

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

Appointment of Chairman and Vice Chairman

1. The Authority has appointed Mr L W Bloomer as its Chairman and Mrs K M Banks as its Vice Chairman for the ensuing year.

Membership of the Authority

2. The Authority has fourteen new representatives from Staffordshire County Council which were reported to the Annual Authority meeting on 10 June 2013 and with effect from 4 July two new representatives from Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The Chairman has welcomed Members to the Authority.

A Members' Induction/Development Session covering the duties of the Authority and its Members and the connections to and duties of the Fire Service has been held for new and existing Members.

Fire Minister Visit

3. The Fire Minister Brandon Lewis MP visited the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters on 27 June 2013. The opportunity was taken to show him a number of the new innovative initiatives that the Service has underway and how it is using the ideas and creativity of staff to develop new ways of working to assist in dealing with the ongoing financial challenges. The Minister also officially opened the new national resilience and incident command facilities at the Learning and Development Centre. The Minister was extremely impressed by what he saw and heard and was very pleased with the positive way the Authority and Service are responding to the difficult challenges that the public sector is facing currently.

Barton under Needwood Community Fire Station Official Opening

4. The official opening of Barton under Needwood Community Fire Station took place on Tuesday 16 July 2013. The opening of the newly refurbished Community Fire Station was undertaken by Lady Hilda Clarke, wife of the late Sir Stanley Clarke. Both Lady Clarke and her late husband have strong links with both Burton and Barton under Needwood Fire Stations and named the vintage fire engine, housed in Burton Fire Station, after their first daughter. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Authority together with local Fire and Rescue Authority Members attended the opening.

Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

5. The Service attended 9291 incidents from April 2012 to March 2013, a decrease of 2363 when compared to the same period in 2011/12. This was testament to the proactive preventative work undertaken by the Service which has reduced both demand and risk.

There were 16 injuries and 4 deaths in accidental dwelling fires for the period April 2012 to March 2013, a decrease of 7 when compared to 2011/12. There were 21 injuries and 6 deaths for the same period in 2011/12. This improved performance, an approximate reduction of 35% in fire deaths, has come at the same time as a 6%

reduction in funding to the Service. It is a credit to all involved, along with partners who have assisted in achieving these reductions. This is a continuing reducing trend although the figures are fragile due to the small numbers.

There were 562 accidental dwelling fires in 2012/13 compared to 598 in 2011/12, a reduction of 36. The Service continues to work with partners with regard to lifestyle issues to reduce these numbers further.

There were 28 injuries and 5 deaths in primary fires (fires involving property) for the period April 2012 to March 2013. There were 37 injuries and 10 deaths for the same period in 2011/12.

There were 1532 primary fires in 2012/13 compared to 1758 in 2011/12, a reduction of 218. There were over 1000 less fires in 2012/13 than there were eight years ago.

The number of small fires, excluding grass, had decreased by 551 from 1836 to 1285 when compared to 2011/12, a 30% reduction. The use of the Targeted Response Vehicle (TRV), Student Firefighters courses and Street Stadia has made a significant contribution to this reduction.

Grass fires for 2012/13 decreased by 1296, from 1720 to 424, when compared to 2011/12. This was a 75% reduction and although the weather had contributed to these results the Service had been actively involved in preventative work with young people.

The total number of accidental commercial fires had decreased by 12 from April 2013 to March 2013, from 224 in 2011/12 to 212.

Deliberate commercial fires had decreased by 20 from 2011/12 to 2012/13, from 103 to 83. The loss of a business through fire affected the whole economy and also the local authority through the loss of business rates.

There were 652 Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) which the Service attended in 2012/13, an increase of 17 (just under 3%) when compared to 2011/12. This was one area over which the Service did not have direct control and influence. Budget reductions at local authorities had meant that some road safety initiatives such as road safety education had to be cut. Members and officers indicted their willingness for all partners to work together with regard to road safety issues. The Service was keen to ensure a downward trend on RTCs.

The fire and rescue service was working in partnership with the Police and others in order to ensure a reduction in RTCs. Members were advised that ACPO guidance had suggested a new concept of anti-social driving, for tail gaiting and undertaking.

An example of successful partnership working was the decision to close a layby on the A500 where there had been a number of accidents and near misses in the proximity, mainly due to lorries manoeuvring in and out of the layby. Due to the evidence provided by the Police and the joint working with the Service, the Highways Department agreed to the closure of the layby.

