

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority**



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 10 JULY 2023 at 10.30am

Present:

Councillor Dodds in the Chair.

Councillors Kilgour, Usher, Wood and Woodwark.

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Burdis.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 20 February 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2022/23 END OF YEAR / QUARTER FOUR PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report to provide the Policy and Performance Committee with information relating to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service's (TWFRS) performance for End of Year / Quarter 4 (Q4) 2022/23 (Appendix A of the report).

ACFO McVay advised Members that the End of Year / Q4 performance report 2022/23 provided a comprehensive overview of Service performance in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Corporate KPI's for 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Service had achieved or were within 10% of achieving 10 of the 16 targets.

Members were then referred to P14 and were advised that next year the reporting would look different in that an amber status would be included as opposed to just red and green.

In relation to deaths from accidental dwelling fires a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Fire Authority. Unfortunately, there had been 10 confirmed deaths in total, 6 males and 4 females. There were 9 incidents in total and 1 fire where sadly two people lost their lives. 80% of these fatalities were aged over 70. 6 of the 10 were living in single occupancy housing with smoking materials being involved in 40% of cases. Smoke alarms were fitted in 89% of the properties with alarms being activated in 63% of cases. A key area of focus for the service was therefore continued community safety work and also work with vulnerable households.

Councillor Kilgour referred to smoke related cases and questioned whether the Service knew the cause of the other 6. AM Leach advised that the source of ignition was unknown.

The Chair queried why the alarms had not activated and was advised that this was likely to be due to the positioning of the alarm. Smoke alarms were often positioned at the top of the stairs however some vulnerable and elderly people did not always sleep upstairs therefore in an ideal world, there should be one on each level.

AM Leach added that some of the deceased were found to be not in the same room as the origin of the fire therefore they had managed to move to another room.

In relation to injuries from accidental dwellings (34) an increase of 8.29% had been seen and injuries were mainly as a result of cooking. Again, this was another key area of focus. Injuries from all fires had decreased by 14%.

ACFO McVay explained that deliberate secondary fires continued to be a significant issue (5469) as with AFA's to domestic premises (3020). The total number of incidents had also increased to 18729.

The number of incidents by time of day continued to peak between 5-9pm which had always been the case historically and Members were advised that the incidents by type had seen an increase in special service due to more calls been received from NEAS.

Grassland/Woodland and crops accounted for 14.1% of incidents which was very hard for the Service to have any influence over however work was undertaken with Local Authorities and the Forestry Commission.

The injury severity from all fires was slight with a precautionary check taking place in 19% of cases and First Aid being delivered at the scene in 46% of cases. Injuries were mainly caused from cooking.

ACFO McVay then referred to the injuries from accidental fires (34) and the operational performance initiatives as follows: -

- **Deaths from Fires** - Hot strikes were carried out in the surrounding areas after all fatalities to ascertain whether neighbouring properties needed any advice. Emollient education was continuing to local watches and to Sheltered Accommodation and Care homes.

Councillor Kilgour suggested that work also be undertaken with health care providers and in addition to this, also the private sector.

- **Injuries from Fires** - All accidental dwelling fires were given a follow up visit by Prevention & Education (P&E) to deliver key fire safety messages to occupants with a particular focus being on kitchen safety.
- **Accidental Dwelling Fires** - P&E North and TWFRS Community Engagement Team attended a large scale EID celebration in Newcastle, delivering key fire safety messages.
- **Deliberate Fires** - within the Newcastle district a fire safety educational talk was delivered to the young people attending Northbourne Youth, to deliver key messages around ASB. Watches from Newcastle West had developed strong links with local primary schools and had delivered educational talks.

AM Leach added that with the zero-tolerance approach, issues of ASB in West Denton had reduced by 70%.

- **False Alarms** – Fire safety had carried out follow up engagements with residential homes to continue to reduce UWFS. Engagement with Student Accommodation also continued to provide education on key areas such as cooking. Engagement also continued with non-domestic premises to reduce actuations. Fire safety continued to carry out post fire activities. These engagements supported the main post firework following significant or prominent fires. Staff visited the surrounding premises in a hot strike strategy to raise awareness of timely issues. In derelict premises the department would contact those responsible for the premises as they had a responsibility to ensure it was secured.

