

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 SEPTEMBER 2019

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Berry, Coleman, Grace, Knight, Makinson, Barrington and Tweed

Also Present:

Apologies of absence were received from: Cllr Arnall, Anthony Boyle and Cllr Preston

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 items 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 9th May 2019, were approved as a correct record, and signed accordingly by the Chair.

3. Minutes of the Operational Response Scrutiny Rapid Review

The Minutes of the Operational Response Scrutiny Rapid Review, held on 9th May 2019, were approved as a correct record, and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. Health & Safety Annual Report 2018/19

Members considered Report CFO/049/19 of the Chief Fire Officer, concerning the content of the Annual Health, Safety and Welfare Report, which details the performance of the Authority against its performance indicators for Health, Safety and Welfare for the financial year 2018/19.

Members were provided with a detailed overview of the report, which highlighted information regarding staff injuries. Members were advised that during the year, there were 58 injuries to staff members, with 48 of those remaining in work, indicating that the majority of injuries were minor in nature. Members were informed that this also highlights the positive reporting culture within MFRS.

With regards to injuries occurring during operational activity, Members were advised that out of the 27 injuries reported, only 7 went off duty, with 3 of those related to a non-fault vehicle collision whilst on route to an incident.

It was highlighted to Members that during the year 2018/19, MFRS attended 16,099 operational incidents, supported by 27,145 appliance movements. Working on an average of 4.5 people per appliance, this equates to around 122,000 occasions on which operational staff were exposed to risk during risk critical activity. Therefore, to have only 4 injuries occur that resulted in lost time, is an extremely low figure.

In relation to injuries related to risk critical training, Members were informed that during the year, 110 days of core training were completed, 46 off site exercises; and 2 recruit courses consisting of 15 weeks each. During that period, 7 individuals sustained an injury during risk critical training; and of those 7, only 1 person went off duty for a period of 2 days. Again, when considered against the volume of activity, this is an extremely small amount of injuries.

With regards to the number of duty days lost for operational staff sustaining injury whilst at incidents or during risk critical training, Members were advised that this was a total of 63 days, which is 60 less than the previous year; equating to a 48% reduction.

In relation to injuries sustained by staff whilst conducting routine duties, Members were informed that there were 12 during the year. They were advised that this is a reduction of 5 on the previous year, which demonstrates a downward trend. Of those 12 injuries sustained, Members were advised that 8 of those individuals remained on duty, suggesting that they were minor in nature. They were informed that 4 individuals did go off duty, however this is 4 less; and a 50% reduction, on the previous year.

In relation to operational injuries, it was also highlighted to Members that all were related to individuals over the age of 40.

With regards to non-operational staff injuries, Members were advised that there was a total of 12 during 2018/19, which was an increase of 4 from the previous

year. However, they were informed that although there was an increase, all individuals remained on duty.

Members commented that as an Authority, they were concerned about any injuries sustained by staff; and queried whether there is information available that would enable us to see how we compare with other similar authorities with regards to staff injuries.

Members were advised that such information could be collated and reported back to Members at a future meeting. They were re-assured however, that the figures for MFRA are very low. They were also advised that the reporting of near misses is very high and staff are very proactive with regards to improving the safety culture within MFRA.

A further question was raised by Members with regards to sharing of best practice with other authorities. Members were advised that MFRA have instigated the establishment of a regional forum; and that lots of other authorities come and visit MFRA to look at how we manage our health and safety. They were also advised that through the Collaboration Programme Board, Merseyside Police are now looking to implement some of our ways of working with regards to health, safety and welfare.

It was further highlighted to Members that a great deal of positive work, particularly with the representative bodies, takes place through the Health, Safety & Welfare Committee, which has instigated National work.

Clarification was sought by Members with regards to the ridership levels.

