

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

26 JANUARY 2017

MINUTES

Present: Cllr Dave Hanratty (Chair) Councillors Sharon Connor, Joe De'Asha, Janet Grace, Chris Meaden, Les Byrom, Linda Maloney, Peter Brennan, Barbara Murray, Lesley Rennie, James Roberts, Jean Stapleton, Sharon Sullivan and Paul Tweed

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Denise Allen, Cllr Brian Kenny, Cllr Veronica McNeill and Cllr Marianne Welsh

1. Preliminary Matters

The Authority considered the identification of any declarations of interest, matters of urgency or items that would require the exclusion of the press and public due to the disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved that:

- a) the following declarations of interest were made by individual Members in relation to items of business on the Agenda:
 - Cllrs Lesley Rennie and Jean Stapleton declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item 5 – *Community Risk Intervention Services*; and Agenda Item 7 – *Service Delivery Plan August to November 2016 Updates*, due to being former trustees of Community Risk Intervention Service (CRIS).
- b) no additional items of business were determined by the Chair to be considered as matters of urgency; 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 Authority, held on 20th October 2016, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Minutes of the Member Development & Engagement Group

Members considered the Minutes of the last meeting of the Member Development & Engagement Group, held on 13th December 2016.

The Chair of the Group – Cllr Barbara Murray, commented on the meeting and thanked the Members of the Group for their attendance and contributions. She advised that an action plan for the Group has now been produced; and requested that Members consider the Minutes and note actions.

The Chair of the Authority commented on the Hot News articles, which will be included in future editions of the publication, focusing on Authority Members; and requested that those Members who have yet to provide responses to the questions, do so as soon as possible.

It was resolved that the email containing the questions, be re-circulated to Members, with some clarity provided on the length of responses.

4. Older Persons Day 2016

Members considered Report CFO/001/17 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning the activities undertaken and outcomes achieved during Older Persons Day 2016.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, highlighting that Older Persons Day forms part of Home Safety Week, supported by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). The day saw functional staff joining with operational staff, to help target individuals aged over 65 within our communities. This was co-ordinated by the Home Safety Team, with Exeter data utilised to target which properties to visit.

Members were informed that of the HFSC's conducted on the day, of which 42 were identified as high risk and were referred to the Community Risk Management Advocates for further intervention.

Questions were raised around the high risk referrals and whether the Health and Social Care departments of the local authorities would be notified.

Members were informed that where individuals are identified as high risk, Community Risk Management staff will repeatedly visit the property and engage with partners. However, powers of intervention lay with the local authorities, who we rely on to intervene where we do not have powers to gain entry.

Discussion took place around this issue and the potential scope for Government to issue powers of entry where a clear risk is identified.

It was suggested that the Authority make representations to the LGA and CFOA; and raise the issue at the LGA Fire Conference in March, where the Fire Minister will be present.

Members Resolved that:

The contribution of MFRA staff to Older Persons Day 2016 on Friday 30th September 2016, be noted.

5. Community Risk Intervention Services

Members considered Report CFO/003/17 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, informing Members that Community Risk Intervention Service (CRIS), formally Fire Support Network Charity/ Foundation has ceased trading as of 16th December 2016.

Members were informed that the first iteration of CRIS – “The Friends of the Fire Service”, provided a commissioned service to MFRA in 2002, with the work evolving over the years to include, for example, the provision of a decluttering service, running summer camps for young people and bonfire material removal.

Members were advised that due to austerity, CRIS have faced a reduction in funding for their services. It was emphasised that this in no way means that the demand has diminished, simply that the funding for their services is no longer available. Also, given the significant financial challenge it faces, MFRA has had to review the financial support it provides to CRIS.

Following the decision of CRIS to cease trading, Members were advised of plans to fill the gap in service provision through the use of volunteers and apprentices.

Members were further informed that CRIS staff and volunteers have been provided with certificates in formal recognition for their contributions to making Merseyside safer.

Discussion took place around the commitment of CRIS staff and volunteers and the valuable role they played within the community.

Members requested that their thanks be conveyed to those individuals.

Members commented that CRIS had numerous volunteers, many of which may still want to assist; and it would be fantastic to harness their enthusiasm and recruit them as MFRS volunteers.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The ceasing of trading by CRIS with effect from 16th December 2016, be noted.
- b) The commissioning of CRIS by the Authority to carry out fire prevention and risk mitigation services for the Service; and as such, the inevitable detrimental impact that the loss of these services will have on the number of Home Fire Safety Checks and other interventions carried out by the Authority, be noted.

