MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

25 FEBRUARY 2025

MINUTES

Present: **Councillors** Edna Finneran (Chair), Gill Wood, Ed Lamb, Andrew Makinson, Tracy Dickinson, Sam Gorst, Chris Page (substitute for Jeanie Bell) and Dave Hanratty.

Also Present:		
	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Nick Searle
	Head of Finance	James Campbell
	Monitoring Officer	Ria Groves

27. Chairs Announcement

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed Councillor Tracy Dickinson to the Authority and to her first Scrutiny Committee meeting.

28. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Doreen Knight, Jeanie Bell and Co-opted Member Mr Anthony Boyle.

Members noted that Councillor Chris Page was in attendance, as a substitute for Councillor Jeanie Bell.

29. Declarations of Interest

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

30. Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 23rd July 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

31. Update on Grenfell Recommendations

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle introduced the report which provided an update on Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations.

Group Manager Dave Watson delivered a presentation detailing the advancements made by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) in relation to the Phase 1 recommendations, from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (released in October 2019) comprising of 46 recommendations.

In response, it was highlighted that the Authority had formed a Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) Project Working Group, which led to the establishment of additional initiatives, including the High-Rise Tactics Subgroup.

Dave Watson provided a summary of the 46 recommendations from Phase 1, informing Members that 98% of the recommendations had been implemented across the service.

It was noted that recommendation GR28 was not applicable to Fire and Rescue Services but that it was linked to recommendation GR29 which was relevant, as it pertained to evacuation of high-rise premises.

Dave Watson emphasised that each recommendation's sign off enhanced the Authority's procedures and increased knowledge of high-rise buildings for Operational Crews and Fire Control staff.

Dave Watson drew attention to the changes within the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) 1.10 Fires in Buildings and SOP 1.1.3 High Rise guidance documents.

Councillor Sam Gorst left the meeting at 14:10.

Members were provided with an overview of the training and exercises conducted by the Service in response to the Phase 1 recommendations.

Councillor Sam Gorst re-entered the meeting at 14:12.

In relation to advancements in equipment, Dave Watson provided a summary of specific equipment that had been implemented across the Service as part of the recommendations.

Dave Watson highlighted the final steps undertaken by the Authority to assist in reaching full compliance with the GTI Phase 1 recommendations, which included the MAIT (Multi Agency Incident Transfer) system and the introduction of Stairwell Protection Teams (SPT). It was noted that these steps were part of control measure tactics.

Attention was directed to the GTI Phase 2 report, which was issued on 4th September 2024. It was observed that an additional 58 recommendations were included in this publication. With regards to the Authority's strategy for the Phase 2 recommendations, it was observed that a gap analysis had been conducted, highlighting aspects pertinent to the Service.

The Chair praised Dave Watson for his clear and well-structured presentation, commenting on how easy it was to follow and understand.

Councillor Hanratty raised concerns around high-rise buildings in Merseyside, managed by social landlords. He queried the actions taken by the Authority to ensure these properties adhered to fire safety regulations. Additionally, he requested information on whether new tenancy agreements included provisions relating to fire safety, which would help to establish consistent practices among social landlords and enhance the safety of the residents. Dave Watson informed Members that all high-rise buildings had been audited and inspected by the Service's Protection and Prevention teams as part of the Government-mandated

Phase 1 Building Risk Review (BRR). It was noted that a system had been implemented to alert the Authority for any necessary revisits, assigning risk ratings based on findings.

Members were informed that Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) had been performed in every flat within all high-rise buildings and, where possible, a Home Fire Safety Evaluation (HFSE) had also been undertaken. Members noted that the Authority consistently maintained relationships with landlords to raise awareness of their responsibility to their tenants.

Councillor Hanratty discussed the “Stay Put Policy” and how it was communicated to residents. Dave Watson noted that although the policy was effective, the Grenfell incident highlighted a significant failure in building safety. He noted that the approach to the “Stay Put Policy” had to be paired with regular building maintenance and inspections.

Councillor Makinson also questioned if any briefings around the “Stay Put Policy” had been distributed to ward councillors representing areas with high-rise buildings. Dave Watson noted that any pre-inspection data obtained by the Authority would include an overall count of occupants within high-rise buildings. Furthermore, it was observed that while the Authority’s systems maintained precise residential information, this data would not reflect the real-time number of individuals entering and exiting the premises.

With regards to the research undertaken, Councillor Makinson asked if high-rise buildings could be equipped with a system to monitor the number of occupants, as this would aid operational crews at incidents.

Councillor Makinson also inquired as to whether there was a possibility for AI counters to be required at planning permission stage. Dave Watson advised that the Authority’s involvement in the design phase was confined to its powers under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO). However, Members were assured that the Fire Engineering team were consistently informed of new construction projects within Merseyside. It was highlighted that the Authority could not enforce AI counters to be used within high-rise buildings. Councillor Makinson proposed that Members considered the use of AI counters as a means of lobbying to the government in the future.

