

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF THE

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14TH JANUARY 2021

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Barrington, Finneran, Preston, Tweed, Grace, Knight, Makinson

Also Present: Ria Groves, Mike Rea, Anthony Boyle (Independent Member) Nick Searle, Dave Mottram

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Coleman and Phil Garrigan (CFO)

2. Preliminary Matters

Members 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) 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 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.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, held on 10th September 2020, were approved as a correct record.

4. Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership

Members considered Report CFO/003/21 of the Chief Fire Officers, concerning an overview of and update on, the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP).

Members were introduced to Detective Superintendent (DS) Andy Ryan from Merseyside Police, who was in attendance to provide Members with a presentation around the Violence Reduction Partnership.

The Merseyside VRP was established in July 2019, with the aim of reducing serious violence via a public health approach and Members were shown a short film, providing an overview of the VRP.

Members were advised that the partnership did not want to look at serious violence in isolation, or as being solely an enforcement problem, rather they aimed to look at violence as being a preventable consequence of a range of factors and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).

Members were advised that a number of agencies and partners were involved in the core team, which included officers from MFRA. The co-located team included representatives from public health, the fire service, the probation service and youth offending, amongst others.

Members were informed that having the fire service involved in the core team, was unique to Merseyside, and something that the partnership was very proud of.

The presentation went on to highlight the introduction of a new programme – “Healing Together”, which was a 6 session programme, aimed at young people who have experienced domestic abuse. Members were informed that MFRS were currently leading the way on this initiative; and had been trialling it within Knowsley and St. Helens. They were informed that although the initiative was in its infancy, there were high hopes for the programme, with feedback being excellent; and the VRP were looking forward to seeing the outcome of the evaluation.

A question was raised around funding and the break down in terms of agencies, or initiatives.

Members were informed that the share of funding the Merseyside VRP received from Government, was £3.37m. They were informed that the PCC, provided funding to the Head of the VRP, to spend on specific interventions, with the Steering Group holding the Head of the VRP to account for expenditure.

Members were advised that the Home Office had stipulated that VRU's must spend at least 25% of their funding on interventions, with the remainder spent on staffing and academic support. It was highlighted to Members that in Merseyside as much as possible was to be spent on interventions, which for this financial year, had been around 70% of the funding. However, Members were advised of the requirement to build on the team, specifically around building on the analytical capability, which had an impact on the interventions budget.

Members were advised that no specific amount had been allocated to any work streams or organisations. However, for next year, the VRP were seeking to work more in themes, and so were identifying where the need and demand was greatest within Merseyside.

It was highlighted that there was some outstanding work going on across Merseyside but that this could be better coordinated.

Members were advised that the independent academic evaluation was a key part of measuring success, with the evaluation of the previous year, proving very insightful. However, it was highlighted that the VRP were more interested in identifying areas of improvement. Therefore, Members were advised that the VRP were encouraging more critical feedback and openness in relation to that evaluation. They were also advised that they are very keen on building in evaluation processes within the team, with the ability to evaluate interventions internally.

Another key aspiration for the VRP was to be more engaged with communities, particularly young people, but this had been difficult during 2020. Members were informed that the VRP had purchased an online system called "Dialogue", for engaging with young people through a Q&A function.

With regards to success criteria, Members were informed that the Home Office criteria covered three areas which the VRP measured itself against:

- a reduction on serious violence offences;
- a reduction in homicide; and
- a reduction in hospital admissions.

Over the last 12 months there had been a reduction in these three areas, but it was unclear if that was due to the work of the VRP, the excellent work across the partnership, Covid-19, or a combination of factors.

Members were assured that there were a number of ways in which the VRP can measure success; and that they will continue to develop that, to ensure that they are held to account and understand what is working and what is not.

With regards to the secondment of MFRS staff to the VRP, Members queried whether there were plans for this to be made permanent.

Members were advised that the post was fully funded by the Merseyside VRP. They were advised that there have been conversations around whether that post would continue to be a full time post in 2022, or a part-time post, given the aspiration to ensure that as much funding as possible was spent on interventions. However, Members were assured that having the FRS involved in the core team, puts Merseyside VRP ahead of other areas; and ensured that arson was taken seriously.

Members commented that they were surprised to see that Merseytravel were not one of the key partners listed.

Members were advised that the list shown within the presentation, was of those partners involved in the core team. They were assured that a range of other partners are also involved, including Merseytravel.

A further question was raised around whether any funding was being provided to local communities through City Safe.

Members were informed that the interventions budget was split between the five Community Safety Partnerships, which each receive a substantial amount to undertake initiatives as required.

