

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 21 FEBRUARY 2022 at 10.30
am

Present:

Item 5 (ii)

Councillor Dodds in the Chair.

Councillors Kilgour and Woodward.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Forbes and Samuels.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

5. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Performance Committee held on 8 November 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2021/2022 Quarter Three (YTD) 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 Committee with information relating to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service's (TWFRS) year to date performance until the end of Quarter Three (Q3) 2021/2022.

The Committee was advised that as lockdown measures eased for all of the community an increase had been seen in activity related to anti-social behaviour and

secondary fires. The Service therefore expected that this area of work would be a renewed focus for the service and partners in the year ahead.

AM Clark reported that the Service had achieved 11 of the 16 Operational targets which remained a similar position to that of the same time in the previous reporting period.

Members were advised that the total number of incidents attended had increased by 14% in comparison to the previous Q3 with the increase being attributed to a rise in deliberate secondary fires. This indicator had seen an increase of 35% and was attributed to the easing of lockdown measures which impacted on last years' performance.

AM Clark was pleased to report that there had been no fire fatalities even though the community had spent a significant amount of time in their homes related to Covid-19 restrictions and guidance.

Injuries from accidental dwelling fires had decreased by 39% with 47% of these injuries occurring in the kitchen. One of the initiatives which had taken place during Q3 to target this type of incident included the distribution of specific kitchen safety advice to Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) tenants.

The Committee was then advised that there had been a 9% decrease in accidental dwelling fires and that the Service continued to utilise social media and give on scene advice as well as carrying out follow up visits by the Prevention and Education teams to all accidental dwelling fires. These visits ensured a working smoke detector was fitted in the property and appropriate fire safety advice was given to the occupiers to prevent future occurrences of this type of incident.

AM Clark advised that all Districts had reported 'Loose Refuse' as the highest property type for deliberate secondary fires and explained that this could be to lifestyle changes in shopping habits which had resulted in large amounts of packing to dispose of, and more loose refuse to set fire to. This was a key component of work for Station Mangers and Members were also encouraged to continue to support the uplifts within their constituent councils.

DCFO Heath explained that these were the incidents that firefighters were most likely to be verbally abused or attacked at, and had caused a resultant increase in attacks on firefighters.

False alarms in domestic premises had increased by 7% therefore throughout the Service area TWFRS continued to work with housing providers to reduce false alarm calls.

Members were then advised that the average response time had improved by 4 seconds to 5 minutes and 56 seconds. A further piece of work had been commissioned to consider the response time over a number of years and the

reasons for apparent fluctuations and variance, including National statistics. A report would therefore be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee. DCFO Heath referred to previous discussions in relation to crews wearing seatbelts prior to leaving the station and commented that a close eye would be kept on this and how it potentially affected response times, with the safety of Firefighters being of paramount importance. TWFRS was still however, 2 minutes quicker in response times, than the national average.

The delivery of Safe and Well checks had seen a significant increase in comparison to 2020/21 when it was severely impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and the redeployment of staff to alternative Community Safety activity. TWFRS had successfully delivered 6427 Safe and Well checks to high risk premises, which was an increase of 106% from 2020/21 when lockdown restrictions reduced the Safe and Well check delivery.

In relation to Covid-19 activity, AM Clark reported on the Logistics Cell which was established to support the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to the Covid-19 Omicron variant and the booster vaccination uplift programme, TWFRS again stood up the Logistics Cell and deployed staff volunteers to support our partners and the community at very short notice and at various clinics. This demonstrated that the Service was ready, able and willing to provide assistance where needed.

Members were advised that from w/c 29 March to w/c 27 December 2021, TWFRS staff volunteers:

- Administered 26,220 lateral flow tests; and
- Carried out 14,919 vaccinations.

Councillor Woodward commented that the statistics were very much still in a fluid situation due to Covid-19 whereby some statistics had improved and some had worsened. However overall, how the Service had responded during the Pandemic was a very positive.

Councillor Kilgour commented that it would be useful to provide figures over numerous years as opposed to the last few years to ascertain the trend over a longer period of time. DCFO Heath agreed and commented that in addition to longer reporting periods, discussions were also ongoing with the PCC in relation to how issues could be collectively addressed.

Councillor Kilgour then went on to extend her thanks to the crews who were continuously doing a fantastic job, adding that any attacks on Firefighters were completely unacceptable and welcomed the reporting from fire personnel to the Newcastle Safeguarding Board.

