

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

Industrial Action

1. The Fire Brigades Union's industrial action took place from mid-day to 4pm on Wednesday 25 September 2013. The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Peter Dartford, has praised members of the community for their vigilance as 999 calls dropped by more than half during the industrial action. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service attended just four emergency incidents during the period lower than the three year average for this time period.

A robust and carefully considered contingency plan was in place to deal with emergency calls throughout the national FBU strike to ensure the safety of Staffordshire's residents and firefighters. Appliances, which were down from 42 to 19, were strategically located around the County in order to provide cover which was as coherent as possible, albeit nothing like "business as usual".

A vital part of the plan was to keep the community informed of the situation, through the media, social media, community safety activity and working closely with partners, and to advise people of the various home and road safety precautions they could take to protect themselves.

Honorary Doctorate Award

2. Mr Peter Dartford, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Staffordshire University for his unwavering commitment to the transformation and modernisation Agendas and the influential role he continues to play in modernising the Service. The official ceremony to invest Peter with this award took place at the Trentham Estate on Monday 8 July 2013. The Authority has congratulated Mr Dartford on his achievement.

PFI 2 Financial Close

3. On 10 July 2013 the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) 2 achieved financial close and work commenced at Chase Terrace Fire Station on 12 July. This was great news for the Service and for the Authority. The PFI 2 project will result in the rebuilding of ten fire stations and relocation of one station.

Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

4. The Authority has been advised of the tragic death of Firefighter Stephen Hunt in the line of duty. Mr Hunt, a firefighter with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, had been fighting a particularly difficult fire in a basement store room of a building. Sincere condolences have been sent to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and to Mr Hunt's family.

In Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, there were five injuries and one death in accidental dwelling fires for the period April to June 2013, an increase of one when compared to the same period in 2012/13.

The number of fires involving property and casualties for April to June 2013 was 349, which showed a decrease of 9 (a 2.5% reduction) when compared to the same

quarter in 2012/13. This was a continuing downward trend. The Service's work with communities appeared to be having a positive effect.

There were 128 accidental dwelling fires between April and June 2013, an increase of six when compared to the same period in 2012/13.

The number of small fires excluding grass increased by 52, from April and June 2013, from 326 to 378, when compared to the same period in 2012/13, a 15% increase.

Grass fires had increased by 337, between April and June 2013, from 164 to 501, when compared to 2012/13. Although the number of both small fires and grass fires had increased compared to the same period in the previous year they were still much lower than in 2011/12 where they stood at 545 for small fires and 699 for grass fires.

National Road Safety Week – The Service took part in the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) Annual National Road Safety Week from 6 to 13 May 2013. Events were held throughout the Authority's area highlighting risks and dangers facing motorists.

Sprinklers Update – A standard domestic sprinkler system has been fitted in the home of a vulnerable person who was bedridden and confined mainly to the living room. The person was a heavy smoker and had alcohol issues. The system has been fitted throughout the habitable areas. It was installed and commissioned with an additional facility of audible and visual warning on the outside of the property to show that a system was fitted and it had been activated. The system was installed in partnership with Project Fire.

The Service has worked with Pointons meat and bone processing plant in Cheddleton following a recent fire, to provide a specification for a suppression system at low level, at roof level, in the plant area and on the vehicles to provide a total package, which would be supplemented by a property protection system.

The Service has been successful in gaining an undertaking from Belvedere School in Burton upon Trent that suppression will be installed throughout the school even though the build has already been started. Similarly there has been a pre-consultation opportunity with Staffordshire County Council regarding Christchurch Primary School in Lichfield and the fitting of a hybrid life safety system to allow open ICT breakout areas on the second floor lobby. The step by step approach to risk assessing elements of the design will provide a build of comparable cost and safety but with suppression rather than with passive doors and walls. This has helped to achieve the architectural vision with some trade-offs for access.

Working in partnership with the City Council, two low rise domestic council housing blocks in Matthews Walk and Ashmore Walk, Stoke-on-Trent, were being retro-fitted with sprinklers. Case studies and evidence gained will be used to influence future high rise projects to include sprinklers in their refurbishment programmes. The Service's media team will be working closely with Stoke-on-Trent City Council in publicising this area of work as it develops.

The Service is working with the LGA with the aim of having a "sprinkler week" next year to raise the profile on the use of sprinklers.

