

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

ITEM 3 (II)

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 8 NOVEMBER 2021 at 10.30 am

Present:

Councillor Forbes in the Chair.

Councillors Dodds, Kilgour, Samuels and Woodwark.

Apologies for Absence

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

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dodds declared an interest in relation to Item 5 – Bonfire Period Update, specifically the Bonfire near to the Poacher's Pocket at Gateshead and agreed to take no part in the discussion, as Chair of the Licensing Committee for Gateshead Council.

Minutes

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

2021/2022 Quarter Two 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 Two (Q2) 2021/2022.

Members were reminded that the Covid-19 Pandemic had affected the work of the Service in the first two quarters as TWFRS continued its recovery and reintroduced a physical presence in the community as government restrictions eased.

AM Clark explained that a lot of the effectiveness in the community to resolve challenges with matters such as anti-social behaviour was reliant on a multi-agency co-ordinated approach and that partners had also been working within the same constraints. As lockdown measures eased, the Service had seen an increase in activity related to anti-social behaviour and secondary fires. It was anticipated that this area of work would be a renewed focus for the Service and partners in the year ahead.

In addition, the Service had committed significant resources into supporting the community through the COVID-19 pandemic supporting the vaccination and testing programs, which had subsequently had an effect on some of the operational and organisational performance indicators although the Service was increasingly returning to its main functions.

AM Clark advised Members that the Service had achieved or were within 10% of achieving 12 of the 16 Operational targets which was a similar position to that of the previous year.

In summary:

- There had been 0 fire fatalities;
- Whilst there has been a 4% reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires, injuries resulting from them had decreased by 19%;
- 62% of injuries from accidental dwelling fires occurred in the kitchen;
- There had been a 44% increase in the number of deliberate secondary fires;
- The average response time for the first appliance was 6 minutes and 16 seconds, this was 15 seconds slower than 2020/21; and
- 3330 Safe and Well checks had been delivered to high risk households. This was an 85% increase from 2020/21

The Committee was then advised that the total number of incidents attended had increased by 13% in comparison to the previous Q2 and it was believed that a contributing factor was due to the easing of lockdown restrictions compared to the previous year.

In relation to the increase in the number of deliberate secondary fires (44%) as this was the highest figure since 2009/2020, this would be an area of increased focus and hard targeting for the Service with TWFRS seeking to work in partnership and collaboration with partners in driving these types of fires down as they represented a serious anti-social behaviour issue for communities.

AM Clark explained that all districts had reported 'Loose Refuse' as the highest property type for deliberate secondary fires and that TWFRS had recently had success in this regard in the Beacon Lough area of Gateshead with the Service now reporting accumulations of refuse using the 'Report it' tool.

In response to a question from Councillor Samuels, AM Clark explained that the 'Report it Tool' was a common tool used across all Authorities so everyone was reporting in the same way.

The Chair commented that the amount of loose refuse could be as a result of people now doing more online shopping which generated more packaging which could in turn, lead to more refuse being dumped/flytipped/set fire to.

Councillor Kilgour agreed and commented that if people were not using the correct channels for disposing of waste, this was an opportunity for a clear messaging to be communicated.

DCFO Heath agreed and advised that the work with the 5 Local Authorities was extremely effective with the uplifts proving very useful.

Within South Tyneside, one main culprit had been identified as causing numerous amounts of deliberate secondary fires, and it was pleasing to note that the individual was engaging with the Service and would be joining the Fire Cadets in the near future.

Members were then advised that social media had been utilised extensively throughout Q2 with posts highlighting the dangers associated with cooking and general kitchen fires reaching over 50,000 people over the period. More recently, a media campaign related to 'darker nights' and the scourge of anti-social behaviour associated with deliberate secondary fires, had attracted both local and region wide press interest.

False alarms in domestic premises had increased by 2% therefore TWFRS continued to work with housing providers to reduce alarms activating in domestic premises with Gentoo challenging 77% of actuations from their monitored housing stock as well as delivering fire safety leaflets to their high rise buildings.

In relation to false alarms in non-domestic premises, an increase of 9% had been seen. Action had been taken in North Tyneside where contact had been made with non-domestic premises who had had multiple attendances. This had resulted in contractors carrying out remedial work on the buildings alarm system.

AM Clark then explained that average response times for the reporting period had increased by 15 seconds to 6 minutes 16 seconds when compared to last year. This continued to be more than two minutes faster than the average response time to property fires across English FRS which was reported as 8 minutes and 43 seconds.

Within dwelling fires where no smoke alarm had been fitted (48) Members were assured that contact had been made with each of the properties to try and educate occupiers where possible however sometimes, people did refuse to co-operate.

Councillor Woodwark commented that some statistics may look either better or worse due to circumstances beyond the control of the Fire Authority, which could question the validity of some data.

DCFO Heath agreed and explained that TWFRS would not fully understand what impact COVID19 had had on data until the information was further analysed. In addition, statistics could vary depending on the way in which they are reported across different authorities.

