

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 11 July 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Ben Curran (Chair), Tim Huggan (Deputy Chair), Sue Auckland, David Baker, Penny Baker, Michelle Cook, Dawn Dale, Terry Fox, Karen McGowan, Anne Murphy, Kaltum Rivers and Richard Shaw

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 13th December, 2018, 14th March and 15th May, 2019, were approved as correct records.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 Ruth Hubbard asked a question on behalf of the Friends of Birley Spa Bath House. Ms. Hubbard stated that a Cabinet decision had been made with regard to the future of the Bath House, which overrides previous agreements that the Friends Group had with the Council. She said that the Group had received a letter saying that the building will be sold off in four weeks' time unless £200,000 has been raised to cover out essential works.

5.2 In response to this, Councillor Karen McGowan, a local Ward Councillor for that area, stated that, unfortunately the cost of repairs to the building was a lot more than it had been anticipated. However, the Group needed to obtain a letter of commitment so that they would be able to apply for funding towards the cost of the repairs to the roof. Due to the fact that the building was due to be sold in four weeks' time, she suggested that the Group should obtain quotes for the works to be carried out so that they are aware of what needs to be done and the funding required. The Chair added that he would chase up the letter of commitment and a list of requirements that the Group needed.

6. SOUTH YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE - DRAFT INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 6.1 The Committee received a report on the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which was currently out for consultation. The plan sets out the steps proposed to be taken by the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service with the resources at their disposal to improve public safety, reduce fires and save lives. The Committee was requested to consider the implications of the plan, especially in light of the matters raised by a petition which had been presented to Full Council on 12th June.
- 6.2 In attendance for this item were Jamie Courtney (Chief Fire Officer), Stuart Booth (Director of Support Services) and Andy Strelczenie (Head of Emergency Response).
- 6.3 Jamie Courtney thanked the Committee for giving him the opportunity to come and speak about the consultation document. He said that South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue (SYFR) was now entering its ninth year of austerity and a pensions' deficit which public sector organisations have been advised they will have to fund could cost up to £3m a year. The Government have said they will cover 90% of this cost for this financial year, but after that the service will have to cover its own costs. Additionally there was uncertainty about how public services would continue to be funded beyond 2020/21. Mr. Courtney stated that the service had looked at ways of making new savings without a great deal of success and was running out of options. He added that SYFR had a responsibility to operate a structure to meet the requirements of the National Framework which sets out the Government's expectations and responsibilities for all fire and rescue authorities. Mr. Courtney said that the options that had been considered were making some fire stations day crewing stations with firefighters providing on-call cover at night; some stations day crewing with a roving fire engine from another station at night; changing some stations to being available "on call". It was felt that these options carried risks by increasing the response time, especially at night, from several stations. The preferred option would be to reduce the number of firefighters riding a fire engine from five to four. He said that a number of fire engines already ride with four firefighters on a number of occasions and this practice had been established as standard elsewhere in the country. It was felt that this was the only option available which would reduce costs without impacting on the speed of emergency response times.
- 6.4 Members of the Committee asked a number of questions, and responses were given by the Fire Service representatives as follows:-
- Currently there are 17 fire stations across South Yorkshire that can respond to an emergency. To achieve the savings required, the service would have to reduce several fire engines from whole-time, immediately available 24/7, to day staffing/night time on call where response times would be longer during the night
 - Throughout austerity, SYFR, through careful spending, had built around £25m in reserves and when faced with decisions to make cuts, it looked at ways of underspending each year. This meant carrying out essential repairs only to fire stations, the result of which was that now four stations

were in need of significant investment to bring them up to standard. It was considered that it would be cheaper to rebuild the station at Barnsley rather than carry out repairs.

- £16m of the reserves were now committed to capital projects and it was felt that the reserves should not be used to “prop up” annual revenue spending which would postpone the inevitable.
- Fire engines riding with four crew members provide a speedy response and the crew would have to work slightly harder than if riding with five crew members. All South Yorkshire firefighters are fully trained and very competent in the job they do and the right number of firefighters will be deployed to deal with any incidents they are faced with.
- There are to be no job losses. The reduction of 85 members of staff would be through personnel retiring, mainly through completing 30 years’ service, and not being replaced. Figures suggest that it would be 2024 before this reduction was achieved. There is a central group of personnel who adopt a flexible role to cover sickness absence, holidays, etc.
- There are 17 other Fire Authorities around the country who have adopted the four man crew system. Fire Authority members had visited Tyne and Wear to ask about their experience of four man crews and was assured that it worked well. The Control Staff knew how to deploy additional pumps as necessary.
- The IRMP has been advertised through the media and has reached circa 1,000,000 people. There have been 100,000 contacts through social media and the Fire Service has consulted all partner agencies and had received 501 written responses thus far.
- It was reiterated that no-one will lose their job. Recruitment will take place again but the organisation as a whole will be smaller.
- The reduction of 85 employees would not affect any one area as the contract of employment for a firefighter states that they can be moved to any station. There is always a rebalancing act which is managed locally.
- There has been a 50% reduction in Senior Managers and the Executive Team.
- The Service has to plan for the future and consider all funding scenarios and the possibility of a change in Government and the effects of Brexit could affect the budget. The options outlined in this document present the worst case scenario.
- These proposals will not have an impact on the community. In the aftermath of the Grenfell disaster, SYFR risk assessed the high rise buildings throughout the county to determine whether any were at risk.

