council and that of the wider fire sector, and fully supported the installation of sprinkler systems.
- Incidents recorded as arson were a result of a genuine belief that there was a proven intent to deliberately set a fire, and therefore a criminal act. In terms of arson rubbish fires, an example such as if a fire was started due to a cigarette accidentally being thrown into a bin whilst still burning / smouldering, would probably not be considered to be arson.
- It was noted that all of the services continued to be delivered within the budget.

- A further breakdown of the BME figures would be provided at future meetings, including the composition of new recruit courses and the entire workforce.

04/18 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017/18 – February 2018**

Progress against the work programme was noted by the Committee.

Meeting ended at 12.05 hours

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