A question was raised around whether the VRP were involved in any drug prevention work, given the amount of young people getting involved in county lines activities.

Members were advised that there was a lot of drug prevention work already being undertaken across the partnership, therefore, whilst the VRP were acutely aware of the impact of drugs and links to violence, they were not directly involved in drug prevention activity. However, they do a lot of work around county lines. Members were advised that the VRP were trying to plug gaps and avoid duplication, and there were some areas, such as drug prevention, which were already well catered for.

Resolved that the content of the report and presentation be noted.

5. Publication of the UCLAN Minimising Firefighters Exposure to Toxic Fire Effluents – Interim Best Practice Report

Members considered Report CFO/002/21 of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, concerning the publication of an independent UCLAN report entitled '*Minimising firefighters' exposure to toxic fire effluents – interim best practice*' and the recommendations made therein.

Members were advised that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), commissioned a report published in November 2020, titled "Minimising Firefighters Exposure to Toxic Effluents".

The research behind the report was comprehensive and contained a review of current and previous UK FRS's decontamination processes and policies; and also a survey of over 10,000 firefighters.

Members were then provided with a presentation by GM Craig Whitfield – Health & Safety Manager, which provided the Committee with some background information, assurance around where MFRS was at present with regards to the report recommendations; and information regarding how MFRS proposed to move forward and the involvement of the HSE.

It was highlighted to Members that the report made a number of recommendations, split into two areas. One being recommendations for FS personnel, with regards to individual responsibility; and the other being for FRS's, in terms of looking at the broader picture, with regards to mechanisms, policies and procedures, to implement and support the recommendations.

Members were advised that the first recommendation for staff, was in relation to responsibility for protective equipment, such as breathing apparatus (BA). They were advised that the recommendation was very clear, in that during fire activities, respirators or BA, should be worn; and this is extended to post-fire, where crews are turning over, or dampening down materials that have been on fire. It stated that respirators should be the last piece of equipment to be disrobed, once they are out of

the risk area. Members were assured that MFRS are compliant with this practice already.

Again, Members were assured that MFRS are ahead of this recommendation, with a clear and robust cleaning kit policy, already in place.

Members were informed that MFRS had been at the forefront in leading on some of the work around this since 2013/14, and so were in a good position when the report was published in November 2020.

Members were advised that MFRS have an established HS&W Committee, which a Joint Statement, signed by all relevant parties including Trade Union representatives, Occupational Health, and Health & Safety. Members were informed that the HS&W Committee meets on a quarterly basis; and is the driver of this work, with support from the H&S Department.

Members were advised that the Beureu Veritas research and report, was commissioned by MFRS in 2014/15; and resulted in the production of three papers. Members were advised that the reports produced by Beureu Veritas, went through the relevant Committees at the time; and were also shared nationally, again underpinning the lead role MFRS have taken in this area.

The presentation then highlighted “Tool Box Talks” developed by the H&S Team, to be delivered to all operational crews and station based Station Managers. Members were informed that this complimented the training recommendation within the UCLAN report.

A question was raised by Members with regards to comments received from staff via the representative bodies, around changes to shift systems and the requirement for staff to transport some equipment in their own vehicles. It had been suggested that staff could be asked to transport potentially contaminated equipment in their own vehicles, in which children and other family members could also be travelling.

Members were assured that this was not the case and did not adhere to the Clean PPE Policy, which applies whether in a domestic vehicle, fire appliance, or any other operational aspect. Members were advised that any kit suspected to be contaminated was not deemed to be fit for operational duty, until it has been fully decontaminated and therefore, should not be transported. They were also informed that specific antibacterial wipes were provided for the cleaning and decontamination of helmets at scene, prior to being placed back into a kit bag; and items that could absorb contaminants were sent off-site for specialist cleaning.

Members queried the age of some PPE equipment and requested if the figures could be broken down to see how MFRA compared to other FRAs. Officers agreed to provide that information if it was available and it was noted that MFRA's Asset Management Plans, included a refresh of equipment such as PPE.

Members were informed that the current fire kit being distributed was brand new and top of the range and that the remaining stock was still fit for purpose with long asset dates remaining on them.

Resolved that:

- (a) the recommendations of the report specifically those for 'Fire Personnel' and those for 'Fire and Rescue Services' be noted;
- (b) the work carried out by MFRS in relation to contaminants and firefighter safety, including future developments be noted; and
- (c) that the content of the presentation from the H&S Manager be noted.

6. Standing Item: Review of Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan

Members reviewed the current Forward Work Plan for the Scrutiny Committee; and considered the inclusion of any additional items for Scrutiny, and the priority of any additional items.

No further items for scrutiny, were identified by Members at this stage.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 14 January 2021

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