

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16TH JANUARY 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Dan Barrington, Bruce Berry, Janet Grace, Andrew Makinson, Lisa Preston, Paul Tweed, Del Arnall and Doreen Knight

Also Present: Anthony Boyle

Apologies of absence were received from:
Cllr Angela Coleman

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 and 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 thereof, due to no disclosure of exempt information:

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12th September 2019, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

4. Minutes of the Community Risk Management Scrutiny Rapid Review

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Risk Management Scrutiny Rapid Review held on 15th November 2019, were approved as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Chair.

5. Fires in Waste Transfer Sites

Members considered report number CFO/006/20 of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, concerning current National and Local fires in Waste Sites and the actions being taken by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority to reduce such incidents and deal with them effectively.

Group Manager Chris Head provided Members with a presentation on Incidents in Waste Transfer Sites. The presentation provided a review of the waste transfer sites, which have experienced fires: and explained the approach that has been taken with partners and businesses to reduce incidents, demands and impacts on communities.

Members were informed that there has been a change in language and a push towards recycling, rather than “waste”, particularly as the scope for recycling is increasing all the time. They were also informed that this can also bring with it some challenges, particularly around the recycling of technology equipment and electronics, however it is something that MFRA are very much aware of and have relevant plans in place.

Members were advised that we also have a responsibility to work with partners, such as the environment agency, as it was noted that the sites that the environmental agency have issues with, will be the same sites that MFRA will have issues with.

With regards to the national picture, Members were informed that the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) figures and trends, have remained consistent. They were advised that the estimated impact of large scale protracted incidents, are estimated to be around £16m per year, which has a significant impact on the Authority. Members were also informed that what we have experienced in Merseyside, is consistent with what is experienced within other authorities.

The presentation provided Members with some images from the sites of recent incidents. They were advised that the demands of many of those incidents, are able to be met with current resources. However, we have also seen a number of larger, protracted incidents, which are a huge drain on resources; and therefore far more problematic.

Members were also provided with further details regarding some of the incidents MFRA have attended recently, to highlight some of the complexities and issues that can occur when fighting fires in such premises.

The presentation went on to highlight to Members some of the legislative requirements. They were informed that such sites are required to have an Environmental Permit, as well as having emergency plans in place; and a Fire Prevention Plan. Members were informed that the Environment Agency are responsible for enforcing those, however there is a cross-over of legislation, as MFRA are responsible for enforcing the Fire Safety Order. They were advised that where fire safety breaches are identified, preventative action can be taken. Therefore both pieces of legislation can be used, with both agencies working closely together.

Members were informed that unfortunately, the same controls and measures will not be in place where there are unlicensed premises. An example of such a premise, was provided to Members, with the risks to MFRA and the local community highlighted.

Members were advised that there is an NFCC Waste Fires Group, which share intelligence and best practice; and that a Tactical Advisor role for waste fires, has been created and developed nationally.

The importance of joint working and sharing intelligence with the Environment Agency, was further highlighted to Members. They were informed that the information that the Environment Agency are collecting, is the same information that we require as a Fire & Rescue Service. An example was provided to Members from a recent incident, where both agencies worked collaboratively to prevent risk.

Members were also informed that MFRA have looked to tackle the issue by entering into Primary Authority Scheme arrangements with large Waste Transfer companies, such as Norton's who recycle large quantities of metal.

Questions were raised by Members regarding the cause of these fires. Members were advised that all such incidents will be fully investigated by the Incident Investigation Team. They were informed that a pattern emerged that many of these fires were occurring on a Friday afternoon; and it was initially thought that this may be due to young people accessing the site over the weekend and deliberately starting the fires. However, following investigation, it was established that what was happening is the material was coming in on a Friday; and rather than being sorted and segregated, as it would be through the week, it was being left. Members were informed that often there would be a "hot load", with some material already smouldering and when the material is sorted, this is managed. However, when the material is not sorted and is left, that is when fires are developing.

Members were also informed that Norton's have recently started a campaign regarding the proper disposal of high risk materials, such as batteries, which can often still have some charge in them when they are disposed of. The campaign aims to publicise the risk posed, when people do not dispose of materials properly.