Members were informed that as part of the proposals within the IRMP Supplement, there were some changes to the establishment, which meant that at non-key stations, appliances would ride with 4 members of staff, whilst at key stations, they would continue to ride with 5 members of staff. Members were reassured that 4 riders is a safe system of work.

Members were then provided with an overview of the Road Traffic Collision section of the report. It was highlighted that MFRA has a fleet of 209 vehicles, which over the year, collectively covered approximately 1.2 million miles. Members were advised that during the year, there had been 62 RTC's involving Service vehicles, which was an increase of 6 on the previous year, but was still under target. However it was highlighted to Members that although the number of RTC's increased by 6 on the previous year, the size of the fleet actually increased by 55 vehicles over the same period.

With regards to the number of fire appliance collisions, whilst responding under blue lights, Members were advised that there were 20 during 2018/19, which is a reduction of 2 on the previous year and 8 under target. It was highlighted to Members that during this period, an additional 20 new blue light response drivers, were introduced into the Service, therefore the reduction in collisions provides evidence that their development is being managed effectively. Members were further informed that the majority (13 out of 20) of these collisions occurred whilst the vehicles were moving forward at a speed of less than 10mph.

It was highlighted to Members that for all other routine business, MFRA appliances covered in excess of 400,000 miles, with 28 collisions occurring

during this activity. They were informed that this is an increase of 8 incidents from the previous year, however the figure is still low when compared to the overall level of activity. In addition, a total of 39 new LGV drivers, have been progressed into the operational environment during this period. Members were advised that the vast majority of these collisions (20 out of 28) occurred whilst moving forward at a speed under 5mph.

With regards to collisions involving other light vehicles, Members were advised that there were a total of 14 incidents, which is the same number as the previous year. However, it was highlighted to Members that during the same period, the fleet has increased by 55 vehicles; and the total number of miles covered, increased by over 300,000.

Further information was highlighted to Members relating to near miss reporting; and joint workplace inspections.

In relation to the financial implications, Members were informed that the proactive collaborative work with the Legal and Litigation Teams and other internal stakeholders, around reducing accident and injury, has positively impacted on the amount of litigation and repair costs, as well as the additional costs associated with a poor health and safety culture. They were informed that these improvements have also led to a large reduction in insurance premiums, which has had a significant positive impact on the finances of the Authority.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The performance outcomes of the Authority, against its Health, Safety and Welfare performance targets for the period April 2018 to March 2019, be noted.
- b) A further report be brought back to a future meeting, providing a comparison with other similar authorities, around accident and injury figures.

5. Presentation - Impact of Prevention Activity on Operational Response

Members were provided with a presentation by Group Manager Ben Ryder, reviewing the impact of prevention activity on MFRS's operational response.

Members were informed that in 2017, a new Arson Reduction Strategy was introduced, which marked a change in thinking around tackling deliberate secondary fires, which is the Services largest incident type. Members were informed that the strategy is predicated on the "4 P's" Model – Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue, which is consistent with language used by partners.

Members were informed that in 2016/17, prior to the strategy being introduced, there were a large number of deliberate secondary fires, the number of fire appliances was reducing; and a new "functional" structure had been introduced. Therefore, a clear plan was required to tackle the issue.

Members were also advised that deliberate secondary fires can have a significant impact on a community, not only physically, but also psychologically; and can also lead to further criminal activity.

With regards to the Arson Reduction Strategy, Members were informed that this links arson to high demand areas, which when data from partners is overlaid, also happen to be the same areas with the highest levels of serious organised crime, high deprivation, low life expectancy and other risk factors. Therefore, particularly when all agencies have been impacted by austerity, it makes sense for agencies to pool resources and work together to target those areas and support the community, in order to have a real impact. Therefore, the Arson Reduction Strategy is discharged not only by MFRA staff, but also by our partners.

Members were informed that during 2018/19, 65 multi-agency Arson Reduction Campaigns took place across Merseyside, with pictures shown to demonstrate the positive impact that these campaigns have had within the community.

