

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 JANUARY 2019

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Anthony Boyle, Peter Brennan, Sharon Connor, Roy Gladden, Janet Grace, Andrew Makinson and Paul Tweed

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Steff O'Keeffe, Cllr Lisa Preston and Cllr Lesley Rennie

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.

Members Resolved that:

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

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, held on 30th October 2018, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Verbal Update - Incident Involving Injury to Firefighter

As requested at the previous meeting of the Committee on 30th October 2018, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer provided Members with a verbal update, concerning the outcome of an RTC incident at which a Firefighter was struck by a 3rd Party Vehicle.

Members were informed that the incident occurred on Longmoor Lane; and was as a result of the 3rd Party driving without due care and attention.

They were informed that the female driver was questioned by Police regarding the incident. She admitted the offence of driving with undue care and attention and was given the option of an out of court disposal consisting of attendance at a driver awareness course. She has since attended and completed the course satisfactorily.

The course is a 1 day course which the offender pays for, typically around £150 for this course, and consists of a half day of theory and a half day of practical driving with an ADI.

The alternative to this would have been a criminal prosecution where the sentence would likely be a fine and 3-9 points endorsed on the license.

Members queried whether there are additional measures that MFRA could take to prevent further incidents of a similar nature.

They were informed that our staff followed the relevant procedures; and did everything that they should have done. The individual was turning right; and drove into a coned area. Therefore, the incident occurred as a result of human error.

Members Resolved that:

The content of the verbal update, be noted.

4. Operational Response Presentation

Members were provided with a presentation by James Berry – Area Manager for Operational Response.

The presentation provided Members with a brief overview of the Operational Response Directorate, which consists of Service Delivery, Health and Safety, Operational Assurance; and Time and Resource Management.

Members were advised that the presentation would focus on Service Delivery; and would provide some background information regarding where MFRA have come from and some of the drivers for change, where we are today; and some considerations for the future.

In terms of where MFRA have come from, Members were informed that in 2005, the population of Merseyside was 1.4 million, with an increasing elderly population, high incidence of socio-economic deprivation; high levels of social exclusion and crime; and high levels of deprivation.

With regards to operational response in 2005, MFRA had 1200 Operational Firefighters, a budget of £75 million, 26 fire stations; and 42 fire appliances, in addition, there were 420 Support Staff.

Members were informed that around that time, there were a number of catalysts for change and reform of the Fire Service, including the Fire Services Act 2004, which introduced the National Framework; and the requirement to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan. There was the ODPM White Paper – “Our Fire and Rescue Service” in 2003; and the Bain Report 2002, which built on the requirement for reform and supported the move to locally determined risk based standards, as well as addressing other requirements for change identified by the Audit Commission.

Members were advised that it was important to note that at this stage, there was no austerity.

In addition to these catalysts, there was also a drive to ensure the effective provision of resources, which resulted in aligning risk to life -not property, improving response times; and ensuring that the right resources were in the right place at the right time.

Members were informed that at this time, there were lots of ideas generated, however in hindsight, there was nothing to measure those ideas against. This resulted in resources being removed first and then the impact being evaluated; and it became clear that a different approach was required.

The presentation then showed Members a chart, which detailed the daily demand on operational resources, between 2000 and 2003; and a chart that showed the incident demand curve for 2004/2005 along with appliance availability. This clearly demonstrated that demand fluctuates throughout the day, increasing significantly between 16:00hrs and 20:00hrs, however the number of appliance immediately available, remained the same at all times. Members were advised that this highlighted a requirement to look at things differently; and take a more scientific approach to decision making, rather than solely professional judgement.

Members were advised that MFRA then took the decision to work with a company called Process Evolution on a system called Fire Incident Response Simulator (FIRS). This system enabled resources to be removed in a “virtual” environment, to challenge decision making; and provide reassurance.

Members were also informed that at the time, there were 3 different standards of fire cover, dependent on the perceived risk.

Lots of data was collated from the Incident Recording System (IRS), which captures information electronically from the incident; and was used to populate the FIRS System.

Members were then shown a snapshot of an early model of FIRS, which included all the call-signs/ resources. This highlighted that there was significant periods where resources were not being utilised; and provided officers with an idea of where resources should be allocated.

