



Fire and Rescue Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 20 November 2013
Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:	Mr T Adams	Mr C Jordan
	Mr S Agnew	Mr W Northam
	Mrs J Chamberlin	Mr W Richmond
	Mr J Childs	Mr M Sands
	Mr A Dearnley	Mr N Shaw
	Mr N Dixon	Mr P Smyth
	Mr C Foulger	Mrs A Thomas (Chairman)
	Mr B Hannah	Mr J Timewell
	Ms D Gihawi	Mrs C Walker (Vice-Chairman)
Cabinet Member:	Mr D Roper	
Also Present:	Mrs K Palframan – Brigade Manager	
	Mr R Harold – Brigade Manager	
	Mrs K Haywood – Scrutiny Support Manager	

1. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies were received from, Mr J Dobson (Mr Adams substituting), Mr FitzPatrick (Mr Foulger substituting), Mr Iles (Mr Jordan substituting) and Dr Boswell (Mr Dearnley substituting).

The Chairman extended a welcome to students from the Leadership in Public Services course at City College Norwich who had attended to view the meeting.

2. Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on 11 September 2013 were agreed by the Panel and signed by the Chairman subject to the following clarifications:-

Item 9.7. Final paragraph, should read: "In response to a question regarding the deployment of armed *forces* services fire teams . . . "

Item 10. Fifth bullet point should read "(PBB)"

Item 13.2. Officers confirmed that an update report would be brought to the January meeting regarding location of pumps.

3. Declarations of Interest

The following declarations were confirmed:

- Mrs Walker noted that her son in-law was a retained firefighter
- Mrs Thomas noted that her daughter's boyfriend was also a retained firefighter.

4. Items of Urgent Business

4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5. Public Questions

There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Questions

There were no Member questions.

7. Cabinet Member Feedback

7.1 The Cabinet Member for Public Protection advised that a workshop on Integrated Risk Management Performance had been held. 17 Members had attended and positive feedback had been received.

7.2 Since the last meeting of the Panel four periods of industrial action had taken place. Contingency arrangements had been in place and fortunately call outs had been low on these days. Almost half of appliances had been available during the strike action so far.

The Chief Fire Officer was asked to explain the reasons for the industrial action. He explained that this was due to changes within the pension scheme and that fact that firefighters had to prove that they had maintained fitness levels between the age of 55-60 or they would have to leave the service, which would affect their pension. The dispute was between the Government and the Union and not with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire Brigade Union was currently balloting staff regarding further action and had widened the staff included to control room employees. Officers confirmed that if a fire fighter did fail a fitness test a programme was in place to help them to regain their fitness levels.

7.3 The Community Interest Company would next meet in January, in order to consider recruitment for the post of Business Manager.

7.4 The Cabinet Member advised that he had attended the annual NORMIT training study day with the Chief Fire Officer.

7.5 A discussion had been held with the Police and Crime Commissioner regarding the potential integration of services. A tender document had been circulated which considered how Police and Fire services could better deliver services together to save money.

7.6 The Fire and Rescue award evening would take place on 13 November 2013 which would mark the achievements of fire fighters. Panel Members asked that their thanks be passed to all staff for their hard work.

8. Service and Financial Planning 2014-17

8.1 The Service and Financial Planning 2014-17 Report (Item 8) was received. The report set out the financial and planning context for the Authority and gave an early indication of what this would mean for the Fire and Rescue Service.

8.2 The Chief Fire Officer updated Members to a slight change in the revenue target since the report had been written, with regards to the IT refresh. The £1.8m capital funding had not been made available to the Service meaning that the annual lease cost savings of £380,000 would not be made. It appeared likely that the existing lease would remain with the Service until 2015.

8.2 During the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:

- The Service was trying to work with all shared housing providers as a way of enforcing fire safety standards in homes of multiple and shared occupancy. A full list of these would be provided to Members.
- A report on retained duty staff availability would be presented to the Panel in January 2014. There had been a difficulty in some areas with recruitment so currently officers were going through a process to closely manage availability.
- The Service worked with local communities and employers in order to attract more retained firefighters. Benefits were explained to potential employers but there would be a degree of impact on employers also.
- Automatic fire alarms which had not been attended during the period had increased to 17.7% from 4.1% in the same period in 2012. This was due to a new policy where in-scope premises had to confirm the smell of burning before an appliance was mobilised. Members queried whether premises could be charged if an appliance attended a false alarm. They were advised that costs could be recovered but an additional fine could not be levied. There were concerns that applying a charge could lead to businesses removing their fire alarm for fear of being charged for false call outs.
- A tour of Diss Fire Station had been organised by the local Member and had proved very valuable.
- The majority of calls attended by the Fire and Rescue Service had been to road traffic accidents rather than fires. It was very important that the police, fire and ambulance control rooms worked in a joined up way and as such a text service had resumed to let the control room know when the Service needed to attend an accident. Approximately one in ten reported incidents had been attended. The Fire and Rescue Service could only be of assistance where an injured person was still in the vehicle.
- The emergency response time standards were commendable as they were at a very high rate.
- The predicted budget savings were an informed guess. Officers had confidence in the figures and were assured that the savings which were required would be achieved. Contingency planning had been put into place – if necessary contracts and leases could be run on for longer. Good investment had been made the past few years in buildings and vehicles and so these should not need to be replaced.