Dave Watson advised that he would verify if any information had been shared with Members already with high-rise buildings in their wards and for further information to be shared if required.

RESOLVED that;

a) the summary points contained in this report be noted; and

b) the substance of the associated presentation to this report be noted.

32. Annual Health, Safety and Welfare Report 2023/24

Group Manager Craig Whitfield gave a presentation which outlined the performance of the Authority against its Local Performance Indicators (LPIs) for Health and Safety during 2023/24. Group Manager Craig Whitfield highlighted the report's importance in providing assurance of compliance with corporate policies, legal requirements, and health and safety practices.

To provide context it was noted that an analysis of 2023/24 data displayed a significant increase in Fire Service activity, which included community engagement through HFSC's. In the reporting year, there were also 17,345 operational incidents, supported by 36,240 appliance movements. These figures were significant as they reflected the operational challenges faced in managing life-risks.

Craig Whitfield discussed the workplace data contained in paragraph 9, page 16 of the agenda. Key points included a total of 39 operational staff injuries for 2023/24; a decrease from the previous year. Of these, it was noted that the most common injury type was sprains and strains, with 11 during this time.

It was reported that of those 39, there were 12 injuries recorded at operational incidents, representing a decrease of four compared to the previous year. Among the injured, it was noted that four staff members were unable to continue their duties; however, three of them returned within 12 days, while one remained on long-term sick leave. Craig Whitfield informed Members that the remaining eight staff members continued to fulfil their duties.

The report included injuries occurring during training and it was emphasised that the Authority undertook a significant amount of training compared to other services. In 2023/24, examples of training undertaken included 343 core training courses, 74 off-site station exercises, 45 high rise/hazmat exercises, and the successful delivery of three recruit courses. It was noted that seven individuals were injured during risk critical training. Two subsequently went off duty and booked sick, and performance was equal to the previous year.

It was highlighted that the report for 2023/24 displayed an increase in injuries among operational staff conducting routine activities, with 20 incidents identified, noted as one less than the predicted target. Notably, 16 of the injured remained on duty, whilst four staff members were off duty, resulting in a total of 21 lost days. Craig Whitfield emphasised the importance of reporting injuries and near misses, as it was crucial for improving safety and operational effectiveness.

Members noted that there was a total of 10 injuries across non-operational staff, which was the same as the year before. Craig Whitfield advised Members that all 10 injured staff had remained on duty.

It was explained that under Health and Safety Executive guidance, the Authority held a responsibility to report Reports of injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) events, which were categorised into two standards: 'Major' and 'Minor'. It was reported that one 'Major' RIDDOR event

was identified within the reporting period and seven ‘Minor’ incidents were reported, noting a decrease of 50% from the previous year. It was highlighted that these injuries consisted of five sprains/strain injuries, one minor burn/scald and one bruising.

Councillor Sam Gorst left the meeting at 14:51.

Members were advised that within the reporting year 2023/24, there were 66 road traffic collisions involving Authority vehicles. It was noted that this represented a decrease of 13 incidents compared to the previous year and fell six incidents below the initial target.

Members were advised that there were 29 collisions involving fire appliances operating under blue lights. This was noted as a reduction of 17 incidents from the previous year but one incident above the anticipated target. Craig Whitfield drew Members' attention to the trend for speeds below 10 mph, with 75%, falling into this category. It was advised that all collisions were documented, and that the Authority had conducted campaigning and leafleting in heavily congested areas to try and reduce this issue.

Councillor Sam Gorst re-entered the meeting at 14:53.

Members were advised that the total number of appliance collisions whilst engaged in routine activities had increased from 15 to 37, ten above the predicted target but that routine activities involving fire appliances had increased significantly in 2023/24. Additionally, it was noted that this would be a focus for the forthcoming year.

Craig Whitfield highlighted 59% of these incidents occurred at speeds lower than 10 mph. He discussed that 38 staff members had transitioned from LGV to EFAD drivers during the reporting period. Additionally, Members noted no direct correlation had been found between age groups and service duration in relation to collision trends.

It was noted that zero collisions had been reported for Senior Officers Light vehicle response whilst under blue lights. It was highlighted that this reflected the effectiveness of the training provided at the Training and Development Academy (TDA).

Members’ attention was drawn to paragraph 13, page 19 of the agenda, which highlighted observations from the near miss reporting. Craig Whitfield emphasised reports of near misses had risen from 117 to 148 in line with the Authorities work on increasing recording near-misses. This correlated with a reduced likelihood of significant incidents, as identified hazards were being addressed through near miss actions at an early stage.

