

Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee

**11 November 2019 at 12:00 p.m.**  
**at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham**  
**B7 4HW**

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

**Apologies:** Councillor Barrie  
S Middleton

**Observer:** Nil

**43/19 Declarations of Interest in contracts or other matters**

There were no declarations of interest.

**44/19 Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7 October 2019**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2019 be approved as a correct record.

**45/19 Fire Control performance Update Q1 & Q2 2019/20**

Gary Taylor, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, provided the background to the report and the reason for its submission to the Committee.

The Shared Fire Control Governance Board had been established to provide the appropriate oversight of the function. The change in the governance model at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service had resulted in the

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decision to disestablish the Board. It had been agreed that a six-monthly update would be provided to the Authority, via the Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that appropriate oversight was maintained.

It was noted that the update would be provided on a six-monthly basis initially and then on an annual basis from 2020/21 onwards.

Simon Barry, Strategic Enabler for Command Delivery, Fire Control and Workforce Planning, provided an overview of the report.

Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control had received 37,175 emergency calls between 1 April and 30 September 2019. 26,496 calls had been received for the West Midlands, and 10,679 calls had been received for Staffordshire. This equated to a split of 71% to 29%. The split in the number of calls mirrored the financial arrangements of the Fire Control function which were 70% West Midlands Fire Service, and 30% Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. It was noted that the level of calls received compared to the number of calls mobilised to had remained consistent reflecting the continuing approach to call challenge.

A key performance measure for Fire Control was the length of time from answering a 999 call to mobilising resources to the incident for category one (life and property) incidents. The target was 80 seconds. Performance for the six-month period was an average call handling time of 78 seconds.

It was noted that Fire Control had used to be quite restricted due to mobilising to incidents based on pre-determined levels of attendance. However, this could lead to too much or too little resources being sent to an incident. Dynamic mobilising helped to reduce this situation occurring by supporting and enabling the skills and experience of Fire Control in increasing or decreasing the resources mobilised, aided by solutions such as 999eye. Fire Control had dynamically amended the initial level of response on 1486 occasions during quarters one and two.

999eye had been used almost 3000 times year to date. This increased use ensured that Fire Control were gathering and using the data that was available.

Increasing levels of sickness absence had been experienced, mainly linked to long term sickness which accounted for 71% of all sickness. This was particularly felt within Fire Control due to the relatively small number of staff.

In recognition of the higher levels of long-term sickness, and that there was an agreed budget with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, an additional three individuals had been recruited as part of the latest recruitment campaign. The additional three individuals would not be putting extra pressures on the budget as it was known that three existing members of staff were due to leave. The recruitment of the individuals allowed Fire Control to build a buffer in place.

Work continued with the Command and Control supplier, Capita, regarding the upgrade of the Vision 3 system to Vision 4. Due to a number of issues identified as part of end user testing, the planned go live in November had been delayed until January 2020. This had followed an agreement that the system would not go live whilst significant issues remained unresolved. Capita were providing a responsive service and working closely with the Service. Implementation was getting closer and the Service was confident that there would be no issues when the system would go live.

The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) was a national programme to replace the current emergency services network. It was noted that the programme had been beset by delays and a lack of clarity. The Service remained plugged into this work but it still remained unclear of when it would be implemented or what it would actually comprise. A corporate risk and separate project were in place for this workstream.

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

- In relation to a question regarding how attendance times were calculated:
- Attendance times were calculated from the time that Fire Control mobilised a resource. The attendance times did not include call handling times. However, it was important to consider how these contributed to survivability.
- The attendance times were calculated in accordance with the Dear Chief Officer Letter guidance which recommended that times be calculated from the time that resources were informed. It was acknowledged that there were differing views regarding the guidance and the way of calculating / recording attendance times.
- All call handling and response times were reported to the Home Office. The Service had taken the conscious decision to break the response times down into the different elements such as call handling, mobilising and responding as this enabled Officers to work on reducing the times accordingly.
- It was noted that there were elements that impacted upon attendance times that were outside of the Service's control such as call handling by the operator.
  
- In relation to a question regarding sickness absence and stress related illnesses:
- A sickness absence lasting for 28 days or more was classed as long-term sickness. The cause in some cases was identified as stress. However, this was recorded under a general category of sickness. Work was currently being undertaken regarding this, to explore the subject in more detail, and to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms were in place to support mental health and wellbeing.
- Following a request by Members, it was agreed that information would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee on the work undertaken to explore the subject of stress related illnesses in more detail, and to ensure the appropriate mechanisms were in place to support mental health and wellbeing.

