

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

16 MAY 2024

MINUTES

Present: Councillors **Les Byrom (Chair), Brian Kenny, James Roberts, Edna Finneran, Jan Grace, Gill Wood, Linda Maloney, Lesley Rennie, Ed Lamb, Sam Gorst, Barbara Murray, Doreen Knight, Dave Hanratty and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside Emily Spurrell.**

In attendance:	Chief Fire Officer	Phil Garrigan
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves
	Director of Finance and Procurement	Mike Rea
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Dave Mottram

1. Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Sue Murphy, Paul Tweed, Pat Moloney, Lynne Thompson, and Terry Byron.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 25th January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Declaration Of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made in relation to any item on the agenda.

4. National Fire Standards Annual Update April 2024

Chief Fire Officer, Phil Garrigan presented the National Fire Standards Annual Update for April 2024.

Members were advised on the Authority's progress towards compliance with the National Fire Standards. The Chief Fire Officer explained that 17 standards were approved, by the Fire Standards Board and that two further standards were awaiting approval; 'Internal Governance and Assurance' and 'Procurement and Commercial Services'.

Members were advised that the Fire Standards were demonstrated within the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and would be delivered by all the functional areas within MFRS.

It was acknowledged that the Authority had been involved with the development of some of the 17 National Fire Standards.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that a gap analysis is carried out for each Standard, using the National Fire Chiefs Councils (NFCC) implementation Toolkit. It was noted that the delivery of the Standards is monitored using a tracker.

Members were directed to page 31 of the report, which contained an overview of MFRA's achievements to date. It was noted that the Authority had achieved good progress, in relation to implementing the Standards.

Councillor Grace, queried the progress made against Fire Standard 8, which read, "To demonstrate inclusivity by recognising the diversity of the community and providing equality of access." The Chief Fire Officer explained that the ratings in the report were part of a self-assessment and that the Authority felt that further work around cultural aspects and understanding the community was needed. It was explained that the Authority wanted to consider all the different communities within Merseyside in line with feedback from HMICFRS.

Councillor Lamb commended the Authority on its progress and asked for further information about the 'Communication and Engagement' Standard. Councillor Lamb queried the rating, noting that the report stated that the Authority had adequate resources in place to achieve the Standard. The Chief Fire Officer noted the recent release of this particular standard and Members were reassured that work around communication and engagement was always prevalent to the Authority.

Councillor Gorst queried if the Action plan was targeted at MFRA staff or communities in Merseyside. The Chief Fire Officer explained that the standard related to the community and the Authority's effect on people's habits e.g. safer driving.

Councillor Hanratty welcomed the new standards for Fire and Rescue Services. However, it was noted that the standards were not mandatory and so would not be financed by central government. It was explained that maintaining standards would assist with prioritising the best interests of the community.

Councillor Hanratty questioned the Authority's contribution to the creation of the Standards. It was noted that MFRA has been involved in the development of several of the Standards but that the Board was independent.

Councillor Hanratty queried if any of the 17 Standards included the introduction of policies and if they needed to be adopted by the Authority. The Chief Fire Officer discussed the use of the implementation Toolkit to identify any areas of improvement and explained that if a new policy was needed the Chief Fire Officer would report that back to Members.

It was confirmed that the Code of Ethics Standard had already been considered by Members and the Chief Fire Officer welcomed further Scrutiny on the matter if Members felt it was necessary.

Councillor Hanratty asked if a dedicated team for ensuring all Fire Standards would be beneficial for the Authority. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Director of Strategy and Performance would ensure that proper governance was always maintained, with an annual report presented to Members.

Councillor Hanratty discussed Succession Planning. The Chief Fire Officer explained the difference between succession planning and workforce planning. Members were reassured that the Authority were integrating succession planning into the functional planning process.

Councillor Hanratty queried the Authority's progress on the Prevention Standard in relation to residents who are hoarding in Merseyside.

It was noted a multi-agency approach was used but that individuals have freedom in their homes and the Authority had limited legislative power. It was noted that powers were in place to ensure that the public's well-being and safety, in particular high-rise buildings and new premises.

Councillor Hanratty inquired about the potential impact on the Authority's budget if standards were to be implemented completely. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised that budget allocations aligned with the Standards and that a lot of the recommendations were already in practise so would not attribute further cost.

RESOLVED that the progress against achieving compliance with the National Fire Standards and the work being undertaken within Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service ('MFRS') to implement and ensure compliance with the National Fire Standards be noted.

5. Overview of Scrutiny 2023-2024

Ria Groves presented a report providing an Overview of Scrutiny for 2023-2024. It was noted that the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan was agreed by Members at the Authority meeting in October 2023. Topics within the Forward Work Plan were then presented to the Committee throughout the year.