- c) The necessity of closure of the Charity, due to the cuts to public sector spending (Fire and Local Authority) and the requirements placed on the Authority to set a balanced budget, be noted.

6. Supporting the Syrian Resettlement Programme

Members considered Report CFO/011/17 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority's support to the Syrian Resettlement Programme.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, which highlighted the Authority's contribution; and in particular the contribution of the Authority's Arabic speaking Bi-Lingual Advocate – Suzanne Hazza, to the programme thus far and their proposed contribution over the next 6 months.

Members were advised that the full cost of the secondment will be met by Knowsley Borough Council.

Questions were raised by Members regarding work with Halton Council, due to the conversion of a nursing home into a resettlement centre within the District; and the subsequent impact this may have on neighbouring authorities such as Knowsley and St. Helens.

Members were informed that as Halton falls within the boundaries of Cheshire Fire & Rescue Authority, it is more likely that their advocates would be involved in this area. However if Cheshire were to request assistance from MFRA, this would be provided where possible.

Further comments were made regarding asylum seekers of all nationalities and their involvement with our Princes' Trust Programme over the past few months. It was noted that this programme has helped to change the lives of these individuals, who have been welcomed into the area and into MFRS, which is testament to the Service and its staff.

Members Resolved that:

The content of the report be endorsed and continued support be noted.

7. SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN AUGUST TO NOVEMBER 2016 UPDATES

Members considered Report CFO/004/17 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning scrutiny of performance against the Service objectives and the performance targets/ outcomes as set out in the Service Delivery Plan 2016/17 for the period August to November 2016, including cumulative reporting from April to November 2016.

Members were provided with an overview of the report, with attention drawn to the Benchmark Performance Indicators.

Members were informed that performance in relation to special service calls attended and the number of Road Traffic Collisions (RTC's) is not on target. In relation to special service calls, Members were advised that out of the 208 extra special service calls received, 160 incidents related to EMR response.

A further indicator for which performance is not on target is in relation to the total number of false alarms. However Members were informed that a number of those AFA's responded to were in sheltered accommodation, which will always receive a response as they are domestic dwellings.

Questions were raised regarding AFA's and whether more could be done to raise awareness regarding the issue.

Members were informed that the Protection Team do engage with premises for which MFRA receive a large number of AFA's. However, issues tend not to be with commercial premises, but with single dwellings within a managed facility. Due to the nature of such premises, it is unlikely that the number of AFA's can be managed down significantly without amending our AFA Policy, which is not something that we intend to do.

The Chair suggested that it may be worth looking at the ten premises to which MFRA receive the most AFA's; and consider how we can work with those premises and impress on them any changes which could be made to help reduce the number of AFA's received.

Members Resolved that:

The Service Delivery Plan update, be noted.

8. Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) Change Programme

Members considered Report CFO/010/17 of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, concerning progress made in relation to the Chief Fire Officer Association (CFOA) change programme.

Members were provided with an overview of the report which detailed the drivers, guiding principles and the basis for the reform programme, which will see the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) replace the CFOA FRS Council; and the previous Presidents role, replaced with a paid Chairs role.

Members were informed that MFRA's Chief Fire Officer will take on the role of Chair of the Operational Co-Ordination Committee, a role which sits well with the Lead Authority role for National Resilience.

Members were advised that CFOA will continue to exist as a charity and membership association.

Members commented regarding the involvement of MFRA Officers within the new structures; and requested that their thanks be recorded to those Officers for their hard work and dedication.

Members Resolved that:

The content of the report be noted.

9. PROPOSED NEW COMMUNITY FIRE STATION AT SAUGHALL MASSIE, WIRRAL

Members considered Report CFO/007/17 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the decision of Wirral Council's Planning Committee to refuse planning permission for the building of a new community fire station in Saughall Massie; and the approach taken by officers in order to deliver the Authority approved station merger proposals as per CFO/058/15.

Members were provided with an overview of the report and background information to the merger proposal.

Detail was provided regarding the meeting of Wirral Council's Planning Committee on 15th December 2016, at which the planning application was considered; and the procedure followed at that Committee.

Members were informed that as a result of the procedure followed at the meeting, the Chief Fire Officer was not afforded the opportunity to address the Committee or correct factual inaccuracies advanced by a local Ward Councillor during proceedings.