The presentation highlighted, that on average, there is a multi-agency campaign within each District every month (2 per month within the Liverpool District, which in terms of delivery, is divided into North Liverpool and South Liverpool). Members were informed that since the Strategy was introduced, over 6,000 HFSC's have been delivered during multi-agency campaigns, with target hardening measures put in place at over 100 properties; and over 150 incidents of fly-tipping reported.

With regards to the impact of the Strategy, Members were advised that there continues to be a downward trend with regards to the number of deliberate secondary fires. However, they were informed that as an organisation, we are not resting on our laurels. Members were advised that we are also linking in with our partners objectives, for example recycling, which is high on the agenda of local authorities. They were informed that in areas with poor recycling, there are a higher number of deliberate fires, which can lead to further issues within the community.

Members were also informed that our partners are keen to utilise our brand, in order to access some of the harder to reach communities.

The presentation highlighted to Members that up to the end of August 2019, deliberate secondary fires were at their lowest levels recorded - 1488, which represents a 40% reduction on the same period last year. They were informed that in conjunction with colleagues in the Strategy & Performance Directorate, work had then been undertaken to identify what this reduction means in reality for Operational Response.

Members were advised that each deliberate secondary fire, from the point of alert, to the time the appliance returns to station, takes on average, 26 minutes. However, when you factor in the time taken to complete paperwork, check and maintain equipment; and complete other tasks associated with attendance, the average time taken to deal with each deliberate secondary fire, is actually around 1 hour 27 minutes.

It was highlighted that the 40% reduction in deliberate secondary fires, as detailed above, equates to 1461 hours, or 61 days, of additional capacity. Should performance continue and the 40% reduction is achieved at year end, Members were advised that this will equate to 2428 hours, or 101 days of additional capacity over the year. When averaged out, this equates to 4.4 days of additional capacity, per appliance, per year.

The presentation then provided Members with a flavour of what could be achieved with this additional capacity, for example, over 4400 extra HFSC's, extra training, additional hydrant walks; and extra Site Specific Risk Inspections (SSRI's), which are all important activities for our crews to undertake.

Information was provided to Members around further work being undertaken around improving the number of stop messages sent when attending secondary fires. They were advised that improvements have been made, which are having a positive effect on data collection, to enable us to form an accurate picture.

The presentation concluded by assuring Members that the Arson Reduction Strategy has been very effective in reducing deliberate secondary fires; and therefore putting additional capacity back into the system to enable extra positive work to be undertaken to keep the communities of Merseyside safe.

A question was raised by Members regarding engagement work with young people, who are potentially causing these fires. Members were advised that further information would be provided at the end of the next presentation, regarding such work.

Member commented that it would have been useful to have the information prior to the meeting.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The content of the presentation, be noted.
- b) A copy of the presentation be circulated to Members of the Committee, to enable them to consider the figures contained within in more detail.

6. Presentation - Tackling Crime

Members were provided with a presentation by Station Manager Ian Mullin from the Incident Investigation Team, highlighting how MFRA are contributing to tackling crime within Merseyside.

Members were informed that the Incident Investigation Team (IIT) consists of 4 officers; and that they are part of a wider team, working together to drive down deliberate fires. They were informed that the aim of the team, is to provide excellent prevention and protection by "working with our partners and our communities to protect the most vulnerable through targeted local risk reduction

interventions and the robust application of our legal powers". This involves using local interventions to stop fire being used as a weapon.

Members were informed that the IIT work very closely with the Police; and produce detailed fire investigation reports. They were advised that IIT officers are also classed as expert witnesses and have a great deal of influence in court. This has led to a number of early guilty pleas, resulting in significant savings with regards to court costs.

The presentation highlighted that fires are started deliberately for a number of reasons, however they tend to fall into one of the following broad categories: domestic abuse, serious and organised crime, mental health and wellbeing, deliberate fire setting, child/ juvenile fire setting.

