

COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE
(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

26 April 2024

Present:

Councillors Hendy (Chair), Best, Chesterton, Coles (vice Brazil), Kerley, Patel and Radford

* **CSC/23/14** Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 be signed as a correct record.

* **CSC/23/15** Strategic Priority 1 and 2 Performance Measures: Quarter 4 - 2023-24

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Service Delivery (CSC/24/4) to which was appended a performance monitoring report for the fourth quarter of the current (2023-24) financial year against those Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) falling within the remit of this Committee for scrutiny purposes and aligned to Authority-approved Strategic Priorities 1 and 2.

In summary, the KPI performance was:

| | Succeeding | Near target | Needs improvement |
|------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Priority 1 | 13 (+3) | 4 (-1) | 2 (-2) |
| Priority 2 | 6 (-) | 8 (+1) | 0 (-1) |

The two KPIs with a status of “needs improvement” were:

- KPI 1.2.4.1 - Fire safety checks completed;
- KPI 1.2.5.4 - Non-domestic false alarms due to apparatus.

The report provided a detailed exception report for the two KPIs requiring improvement, explaining the reasons for the exceptions and measures to remediate the performance.

In terms of the number of fire safety checks completed, the Committee queried the setting of the target for Fire Safety Checks and the rationale for this. Figures were based upon the risk based inspection programme and the Services capacity to deliver, the Service strived to set an achievable target for each year. The Service clarified the figure discussed had been for businesses. The Service had recognised the work undertaken to embed regional fire safety teams had subsequently reduced local capacity, thus impacting the ability to deliver. The Committee requested the setting of realistic and achievable targets in the future.

The Service reported an increase in the completion of audits which the Committee queried in light of the reduction in checks. The Director of Service Delivery advised that this had been due to the further training of Protection staff to the requisite level which had meant that more audits could be undertaken.

In respect of the rate of false alarms in non-domestic premises, an increase of 15.2% had been noted. The Service would be undertaking work to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals (“UWFS”), a report on which would be presented to the Committee in due course. The Committee asked if there was any challenge made for premises where there were frequent unwanted fire calls due to malfunctioning equipment. The Service confirmed this. Information was fed into the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) which maintained a database through which challenges were made to manufacturers directly. This work was led by the London Fire Brigade.

The Committee commented that the Service may have experienced an increase in activity due to economic factors and associated ageing fire prevention systems. It was noted that that an additional factor was that some premises owners allowed the Service to respond to unwanted fire calls to inform their fire risk assessments and would pay the associated call out charge, therefore resulting in a continued high number of UWFS.

The Committee noted that the Community Risk Management Plan informed the risk based inspection programme. The Chief Fire Officer advised that a report would be presented to the Committee at a future meeting detailing the Service’s response to UWFS.

* **CSC/23/16** **Home Fire Safety Visits - Backlog**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (CSC/24/5) on the Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV) backlog, relating to KPI 1.1.4 ‘Number of home fire safety visits completed’.

The Service had delivered 15,081 visits against a target of 13,500 in 2023-24, thus exceeding the target set. The Service had reported a backlog of 7,388 cases, however, generated by a number of factors including:

- not being able to undertake visits during the Covid 19 pandemic;
- performance issues with Information Technology (IT) systems;
- IT systems that were unable to provide adequate management information and reporting;
- an increase in the number of referrals being received; and
- recruitment challenges and high levels of staff turnover.

It was noted that the Service had made the decision to temporarily pause referrals of HFSV from partners with the exception of the prioritisation of high risk members of the public. As a result of this action, the Service had seen a reduction in the backlog by over 2000 cases. The reported figure, not captured in the report, had been 1,695 as of 22 April 2024. The Service remained confident that the temporary pause in referrals to all but the most vulnerable would continue to support the reduction in the backlog, with an anticipated resolve date of the latter end of 2024. The introduction of the new ICT system in 2024 would further enhance the Service's ability to deliver this function.

The Committee welcomed the Services actions to resolve the backlog and the attempts in recruitment, however, raised concerns around the ability to recruit administrative staff which had been compounded by the failing IT systems.

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that the Service would be introducing the system presently used for Protectino work, this had been the "Community Fire Risk Management Information System" ("CFRMIS") which was considered a national standard. The Committee was assured that staff would be able to directly input information into the system at the time of a visit or shortly thereafter, therefore reducing the administrative burden.