Craig Whitfield noted that the 2023/24 report included partnerships with the Occupational Health department, which highlighted the Authority’s commitment to employee wellbeing and welfare. It was highlighted that the Occupational Health team had organised 2,476 medical appointments for Authority staff which included health screenings, early interventions, management referrals, and pre-

employment assessments. Members also noted that there had been many referrals for physiotherapy, fitness assessments, nutritionist, and vision checks to promote and encourage staff to return to their role.

During the reporting period, the Health and Safety team documented a total of 99 critical incidents and had facilitated 191 defusing sessions with crews.

Councillor Gorst highlighted the Authority's performance around welfare and mental health, referencing the 582 medical appointments recorded. He specifically referred to pages 19-20 of the agenda and inquired about the nature of the appointments, seeking clarification on whether they were related to physical or mental health. It was highlighted that a further breakdown would be provided to Councillor Gorst. Craig Whitfield informed Members of the active engagement between Health and Safety and the Occupational Health teams.

Councillor Gorst inquired whether the recent change on the Occupational Health provider had a positive impact on staff and statistics. Ria Groves indicated that there had been positive feedback already received in relation to the new provider.

Councillor Makinson inquired whether the Authority maintained statistics regarding the effect on appliance's response to incidents caused by illegally parked vehicles and how these figures were considered in the evaluation of compensation claims. Craig Whitfield stated that the Authority did not collect data on illegally parked vehicles; instead, this information would be gathered through investigations on a case-by-case basis. Ria Groves noted that the majority of motor claims did not involve illegal parking and issues usually arose from narrow roads, which could hinder large fire appliances passing through and lead to incidents. Members were assured that leafleting around parking had been established within areas of concern.

Councillor Makinson asked whether Councillors could refer any concerns within their wards relating to street access for fire appliances to the Authority as well as to request permission for additional leafleting activities. Ria Groves discussed previous initiatives around leafleting as part of prevention activities, whilst noting that an officer would liaise with Councillor Makinson to provide further information in relation to this initiative.

Councillor Page commended the report, underscoring the significance of conducting no-blame debriefings following critical incidents. He inquired as to whether the process emphasised accountability in recognising errors. Craig Whitfield elaborated on the function of Operational Assurance in critical incident debriefings, noting that these sessions were centred on transparency and honesty to foster a secure environment for those discussions.

Councillor Wood praised the presentation and inquired as to whether the incident data accurately reflected road conditions during adverse weather conditions. Craig Whitfield discussed the Authority's unique data set across Level one and Level two incidents which incorporated the time of day and weather.

Councillor Hanratty inquired if H&S e-learning packages were distributed to staff on an annual basis. Craig Whitfield affirmed that all staff completed a basic Health and Safety module as part of the e-learning programme.

Councillor Hanratty highlighted attacks on firefighters during the bonfire period and inquired as to whether that data could be recorded separately. Craig Whitfield confirmed that any reports of attacks against firefighters were captured and considered by the Workplace Review Group. Councillor Hanratty addressed issues relating to CCTV onboard fire appliances and inquired if the issues were regular occurrences. Craig Whitfield confirmed that both new and some older appliances were experiencing software problems especially on the older appliances, although it was noted that such occurrences were infrequent. Members were advised that the Authority evaluated its benchmarking data performance into four to five areas, similar to other Metropolitan Fire Rescue Services.

The Chair commended Craig Whitfield for the clarity and effectiveness of the presentation regarding the Authority's benchmarking data, however it was felt that the report didn't detail enough information around training undertaken by staff.

Craig Whitfield observed that the report did not include a comparison of staff training statistics. However, he highlighted that the Authority had excellent results on firefighter recruitment, training relating to the six key risks, off-site operations, TDA, on station, and cross-border operations.

RESOLVED that the performance related contents of the report and presentation which highlighted the positive progress and safety culture within MFRS be noted.

33. Scrutiny Forward Work Plan

Monitoring Officer, Ria Groves presented the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan report to Members, highlighting it as a recurring item. Members were directed to page 61 of the agenda, where all topics presented had been highlighted in blue.

Ria Groves addressed proposals made by Councillor Hanratty, who had previously identified three items to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee. It was noted for the first proposed topic in respect of the most recent staff survey, the outcome was due to be presented to Members at the upcoming Policy and Resources Committee. The second proposed topic to review the grievance and complaints policies were already currently under review and will be reported back to Members as part of the response to the cultural actions issued by the HMICFRS across the sector. The third proposed topic was in relation to the Key Performance Indicators of the Service. Members noted that all three of the topics would be considered at a workshop for Members of the Scrutiny Committee in the next municipal year in order to propose a new scrutiny forward work plan for 2025/26.

RESOLVED that Members;

a) the current progress of the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan 2024-2025 to date be noted; and

b) review the outstanding items on the Scrutiny Forward Work Plan be noted.

Close

Date of next meeting Thursday, 10 April 2025.