

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority Periodic Report of the Chairman on Authority Matters

Retirement of Members of the Authority

1. Mr Bloomer has thanked retiring Members for their contribution to the work of the Authority and the Service during their period of office. The retiring Members had a combined service to the Fire and Rescue Authority of 37 years. They were Mrs E J Bayliss, 5 years; Mr R Easton, 4 years; Mr P G Jones, 4 years; Mr M Maryon, 3 years; Mr R F Reade, 4 years; Mr R Roberts OBE, 13 years; and Mr J Wells, 4 years.

Particular recognition was given to Mr Rex Roberts OBE who has been Chairman of the IADS Programme Board since 2005 and made a significant contribution to the success of the PFI projects. Mr Bloomer and Mr Dartford presented Mr Roberts OBE with a Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service figurine in recognition of his contribution to the work of the Authority and the Service.

Fire Authority End of Term Assessment June 2009 to May 2013

2. The Authority has received a presentation by the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Mr Dartford, outlining the key achievements of the Authority during the past four years in relation to:- the Asset Development Strategy, the Business Transformation Programme, Cultural Transformation, Member Engagement and Development, Prevention and Protection, and Response. The achievements have been made for little additional money as the budget of £41.8 m was just £600,000 more than four years ago. The budget/spending of the Authority is expected to reduce over the coming years. Since 2008/09, Primary Fires have fallen by 32%, Accidental Dwelling Fires are down 2%, Deaths and Injuries in Accidental Fires are down 56% of which deaths have reduced by 33%, Small Fires have fallen by 55% and Grass Fires have reduced by 60%. These achievements were down to the political/professional partnership that has endured throughout the Authority's term.

Operational Assurance Peer Challenge

3. Between 26 February and 1 March 2013 the organisation took part in an Operational Assessment and Peer Challenge Review. The Peer Challenge Team presented an overview of their findings to members of the Service and the Authority. The feedback given during the presentation was extremely positive.

The Team highlighted the very positive and unique organisational culture, driving improvement and change. There had been trusting, open and honest engagement throughout the review. They also commented upon the very strong senior managerial leadership who were committed to cultural change and on the excellent organisational structural model.

The findings of the Fire Peer Challenge Team were outlined to the Authority and included strengths in the following areas:- Culture and the impact on your communities; Organisational Capacity; and Leadership and Governance.

The final messages from the Peer Review Team were the positive things that senior partners had said about the Service and the Authority.

Audit Committee held on 6 March 2013

4. Mr Dartford advised the Authority of five audits which had been finalised and all of which had been given Substantial Assurance. This was unprecedented and demonstrated the levels of controls in place across the organisation.

Business Transformation Working Group

5. A Business Transformation Members Working Group comprising four Members is to be established. The nominations to this Working Group will be dealt with at the Authority's annual meeting. The Working Group will give Members the opportunity to be involved in and contribute to the Business Transformation work being conducted within the Service and provide oversight to the transformation process. The decisions on the running of the Service including the provision of resources and equipment are delegated by the Authority to the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive.

Periodic Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

6. There were 15 injuries and three deaths in accidental dwelling fires for the period April – December 2012 compared to nine injuries and two deaths for the same period in 2011.

The number of primary fires recorded for April to December 2012 was 1158 which showed a reduction of 178 when compared to the same period in 2011, a 13% decrease. This is a continuing downward trend.

There were 421 accidental dwelling fires for April to December 2012, a decrease of six when compared to the same period in 2011. The Service is to re double its efforts to reduce these further.

The number of small fires excluding grass decreased by 554 for April to December 2012 from 1470 to 916 when compared to the same period in 2011.

Grass fires had also decreased by 1197 for April to December 2012, from 1503 to 306 when compared to the same period in 2011. Although the weather has had an impact on these fires there has been other activities undertaken by the Service in communities which has had a positive effect on the figures eg Street Stadia. The work undertaken by the Service has been widely publicised by the Marketing and Communications Team.

Community Risk Reduction - The Authority has been advised of a fatal fire incident. On 26 January 2013 at 07:44 hours Fire Control received a call from a neighbour to a detached, thatched cottage in Little Hay Lane, Lichfield. On arrival the crews found a 43 year old female casualty showing no life signs in a first floor bedroom along with her pet dog. Early indications were that the fire had started in the dining room and spread to the first floor. The incident was under investigation by Staffordshire Police and the Fire Investigation Team from West Midlands Fire Service and would be the subject of a Coroner's inquest. The property did not have smoke alarms fitted. Following the fire, Firefighters offered local residents free Home Fire Risk Checks to help prevent further tragedies from happening by identifying fire hazards, discussing escape plans and fitting safety equipment as required. A press release had also been produced.