Members were advised that the presentation would take them through a couple of case studies, each of which fall into one of the categories outlined above.

The first case study highlighted to Members, was around domestic abuse. Members were informed that the IIT attend all incidents where it is suspected that domestic abuse is involved. Members were shown a series of pictures of the scene of the incident, which showed a bed which had been set on fire, a smoke alarm which had been removed, abusive writing painted on the walls of the property, a kitchen knife, which had been used to slash the couch and a roll of tape. Members were informed that there was lots of information and clear evidence of domestic abuse at the property. Members were advised that the outcome of this investigation resulted in the ex-partner of the occupier being imprisoned for 2 years and 4 months.

The second case study within the presentation, was around serious and organised crime. Members were informed that a substantial amount of money has been provided to tackle serious and organised crime, which is a big problem across Merseyside, with fire often being used as a weapon.

With regards to the case study, Members were informed that crews had initially responded to a vehicle on fire on a field within the Everton ward, late one evening. They discovered a badly burnt body in the rear of the vehicle. An IIT Officer was requested to attend; and Merseyside Police launched a murder investigation. Specialist equipment was used to detect accelerants; and it was found that petrol had been used. Members were informed that this was a particularly complex case, with IIT also attending two additional addresses, to assist in forensic recovery. One of which was the scene of the murder; and the other being the scene of torture.

Members were advised that the individual who had been murdered was involved in an organised crime group and had been sent to collect drugs. The drugs had been seized, however other members of the group did not believe this to be the case. Therefore, the individual was taken to a container and tortured, before being taken to another address and being murdered. Another vehicle was used to transport the body, which was also searched for forensic evidence. The body was then placed in the vehicle and set alight.

Members were informed that this case was particularly complex; and involved an extensive number of detailed reports being produced for the Police. They were informed that the outcome of this, was that 2 individuals were convicted of

murder and each received a 27 year sentence. 2 individuals were convicted of manslaughter and received a 22 year sentence each; and 1 further individual was convicted of assisting an offender; and received a 6 year sentence.

The next case study highlighted to Members was around mental ill health. Members were informed that the fire service were called to a caravan on fire. However on arrival, it was established that the fire actually involved a person and petrol in the rear garden of the property. The incident was captured on CCTV and was particularly graphic, with the individual pouring petrol over themselves, before setting themselves alight; and taking their own life. Members were advised that the incident was a tragic case, which links back to organised crime, as the individual was a cannabis user, who had got into debt with money lenders, to fund his drug habit.

A further case study presented to Members – “Operation Milna” was around deliberate fire setting, which highlighted the effectiveness of partnership working between MFRA and Merseyside Police. Members were advised that there was a prolific arsonist operating within the Wavertree area; and the frequency of incidents was increasing and consuming lots of resources. Over 100 bin fires were attended, which led to an increase in Police patrols and MFRS assurance visits. Members were informed that incidents started to move into the Liverpool City Centre area; and were becoming increasingly dangerous. Members were advised that as part of the investigations, CCTV footage from local premises, was interrogated. Images captured, showed the offender present before, during and following several fires in Liverpool City Centre, involving bins in buildings and an Apart-hotel. The footage obtained also showed the individual directing crews to one of the fires he had started. Members were informed that the outcome of “Operation Milna” was that the individual was imprisoned for 10 years, with an extended sentence of a further 5 years, after it was ruled that he represents a danger to the public.

Members were advised that another category that deliberate fires tend to fall into, is child/ juvenile fire setting; and that such behaviour can be due to several reasons, such as a cry for help, curiosity, a coping mechanism, or due to adverse childhood experiences.

Members were informed that when such individuals are identified, trained staff will work with them and their parents or guardians, providing the SAFE (Safety Advice and Fire Education) programme, to educate them. Members were advised that it is important to work with the responsible adults as well as the child to ensure the safety of the property, as children are often copying behaviour from them, for example lighter usage.