Members were reminded that in March 2020 a Logistics Cell was established to support the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This cell had now been stood down but could be reinstated if the community need changed.

AM Clark referred Members to Sections 5.3 and 5.4 of the report and advised that:

From w/c 29 March 2021 to w/c 27 September 2021 TWFRS staff volunteers:

- Administered 19,705 lateral flow tests
- Carried out 14,076 vaccinations

In total since the beginning of the pandemic TWFRS Staff volunteers had:

- Administered 23,685 lateral flow tests
- Carried out 18,510 vaccinations

The Chair referred to the destination sites which were required for PPE and congratulated the Service on playing an excellent role, further commenting that the responsiveness, professionalism and attention to detail showed the Service in the best light possible. Councillor Forbes hoped that this had raised the profile of the Service which was beyond immediate fire response.

DCFO Heath agreed and commented that TWFRS and a partner had submitted a bid for the excellence awards and was pleased to announce that the Service had been shortlisted.

The Chair then referred to the response times and commented that there were 3 potential reasons for the slight increase. These being that the previous year was artificially low, due to an operational change or generally more traffic on the roads since restrictions had been lifted.

DCFO Heath commented that it was currently very complex to understand and likely to be a combination of all 3, however the response from TWFRS was still 2 minutes faster than other FRS's.

The Chair went on to say that if there had been operational changes, Members needed to be assured that it was not a change in the service model which was resulting in the impact on response times.

DCFO agreed and commented that a discussion would be taking place with the FBU in due course regarding fire crews wearing seatbelts prior to leaving the station. The current exemption in the law allowed the service to do what it was currently doing, however this discussion would be predicated on the safety of staff and may impact on response times by a further few seconds.

Councillor Dodds questioned whether any changes in people's mental health could be impacting on the number of deliberate secondary fires and antisocial behaviour and was advised by ACFO McVay that a very strong relationship was in place with the Head Fire Strategy and Reform Office and that a discussion would be taking place early in the new year to see what further information could be gathered.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee congratulated the Service on a positive report, and whilst acknowledging the impact of antisocial behaviour and deliberate secondary fires, welcomed the focused work which would be undertaken in the future.

4. RESOLVED that:

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

Bonfire Period Update

DCFO Heath tabled a Bonfire Period Report which detailed incidents between 1st November and 6th November 2021.

Members were advised that an uplift regime had been in place and that contact had also been made with 65 schools to share messages about the bonfire period. In addition, the online app for parents was also used to share information and overall, it had been a very proactive campaign.

DCFO Heath advised Members of a bonfire in Gateshead (near the Poacher's Pocket) and reassured the Committee that contact had been made with Councillor Haley and works had also been undertaken with the Local Authorities, the Police and Trading Standards to provide guidance, support and advice.

The Committee was advised that a level of activity was seen which did test the Service, and whilst being very busy, not all calls resulted in mobilisation and that overall the bonfire period was well managed.

There had been two firework related primary fires, one relating to domestic violence/abuse and the other being a firework posted through a letterbox. These were now police matters.

With regards to deliberate secondary fires, there had been a decrease of -13.3% from the same period the previous year, with Members being advised that a lot of bonfires had been well managed.

On bonfire night there had been good police presence in the Southwick area of Sunderland with no reported fire related incidents, however overnight some vandals and pulled up some trees which had recently been planted as part of the Sara Project. Members were advised that a number of trees had been successfully retrieved and stored with a hope that they can be replanted again in the future.

Councillor Samuels commented that reaction from the Community had been extremely supportive and confirmed that the trees would be replanted sometime soon.

The Chair referred to the 6 attacks on Firefighters commenting that a zero tolerance approach needed to be undertaken and hoped that these were thoroughly investigated by the Police to send out the necessary message.

DCFO Heath responded by advising that the support from Northumbria Police had been first class and that the Service had very strong working relationships in place.

Councillor Woodward commented that 6 attacks on Firefighters was not acceptable under any circumstances and that it was deeply regrettable that the Service continued to endure these when trying to keep the community safe.

DCFO Heath agreed and commented that the investment in Bodyworn Cameras had been beneficial as footage was subsequently shared with the Police. Councillor Woodward welcomed this and reiterated that whilst there had initially been some reservations from the Trade Unions that footage could be used against staff, that this was not the case and that the equipment was used to protect Firefighters.

Councillor Kilgour welcomed being able to see a 5 year trend and commented that in relation to statistics on Firefighter attacks it would be useful to see additional information, which also compared across the year and not just the bonfire period for a better understanding overall.

The Chair welcomed a report being submitted to a future meeting of the Authority and commented that further detail in relation to each of the attacks would be useful which also included information in relation to whether action had been taken, with individuals being prosecuted or sentenced as a clear message of a zero tolerance approach was of paramount importance.

Councillor Dodds agreed and added that a precis of procedures Firefighters had to undertake to de-escalate a situation would also be useful information for Members.

DCFO Heath agreed to action this and submit a report to the December meeting of the Authority.

(Signed) N. FORBES
Chairman