8.3 It was **RESOLVED** that:-

- the revised service and financial planning context be noted.
- The revised spending pressures and savings be noted
- The updated capital bids and announcements be noted

9 Fire and Rescue Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013-14.

9.1 The Fire and Rescue Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013-14 (item 9) was received by the Panel. This monitored the priorities of the service and provided an update on performance, finance and risk monitoring information.

9.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- A new risk had been added to the risk register around “failure to provide protective security”. The Government had advised that this needed to be undertaken but had not supplied any funding. An audit had been undertaken and, once the results had been received, there may be more work which would need to be carried out.
- The security audit had covered physical, personal and electronic security.
- The new station in King's Lynn had fallen behind schedule by over six weeks. NPS had taken full responsibility for this. Officers had communicated that they were not happy with the delay and had ensured that it would not cause any additional costs. There would be no operational implications as a result. Once the station was complete it would improve service within the south King's Lynn area.

9.3 It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

10 Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2014-17

10.1 The Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2014-17 report (item 10) was received by the Panel. This set out the method for developing the integrated risk management plan and contained the draft proposals to change the way the Fire and Rescue service delivered services and responded to emergencies.

10.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The provision of free domestic smoke detectors was discussed. If this service was ceased it was expected that it would save £80,000 in 2014-15. However Members raised concerns that the decision would cost more than this in lost lives. It was noted that there was no statutory duty to provide this service. Officers were asked to investigate purchasing and fitting the smoke detectors at cost although there was still concern that any cost would prevent people from having an alarm. This was a recommendation and it was for Members to make the final decision once the results of the consultation had been received.
- Funding may be available for sensory fire alarms from the Royal National Institute of the Blind.
- Concern was raised that new houses were still being built without sprinklers being installed. Members agreed to arrange a meeting with Brandon Lewis MP regarding this.
- Work had been carried out with Community Services to ensure residents were able to live independently.
- IRMP briefings had been held for Members, who agreed that a working group to look at this further would not be required.

10.3 **It was RESOLVED that:-**

- Officers will investigate purchasing and fitting smoke detectors at cost
- A meeting would be arranged with Brandon Lewis MP to discuss sprinklers in new build houses
- The report be noted

11 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

11.1 The Scrutiny Forward Work Programme (item 11) was received. This considered the draft work programme for 2013-14 and asked Members to consider any items which they would like to add or delete.

11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- A meeting would be organised for scrutiny leads before the next meeting, in order to bring a refreshed work programme to the next meeting.
- Members noted a disconnect between statistics being used by the County Council on road safety and information provided at a recent meeting of the Joint Casualty Reduction Partnership and enquired whether the evidence base should be looked at. Currently it was not a collaborative environment and closer working would lead to a more coherent and coordinated response.
- Staff training had been provided and equipment had been purchased in order to carry out rescues by boat. There was no legal requirement for the Service to offer this, it had been a past Member decision. Figures were not yet available on how many rescues had been carried out. Capital and DEFRA funding were available to provide this service for 2-3 years only. After that Members would have to decide whether to continue.

11.3 It was **RESOLVED** that:

- The forward plan be noted
- A scrutiny working group to consider the draft IRMP proposals was not needed
- Scrutiny leads would meet before the next meeting to consider suggested scrutiny suggestions.

12 Sickness Absence Report

12.1 The Sickness Absence report (item 12) was received. This provided further information to Members to set the context around the issue of sickness absence and described the actions the Service was taking to address absence levels.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Mental well-being issues were the largest absence category, with almost half of incidences being related to work. Two-thirds of those were related to members of staff who had been going through a disciplinary procedure.
- Control room staff appeared to have a high percentage of days lost. This was because they were a small group of staff and some cases of long term sickness had caused a large impact. These incidences had now been resolved which would improve the figures.
- A key part of the recruitment process of control room staff was to monitor and work

through stress. A monitoring system remained in place. A critical incident response team was also on hand to offer support after a serious incident.

- It was noted that the report at item 8 stated that musculo-skeletal incidents were the largest cause of absence, not mental well-being issues. Officers agreed to confirm which report was correct.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 22 January 2014 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.10pm

CHAIRMAN



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