DCFO welcomed the comments and explained that the number of referrals had increased due to staff feeling more comfortable in being able to record any incidents which was reassuring to note.

The Vice Chair commented that he was very proud of TWFRS for how it had responded during the Pandemic and also worked with partners, and went on to extend his appreciation to all staff within the Service.

6. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) Further reports be received as appropriate.

Attacks on TWFRS Staff

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 present the Committee a report detailing attacks on TWFRS crews at operational incidents and reports of violence at work on staff whilst carrying out their daily duties (Appendix 1).

The report covered the period from 01/04/2017 – 30/11/2021. The 2021/2022 fiscal year was therefore an 8 month period.

Members were reminded that the term 'attack' refers to any kind of verbal or physical assault, abuse or other kind of violence towards TWFRS staff.

DCFO Heath explained that the Service benefited from support within the community and that generally, most people treated the Service very well therefore this was not a widespread problem however a small minority of people did either verbally or physically abuse personnel from TWFRS, therefore this included all staff ranging from Firefighters to Control Room staff.

Members were reminded that the report covered the period from 01/04/2017 to 30/11/2021 and looked at the type of attack, the severity of any injury sustained by the Crew, where and when the attack took place, employee absence costs and damage to TWFRS equipment.

AM Clark then advised Members of the following:-

- The data showed a strong correlation between attacks on firefighters and incidents involving deliberate secondary fires.
- There were 53 incidents where an attack on firefighters took place during 2021/22 (up to 30/11/2021). This was an increase of 43% on the previous year (2020/21) where the lowest number of 37 incidents was recorded in the five year reporting period.

- The decrease in the number of incidents recorded in 2020/21 could be explained by the restrictions on life including lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in a significant reduction in deliberate secondary fires.
- 58% of incidents where an attack on Crews took place involved objects being thrown at firefighters/appliances. Members were advised that as objects were often thrown from a far, unfortunately the perpetrators were often difficult to catch.
- Over 40% of the attacks were carried out in the Newcastle district therefore work was underway with the Local Authority and Ward Councillors to attempt to resolve this issue.
- The proportion of attacks per 1,000 incidents was on a downward trend from a high of 4.4 per 1,000 in 2018/19 to a low of 2.4 per 1,000 in 2020/21.
- The cost to TWFRS to cover absence and damage to appliances/equipment was over £16,000 during the reporting period. Members were asked to note that this statistic may be underreported.
- The Service had the third lowest number of attacks per 1,000 incidents when compared to other Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services therefore elsewhere in the Country, a more serious problem was being seen.
- In addition to attacks on firefighters, there were 40 Violence at Work (VAW) reports submitted to the Health and Safety team. Incidents of Violence at Work were not confined wholly to appliance crews and could, potentially, affect other service staff, and in particular control staff, fire safety staff, community safety staff and flexible duty officers.
- The majority of these VAW incidents were recorded as verbal abuse whilst carrying out routine activities on TWFRS premises. More than half of the incidents of VAW were experienced by Control room staff whilst taking an emergency call from members of the public with reports of callers being verbally abusive and making threats.
- Appliance and Body Worn video CCTV cameras were a useful deterrent and were being utilised in social media campaigns as well as being used as evidence if cases were brought before the courts.

AM Clark explained that whilst the number of attacks on operational crews for the 8 month period in 2021/22 was higher than for the previous full fiscal year, there had been a downward trend in attacks on crews from 2018/19 to 2020/21. This could be attributed to the national lockdown restrictions put in place by the UK government due to Covid-19 that required people to only leave their homes for essential reasons. As most attacks on crews occurred at Secondary fire incidents, the increase in this type of incident could be linked to the rise in attacks on operational crews for the 8 month period of 2021/22. AM Clark advised that as a result of this, education in relation to secondary fires was now of paramount importance.

Councillor Woodward commented that the figures detailed within Section 3.8 of the appendix were alarming, particularly in relation to objects thrown at Firefighters/appliances which had significantly increased and also expressed his concerns with regards to verbal abuse, commenting that this was unacceptable and welcomed the public engagement which was currently taking place.

Councillor Kilgour commented that she would be interested to understand whether these trends were reflected in all emergency services and if so, whether multi agency work was required to tackle the issues.

DCFO Heath responded by advising that unfortunately, these statistics were reported across all emergency services therefore work was underway to collaboratively address issues of anti-social behaviour.

7. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The contents of the report be noted and endorsed; and
- (iii) Further reports be received as appropriate.

(Signed) K. DODDS
Vice-Chairman