

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

5 MARCH 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Dan Barrington, Bruce Berry, Anthony Boyle, Janet Grace, Doreen Knight, Andrew Makinson, Lisa Preston and Paul Tweed.

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Angela Coleman and Cllr Del Arnall

1. Chair's Announcement

Prior to the start of the meeting, information regarding general housekeeping was provided by the Chair to all in attendance.

The Chair confirmed to all present that the proceedings of the meeting would not be filmed.

The meeting was declared open.

2. Preliminary Matters

Members considered the identification of declarations of interest, any urgent additional items, and any business that may require the exclusion of the press and public.

Resolved that:

- a) no declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to any item of business on the Agenda
- b) no additional items of business to be considered as matters of urgency were determined by the Chair; and
- c) no items of business required the exclusion of the press and public during consideration, due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16th January 2020, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. Joint Competent Authority (JCA) With Liverpool City Council (Seconded Protection Officer)

Members considered report number CFO/011/20 of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, concerning the establishment of the Building Safety Group (BSG) with Liverpool City Council and key stakeholders/partners, previously referred to as the Joint Competent Authority (JCA). The creation of the BSG and the secondment of a Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (MFRA) Officer responds to the recommendations as contained within the Dame Judith Hackitt Review in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire.

Members were given a brief introduction of this report, highlighting the BSG's purpose to arrange joint inspections with key stakeholders. They were told that they can receive further information regarding future meetings of BSG if they wish.

Station Manager Dave Watson then presented to Members about the joint work that MFRA are doing with Liverpool City Council (LCC) in response to the Grenfell Towers incident which happened in 2017.

High Rise Reassurance Campaigns have taken place throughout Merseyside, which included work ensuring General Fire Precautions and Home Fire Safety Checks for communities. All the information gained from this work is stored on a database, which is due to be fully completed by next summer.

Members were advised that a large exercise took place recently at Irlam House, a high rise building located in Bootle, and the training was very successful.

MFRA have had an Officer seconded into this joint working role with the Local Authority since October 2018 and it is a key working strategy.

Group Manager Chris Head then advised Members that the plan to second an officer in this way is very well thought out and that other services have followed this practice. He added that sharing information is very important and that this ensures MFRA have direct access to all the data stored with the Local Authority on this practice. The data we have about cladding on buildings is a big part of keeping firefighters safe. After 2 years around 200 properties have been looked at with regards to Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) and its removal. There are 5 High Rise buildings left on Merseyside that have cladding and it is ongoing to get this removed.

It was explained to Members that due to the different types of legislation for different properties (ie: Housing Act and Fire Safety Order) that these powers require revising to assist Fire Services in their duties. MFRA will continue to work closely with the Local Authorities to ensure properties and the public remain as safe as possible.

Members asked if the Local Authorities are enforcing the assistance with MFRA with regards to the removal of cladding and were advised that they are. It was added that MFRA can serve Prohibition Notices and this means people are

required to leave properties immediately – about 20 of these are served a year and there have been no appeals on Merseyside in relation to this.

Members then raised a question of whose responsibility it is to re-home any tenants that were forced out of their properties and it was confirmed that this is the responsibility of the housing service or student accommodation service. It was added it is more difficult for people in privately owned properties, but that MFRA would notify Local Authorities if required and would not leave people homeless.

It was asked by Members if any of the 5 remaining high rise buildings were occupied and if they were, was there any provisions in place, for example Fire Marshalls. Members were informed that there is a degree of cladding on the properties and that owners are aware of this. Student accommodation do have Fire Marshalls.

A question was raised by Members asking if properties, which were not high rise buildings, still have cladding on and were informed that properties below 18 metres were not classed as high rise and that they have limited cladding composite. It was added that a fire fighter's definition of a high rise is anything they cannot reach via their ladders. There are proposed changes anticipated to lower the height of a high rise building from 18 metres to 11 metres and that a new strategy will be looked at if this is the case.

Members asked who was responsible for costs of cladding removal if the property is privately owned and were advised that the Government are providing funding for this, so the work will still be carried out, but that timescales are given by the owners.

The "Stay Put" system in relation to fires in high rises buildings was raised by Members and they asked if this system is still instructed. Members were advised that it depends on the type of fire, but due to Grenfell changes have taken place regarding this. The "Stay Put" system does work if the fire remains departmental. The "Stay Put" system is changed to "immediate evacuation" if it is deemed unsafe. The remaining 5 high rise buildings have an "immediate evacuation" system in place.

Members were given information on the way in which ACM is used on buildings and the materials that are used in the fixing of it. MFRA Fire Safety Inspectors now ask if properties have had assessments on the building in relation to the building material to see if it is fit for purpose.

Members Resolved that:

the content of this report and accompanying presentation, be scrutinised.

5. Verbal Update - CfPS Local Government Scrutiny Conference

Members considered a verbal update from the Lead Scrutiny Members – Cllr Jan Grace and Cllr Paul Tweed, following their attendance at the recent Centre for Public Scrutiny – Local Government Scrutiny Conference.

The importance of courses and attending them was relayed to the Members and they were told that the Fire Authority is happy for training to be completed if required for Fire Authority commitments.

Members were advised that Scrutiny is a vital role and for it to be effective it requires vision and the ability to articulate. It is necessary to access and challenge information.

Demand and cost pressures were then presented to Members highlighting financial sustainability of Local Authorities 2018, consisting of: spending powers being reduced by 26.3% from 2010-11 to 2018-19; the number of children looked after in care has increased by 15% from 2010-11 to 2017-18; and the population of people aged over 65 years who need care increasing by 14% from 2010-11 to 2016-17. It was added that the pressure of financial issues will continue and that substantial savings have had to be made, which has meant difficult decisions over spending reductions and the prioritisation of different service areas.

Members were advised that forward planning is a good way in which we can prepare for any future challenges such as climate change, budgets, the possibility of a recession and the exit from the European Union.

Transparency for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is paramount and good governance and scrutiny should be upheld.

Members were reminded that for scrutiny to be effective the committee should constructively challenge, amplify the voices and concerns of the public and drive improvement in public services.

Members resolved that:

the verbal update regarding the Local Government Scrutiny Conference, be noted.

6. Standing Item: Review of Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan

Members considered and reviewed the current Forward Work Plan for the Scrutiny Committee; and considered the inclusion of any additional items for scrutiny.

Members were advised that the items on the current Forward Work Plan are highlighted as follows:

- actions in Green are completed items,
- actions in white are outstanding items; and

- actions in yellow are new items added since the last Scrutiny Committee.

In relation to the action regarding 'Family Friendly Policies and Staff Retention', a question was raised asking what we have in place for families and if adoption was covered. Members were informed that we have an adoption policy and also policies for both maternity and paternity.

It was re-iterated to Members that if they required any further information on topics, they were more than welcome to send any questions to Democratic Services for this to be added to the Forward Work Plan.

Members resolved that:

The current Forward Work Plan, be noted.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 10 September 2020

Signed: _____ Dated: _____