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- Sickness added additional pressures to Fire Control. A review of staffing within Fire Control had been undertaken three years ago. The review had examined what levels of staffing were required and when. This had resulted in optimum crewing levels (OCL) being introduced, which was a very lean staffing model. The OCL were based on an assumption that a certain number of staff would be on duty. However, sickness levels meant that sometimes the OCL was not met (the OCL was met approximately 80% of the time). This built in additional pressures for Fire Control.
- Officers pro-actively planned to ensure that a shift would not start below OCL. A number of measures had been put in place which included bringing in additional Fire Control staff, utilising members of the day team, putting in place Flexible Duty Officer support, and utilising members of staff from other areas of the Service who had Fire Control experience.
- In relation to a question regarding Fire Control recruitment:
- The latest recruitment campaign had attracted a high level of interest from individuals from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. However, the level of interest had not resulted in any BME individuals being shortlisted. It was noted that, via Thinkology, the recruitment adverts were very targeted to reach particular communities, and this had generated a lot of expressions of interest. However, expressions of interest were not being converted into applications. It was evident that individuals were deselecting themselves from the application process and there was a need to understand why.
- It was noted that Fire Control was slightly different to the rest of the organisation in that BME and white males were under-represented.
- Following a request by Members, it was agreed that further information would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee on Fire Control recruitment and the approach used by the Service to recruit people from under-represented groups.

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- It was confirmed that the Service was no longer using a recruitment agency to recruit individuals for positions in Fire Control. However, due to the number of staff, some were employed on temporary contracts.

It was agreed that:

- Information on the work undertaken to explore the subject of stress related illnesses in more detail, and to ensure the appropriate mechanisms were in place to support mental health and wellbeing would be provided to Members at the next meeting of the Committee.
- Further information on Fire Control recruitment and the approach used by the Service to recruit people from under-represented groups would be provided to Members at the next meeting of the Committee.

#### **46/19 Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality Update**

Jo Simmonds, People Support Manager, People Support Services, provided an overview Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion, Equality (DICE) Update:

In conjunction with the Service's Staff Engagement Groups, the DICE team hosted an Inclusion and Development day for staff in June 2019. The event focussed on raising the profile of the staff engagement groups and included a range of speakers covering a variety of topics such as mental health and wellbeing, positive action and recruitment, a transgender case study, and awareness of organ donation specifically within the African Caribbean community. Further events would be held in the future.

The Buddy Scheme was launched in July 2019 and it featured an emphasis around new entrants. Trained buddies were now in place with a view to increase the number of buddies going forward.

The draft DICE Report 2020-2023 had been developed. The report celebrated the success experienced over the last few years and looked forward, including the DICE Objectives for

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2020-2023 which had been developed in consultation with departments and functions across the Service. The DICE Objectives included reducing the gender pay gap, a refresh of the Service's core values, and the continuation of positive action.

Sections five and six of the report provided a snapshot of the activities carried out by the Service including the work of the Service's specialist deaf team, the prevention team, the complex needs officer team, and the hosting of a Stonewall event.

Section seven provided a profile of the workforce. It was noted that 10% of uniformed staff were female which represented an improvement compared to past performance.

There had been a total of five grievances lodged during the reporting period of January to June 2019. All five were related to working practices. There had been 10 discipline cases. Five cases had been investigated under gross misconduct and five cases had been investigated under misconduct. At the time of the report, four cases had progressed to a hearing, the outcomes of which were final written warnings in all four cases.

No trends in relation to the protected characteristics had been identified regarding the grievances or discipline cases.

It was noted that the Service intended to carry out a benchmarking exercise in the future to compare the grievance and discipline data to that of other Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services. The outcomes of which would be reported to the Committee via a future DICE Update report.

Since April 2019, the Service had employed 32 new entrant firefighters, of which, 14 (44%) were women and five (16%) were from BME communities. It was noted that there remained work to be done particularly with regard to recruiting individuals from BME communities. As a result, the Service continued to carry out pre-recruitment activities. A BME pre-recruitment programme commenced in August following further targeted advertising by Thinkology.

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Approximately 40 people attended the initial open evening with 20 individuals registering their interest. 12 people committed to the six-week programme which started in September.

The female development sessions were being implemented with the first workshop being held in June 2019. The session was well attended by women from across the Service and topics covered included progression and development, confidence building, coaching and the benefits of volunteering.

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

- Members of the specialist deaf team were able to use sign language. The team did attend school events etc but generally attended referrals involving people with a hearing impairment / deafness.
- The Stonewall event held in September was for organisations committed to supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) employees and providing a fully inclusive environment using appropriately trained non-LGBT champions.

#### **47/19 An Analysis of Progress of Quarterly Performance against 'Our Plan' – Quarter Two 2019/20**

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

PI 1 'The risk-based attendance standard', the median attendance time to high risk (category one incidents) was 4 minutes 38 seconds, a one second improvement compared to quarter one. The Service continued to overperform for category two, three and four incident types, with all three median attendance times well within the respective targets. However, it was important to note that attendance times for category two and three incidents had increased by 12 seconds each, and a small increase had been observed for category four incidents. The Service Delivery Model

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continued to protect the PRLs ensuring their availability to attend category one incidents, and some flexibility remained within the lower risk categories of incident.

PI 2 'The number of accidental dwelling fires', there had been 824 incidents year to date, 4% above target but within the tolerance levels.