Further questions were raised by Members with regards to the recycling of batteries; and whether discussion had taken place with the local authorities, around the ability to recycle them as part of the household recycling collections. Members were advised that all recycling centres/ waste disposal sites, have provision for the disposal of batteries. However, what is often the problem, is items with built in batteries, such as computers, which are contaminating the waste with batteries. It was noted that what is required, is a change in attitude regarding recycling.

A question was raised by Members regarding breaches in Fire Protection Plans and what the potential consequences would be. Members were informed that it would be for the Environment Agency to take action in those circumstances, as it would be deemed that the fire had occurred as part of the waste process, rather than a breach in fire safety.

Members were also advised that MFRA are working with waste transfer companies to encourage the provision of additional training to staff, so they can have their own trained fire marshals; and frontline equipment, that will enable them to commence firefighting before fire crews arrive, and therefore reduce the risk. However, it was noted that it can sometimes be difficult to track down the rightful owners of sites.

Further information was provided to Members regarding the EMR site, in which there have been 2 large scale incidents in recent years. Members were advised that since those incidents, the company have been willing to engage with MFRA and massive improvements have been made both in terms of the site itself; and the professionalism of the company.

Members resolved that:

- a) the current trends with regard to Fires in Waste Transfer Sites, be noted.
- b) the responsibilities of other Partners roles with regard to approval and permits, be noted.
- c) our current joint working with partner, be noted.

6. MFRA Partnership Working Regarding Vulnerable Individuals with Mental Ill Health

Members considered Report CFO/005/20 of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, concerning MFRA's partnership working with regards to vulnerable individuals with mental ill health.

Members were provided with a presentation in support of this report, by Area Manager Gary Oakford.

Members were informed that from a governance perspective, MFRS is an active and engaged stakeholder on Safeguarding Adults and Children's Boards; with

the Strategic Safeguarding Manager attending a range of Boards across Merseyside, as a key partner.

With regards to hoarding, Members were informed that following the tragic incident in Mather Avenue, a new Multi-Agency Hoarding Protocol, has been introduced. They were informed that there is now a very active process in place for whenever hoarding issues are identified, which enables safeguarding referrals to be made.

The presentation highlighted to Members that hoarding can cost anywhere between £1000 and £60,000. Members raised a question around what this means. They were advised that wherever hoarding is identified, the figures represent the cost of potential remedial work, which can vary anywhere between clearing out hoarding material, to demolition costs.

Members were provided with an overview of what hoarding within a property may look like. They were informed of an incident that had occurred the previous evening, which was quite an extreme example of hoarding. In this case, the occupier was able to reach their mobile phone and call for help, which enabled MFRS to respond, remove the individual from the property; and put the relevant referrals in place.

Members were informed that hoarding can be very organised clutter, or it can be chaotic.

Members were advised that wherever hoarding is identified, a referral will be made that comes into a central team. A range of triage questions will be asked to ascertain relevant information and appropriate action. They were also informed that there is always a Safeguarding Officer on duty, to which referrals can be made outside of normal working hours.

It was highlighted to Members that last year, 264 Safeguarding referrals were made, which shows that crews are now much more aware of safeguarding and the referral process. Of those 264 referrals, Members were advised that 164 were referred onto other agencies for action.

Members were informed that in terms of possible outcomes for individuals identified as experiencing mental ill health, there are broadly 3 levels. The first is relatively low level, with individuals perhaps living in social isolation, experiencing a recent bereavement, or suffering from lower level anxiety or depression. For such individuals, they may be referred to local services or community groups, provided with relevant information, or advised to contact their GP.

The next level is more severe, with individuals demonstrating severe hoarding, self-neglect, or undiagnosed or uncontrolled mental health problems. Members were informed that for such individuals, the internal safeguarding protocol would be implemented, with referrals made to other agencies where appropriate. The final level is where the situation is deemed to be critical, with the individual threatening suicide, at which stage other emergency services/ agencies will be contacted immediately.

