

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 20 FEBRUARY 2023 at 10.30am

Present:

Councillor Dodds in the Chair.

Councillors Usher and Woodwark.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Burdis, Kilgour and Wood.

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 7 November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

2022/2023 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 Policy and Performance Committee with information relating to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service's (TWFRS) performance for Quarter 3 2022/23.

The Q3 performance report 2022/23 provided a comprehensive overview of Service performance in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022.

Members were advised that there were two corrections to be made to the report in that the total average response time was 5 minutes and 46 seconds and also that of the total number of calls received, 28,738 were answered within 7 seconds.

Whilst the statistics covered both the bonfire and Christmas period, as a report had previously been submitted to the Authority in relation to this, it was not proposed to address these figures at the meeting.

The Appendix to the report provided the Committee with a high level summary with a few key issues being brought to the attention of Members.

In relation to the incidents by time of day, the hours of between 4pm and 9pm continued to be the busiest period and of the 15,205 incidents attended (which was an increase of 12%) fire, grassland, woodland and crops continued to be the main type of incident (16%).

Being referred to the number of accidental dwelling fires, Members were advised that there had been a 4% decrease and that the main causes for these type of incidents were cooking appliances and smoking related materials.

With regards to deliberate fires, the Service had seen a 20% increase, with only Gateshead showing a decrease in numbers within this target.

The number of non-domestic fires had reduced (146 compared to 153 in the previous year) and the proactive work undertaken with schools and hospitals had clearly been beneficial especially in relation to automatic false alarms and also the risk based attendance policy which had been implemented.

The Committee was advised that the Service had lost 7,145 shifts due to staff sickness with Mental Health – Stress being the highest number reported. This being a reduction of 108 shifts when compared to the same period in 2021/22. The Service continued to look for ways to reduce this including a Health and Wellbeing Hub on the intranet, Trauma Support teams and mental health first aiders. Whilst the number of shifts lost still remained high, staff on long term sickness leave did contribute to this factor. ACFO McVay commented that it was extremely positive that employees felt comfortable in declaring mental health issues and added that a further breakdown in relation to shifts lost by category would be submitted to future meetings.

Councillor Woodward referred to P14 in particular, the statistics which had seen an increase commenting that the increase in the number of deliberate refuse fires was completely beyond the control of the Service and that whilst the targets were challenging, the number of fire related deaths (6) was the most worrying.

ACFO McVay agreed and added that the number of deliberate secondary fires had also increased (20%) therefore work was ongoing with Local Authorities and schools, for example within the Sunderland district, Crews had been allocated hotspot ward areas within their station areas. ASB reduction would be carried out in these areas, including multi agency working, ASB tours and fly tipping removal.

Councillor Usher questioned how the Service felt about the level of policing and was advised that the relationship with the Police was very good and that TWFRS worked with them as much as they could and that they did commit to that, especially in relation to the issues at West Denton.

Councillor Woodwark welcomed the multi-agency approach but commented that the Police were also overstretched.

Members were advised that there had been 61 attacks on firefighters (1 including an attack on a Police Officer) with appliance CCTV and body worn footage provided to the police to assist in investigations of these occasions. This was an increase of 6 compared to the same period last year and the Service was committed to reduce the number of these occurrences by working with Police and partners. The Police presence had been beneficial with a number of arrests being made, and the multiagency approach between the Fire Service, the Police, Local Authorities and Schools continued and was having the desired impact with only 2 attacks the previous month which fell outside of the inclusion zone.

The Committee was advised that there had been six confirmed fire fatalities. Each one was as a result of an accidental dwelling fire. Two occurred in North Tyneside, two in South Tyneside and two occurred at the same incident in Sunderland. Following a case conference and findings of the fire investigator for one of the fatalities in North Tyneside, the Prevention and Education team had worked with sheltered accommodation to raise awareness of the potential dangers of emollients. A Coroner's report was still awaited on two of the incidents.

In relation to the incident in North Tyneside the male was deceased and the female was rescued. TWFRS engaged with them in 2019 and they were not deemed to be high risk. With regards to the incident in Sunderland both the male and female were deceased again with smoking believed to be the contributing factor, as with the incident in South Tyneside with the investigation still ongoing.

ACFO McVay explained that these incidents must be declared until confirmation of a fire related death was received however it was believed that all 3 incidents related to the disposal of cigarettes.

There had been a total of 15,766 Safe and Well visits carried out across the Service by the Prevention and Education (P&E) Teams as well as Operational personnel. This was an increase of 9,300 (144%) when compared with last year. Targeted Priority lists equated for 38% of these visits.

Councillor Woodward questioned whether the targeting strategy was based on risk and was advised that there was an intention to review the targeting strategy with the Prevention and Education Teams with a focus being on smoking and emollients.

Councillor Woodward then referred to the number of false alarms (5432) which had seen an 11% increase and was advised that a 'call challenge' procedure was in place.

Councillor Usher referred to the number of emergency calls received (62,334) and questioned whether the number of call handlers was adequate and was advised that staffing levels had been considered and that TWFRS always seek to maintain 5 call handlers on duty at all times.

The Vice-Chair on closing the meeting, commented that smoking did seem to a huge factor and that a lot of work was underway to highlight this risk.

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

(Signed) K. DODDS
Vice-Chair