Members were informed that the Committee had considered the Annual Health, Safety, and Welfare report 2022-2023 particularly focusing on injuries at work, road traffic collisions and near misses. It was noted that benchmarking against other Fire & Rescue Services was included.

A detailed presentation on Wildfires was also provided to Members to gather crucial information on the environment and the Authority's impact. It was advised that the presentation led to Members reaching out to the National Tactical Advisor to present to their relevant areas.

Ria Groves noted that Staff Sickness over the course of three years was discussed, which resulted in a Task and Finish Group for Members of the Scrutiny Committee. Members were advised that two areas were identified as significant in terms of their effect on long-term sickness; Musculoskeletal (MSK) Injuries and Mental Health.

Ria Groves advised Members that at the Scrutiny Committee held on the 25th April 2024, the results of the 2022 Staff Survey and the feedback from the ongoing trial of Hybrid Working were presented.

Councillor Maloney requested that the Plan include the battery life of smoke alarms installed in households throughout Merseyside, as she was concerned that they were failing to meet the advertised lifespan.

The Chief Fire Officer reassured Members that the Authority was constantly working to improve smoke alarms, working with the providers to monitor performance and make sure they meet expectations after delivery.

Councillor Hanratty expressed gratitude to the officers for sharing the staff sickness information during the Task and Finish Groups. Councillor Hanratty summarised that the main topic focused on MSK issues, specifically how wear and tear affects muscles and joints and how age played a significant role in this matter.

To gather more information on a national level, Members proposed to ask the Local Government Association (LGA) to investigate the evidence obtained from the scrutiny process and agreed it could benefit current and future Firefighters.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the significance of gathering data to inform future practices and it was noted that sickness absence was continually monitored.

The Chief Fire Officer discussed firefighters' health and well-being and the gym facilities available which allowed Firefighters to stay fit for their role and duty.

Councillor Knight enquired whether it would be beneficial to seek a third party to discuss Mental Health to staff. It was noted that it would assist with motivating more staff to engage in conversations regarding their health.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Authority already provides Mental Health First Aid Support through Blue Light Champions, courses, and training. The importance of debriefing and defusing post incident for firefighters was discussed.

The Employee Assistance Programme was noted, and it was advised that the programme extends to the families of staff. The Chief Fire Officer proposed that Mental Health could return to the Authority at a future meeting if Members requested to do so.

A previous Blue Light Mental Health Awareness course attended by Members was discussed by the Chair. It was noted that the training focused on identifying triggers and recognising early signs of mental trauma, Members agreed it was a well received course.

The Chair emphasised the importance of providing support to colleagues and highlighted the significance of addressing invisible injuries as well as creating a safe work environment for both physical and mental well-being.

Councillor Hanratty discussed that identifying individuals with mental health issues could be challenging but emphasised that support was available. It was noted that while the Authority was proud of the progress made, there was still work to be done.

RESOLVED that the continued work of the Scrutiny Committee throughout 2023/24 and the matters considered from the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan be noted.

6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2024 - 2027

The Chief Fire Officer presented the updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 2024-2027.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted that Members were well-acquainted with the implementation of the EDI Action Plan, but it was emphasised that having clear objectives to address any improvements was crucial.

It was advised by the Chief Fire Officer that a modification was made to objective four, contained within the report to reflect the HMICFRS inspection feedback and the Authority's approach to its own culture.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the amendment was predicated on community needs and to address EDI inequalities that exist across Merseyside.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the need to improve cultural competence and understand how the community's environment affects daily life. It was noted that the Authority recognised the need to address the specific needs of its communities through a targeted, person-centered approach.

Members were directed to page 8, the Chief Fire Officer clarified that the People Plan would encompass and emphasise aspects of cultural transformation.

It was noted that the inclusion of the NFCC Code of Conduct and standards and HMICFRS Action Plan would align with MFRA's leadership behaviours and values.

Members attention was drawn to page 81 which commended the effective execution of the six-monthly reviews. It was noted that this played a key role in cultivating a successful mindset among all staff.

Councillor Hanratty noted that it was important to have respect in the workplace and the Authority's culture. It was mentioned that the plan would guide MFRA in handling the specific issues raised.

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves reminded Members that the topic of Culture will be an item on the agenda for the next Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the importance of third-party scrutiny and involving other agencies and partners as it would enhance the effectiveness of the action plan.

RESOLVED that;

- a) the report contents be noted; and
- b) the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan for 2024 – 2027 be approved.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 13 June 2024