Members were advised that there are many people in our communities, who are very vulnerable; and the more we can engage with our communities, the more likelihood there is of them being identified and receiving the support they need.

The presentation went on to highlight that MFRA have signed up to the Mental Health Concordat. This sends a clear message that effective prevention can only be achieved through a collaborative approach; and provides clear recognition that mental ill health can often be linked to the work of the FRS.

With regards to our own staff, the presentation highlighted to Members, some of the initiatives and support provided internally. Members were informed that all senior managers and new recruits, undertake Mental Health First Aid Training; with all staff undertaking the Mental Health First Aid Lite course. There is a Critical Incident Stress Management process in place to support staff following traumatic incidents, a network of “Blue Light Champions”; and an Occupational Health Team. In addition, Members were informed that MFRA are leading some national work around mental health.

Members raised a question regarding how much we do as an FRA, which goes beyond our statutory duty.

Members were informed that internally, we have a very robust occupational health programme. They were informed that MFRA have a psychological contract with its employees, as we need to normalise, what would be totally abnormal for most people. Members were advised of a very traumatic incident that occurred approximately 10 years ago, which prompted MFRA to consider the impact of such traumatic incidents on its staff; and also the frequency of exposure to such incidents; and how this could be actively monitored. Members were informed that the process we now have in place is far more robust.

Members commented that MFRA scored really high around employee welfare in the recent HMICFRS Inspection. They asked that in terms of the expertise of our staff and their involvement with other agencies and boards, to what extent is their participation a statutory requirement.

Members were advised that MFRA are not a statutory partner, but a co-opted partner. However, our staff are able to cross thresholds and are therefore able to identify vulnerable people, which is why “Safe and Well” visits take a more holistic approach.

With regards to the statutory points, Members were advised that MFRA do have certain powers around data sharing; and it also has a duty of care to its employees. They were informed that as the type of incidents and issues that our staff come across change, the duty of care therefore changes, but Members were assured that MFRA do go above and beyond in this regard; and that they do share information and knowledge with other agencies.

Members were also informed that MFRA are one of the leading Blue Light services around this, with each community fire station across Merseyside being a designated “Safe Haven”. Members were advised that everything we do is around ensuring that our communities are safer and our staff are protected; and this is something which is taken very serious, with constant improvement being sought.

Members were advised that “Blue Monday” was approaching, which has been statistically proven to be the day, post-Christmas, when many people feel at their lowest; and that MFRA will be supporting the campaign to change this day to “Brew Monday”, aimed at encouraging people to sit down and talk.

A further question was raised by Members regarding whether certain properties can be identified as housing vulnerable individuals and how proactive we can be.

Members were advised that officers are currently in the process of reshaping the Home Safety Strategy; and that to date, they have been successful in identifying vulnerable individuals through the utilisation of Exeter Data. However previously, individuals over the age of 65 have been specifically targeted. Members were informed of the intention to evolve the current strategy and overlay the data with indices of deprivation, with targeted campaigns then taking place within identified areas.

They were also advised that discussions are continuing around data sharing with DWP, to help refine the data; and the possibility of providing training to domiciliary carers, to better enable them to identify issues.

Members Resolved that:

The content of the report and accompanying PowerPoint presentation, be noted.

7. 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 suggested that an additional item be added to the Forward Work Plan, around the revised Home Safety Strategy and any impact on hoarding.

Members were informed that a report around the revised Strategy, will be brought to Members; and it was highlighted that the new Strategy will also look at deprivation. They were informed that the intention will be to trial targeted campaigns within the top 10% of most deprived wards, to test current thinking; and to see what the outcomes of those trials are.

It was therefore suggested that following those trials, Members undertake a review to scrutinise their impact, which will incorporate information regarding the fitting of smoke alarms in those areas.

Members Resolved that:

An additional item be added to the Forward Work Plan, regarding a review of the revised Home Safety Strategy, and the impact of targeted campaigns within the most deprived wards. This review will also provide a breakdown of

information concerning the provision of smoke alarms, within those deprived areas.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 5 March 2020