Members discussed the issues of flooding and the need for authorities to work together to ensure that gullies were cleared etc. If flooding was prevented by frequent gully clearing then this would mean reduced calls for the Fire Service and Police.

There were 2097 unwanted fire signals from April 2012 to March 2013. This was a decrease of 43 when compared to the same period in 2011/12. The Scrutiny and Performance Committee had helped to develop a revised Policy which required control staff to challenge callers to check whether a fire was occurring and this has been commended by the Chief Fire officer/Chief Executive. Unwanted fire signals came from mostly commercial and industrial premises from automatic systems and it was normally through bad maintenance that they were set off. There were consequences for businesses that were repeat offenders whereby no attendance would be sent unless the Service got a confirmed call of a fire.

There were 337 hoax calls from April 2012 to March 2013 which showed a decrease of 143 when compared to the same period in 2011/12. This was nearly a 30% reduction in calls. The Service has the technology to deactivate mobile phones which have made hoax calls. The reduction of hoax calls has reduced the demand for operational response.

There had been a 4997 increase in Home Fire Risk Checks between April 2012 and March 2013 compared to the same period in 2011/12 – in total 32256 have been completed. These had been provided free of charge. In comparison with Derbyshire in 2011/12 they had conducted just 11,000 HFRCs and had 73 casualties and Staffordshire had completed 27259 and had 27 casualties. A direct correlation could not be claimed although the more that was invested in proactive work then the less time was needed for response.

The Authority has been advised of the death of an elderly lady in a static mobile home in Tamworth. Her death was still under investigation and subject to a Coroner's inquest. The casualty was reported to be suffering from mobility issues. A mains wired smoke alarm was fitted. There was limited effectiveness from smoke detectors as they still may not allow sufficient time for a person with mobility issues to get to a place of safety. A sprinkler system may have been more effective under the circumstances. HFRCs were offered to other residents on the site.

Coroners rule 43 letter noted shortfalls following two high rise fires at Lakanal House, London in July 2009 and Shirley Towers, Southampton in April 2010 where eight people, including two firefighters, died. The Service had looked into detail at the lessons learned and had written to local authorities and housing providers outlining the recommendations, most notably the fitting of sprinklers in high rise dwellings.

National Resilience Assurance - On 5 April the Service received the report from the National Resilience Assurance Team who carried out a review of the Service's Chemical Biological Radioactive Nuclear Environmental (CBRNE) response capabilities during February this year. Pleasingly and reassuringly the review reported conformance in all areas of the Service's capability along with a few suggestions where improvements could be considered by the Service.

Operational Assurance Review - During the second week of April the Service received the full report of its Operational Assurance Review, which was a very positive and successful report. An action plan had been produced and the Service is using the comments made by the Team to assist in continuing the Service improvement journey.

Long Service and Good Conduct Awards - On 5 and 19 March the Service hosted two Long Service and Good Conduct Award Ceremonies at Headquarters. In total 22 members of staff, were awarded with their medals and certificates in recognition of their good conduct, loyalty and dedication to their duty.

More Awards Winners - The 2013 winner of the Sonja Oatley Award for Member Involvement in the Community was awarded to Cllr Kath Banks.

Chief Fire Officer's Commendations - Catherine Armstrong, Marie Downes, Sarah Jayne Rockey, Ian Cooper, Pete Walker, Nicky Smith and Matt Bettany all from Fire Control were awarded Chief Fire Officers Commendations on 12 March. The awards were in recognition of the exemplary way in which two serious life threatening incidents were dealt with and the contribution that the Control staff made to ensure both incidents were concluded with positive outcomes.

Facing the Future - On 17 May Sir Ken Knight's report entitled "Facing the Future" was published. Sir Ken's report presented his findings from the review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England which he carried out earlier this year. The report indicated that £196 m in savings could be made across all fire and rescue services if they were to reduce their spending to those of the average cost of fire and rescue services. The Service in Staffordshire was the 8th lowest costing per head of population and was in the lowest quartile of expenditure. The report was presented to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 24 June 2013 and Members would give further consideration to a response to this paper at a Member Development event in August.

Exercise Triton - A joint exercise with the Police, Fire, Air/Sea Rescue etc had recently been held. The exercise was conducted in a professional way and all agencies had done a fantastic job. The Exercise covered various emergencies throughout the County including flooding.

L W Bloomer
Chairman