Members were then advised that with regards to accidental dwelling fires, a slight increase had been seen, however the trend had decreased over a 3-year period. The main source of ignition being cooking appliances, with smoke alarms being present in 89% of properties.

In relation to deliberate fires, an increase had been seen since the end of the COVID Pandemic.

The main property type being refuse (including gardens). Engagement work was therefore being undertaken with Local Authorities, with ACFO McVay explaining that any influence from local and ward Councillors would be greatly appreciated.

Councillor Usher advised the Committee of Sunderland's free bulky waste collection scheme. ACFO McVay thanked Councillor Usher for this information and agreed to bring this to the attention of stations.

In relation to non-domestic fires, there had been an increase of 2 with a significant increase being seen in South Tyneside and Sunderland. The main property type was retail and Members were advised that the service always 'call challenged'. If there was no sign of fire the service would not respond, however if confirmation could not be given the service always would respond. AM Leach added that hot strike was also undertaken whereby the business and surrounding businesses were provided with advice.

There had been a significant increase in domestic AFA's for which the service always attended and if it was a false alarm, advice was given.

Councillor Woodwark referred to the fact that AFA's were significantly higher than those of other districts and questioned whether there was any obvious reason for this. ACFO McVay advised that Newcastle had the largest population and also the highest number of activations in student properties.

With regards to internal performance monitoring Members were advised that in relation to safe and well visits, the Service had a priority list who may have been highlighted by partner agencies as well as occupier requests, hot strikes etc.

60% of the yearly target (1189) of fire safety audits had been undertaken which was an incredible amount of work from the Team. In addition, there was a 95% PDR completion rate with the outstanding 5% being due to sickness absence. Critical training compliance rate was 98% again with the outstanding 2% being due to sickness absence or waiting for courses.

In relation to sickness absence, there had been a reduction in 442 shifts lost which was positive as the Service was below the national average but the number was still high. ACFO McVay explained that mental health was a key area of focus and it was now mandatory for all staff to receive a health and wellbeing talk.

Councillor Woodwark commented that stress was the main reason for absence and asked what attempts were being made to lower this. ACFO McVay advised that a lot of cases were caused by external factors for which there was very little the Service could do other than offer support. For cases which were work related, the Service did as much as they possibly could. Work was also underway nationally whereby the NFCC were looking at a 24 hour hotline in which Firefighters could call for support as this was a national not a local issue.

Councillor Kilgour queried why stress and anxiety were separated out and was advised that this was likely to be due to how it had been recorded on the fit note.

Referring to the emergency response times, these were still low when compared to the national average.

There had been 54 accidents reported which was an area for improvement as it was increasing therefore every accident was investigated to see what could be done to prevent it happening again in the future.

There had been a decrease in near miss reports and also attacks on Firefighters and in relation to vehicle accidents the main time was on route to an incident (blue lights on). The majority of attacks on Firefighters related to objects being thrown.

ACFO McVay advised the Committee that in relation to carbon monitoring the gas costs had decreased however the electricity costs had increased. The Finance Director explained that the electricity costs would have been significantly higher had energy saving light fittings not been installed.

Councillor Woodwark referred to the overtime costs in particular why the costs fluctuated throughout the start and end of the year in 2021/22 and was advised that new recruits courses could cause a dip in overtime and also that recruitments and retirements did not always happen at exactly the same time.

The Committee was then referred to Appendix B of the report (2022/2023 Mets Comparison Performance Report) and were advised that when looking at the statistics, whilst they were a concern, they may not be a fair reflection. If for e.g., London was called out to a deliberate secondary fire, the incident would not be recorded as a deliberate secondary fire unless the individuals were seen to be at the fire. As TWFRS did, there was a lot of inconsistency in terms of reporting.

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

(Signed) K. DODDS
Chair