

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

24 MARCH 2022

MINUTES

Present: Cllr James Roberts (Chair) Councillors Edna Finneran, Sharon Connor, Hugh Malone, Gillian Wood, Lisa Preston, Lesley Rennie and Andrew Makinson

Also Present: Mr I Cummins (IC) and Ria Groves

Apologies of absence were received from:
Les Byrom CBE

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.

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 because of the possibility of the disclosure of exempt information.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on 16th December were approved as an accurate record.

3. Service Delivery Plan 2021-22 April to December Update

Phil Garrigan, Chief Fire Officer, presented the Service Delivery Plan update for April to December and the HMICFRS Improvement Plan for the Committees approval.

It was explained that the Service Delivery Pan formed part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan and provided Members with a reflection on implementation across each area through performance indicators.

Concerning the performance of the service from April to December, the Chief noted that the total number of incidents was amber, rising from 12878 to 14051. The increase in incidents was partly attributed to a rise in special service incidents such as Covid support and therefore was more of a reflection of MFRS' multi agency work and it's role during the pandemic.

A reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires was highlighted with an acknowledgement that this signified a year on year reduction, spanning the last five years. The Chief commended the outstanding preventative work that had been undertaken to secure this continued reduction. Members were advised that the number of injuries and fatalities had also decreased during this period.

With regards to the per cent of shifts lost to sickness absence, it was explained that Covid absence affected the figures and that if those instances were removed, absence performance would be below the set target of 4% (around 3.38%).

Councillor Wood noted that projections for infection rates in Wirral showed 1 in 20 residents currently had Covid and so queried if the service expected any fluctuations in transmission rates that could necessitate altering the plans outlined in the report. The Chief confirmed that when transmissions increased that was often reflected in the workplace but that effect was usually lessened at MFRS due to the precautions in place. The change in government guidance was expected to have a significant impact on transmission rates and it was explained that nationally Covid sickness was around 2%. It was explained that in MFRS if that figure rose to above 5% then there would be a review of the arrangements in place and the Chief was confident in that approach.

In relation to testing and access to tests, Councillor Wood asked if MFRS had a resource available for the public or its staff. Residents were currently being directed to their local authorities to arrange testing and the Authority had a supply of test kits through the Occupational Health team for its staff. The requirement to test had reduced and it was suspected this was affecting the accuracy of actual infection rates as asymptomatic cases would go unnoticed.

Councillor Connor noted the overall good performance of the Authority during the period and commended the work of the prevention team in reducing incidents as depicted in the performance figures. Councillor Connor had recently observed the prevention team on a local campaign after a fatality in the area, and the Chief extended an invite to any other Members who wished to join operational crews for a first-hand experience of how the crews operate and access communities.

The Chair of the Committee commended the service on its outstanding outcome in the HMICFRS inspection and its robust approach to tackling the areas that required improvement. It was asked if there were any areas that the service needed to focus on to improve performance.

The Chief explained that as a result of the inspection, Mo Yogi from the NHS and Asian Fire Service Network had been seconded to the Authority and was currently working on strengthening the Authority's approach to equality, diversity

and inclusion. The Chief expressed his confidence in the skills and strengths that this would bring into the service in terms of embedding and supporting the approach to equality.

A change in how Station Managers operate was also highlighted to Members, as the role would now encompass functional responsibilities alongside their station-based work. This change would be implemented on the 1st April and would seek to create stronger relationships between crews and the communities that they serve. The Chief explained that the new approach would help to 'round' the Station Managers, providing them with knowledge on station response, developing people, organisational response and functional knowledge to be better on the ground, thus improving that middle manager group's effectiveness.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the attached Service Delivery Plan reports (Appendices A-C) be approved for publication on the website; and
- b) the HMICFRS Improvement Plan at Appendix D be approved.

4. Service Delivery Plan 2022-23

Phil Garrigan, Chief Fire Officer, presented the Service Delivery Plan for 2022 to 2023.

Members attention was drawn to the Station Plans contained in the report which had been developed with each station, directed by the IRMP. Each plan was bespoke to the area covered by that station and the communities that it served in that locality meaning that targets would vary across the estate. For example, Heswall may focus on Home Fire Safety Checks and the City Centre would focus on high-rise risk and inspections.

Councillor Wood questioned how fuel poverty and safely heating homes played into the plans especially for areas of deprivation. The Chief highlighted the importance of deprivation in relation to risk of fire and risk of fire death, which had resulted in a higher demand for resources in those areas of heightened deprivation. Through dialogue with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and local authorities, including the adoption of the socio economic duty and the inclusion of deprivation factors in Equality Impact Assessments was being considered. Including this information in local authority plans would help MFRA and partners to tackle fuel poverty and other risks associated with deprivation in a cohesive way, ensuring that the right actions were taken. A collective approach to this issue was needed across Merseyside as more people struggled with the cost of living.

In relation to fuel poverty, Councillor Wood asked what the impact of fuel poverty would be in the winter in terms of health risks like hypothermia, inability to heat homes and some families not being able to afford smoke alarms. The CFO explained the impact that a poor quality environment can have on people's health and that through increased partnership working that could be identified

and remedied earlier. One way to achieve this would be for GP's to prescribe a Safe and Well visit to individuals who present with a pattern of influenza illness. This would reduce costs for the NHS and improve the environment for the individual involved.

The Chief confirmed that data from energy and water suppliers was available to the Authority but this could be reviewed to ensure it was used as effectively as possible to support the most vulnerable.

Councillor Connor queried how outputs from the Station Plans would be measured in terms of attainment against key performance indicators. It was explained that each station would feedback into the Authority were the data would be monitored to ensure that the targets were being met. Comparing each station would be difficult as the targets for each would be based on the communities they served and so would differ. But the outcomes would give a strong indication of performance.

The Chair also complimented the Station Plans as they endorsed localism and using the knowledge of the firefighters working in those areas to help the community. He raised concerns that there could be differing levels of service provided but that allowing stations to use their initiative and dynamism to make improvements was welcomed, provided a baseline of quality was met.

The Committee discussed the Community Impact Fund noting that there would be £1000 available for each station to invest back into the community. It was explained that the relationships formed through investment needed to be maintained and the communities would require support throughout the year, not just a one-time gift or donation. The aim was to tackle root causes of poverty and to facilitate referrals into the stations through positive interactions with the community. Watch Managers were encouraged to work hard in understanding the needs of their locality in order to make a significant impact using the Fund.

It was agreed that an update on the Community Impact Fund be presented to the Committee at a future meeting to highlight how it helped to meet the aims of the Authority.

RESOLVED that the attached Service Delivery Plan (Appendix 1) for 2022-23 be approved prior to the publication of a designed version on the Authority's website.

Close Time:

Date of next meeting Thursday, 28 July 2022

Signed: _____

Date: _____