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

Slitting Mill Fire, Rugeley

1. On 5 September, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service received a call to a waste fire located at Oak Tree Farm, Slitting Mill Road, Rugeley. On arrival, crews were faced with what appeared to be surface level fires within a large stack of what appeared to be mainly waste wood (chipped wood). It became apparent that the fire was deep seated and that the stack also contained domestic refuse throughout.

Following liaison with a number of agencies and consideration of the options available, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service made the decision to take an ‘allow to burn’ approach due to the issues associated with applying copious amounts of water.

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service utilised the lead for the Chief Fire Officers Association on waste fires, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Mark Andrews (East Sussex FRS), to support the protracted incident when it was determined that additional support was required to this extremely challenging incident.

Following the confirmation of asbestos products and other potentially hazardous materials being contained within the waste operational tactics were changed in order to ensure firefighter safety. These tactics have resulted in the waste being “capped” - covered over using soil in order to reduce the amount of smoke, flame and other products that are being generated by this incident.

A public meeting was held with partners to ensure residents were fully informed, chaired by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, with support from Cannock Chase District Council, Staffordshire County Council, the Environment Agency and Public Health England.

Ongoing work is taking place between partner organisations to provide successful recovery operations to this incident.

The Service is also supporting national work relating to these specific types of incidents, which will influence national operational guidance and legislative change in the future.

The Service is now leading on a risk inspection programme with partners to look at preventing the same happening at other similar sites across the country.

Opening of Bilbrook and Codsall Community Fire Station and Loggerheads Community Fire Station

2. Two official openings of Community Fire Stations were performed during May and June 2016.

Bilbrook and Codsall's new Community Fire Station was officially opened during a special ceremony on 24 May. Madeleine Cheadle, Fire Service Chaplain performed the official opening watched by serving and former firefighters based at Bilbrook and
Codsall along with local dignitaries and representatives of organisations that use the community rooms.

On 9 June, Ann Fisher, former High Sherriff, performed the official opening of Loggerheads Community Fire Station. The new Community Fire Station has proved to be a real hub for local groups since it opened last February, attracting many organisations keen to make the most of the excellent community focused facilities which are available free of charge.

**Performance**

3. The Authority has been advised of the annual performance over the last three years with comparisons made between years as appropriate.

**All Attended Incidents** - There have been 8304 incidents in 2015/16 and there was a downward trend over the last three years. False Alarm Good Intent was the most prevalent incident type in 2015/16, followed by Secondary Fires, as was the case in 2014/15. With regard to false alarms the Service has carried out an amount of work driving down these calls and will continue to try and drive these calls down further. The reduction in false alarm calls is a good news story for the Service.

The Service has been working with households experiencing near misses and also highlighting dangers in the home as part of their prevention campaigns. The Service is using social media, as well as the traditional prevention methods, to get safety messages across to the public. The Service is also working with manufacturers to improve recall procedures for faulty goods and to ensure that adequate safety messages are sent out with their goods.

**HFRCs Delivered** - There has been an upward trend in the number of HFRCs delivered over the last three years. During 2015/16 30,324 HFRCs were delivered, with much greater emphasis given to vulnerable households and those identified as at greater risk (Gold, Silver and Bronze households).

**Deaths and Injuries in Accidental Dwelling Fires** - There have been 14 injuries and four deaths during 2015/16, which is one fewer death than in the previous two years and eight fewer injuries than in the year 2013/14. These incidents are on a downward trend over the last three years. The four fire deaths for 2015/16 is the lowest in the Service’s history. Two of the fires leading to the deaths were caused cooking, one by smoking materials and the other by a faulty electric blanket. The performance figures show that the Service is heading in the right direction in the way that it was delivering services.

