



POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the
POLICY AND PERFORMANCE
COMMITTEE held in the Fire Authority
Rooms, Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Nissan Way, Barmston
Mere, Sunderland on MONDAY 24
FEBRUARY at 10.30 a.m.

Present:

Councillor Padgett in the Chair

Councillor M. Forbes

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors N. Forbes, McAtominey and Burdis.

Declarations of Interest

None.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 11 November 2013 (circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

End of Q3 (April-December) Performance Report 2013/14

The Chief Fire Officer submitted a report providing the Quarter 3 (April – December) performance of the Authority against the targets for 2013/14. Members of the Policy and Performance Committee were asked to consider and scrutinise the content of the report and provide comments.

The Chairman welcomed Joy Brindle, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Nina Griffiths and John Pratt, Area Managers, and invited them to present the report.

The report was based on the previous 9 months 2013-14, and historical progress against Service wide targets and benchmarking, noting there had been an improvement in 8 of the 21 performance indicators. The reduction in Primary Fires represented the third best performance in a Metropolitan District, with all districts with the exception of Newcastle having recorded a reduction in primary fires compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

Sadly there had been two Fire related fatalities. The Service would carry out a case study and use this to improve targeting strategies. In relation to fatalities from accidental fires in dwellings the Service was the third best performing Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Service. Members were referred to the peak in accidental fires related to cooking an evening meal. 26 injuries were cooking related. The Service was targeting home safety checks on kitchen safety to address this.

One injury to a firefighter was reported incurred when dismantling a firemantle.

There had been a slight reduction in injuries, and while good progress had been made this would be kept under review.

Councillor Padgett noted there was still a problem with chip pan fires and queried the position regarding people changing to use deep fat fryers. Area Manager John Pratt confirmed that such fires were becoming less frequent.

Councillor M Forbes asked if log burning stoves were causing any new problems and was advised that while no trend had emerged as yet the Service was keeping a close eye on this. Councillor Forbes suggested that guidance at national level may be beneficial and it was confirmed that this may be the case if a trend does emerge.

In relation to Deliberate Fires the Service sees the highest numbers of incident outside Merseyside. The Service had targeted activity such as the darker nights campaign focusing on each ward seeking to address this.

Councillor Forbes asked if there was a trend for particular nights of the week. Area Manager Nina Griffiths advised there was a slight but not significant increase over weekends. In response to Councillor Forbes query regarding participation in diversionary activities it was confirmed that in North Tyneside there had been Phoenix project 'Heat Shield', in South Tyneside safer night time work, wheelie bin stickers and 'Handy Estates' team work. In Sunderland 1800 year 6 pupils had been through Safety Works. All Districts were looking to target activity.

Councillor Padgett asked if there was a focus on deprived areas. Area Officer John Pratt advised of the Sunderland district performance action group which looked at hot spots and work in partnership. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed the figures are linked directly to deprivation, with overlays to antisocial fires and links with Police statistics. Schools work was important.

Councillor M. Forbes asked if incidents of firefighters being 'boobytrapped' had increased. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Joy Brindle advised that the figures were going the right direction. Incidents were still occurring, but had not increased. The Chief Fire Officer noted that the last incident had taken place during a period of industrial action.

In relation to Deliberate Fires the Service was working with Fire and Rescue Services in the other metropolitan areas, including in relation to Bonfire Night, and the increase in lighter nights.

Area Manager John Pratt gave examples of this work including coordinated activity in relation to lighter nights and work across all wards in Newcastle.

Councillor Padgett asked if the Service was getting cooperation from the Local Authorities and was advised that, although resources were increasingly tight, this was continuing. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Joy Brindle observed that it is plausible that reducing some of the activities outlined would have an impact and that funding for some such initiatives was threatened.

In relation to Malicious Fires it was expected that the Service would meet its targets. There had been an improvement in the statistics for false alarms over a 5 year period. The service continued to work closely with hospitals, and station managers were working with repeat offenders to deter them from continuing that behaviour.

Councillor M. Forbes asked about the cause of hospital call outs and was advised that these were various, ranging from toaster fires, to faulty equipment. Work was ongoing to identify causes and some other metropolitan Services had seen a sharp decline following changes to the way they responded to these. The Service was working to educate hospitals about the impact on their business, and this was encouraging them to start to understand the need to invest in new systems. Progress was being made, but slowly.

Councillor Padgett asked if the metro system was included in the figures, and if there were problems with communication on the system. It was confirmed that the Service works closely with Nexus and transport operators. If there is a need for rescue it insists the power is isolated and trains stopped, with Nexus having a risk assessment in place.

The Committee noted the high number of Domestic fires occurring in sheltered accommodation and was advised of work done in Newcastle in the previous year to install new alarms, which had caused figures to peak. The service constantly challenged the reason why call-outs had been made in order to learn from the statistics.

Councillor M. Forbes asked if wheelie bin fires were still a problem and was advised that they were. Loose refuse causes a problem and this was being addressed through education and proactive action. Councillor Padgett observed that it is hard to interact with perpetrators who don't want involvement with Fire or Police services.

Councillor Padgett noted that where there had been an upward trend this seemed to be mirrored in other metropolitan district areas and in police statistics. Overall the figures were very encouraging.

In conclusion, the Authority was maintaining its overall trajectory of improvement and was set to meet the majority of the targets set for the current financial year. This included, based on a comparison with the same period 2012/13:

- 6.2% fewer Primary Fires
- 1.1% fewer Accidental Dwelling Fires
- 12% fewer Injuries from Accidental Dwelling Fires
- 17.6% fewer Malicious False Alarms Attended

3. RESOLVED that

- i) the contents of the report be noted and endorsed.
- ii) the publication of the Performance Report be approved.

(Signed) M. Padgett
Chairman for Meeting