



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 20th November 2024 at Lecture Theatre, Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am.

PRESENT: Councillors Phil Harris (Chair), Razia Daniels, Mo Hussain, Peter Wheeler, and independent (non-elected) member Derek Barnett.

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nick Mannion, Phil Rimmer and Margaret Simon.

C Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

D Minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on Wednesday 11th September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 FINANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2, 2024-25

The Treasurer introduced the report, which provided Members with an overview of the Service's forecast revenue financial outturn and reported on progress against 2024-25 capital projects.

The Treasurer drew Members attention to the proposed an underspend for the year of just under £900,000. He explained that the majority of the underspend, £835, had been generated from the overtime and on-call budgets. He advised Members that the new crewing duty system outlined in the CRMP would redress the under-establishment with the new weekday pumps coming online at the start of 2025.

The Treasurer outlined that the underspend in capital financing arose from the

combination of the interest received and the deferral of loans. The underspend would be transferred to the capital reserve to help fund the fire station and house modernisation programmes.

The Treasurer emphasised that the underspend figures were provisional, given the year was only halfway through. He explained that unexpected incidents or rising inflation could impact these numbers, and prudent cash flow management was being carried out to avoid loans with over 5% interest rates.

The Treasurer advised Members that there was a slight overspend in the Capital Programme, with higher inflation continuing to impact material costs on all the capital projects. The Treasurer reported plans to use the maintenance reserve for a battery system to be installed at Chester Fire Station to optimise power from the fire station's solar panels.

The independent (non-elected) member questioned what the problem was with exporting power at Chester Fire Station. The Treasurer explained that it was a technical issue, relating to outdated infrastructure limiting the ability to export power. Installing a battery system was deemed a cost-effective compromise over funding significant infrastructure upgrades.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Finance Report – Quarter 2, 2024-25 be noted.

3 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2, 2024-25

The Group Manager for Organisational Performance introduced the report, which provided an update on the Service's Quarter 2, 2024-25 performance for each of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The report included the Corporate Scorecard, which reflected the Quarter 2 position against targets set and the year-on-year direction of travel for the KPIs.

The Group Manager highlighted strong overall performance in most areas, with a focus on key exceptions:

- There had been zero deaths in primary fires. However, he highlighted 20 recorded injuries. Upon review, it was determined that 12 of these were not actual injuries and would be removed from the figures, which brought the figure to 8, which was under target;
- Accidental dwelling fires showed strong performance, with 143 incidents against a target of 161. Additionally, the number of deliberate secondary fires, was significantly under target at 321 incidents against a target of 423;
- The Safe and Well target had been exceeded for Quarter 2, which addressed

an AFI (Area for Improvement) identified by HMICFRS. The Group Manager expressed confidence in maintaining this performance for the rest of the reporting period;

- The number of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) in non-domestic properties was over target for Quarter 2 with 305 against a target of 264. The increase was seen in incidents at hospitals where the alarm was attributed to system upgrades and staff unfamiliarity with reporting procedures. Despite this increase the robust call-challenging policy implemented by North West Fire Control, prevented attendance at 2,617 out of 2,922 AFAs received. The Group Manager explained that this saved approximately 57,574 minutes (959.5 hours), equating to approximately £106,831 in staffing costs;
- The 10-minute response standard was green with the Quarter 2 figure at 9 mins 51 seconds and the Group Manager assured Members that this was monitored on a daily basis; and
- The on-call fire engine availability figure was at 49.8%. The lower figure was attributed to the impact of CRMP proposals, with on-call firefighters transitioning to whole-time roles and attending training courses.

The Chief Fire Officer referred Members to the Minimum Fire Cover, Critical Level. He stated that this metric relates to achieving the 10-minute response standard. He explained that during exceptional circumstances (e.g., a pandemic, or industrial action) this level of cover ensures that the Service could meet its statutory duties, although it might affect achieving the 10 minute response. He recommended revising the language in the Service's business continuity plans to make this distinction clearer.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Performance Report – Quarter 2, 2024-25 be noted.