PI 3 'Injuries from accidental fires in dwellings', there had been 17 injuries during quarter two, 37 injuries year to date. Performance was 56.5% above target and 35.4% above the three-year average.

It was noted that the number of injuries would normally correlate with the number of incidents. However, an increase in the number of injuries had been observed which did not correlate with the number of incidents. The increase had been observed over two quarters so could not be attributed to a spike in the numbers, nor could the figures be affected by a single incident. Serious Incident Reviews had discovered no significant issues or factors. As a result, performance would continue to be monitored.

PI 4 'The number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires', there had been seven fatalities year to date. No spikes had been observed. Established reasons and trends continued.

PI 5 'The percentage of Safe and Well visits referred by our partners', performance was 31.7% year to date, below the target of 40%. The revision of the strategy and engagement with partners had resulted in a reduction in the number referrals from partners. Members were asked to provide support with regard to this, to help the Service to receive quality referrals.

PI 6 'The number of Safe and Well points achieved by the Brigade', 121,244 points had been achieved year to date, 8596 below the target. 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', no data had been received for quarter two and only provisional data had been provided up to 30 June 2019.

The latest figures indicated a small reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured. However, the figures remained a lot higher than those killed or seriously injured due to fire. A different profile had been observed with an increase in the number of pedestrians killed or seriously injured. The Service would work on raising awareness via social media and other platforms.

The Service continued to work with the West Midlands Combined Authority and road safety teams across the region.

The suite of performance indicators for deliberate fires, PI 8 'The number of deliberate fires in dwellings', PI 9 'The number of deliberate fires in non-domestic premises', PI 10 'The number of deliberate vehicle fires', and PI 11 'The number of deliberate rubbish fires', were all within their respective tolerance levels, with the exception of PI 12 'The number of deliberate fires in derelict buildings', which was 32.2% above target. It was noted that two derelict sites had been targeted a number of times, impacting upon the figures. The Service was working with local teams to secure both premises.

PI 13 'The number of accidental fires in non-domestic premises', there had been 234 incidents year to date which was 11.9% 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 3071 incidents year to date which was above the target but within the tolerance levels.

Jo Simmonds, People Support Manager, People Support Services, provided an overview of the People Support Services and Safety, Health and Environment performance indicators:

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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 1.74 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness during quarter two, below target and below the lower tolerance level.

An average of 3.8 working days / shifts per person were lost due to sickness year to date, above the target of 3.4 days.

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 21 'The total number of injuries', 47 injuries were reported during quarter two. 89 injuries had been reported year to date, above the target of 63, and above the upper tolerance level. A full breakdown of the injuries by type was provided in the report. The three main types of injury sustained during quarter two were burns / reddening during hot fire training, manual handling injuries, and slips, trips and falls.

Near hit reporting had decreased by 38% during quarters one and two. Reports of violence had decreased by 32% during the same period.

PI 22 'The total number of RIDDOR injuries', there had been six RIDDOR reports during quarter two, and 11 reports year to date. Performance 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:

- In relation to a question if there had been any water related fatalities this year:
- It was agreed that information on the number and type of water related incidents and the number of fatalities would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee. Information would also be provided on the Service's approach to water safety and the prevention of such incidents.
- The National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) had a dedicated water safety and prevention section which had developed a water safety strategy and action plan.
- Nationally, the number of water related incidents had increased. It was noted that more operational discretion was being applied at these types of incidents due to their nature. The NFCC were leading on a project to determine if there should be a national policy regarding sub-surface and water related incidents.
- There was no statutory requirement for staff to go sub-surface if required, for example to affect a rescue. However, staff could find themselves in such a situation and there was a need to look after staff. Other agencies had specialist dive teams but response times could be an issue. Firefighters could be the first responders on scene and find themselves under pressure to do something but not have the training to do so, potentially putting themselves at risk.
- It was noted that recent activity to highlight awareness to communities regarding a spate of deliberate fires involving wheelie bins in the Walsall area had triggered a note into the NFCC which had been circulated nationally as a national issue.
- It was agreed that further information would be provided on the number of injuries, in particular injuries sustained in controlled environments including during training.

It was agreed that:

- information on the number and type of water related incidents and the number of fatalities would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee. Information would also be provided on the Service's approach to water safety and the prevention of such incidents.
- further information would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee on the number of injuries, in particular injuries sustained in controlled environments including during training.

#### 48/19 **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 the Committee had undertaken the review of Business Continuity Arrangements and had agreed to undertake a review of Safe and Well. The review of Safe and Well would need to be scheduled before the end of the municipal year (June 2020). It was suggested that a scoping document for the review be submitted to the Committee at its next scheduled meeting in February 2020.

The Committee agreed that a scoping document on the review of Safe and Well was to be submitted at the February 2020 meeting.

The meeting finished at 13:48pm.

<p>Contact Officer: Stephen Timmington Strategic Hub West Midlands Fire Service 0121 380 6680</p>
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