Members were advised that this report addresses those inaccuracies; and they were provided with an overview of each point addressed, as follows:

- *Upton Community Fire Station referred to as a "fall back location".*

The Chief Fire Officer explained that this would be the inevitable outcome should the planning application be refused. However, he stressed that should there be only one station for West Wirral, Upton is not in the best location.

- *Perceived detrimental effect to Arrowe Park Hospital.*

The Chief Fire Officer stressed that Arrowe Park Hospital is an extremely well-managed property, with staff employed to focus on fire safety. Responsibility for fire safety therefore rests with the hospital itself, not with MFRA who have a responsibility to the whole of Merseyside. It was explained that fire risk is not managed in the same way within domestic dwellings, where the risk to life from fire is far greater.

- *Comments stating that longer attendance times to West Kirby station area from Upton (rather than Saughall Massie) are acceptable because they would be "within national guidelines".*

The Chief Fire Officer reiterated that there are no national guidelines. The only relevant national guidelines are those set out within the Integrated Risk Management Plan Guidance note issued by Government in 2004, in which the reduction of life risk incidents is at the top of the hierarchy, well above the safeguarding of the environment. The guidance is also clear that all sections of society should be treated fairly and equitably.

- *Comments regarding the reduction in the number of incidents and the higher volume of incidents in Upton.*

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the volume of incidents in both station areas is low, with the Upton area being “less quiet”. He stressed that although the likelihood of incidents is low, the severity of an incident would be equally high for both areas.

- *Moving the station two minutes nearer to West Kirby would move it two minutes further away from Upton*

Members were advised that the Saughall Massie Road site is within the Upton station ground area; and moving it nearer to West Kirby would still result in average attendance times of five minutes to areas such as Woodchurch. It was stressed again, that in order to make the required savings, there is nothing that can be done which would not have a detrimental impact.

- *References to Thingwall, Irby and Pensby being negatively affected by the planning application.*

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that these areas fall within the Heswall station area and therefore initial response would be unaffected to these areas.

The options open to the Authority were highlighted to Members, the first being to accept the planning decision and close West Kirby fire station.

It was noted that given the Authority’s experiences with the closure of Allerton fire station, this is likely to be the far easier option. However, to do so would be to accept the logic of the planning committee, which if followed through, would indicate that only Bromborough and Upton fire stations need to be retained on the Wirral to achieve a 10 minute attendance standard to life risk incidents on 90% of occasions. The Chief Fire Officer stressed that this is not something that he would recommend and that is not what the vast majority of Wirral residents would want.

The other two options open to Members are to submit a revised planning application; and to appeal to the Secretary of State. Members were informed that the recommendation of Officers is that both of these options are pursued.

The Chief Fire Officer went on to summarise the potential impact of the refusal of the planning application, as detailed in the report, highlighting:

- Given MFRA cannot continue to crew both Upton and West Kirby fire stations, the proposed station merger would result in the least impact on response times.
- The potential severity of incidents, demonstrated by the double fatality in West Kirby last year.
- The relationship between response times and survivability.
- The powers of a Coroner to make recommendations over preventable deaths; and the requirement for the Authority to demonstrate to a Coroner; and far more importantly, the family of the deceased, that they have done all they could to prevent the death of the individual.

Members were also advised of the predicted costs associated with appealing the decision of the Planning Committee and submitting a revised planning application.

Discussion took place around the report and decision of the Planning Committee, with comments made regarding the requirement for the Authority to do all they can to ensure that everyone across the whole of Merseyside receives parity of service and the fastest response possible.

Members also discussed the potential to claim back costs of any appeal and producing a revised planning application, from Wirral Council. It was noted that this would not be determined at this point.

Further comments were made regarding the conduct of; and comments made by individuals at the Planning Committee meeting.

Members requested that their thanks be placed on record to all Officers involved for their endeavours in dealing with this matter, highlighting the significant drain on the Authority's resources and finances it has caused.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The decision of Wirral Borough Council Planning Committee to refuse planning permission for the new community fire station at Saughall Massie, Wirral, be noted.
- b) In order to deliver the Authority approved station merger at Saughall Massie, it be noted that it is the intention of officers to appeal the decision to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate.
- c) In order to deliver the Authority approved station merger at Saughall Massie, it be noted that it is the intention of officers to submit a revised planning application addressing the specific reasons for refusal.

- d) The possible consequences to the residents of West Wirral as a result of the decision of the Planning Committee, be noted.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 25 May 2017

Signed: _____

Date: _____