4 PROGRAMME REPORT - QUARTER 2, 2024-25

The Corporate Programme Manager introduced the report, which provided Members with an update on the Service's key programmes and projects, aligned to delivering the Community Risk Management Plan 2024-28. He covered the following:

- The Emergency Response project had progressed well, which enabled timescales to be brought forward for the cover at Stockton Heath and Birchwood. The final changes to the duty systems will come on board early in the 2025;
- The Fire Station Modernisation Programme, Year 4 was red due to the funding requirements that would be required to complete the Programme. An

appraisal of options was currently ongoing to determine the most effective way for the Service to complete Years 4 and 5;

- The Fire Service Housing Project was amber due to the large amount of work required to bring the houses up to standard. The risk had been escalated through Senior Leadership Team and was forming part of wider discussions around future capital spend; and
- The Full System Review IT Project was amber due to the extended time it had taken to liaise with suppliers to gain a full understanding about how advancements in technology could improve departmental processes and efficiency. A final report exploring the key options was being produced for consideration by the Service Leadership Team.

A Member questioned if there was any update about the replacement fire station at Ellesmere Port. The Corporate Programme Manager confirmed that the Service was working with the council to identify different sites and working through feasibility studies. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that it was still intended to complete the build within the CRMP period.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Programme Report – Quarter 2, 2024-25 be noted.

5 HMICFRS 2023 INSPECTION ACTION PLAN

The Group Manager for Organisational Performance introduced the report, which updated Members on the Action Plan to resolve Areas For Improvement (AFIs) identified in the Service's 2023 HMICFRS inspection report. He summarised the following:

- The report stated that the Site Specific Risk Information AFI figure was 98% of sites inspected. He confirmed that the figure now stood at 100%;
- The allocation of enough resources to meet its prevention strategy AFI had progressed well. The plan was to be operating the new team capacity as business as usual by the end of Quarter 3. The number of Safe and Well visits were ahead of the year-to-date target;
- The effective system for learning from operational incidents AFI was progressing. A new Operational Improvement Board had been formed to provide a greater level of scrutiny; and
- The AFI relating to assuring that adequate resources are available for future industrial action was being reviewed. A business continuity officer was being recruited to lead a review of the Service's arrangements and other critical business continuity plans.

A Member questioned what was happening with the Minimum Service Levels Act. The Group Manager for Organisational Performance advised that the law had not been repealed, however, it was understood that the Deputy Prime Minister had advised all government departments not to progress any work or actions associated with it.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report about the HMICFRS 2023 Inspection Action Plan be noted.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

The Health and Safety Manager introduced the report, which provided Members with an update on Health and Safety performance 2023-2024. The Health and Safety Manager highlighted the key areas of the report:

- The number of incidents reported was 173, which was slightly down on last years figure of 176. However, the number of near misses reported was up 27% to 80, which gave him confidence that employees were comfortable reporting incidents;
- There had been a decrease in the number of days lost because of injuries in 2023-24 which totalled 22, a reduction on previous year's total of 40;
- There had been an decrease in the number of minor injuries at 43 in the year 2023-24 a decrease of 8. Manual handling and slip, trip and fall incidents had been the cause of the most accidents;
- A significant improvement had been seen in operational employee fitness with the Service fitness pass rate increasing from 95% to 98%;
- Of the injuries reported by employees, none met the threshold for reporting under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations, this was the best achievable result; and
- During the reporting period there had not been the usual increase of anti-social behaviour around the bonfire night period. However, anti-social behaviour had been experienced throughout the year. Events had included projectiles being thrown at appliances, and suggestive and inappropriate comments had been made to female employees by business owners during a Protection visit.

The Health and Safety Manager advised Members that the improvement had been achieved due to a combination of the investment of time and money by the Service Leadership Team, and a continuing improvement in the health and safety culture of both managers and employees.

A Member questioned if there was any follow up to business or house owners who had made suggestive or inappropriate comments. The Health and Safety Manager advised that the premises were flagged on our systems and where necessary the police would be informed.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Health and Safety Annual Report 2023-24 be noted.