Members were then shown a brief video, which was produced to highlight MFRA’s work with Process Evolution, which enabled us to take a more scientific

approach to decision making, work smarter; and improve our operational response. The simulation model works based on information from actual incidents attended. It tracks appliances and enables us to identify danger hotspots, mobilise dynamically; and ensure that our resources are in the right place at the right time.

It was reiterated to Members that this was not in itself due to austerity. The changes being implemented to ensure that the organisation was doing what it should be doing.

The presentation then highlighted to Members some of the other assets that were introduced, in an effort to target operational resources more effectively, such as the Motorbike for responding to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA); and the Small Fires Units, used to respond to small ASB fires.

Other changes that were introduced, included the implementation of different staffing models. A suite of software was utilised to consider alternative staffing models, which resulted in the introduction of Low Level of Activity & Risk (LLAR). This staffing model was cheaper to operate and was introduced at a number of quieter stations. It had minimal impact on response standards, utilised professional, whole-time Firefighters; and ensured that MFRA was resourcing to demand.

Members were informed that in 2008, austerity hit and from that point, there has been a focus on maintaining productivity, including firefighter safety and training; undertaking Community Safety activities, such as Home Fire Safety Checks; and maintaining a challenging response standard. The IRMP 2013-16 introduced a new Pan-Merseyside 10 Minute Response Standard to all life risk incidents, which was a significant change from the previous tiered risk based response standards.

In terms of the number of Fire Appliances available, Members were advised that the numbers only started to reduce in 2008/09 when austerity hit. With regards to the removal of appliances, Members were informed that they were identified using the FIRS system.

The presentation highlighted productivity levels in terms of the number of HFSC's completed. It showed that between 2007/08 and 2009/10 when MFRA had 42 appliances, over 100,000 HFSC's were completed per year. Now, in 2018/19, MFRA have only 26 appliances, however we are still completing high levels of HFSC's – in excess of 50,000.

Some of the key requirements placed on the Authority, were outlined to Members, including the requirements of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004; the Civil Contingencies Act 2004; the National Framework 2018; and the HMICFRS.

Members were advised that the use of Process Evolution and the FIRS system, becomes even more important when planning to meet those requirements, as we can no longer afford to make decisions purely based on professional judgement. The use of FIRS and the XIMES staffing system, enables the organisation to ensure that its resource model matches up with the demand

curve, which clearly demonstrates a requirement for more appliances to be available during the day than at night. It ensures that appliances are in the right place at the right time, to ensure that the response standard is maintained.

The presentation then provided Members with an overview of the 10 key station methodology. They were informed that having the 10 key stations covered at all times, ensures that the 10 minute response standard is maintained. Overlaying this with additional appliances, ensures that the attendance of the second appliance is as fast as possible.

Members were advised that the key station methodology was devised using the FIRS system, with over 100,000 incident reports used to populate the system.

In terms of where MFRA is today, Members were advised that there are currently 625 Firefighters, a budget of £59.7 million, 280 Support Staff, 26 appliances available during the day; and 18 available during the night, with a further 8 available for recall within a maximum of 30 minutes.

In terms of Operational Response, there are currently 4 LLAR Stations, 6 day crewing whole-time retained stations (DCWTR), 1 self – managed team working 24 hours and providing National Resilience; and 12 Whole-time 2-2-4 Stations. They were also informed that one of the Station Mergers at Prescott was now complete, whilst the other 2 in St. Helens and Wirral, were ongoing.

The presentation then provided Members with a snapshot of some of the simulations that have been run through the FIRS system, which now contains over 10 years' worth of information. This has enabled MFRA to look at different options and scenarios, to identify what would happen if certain changes were made; and what the potential impact would be. This enables officers to identify what options would have the least impact. It also maintains a record of all options considered, enabling officers to go back and review options at any time; ensuring that the organisation can demonstrate that it has robust internal processes in place; and can clearly demonstrate the rationale behind changes.

Members were informed that the system also enables information from other agencies to be inputted, for example information from NWS regarding EMR incidents, which enable MFRA to identify what the impact of responding to EMR incidents would be.

Importantly, having the ability to make changes in a “virtual” environment, enables officers to identify options that would not be good, to avoid them being implemented.