DEAFvibe Event - Award winning charity DEAFvibe is an organisation seeking to empower Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-blind people living in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire as well as their family, friends, carers' and professionals involved in their care. The Deaf-led charity, held its second annual "See Me, Hear Me" event in the Britannia Stadium at Stoke City Football Club on Friday 10 May 2013, which was supported by Stoke City Football Club and Hilton Studios. The Service attended with representatives from the Specialist Technicians team and Central Risk Reduction, to give home fire safety advice as well as demonstrating the latest deaf alarm systems available. Approximately 50 members of the public have booked a specialist Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC). Members of the team were all able to practice their British Sign Language skills in addition to using the specialist interpreters.

Tamworth Community Sensory Garden - Safer Communities CIC has been working on a Sensory Garden Project at Tamworth Community Fire Station. Funding of £5,000 has been awarded from the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Trust in partnership with Youth United to create an open space for people to enjoy. Landscaping has been completed by Groundwork West Midlands and two planting days were held in June. Pupils from St Gabriel's Primary School, Tamworth Community Café and two local scouts groups enjoyed planting the beds with donations from the local community, parents and supermarkets. Contributions included hanging baskets, bulbs, herbs, alpines and grasses. On 7 July Belgrave Community Fire Station held a fun day and during the event the garden was officially opened. The school has already been using the garden for poetry and art lessons and users of the community facilities have been sitting in the garden admiring the sights, sounds and smells. Over the next period the Service will be working with other groups to think of ways the garden could be embedded into the local community and innovative ways in which they could benefit from the project.

Assistance to West Midlands Fire Service – The Service gave assistance to West Midlands Fire Service during the Smethwick Fire. This had been caused by a Chinese lantern which landed on paper which was stored outside. It was a 35 pump fire and Staffordshire assisted with ten fire appliances, seven of which helped with the incident and three others provided cover in the West Midlands. CFOA had called for a ban on the sale of Chinese lanterns as not only were they a fire hazard they could be harmful to livestock. Some stores had already withdrawn these lanterns from sale. The Service looked across its area and identified the lowest risk areas and mobilised appliances from these areas eg one pump was mobilised from Ipstones. The Chief Fire Officer from the West Midlands Fire Service reported that all of Staffordshire's crews had performed in an exemplary way and were a credit to the Authority.

Staffordshire Efficient Response Options (SERO) – On 3 - 5 June testing took place at the Training and Development Centre of a potential low pressure fire fighting misting system. The system which was tested on a range of different fires has been designed by a company called Firebug and may provide an alternative extinguishing system to the high pressure systems that were currently being used by Fire & Rescue Services throughout the UK. The trials went well and were the initial stages of a newly commissioned project called SERO. The partners in SERO were Staffordshire University, Longton Trucks, Firebug and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. The system will firstly improve safety and secondly will provide the opportunity for the Service to reduce costs to meet the financial challenges over the coming years.

Safety Town - At the beginning of June a brand new children's community safety campaign titled "Safety Town" was launched in Staffordshire. Safety Town is a partnership between Staffordshire Police, British Transport Police, West Midlands

Ambulance, Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership, Royal National Lifeboat Institute and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. Approximately 500 children from 14 schools across Lichfield and Tamworth will be learning about the dangers of playing with fire, water safety, road safety and rail safety at a series of events that are taking place at Tamworth Community Fire Station over the summer months.

Asian Fire Service Association Awards - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service was successful in three awards at the annual Asian Fire Service Association Gala Awards, which were held in Derbyshire. The standards were extremely high with competition coming from a number of other fire and rescue services and other organisations who were nominated. The Service was awarded joint winners in the Partnership of the Year Award for the work conducted within its communities by the Safer Communities CIC, which was a joint venture by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Fire Support and Ground Works – West Midlands. SFRS was also commended in the highly prestigious Fire and Rescue Service of the Year Gold Award and the Innovations partnership Silver Award for its work at Hanley Museum around Diwali.

Shared Fire Control Project Update

5. The Authority has received updates with the progress on the Shared Fire Control Project that the Service is collaborating on with the West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS). On 17 June Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) fire control implemented a phased rollout programme, which involved a period of time where the SFRS Fire-Cat command and control system was run alongside the new Vision command and control system. This had been highly successful and had boosted confidence. The human resources structure has been agreed for the Shared Fire Control for the first phase of the joint facility and a review of the crewing structure will take place after the first 12 months. The Board has established a small Working Group to further develop the Service Level Agreement (SLA) to ensure it met the needs of both authorities. The shared control facility will be located in Vauxhall Road, Birmingham. Currently there are 101 staff and with effect from April 2014 this will reduce to 76. No one would be made compulsorily redundant. There would be cost saving from the reduction in the number of staff.

**L W Bloomer
Chairman**