7 SAFETY CENTRAL ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

The Education Manager introduced the report, which presented a review of the performance of Safety Central between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024.

The Education Manager outlined how the staffing levels had fluctuated during the year due to changes of team members and availability of volunteer rangers, staff members were providing lots of resilience for both delivery and managing of educational visits.

The Education Manager advised Members that 3,975 school children and 601 supporting adults had visited the centre from across Cheshire. An additional 3,897 visitors had attended for various reasons: training; meetings; clinical appointments; or for a tour of the facility. This gave an overall total of 8,473 visitors throughout the year.

The Education Manager advised that in April 23 there were 23 rangers registered, this increased throughout the year to 31, in March 24, although only 16 consistently supported the visits. The core team had provided regular resilience and support, and this had impacted on centre development and active volunteer recruitment. During the year the volunteers had given a total of 2,741 hours to the centre.

She explained that the centre was extremely thankful for the Safety Ranger's continued enthusiasm, loyalty, and commitment. A range of social activities had been organised to thank them for their efforts.

The Education Manager highlighted key objectives for 2024/25. One of these was the Cash 4 Coaches project, this finds funding for coach travel for schools in the high risk areas.

A Member asked how many other safety centres were around the country. The Education Manager advised there were 13. Some of the centres were run by charities and some were funded by fire services. The centre managers get together on a regular basis to share best practice, exchange ideas and talk about matters such as national funding.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the Safety Central Annual Report 2023-24 be noted.

8 INTERIM BONFIRE REPORT 2024

The Prevention Station Manager provided Members with an interim update on the preventative and operational activities of the Service during the bonfire period. This ran from 08:00 24th October 2024 to 08:00 on 7th November 2024 (aligned with North West Fire Control). He confirmed that a full report would be presented at the next meeting.

The Prevention Station Manager reported that:

- The Service attended 46 deliberate secondary fires during the reporting period, 15 more than 2023. Over a 5-year period the average was 49.8;
- Winsford accounted for 52% of all the secondary fires. With common ignition items being wheelie bins, loose refuse and small refuse containers;
- There were 41 reported accidental secondary fires during the period. This was an increase from the 5-year average of 31 incidents. The most common locations were Ellesmere Port 5, Runcorn 7 and Warrington 5;
- There was 35 reported incidents of false alarm good intent, bonfires and controlled burning. This was slightly above the 5-year average of 33.2. A lot of prevention work had been carried out prior to the bonfire period to reduce this number;
- There were no reported attacks or injuries of crews during the reporting period in 2024; and
- Historically the service had provided additional appliances during the bonfire period, consisting of 4 fire appliances located in key high activity locations. This year the decision was made to respond over the bonfire period with our normal fire cover. This decision was made after analysing historical data over the previous 5 years and looking closely at the 2023 response. The volume of incidents was managed within the normal fire cover.

The Prevention Station Manager advised Members that work continued outside of the bonfire period and debriefs were held to look at future opportunities to reduce deliberate fire setting and analysing the data, trends and good practice from this year. An awareness week 'Resolve Anti Social Behaviour' was taking place 18th to the 24th November 2024. This will see work being undertaken in the community, improving the community parks, removing rubbish, promoting Crimestoppers and discussing and reporting anti social behaviour.

RESOLVED: That

- 9 [1] the Interim Bonfire Report 2024 be noted.
FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25**

The Director of Governance commented that no changes or additions to the Forward Work Programme had been identified.

The Chair requested he was briefed about the HMICFRS 2023 Inspection Culture and Values Update that will be given in March 2025 before the report is finalised.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the Forward Work Programme 2024-25 be noted.**

NOTE

Before the meeting closed a Member wanted to put on record thanks to everyone involved in a recent fire at a flat in Ellesmere Port. The retrofitted sprinkler system had activated, controlled, and extinguished the fire. The actions of the crews resulted in all other residents remaining in their homes during and after the incident.

The sprinkler system demonstrated the importance and value of the investment made by the Fire Authority towards these fixed installations and the positive impacts they had on life, property, and safety of the operational personnel and one that the Service must celebrate.