Members were advised that this has led to the response standard being achieved on 95.3% of occasions; an average response time of 5 minutes 41 seconds, which is the fastest FRS to life risk in the North West and the 5th fastest in the UK; and high levels of productivity maintained during the day. Also, it has provided assurance that the right decisions have been made.

In terms of what the future may look like, Members were advised that officers are working with Process Evolution on a system called HALO, which uses the appliance as the location, not the fire station. The impact of this will be that there

are not as many stand-by moves required, which will have less impact on other activity.

Other areas being considered are the shift start and finish times, considering the demand curve including EMR; different staffing and response models for stations; and surge resourcing, which involves bringing additional appliances on as required.

The Chair of the Committee commented that it is clear there has been a huge transformation; and officers have done a fantastic job.

Comments were made by Members regarding the use of appliances as the location rather than stations, which will be particularly useful given the recent issues and miss-information around Wallasey and Liverpool City Stations. As such, Members requested that regular updates be provided regarding the roll-out of the HALO system.

Members were informed that a meeting had been arranged with Process Evolution for the following month, to consider the implementation of the HALO system. It was suggested that updates be included as an item within the Forward Work Plan for this Committee.

Members also requested that more information be provided regarding prevention activity; and the impact this has had on operational response.

Other areas that Members suggested for further scrutiny, were around the transition of stations to the DCWTR duty system, in particular, Wallasey and Liverpool City Fire Stations.

The Chair of the Committee commented that many Members will have been contacted regarding the changes at Wallasey and Liverpool City; and this will provide Members with the opportunity to raise questions, understand fully why certain decisions were made; and have the correct information available to them.

Further questions were raised by Members regarding the Kings Dock Car Park fire; and whether the software could be used to demonstrate how the service coped; and potentially argue against cuts to MFRA.

Members were advised that issues around managing risk, will be considered as part of the Authority's forthcoming Budget Strategy Day; and will be addressed by the Chief Fire Officer in conjunction with the IRMP. They were informed that in terms of the system, the information is refreshed on a daily basis. The data set is reviewed and updated annually; and the figures re-run to ensure that they are always up to date. This ensures that the best decisions are made to ensure the best possible response is maintained.

Further comments were made by Members with regards to the volume of building works within Liverpool; and the height of some of the buildings, many of which are accommodation for the rising student population. Members asked whether MFRA receive all the relevant information regarding the influx of people into Merseyside.

Members were advised that that information would come under the Protection Function within the Community Risk Management Directorate, however it was confirmed that this information will come into MFRA, through our relationships with the local authorities.

Members were further informed that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 5th March 2019, will be focused on Community Risk Management, therefore it was suggested that this matter be raised during that meeting. It was confirmed to Members that high rise buildings are a high priority, and have been picked up during the HMICFRS Inspections. Members were advised that this will also be discussed at the Budget Strategy Day.

The Chair of the Committee suggested that further scrutiny and a demonstration of the FIRS software, would be a good area to undertake a Rapid Review.

It was confirmed to Members that officers would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate the system in more detail; and it was suggested that the review could focus on the decisions around Wallasey and Liverpool City Fire Stations, so Members could see how the decisions were made.

Members Resolved that:

A Rapid Review meeting be arranged to scrutinise the use of FIRS software in the decision making process around the conversion of Wallasey and Liverpool City Fire Stations to the Day Crewing Whole-Time Retained (DCWTR) Duty System.

5. Forward Work Plan for Operational Response Scrutiny

Members considered items for inclusion in a forward work plan, for the Response function.

It was agreed by Members that the 1st Rapid Review for Response Scrutiny will be based on:

“Scrutiny of the use of FIRS software in the decision making process around the conversion of Wallasey and Liverpool City Fire Stations to the Day Crewing Whole-Time Retained (DCWTR) Duty System”

The date and time of the Rapid Review is to be confirmed.

Members resolved that:

The following topics, be included on a Forward Work Plan for future Scrutiny in different areas:

- 1) Monitoring of the implementation of the HALO system (Response).

- 2) Scrutiny of the impact of prevention activity on operational response (CRM)
- 3) Review of information provided by local authorities regarding the influx of particular populations (i.e student population) into Merseyside, particularly given the increase in high rise buildings built to accommodate such groups. (CRM)

Close

Date of next meeting Tuesday, 5 March 2019