Members were provided with an example of this type of incident, where a 6 year old child had started a fire in their bedroom. When investigating, a lighter was found under the child’s pillow. Members were informed that this was an example of adverse childhood experience, as it became apparent that the property was known to the Police, as the previous year, the door of the property had been shot off, by individuals who were after the older son.

Members were advised that as part of the SAFE programme, a game is utilised with the young person, to show the number of fire appliances within their area;

and highlight what may happen if one of their relatives was involved in a fire or RTC when the closest appliance was tied up dealing with a fire that they had started. They were advised that the aim is to try to tackle this issue early to try to prevent the behaviour from escalating.

Further information was provided to Members around our target hardening measures, which aim to prevent fire being used as a weapon. Members were informed of an incident within the Bootle area, at the property of a woman who lived there with her 5 children. The woman had received threats from her next door neighbour; and as a result, MFRS attended and fitted a letterbox bag.

10 days later, petrol was poured through the letterbox and set alight. The letterbox bag prevented the fire and ultimately saved lives.

The presentation then highlighted to Members, the impact that this work has had on the community. They were informed that vehicle fires had reduced by 21% on the previous year, and a 33% reduction was observed in deliberate fires in occupied premises. They were further advised that this downward trend has continued into Quarter 1 of 2019/20; and that out of the 91 investigations carried out by the IIT during this Quarter, 55% were found to be deliberate ignitions.

The presentation also highlighted that as a result of IIT investigations, over the past 12 months, 16 individuals have been convicted of arson; and their combined sentences totalled 92 years imprisonment.

It was highlighted to Members that MFRS staff attend some harrowing scenes; and it is therefore really important that the organisation has a Critical Incident Stress Management process, to provide the necessary support.

Further information was highlighted to Members around ongoing work within Merseyside to help tackle serious and organised crime; and the knife crime epidemic. Members were informed that Merseyside Police have secured a £3.37m grant from the Home Office, to help tackle the issue, which is to be used to establish a Violence Reduction Unit, to which an officer from MFRA will be embedded.

Members were advised that a Public Health approach is being taken to the unit, which will be a further step in our prevention activity.

Members thanked officers for the very informative presentation and commented that although some of the content was quite shocking, it is very important that they understand what our staff face.

Questions were raised by Members regarding where the funding will be utilised.

Members were provided with some further information regarding the establishment of the unit, which will replicate similar models established within Glasgow and other areas. They were advised that across Merseyside, a great deal of positive work is being undertaken to tackle the issue, however at present, it is not knitted together. They were informed that the funding will be utilised to ensure that everything is knitted together across Merseyside, with existing money continuing to be utilised for interventions.

A further question was raised around how specific areas will be identified for input; and whether as elected Councillors, they would be able to request input within a particular area.

Members were advised of the Safer Merseyside Partnership that has been established by the Police & Crime Commissioner, for which Cllr Steff O’Keeffe has been appointed as the representative of MFRA. They were informed that the Violence Reduction Unit will feed into this and all the relevant strategic boards, with each local authority having input around governance and structure. In terms of areas that will receive input, Members were informed that this will predominantly be demand led.

Members were also advised that other areas of the Country applied for the funding, but were not successful.

It was suggested to Members that further information could be brought back to a future meeting, regarding the outcomes and impact of the Violence Reduction Unit.

Members thanked officers for the very informative presentation.

Members Resolved that:

- a) The content of the presentation be noted.
- b) A further presentation regarding the progress and outcomes of the Violence Reduction Unit, be added to the Forward Work Plan; and be brought back to a future meeting.

7. Standing Item: Review of 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 Resolved that:

- a) an item around Health & Safety figures and a comparison with other FRA’s, be added to the FWP.
- b) An item around the effectiveness and outcomes of the Violence Reduction Unit, be added to the FWP.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 16 January 2020

Signed _____

Dated _____