

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

PERFORMANCE & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JANUARY 2016

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Robbie Ayres (Chair) , Cllrs Barbara Murray, Jean Stapleton, Sharon Sullivan, Anthony Boyle and Peter Brennan

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from:
Ray Halpin, Jimmy Mahon and Lesley Rennie

7. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

At the opening of the meeting, after a count of the voting Members present, the Chair of the Committee declared that there was not a quorum present. As such, the meeting stood adjourned for a period of 15 minutes.

It was agreed that the presentation in support of Agenda Item 3 – “Community Fire Protection Update” be heard whilst the meeting stood adjourned.

During the period of adjournment whilst the presentation was being heard, two further Members of the Committee arrived, meaning that there was a quorum present and the meeting could be opened.

The remainder of the presentation was therefore deferred, to be concluded at the close of the meeting.

Information regarding general housekeeping and confirmation of the recording of proceedings was provided by the Chair to all in attendance. The Chair then declared the meeting open and recording of the proceedings commenced.

1. 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 thereof because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Performance and Scrutiny Committee, held on 5th November 2015, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Community Fire Protection Update

A presentation was delivered outside of the meeting in relation to this item.

Members considered report CFO/006/16 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning an update on the Community Fire Protection function for 2015.

Members were informed of the work undertaken over the last 12 months with regards to functional planning, supporting businesses, enforcements and prosecutions, and 5 year planning with due regard to the financial challenges faced by the Authority.

The overview highlighted the introduction of a new Protection Information Management System, response to unwanted fire signals; and utilisation of protection staff to provide training to operational colleagues around the built environment.

Discussion took place around work undertaken with diverse businesses within the community to provide support and education around Fire Regulations; and the recent, successful conference– “Engaging with Diverse Businesses for Business Safety Compliance”, which was initiated and led by MFRA.

Advice was sought from Officers regarding the installation of sprinklers in new developments and how fire safety measures with regards to buildings are considered during planning processes.

Members were informed that officers do work with planners to ensure that sufficient fire safety measures are incorporated within any building plans. With regards to sprinkler systems, Members were informed that they do not activate without cause; and in the majority of cases when they are triggered, only one sprinkler head actuates.

Members resolved that:

- a) Performance concerning the Community Fire Protection Department, be noted
- b) A further report concerning sprinkler systems be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

4. Freedom of Information requests and organisational capacity 2015

Members considered report CFO/001/16 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning a review of the impact of processing Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Members were informed that the Service fully supports and adheres to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, use of the Act has become increasingly popular, demonstrated by the significant increase in the number of FOI Requests received by the Authority over recent years. It was highlighted that organisations always have the option of determining a request as being vexatious; and therefore not requiring a response, however, doing so can be difficult to legitimise and organisations can be seen as “protectionist”.

Members were informed that a number of requests received are from members of the public, however many come from journalists; and businesses or organisations, who can potentially use the information obtained to gain an advantage.

Information was provided concerning the amount of time spent by MFRA employees in dealing with FOI Requests, which is significant, especially when resources are continually reducing.

Members were informed that a review of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, is currently being undertaken by an Independent Commission. MFRA have responded to their call for evidence, suggesting that consideration be given to levying a charge for requests from commercial organisations, or to refusing the request should it not be demonstrated that the request is in the public interest. However, the Commission has argued against the use of charges and has stated that to reduce the burden, more use should be made of section 14 of the Act (vexatious requests).

Discussion took place around the cost associated with responding to FOI Requests and the possibility of highlighting within responses, the cost associated with dealing with that request.

Members were informed that this may be problematic as the cost will depend on the individual/s dealing with each query. Therefore, it was deemed that highlighting the overall cost in terms of days lost, was a better indicator. It was also highlighted that some departments can be disproportionately affected by responding to requests.

Further discussion took place around the involvement of MP's in raising some of the issues associated with Fol Requests and Fol Legislation.

Members resolved that:

- a) The contents of the report concerning Freedom of Information Requests, be noted.
- b) A report be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee, regarding the outcomes of the Independent Commission review of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- c) The content of this report, be shared with Merseyside MP's.

5. Review of CLG FRS Attendance Times 2014/15

Members considered report CFO/002/16 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer concerning analysis of CLG Fire & Rescue Attendance Times 2014/15; and comparison of MF&RS attendance times for Dwelling Fires and Primary Fires against fellow Metropolitan Fire & Rescue Services.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which highlighted the performance of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service within the recent CLG Publication "Fire Incident Response Times: April 2014 to March 2015, England".

It was highlighted that out of all Metropolitan Fire & Rescue Services, MFRS has the fastest attendance times in response to dwelling fires, and the second fastest response to primary fires.

It was also highlighted that during 2014/15 all Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Service's had slower attendance times than in previous years.

Members resolved that:

- a) Performance in relation to attendance times of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service appliances to dwelling and primary fire incidents, be noted.
- b) Thanks be recorded to all staff who contribute towards maintaining excellent response times on Merseyside.

6. Standing Item: Forward Work Plan

Members considered the updated Forward Work Plan for the Performance & Scrutiny Committee; and the items due to be reported to the next meeting of the Committee on 17th March, were highlighted as follows:

- Fire Control and the Mobilisation Process
- Implementation of the Management Review (including impact on Partnership Arrangements)
- How effective is our Consultation Process?
- Implementation of New HR Policies
- Environmental Performance

In relation to “How Effective is our Consultation Process?” - Members were informed that a significant amount of consultation has been undertaken recently, which has now concluded. An audit of our consultation processes has formed part of the Annual Internal Audit Plan; therefore this will be reported back to Members once the Internal Audit Report has been received.

Members requested that an additional item be added to the Forward Work Plan, to scrutinise and review the Emergency Medical Response Pilot.

Members were informed that the pilot is due to commence shortly, therefore it was suggested that this item be carried over to next year’s Plan, to be reported on once there is sufficient data to do so.

Members confirmed that they were happy with the updated Forward Work Plan; and noted the reports for submission to the next meeting of the Performance & Scrutiny Committee on 17th March 2016.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 17 March 2016

Signed:_____

Date:_____