The Committee queried if HFSVs covered residential garages, this had been in light of recognising the risks of electric vehicles and their charging infrastructure. The Service responded that individuals visited rarely had garages, however, the risk was recognised. The Committee requested consideration of this emerging risk.

The Committee recognised the pragmatic response taken by the Service in response to the backlog and requested the recording of their gratitude for work undertaken to date.

NB. Minute CSC/23/17 below also refers.

* **CSC/23/17** **Charging for response to Unwanted Fire Signals**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery (CSC/24/6) on the four-stage process for charging for unwanted fire signals in accordance with the appropriate legislation.

The Committee was advised that an unwanted fire signal was defined as a fire signal resulting from a cause other than a fire. The Service had instigated a four-stage process for dealing with repeat offenders as outlined in the report circulated. The cost as of April 2024 had been £440.68 plus an additional £28 for a major appliance and an additional £28 administrative charge. For the 2023-24 financial year, cost recovery had totalled nearing £9,500. In response to a query from the Committee, the Service provided the assurance the figure was accurately reflective of costs incurred.

The Committee sought clarification of the next steps should an organisation fail to adhere to stage four cost recovery. The Service advised that, should cost recovery not be successful, legal action would be considered. The Service also had mechanisms under the Regulatory Reform Order 2006 to inspect and ensure that premises were adhering to the correct standards for fire prevention. Should this not be the case, mechanisms were available to either request the owners of premises to undertake remedial works to address any issues or to enforce closure of premises should this be necessary. The Service provided assurance to the Committee that Fire Protection Officers continued to engage closely with businesses to aid them in their protection requirements in the eventuality that failings were observed during regular inspections of premises.

The Committee noted the report and requested a further report detailing recognised repeat offenders, in particular, those that have reached stage four within the Service's trigger points.

* **CSC/23/18** **Service Response to the Serious Violence Duty**

The Committee received for information a report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery (CSC/24/7) setting out details of the Serious Violence duty which the Service had been subject to as of 31 January 2023. The responsibility had been for the Service, as a partner, to collaborate on the Public Health agenda to tackling serious violence.

The Committee recognised the importance of ensuring the safety of staff, notably in response to the violence duty. In addition, the difficulties the Service experienced due to having to work alongside two Police areas: Devon and Cornwall and Avon and Somerset were noted by the Committee.

The Committee queried if the duty would allow for greater data sharing with partners, in particular Police forces, to aid operational crews in responding to incidents. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Duty did allow for greater data sharing, an example of which was the data sharing with Avon and Somerset Police, with the Service recognising the greater steps which had been taken by the Force to share information with partners.

* **CSC/23/19** **Community Safety Campaigns 2024-25**

The Committee received for information a report and supporting appendix of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Service Delivery (CSC/24/8) on the Services community safety campaigns.

The Head of Communications and Engagement gave a presentation to the Committee at the meeting, elaborating on the work being undertaken to promote community safety campaigns. The Committee requested the wider circulation of the report to the Authority for information.

* **CSC/23/20** **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Areas for Improvement Action Plan Update**

The Committee received for information a report of the Chief Fire Officer (CSC/24/9) on progress against the action plans to address Areas for Improvement within the remit of this Committee and stemming from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 2022 inspection report of the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service (the Service).

Action plans had been developed to address the following two Areas for Improvement which were specifically related to the remit of this Committee: In summary, the areas for improvement action plan completion status had been:

| Reference | Description | Target Completion | Status |
|----------------|--|--|-------------------------|
| HMI-1.2-202203 | The service should evaluate its prevention activity so it understands what works. | 29/02/2024 | In Progress (Off Track) |
| HMI-1.2-202204 | Safeguarding training should be provided to all staff. | 30/04/2024 30/06/2024 | In Progress (On Track) |
| HMI-1.3-202205 | The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits and fire safety checks to an appropriate standard. | 30/09/2023 30/11/2023 31/08/2024 | In Progress – On Track |

In terms of the completion of Safeguarding training, it was reported that good progress had been made. As at 26 April 2024, 956 staff members had completed the requisite safeguarding training.

As a result of discussions at Audit and Governance Committee in January 2024 (Minute AGC/23/27 refers) and subsequent review by Executive Board, HMI-1.3-202205 (Quality Assurance of Audits and Fire Safety Checks) would now be reported to the Community Safety Committee. Due to the new quality assurance process and the time for implementation, the target completion date of the area for improvement had been extended.

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.52 am

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