Sufficient resources are committed to training and the delivery of the community safety programme, which it was felt helped to save lives. Fire crews visit homes to give advice and this will continue.

- The Fire Authority has had limited opportunity to increase the fire service precept levied on Council tax payers and the regeneration of the city centre should ultimately generate more business rates which could mean more investment into the fire service.
- The mobilising system records attendance data and it is not about the first or second response, but the optimum response to incidents that matters the most.
- SYFR consistently publishes the amount of reserves it holds, which have been verified by the Finance Officer. There is a pay dispute at the moment and the pensions' shortfall came out of the blue. The Fire Authority does not want to become dependent on using reserves as the amount will continue to reduce as the capital programme is delivered. The Home Office is aware of the amount of reserves the Authority currently holds but there is no reason to believe that this impacts upon the level of funding received from the Government.
- It might be necessary to staff some of the fire engines on a "full time day staffing/night time on-call" basis, which would mean that those engines would be permanently staffed during the day but would be available on a delayed on-call basis during the night time period. These changes would be a realistic way to achieve the level of savings needed to meet the full cost of the pensions' shortfall. If this proved to be necessary in the future, an amendment to the IRMP would be produced and the proposals set out in more detail.
- In response to the question to the Chief Fire Officer relating to the option open to him to retire next January, he said that given the importance of this, he did want to leave the funding problem for his successor to 'sort out', and wanted to hand over a fire service that was fit for purpose.

6.5 The Chair thanked Jamie Courtney, Stuart Booth and Andy Strelczenie for their contribution to the meeting and stated that the Committee's recommendations would be made following its consideration of the next item of business – "Petition Opposing Fire Service Cuts".

7. PETITION OPPOSING FIRE SERVICE CUTS

7.1 The Committee received a report regarding a petition that had been debated at a meeting of Full Council on 12th June, 2019 - "Opposing Fire Service Cuts". Following the debate, one action agreed by Council was to refer the matters raised to this Committee for its consideration.

7.2 Neil Carbutt, who had presented the petition to Council, was in attendance and asked that the Scrutiny Committee consider the petition as set out in the report.

He stated that there were different pressures around the Service and gave a brief history about the Close Proximity Crewing (CPC) duty system which the Fire Authority had tried to introduce in 2012 to deal with severe budget cuts imposed by the Government, but this system was deemed unlawful and industrial relations between the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and the Authority were poor.

7.3 Matt Nicholls, Chair of the Fire Brigade Union, representing 500 firefighters in South Yorkshire, stated that riding with four crew members instead of five was less safe, the fifth person ensured the safety of the other crew members. He referred to the Grenfell disaster and said that initially 25 engines had attended but this soon increased to 40. He added that he and his members understood the pension deficit and shortfall to the budget, but felt that the reserves the Authority holds should be used to buy time.

7.4 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided by Neil Carbutt and Matt Nicholls, as follows:-

- The published national response to attending a house fire is nine firefighters. Its not about the number of engines attending a fire but the personnel there.
- The proposed introduction of CPC did not look at the issue of fatigue, whereby firefighters were on shift for 11 hours without sufficient breaks and any subsequent job losses.
- Rotherham is a growing and thriving community as was Doncaster and extra resources will be needed to cover this.
- It was felt that there should be a “top down” review of personnel in order to achieve savings.

7.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Neil Carbutt and Matt Nicholls for attending the meeting;
- (b) authorises the Policy and Improvement Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to develop and submit a response on behalf of the Committee, to the consultation on the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service’s draft Integrated Risk Management Plan; and
- (c) encourages Cabinet to also submit a response to the consultation on the Plan.

8. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson), attaching the Committee’s draft Work Programme for 2019/20.

8.2 Members suggested a number of issues that the Committee could look to include on the Work Programme, predominantly:-

- Cross over working with Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee (CYPFS) on Youth Issues e.g. gun and knife violent crime, school exclusions, child sexual exploitation, young people's housing, especially care leavers.
- Gun and knife crime scrutiny review – to be updated into a formal review report, gathering more information if required. A small task group of the Committee to work on this.
- Universal Credit in Sheffield Update.
- Community Safety Partnership - Statutory role for this Committee as the Crime and Disorder Committee to scrutinise the Sheffield Community Safety Partnership (CSP), incorporate in the Committee's work programme a through the year scrutiny of CSP performance as well as annual report.
- Hate Crime in Sheffield - Hate Crime is a CSP (Community Safety Partnership) priority, an action plan was a recommendation of this Committee 2016/17; This item would be to receive a report of performance on this CSP priority as part of this Committee's Statutory role to scrutinise the CSP; and a progress update on the Hate Crime Action Plan, including how (what routes) are people reporting hate crime.
- Cohesion Sheffield - an update on city-wide framework, joint strategy and area projects.
- 101 service – operation and performance update.
- Housing + Update.
- Affordable Housing and affordability - where is it, what is our housing strategy; how can we get housing in the city that is affordable to Sheffield people; how do we maintain affordability; specific issues of appropriate housing, for older people catering for new way of living for ageing population, and young people's housing opportunity (especially care leavers); city fairness and equality in housing.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) approves the contents of the Work Programme for 2019/20; and
- (b) requests the Policy and Improvement Officer to look at including the items now mentioned as part of the Work Programme.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 19th September, 2019, at 5.00 pm, in the Town Hall.