Housing Association Fits Retro Sprinkler System - In June 2012 several meetings took place between Choices Housing and the Fire Safety (FS) Team from the Northern Service Delivery Group to discuss the benefits of fitting sprinkler systems. The FS Team provided professional advice and guidance about the sprinkler systems available and following these meetings Choices Housing decided to retro fit a residential sprinkler system into one of their bungalows in Chesterton, Newcastle. The sprinkler system will safeguard the four disabled residents who live in a homely environment, each with their own room, a communal area and 24 hour care provided by on site staff. The cost of installing the retro fit sprinkler system is approximately £20,000. Choices Housing are also reviewing the suitability of other properties for further sprinkler systems to be fitted. This has been welcomed by the Service.

Successful Court Cases – There have been two successful prosecutions which went to court in December 2012 in relation to fires which occurred in July and August 2012. The successful prosecutions followed consideration of evidence produced by Service Fire Investigation Officers and given to the Crown Prosecution Service. Darrell Heath pleaded guilty to the production of controlled drug of a Class B, Cannabis and arson recklessly endangering life. He was given an extended sentence of nine years comprising of a custodial sentence term of four years and an extension period of five years. Jason Redfern a 29 year old alcoholic who had been a tenant of Castle Court was jailed for four years after admitting attempted arson with intent to endanger life by setting fire to his flat. The Authority has produced press releases to highlight these successful prosecutions.

Community Facilities – Statistics - Community use across Staffordshire's fifteen community fire stations is continuing at a consistent level with 516 uses during February 2013. The number of community groups supervising their own use of the stations has risen to 52 and this is being actively encouraged.

Evaluation of Community Engagement - Information gathering for a report on community engagement through the use of facilities at community fire stations has taken place during January and February. A full report will be published at the end of March 2013. The findings of the evaluation will be reported to the Authority's Strategy and Resources Committee in due course.

Caudwell Children's Charity Boxing Match - On 1 December 2012 the Service's boxing team competed in the 2nd Annual Boxing Tournament against Staffordshire Police at Fenton Manor Sports Centre. Despite the great support that roared the team on throughout the evening, the Police were the eventual winners of the rematch. Overall the result between the two Services stood evenly balanced at 1:1. The event raised a staggering £19,500 for the Caudwell Children's Charity.

Marketing & Communications Team Award – Following an external audit, the Marketing and Communications Team, have been awarded an accreditation from the Public Consultants Association as an outstanding Communications Team. This is a fantastic achievement and is well deserved by the Team as it recognised their hard work and quality of service.

The Alan Butler Gold and Silver Awards - The North Staffordshire Health & Safety Group saw the 50th Anniversary of the group in 2011, which was marked with a celebratory luncheon addressed by Judith Hackitt, HSE. In 2012 the group was awarded the prestigious Alan Butler Gold award at the House of Lords in recognition of providing 50 years of dedicated service to the local business community of

Staffordshire. This year Staffordshire Health & Safety Group entered the competition with an entry based upon the Service strategy of business community engagement by utilising the new fire station meeting room at Sandyford and including business continuity and business fire safety as core topics. Again the Group was recognised for providing excellent service/advice and was invited to accept a Silver award at the House of Commons on 21 January 2013. John Berrisford, the Service's Business Support Manager, Carl Norman Chairman of the Group from F Ball & Co and Steve Mullock of Dudson's Ltd were nominated by the Executive Committee to attend the prestigious event to collect the award. The awards were presented by Lord Brougham and Vaux.

Financial Mail Awards - As a result of achieving the Excellent Level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework and along with the Service being recognised in the Times Top 50 Employers for Women listing, the Service was invited to take part in the inaugural Breaking the Mould Awards. The Financial Mail on Sunday invited the Service's application as they were keen to see what the Service was doing here in Staffordshire. The awards evening was hosted on 19 February at the Institute of Directors in London. Despite being shortlisted down to three contenders unfortunately on this occasion the Service had to settle for being pipped to the post by the Bank of England. Nevertheless and perhaps more important than the result was the fact that the event marked and acknowledged the growing reputation of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services' MORE Awards - On 7 March 2013 the Service hosted its Annual More Awards at the County Showground Stafford. The event provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on and acknowledge the exceptional contributions made by staff and partners which were contributing to improve the safety and quality of life for people within our communities.

Shared Fire Control Project Update

7. The Authority has been advised of the progress on the Shared Fire Control Project that the Service is collaborating on with the West Midlands Fire Service including:- the successful joint bid for funding; the appointment of a project manager; the development and implementation of a communications and engagement strategy and data sharing protocol; the opportunities a shared control facility would offer; the Governance arrangements for the shared facility; the employment arrangements for the personnel working within the shared facility; and the interim solution was being implemented with an expected go live date of May 2013.

The Authority has approved the actions taken to date by the Fire Control Project Governance Board as follows:- (a) The single shared facility being located at Vauxhall Road in Birmingham at the current WMFS HQ site. (b) The new Shared Fire Control Centre Governance Board will become the overarching strategic board for the Shared Fire Control Centre from the time the Shared Fire Control Centre (SFCC) goes live. (c) That the use of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) will be the legal mechanism for the contractual arrangements between the two FRA's. (d) That the West Midlands Fire Service will become the employing body for all personnel working within the SFCC.

**L W Bloomer
Chairman**