**Involvement in My World Project**

4. During May and June the Service teamed up with St. John’s school in Trent Vale to deliver a campaign which introduces pupils to the world of work. Year 6 pupils visited Newcastle Community Fire Station on 18 May and Hanley Community Fire Station on 10 June as part of the Open Doors2 Ltd - My World Project which aims to expand pupils’ knowledge of the workplace and encourage the development of life skills, aspirations and team building. Community Safety Officers spoke with pupils about fire safety and raised awareness of the consequences of starting deliberate fires and
making hoax calls. Pupils also had the opportunity to tour the fire stations and appliances and learn about breathing apparatus and other firefighting equipment.

Visit of colleagues from Montreal and New South Wales

5. On 19 June the Service was delighted to host a visit from Anik St-Pierre – Diversity Advisor to the Montréal Fire Chief, Montréal Fire Department and Bronnie Mackintosh – Station Officer from New South Wales Australia and Chairperson of Women and Firefighting Australia. They were interested in gaining an understanding of the Service’s approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, including the Service’s prevent, protect and response activity, as well as staff training and recruitment. During their visit they met with a number of staff, had a tour around Learning and Development and visited Stone Community Fire Station.

Anik St-Pierre is a member of ‘Change Agents for a Modern Fire Service’ a web based group of fire service influencers from around the world coming together to exchange ideas and best practices in the areas of equality, diversity and inclusion in order to affect positive change in the fire service as a whole. She is a trainer at the Montréal Fire Department and has strong international links with human rights and domestically works closely to the Mayor of Montréal and the Premiers office.

Bronnie Mackintosh is currently undertaking a Churchill Fellowship programme, which includes a ten week piece of research exploring women and firefighting in industrialised states. The visitors suggested that Staffordshire Fire and Rescue was years ahead of their own organisations in terms of equality and prevention work and they wanted to learn from our journey and our work around culture. They both hope to come back for the conference that the Service is hosting on ‘The Contribution Women Make to a Safer Community’ on 3 November 2016 and will continue to develop links with the Service and exchange ideas.

Engagement through Community Facilities

6. The PFI 2 Community Facilities are becoming increasingly popular. Local Business Support Teams are continuing to support the booking process and increased links are being made between the community groups and local prevent teams to ensure fire safety messages are being delivered to the most vulnerable of Service users. SFRS are looking to procure a comprehensive booking system to support the Business Support Teams to capture all the bookings; which should improve the ability to report activity and engagement.

Prince’s Trust

7. The Prince’s Trust has asked Safer Communities CIC/Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service if they were able to take over the delivery of the Team programme as Stoke College has recently relinquished the following areas in its delivery of the Team programme: Cannock, Tamworth and Burton upon Trent. A draft project plan is currently being developed to start delivering Team in Cannock by October and Tamworth or Lichfield by January 2017. Burton upon Trent will be explored later in 2017. Stafford Team 5 finished with 17 young people successfully completing the programme. These were record numbers for the programme in Stafford. Stafford Team 6 has started and has 17 young people engaged on the programme.
The Fairbridge programme is an individually tailored personal development programme for young people aged between 13 and 25. The programme helps marginalised and disengaged young people who face a range of issues and barriers in their lives. It empowers them through positive opportunities and experiences and helps them re-engage with society. The Fairbridge programme has finished its fourth programme in Staffordshire. The next programme was planned for August in Cannock. The delivery of the programme has shown strong outcomes for the young people who have gone back into work, education or further training such as the Team programme. A part time position is currently being recruited by Safer Communities CIC/Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to help continue to staff the programme for the next 12 months. This programme continues to support some of the most vulnerable young people in the Stafford and Cannock communities.

Operational Assessments and Fire Peer Challenge

8. Following the visit of the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Team on 21 to 24 March 2016 the final report has been received and made available to Members and staff. Although there is no requirement, the report was shared internally to the organisation within two days and to the public within one week. The report contains a number of observations and suggestions with a view to informing practical actions. It also highlights a number of areas of activity as notable practice. The report will also assist with sector led improvement. Members have commended the Service for sharing the report for the good of the fire sector. The Team proposed three priority areas to consider. They suggested that there was an opportunity with a new Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive and a new Chair of the Fire Authority to set clear direction and a shared vision to drive future direction, along with the opportunity to clarify the medium/longer term savings plan and reframe the relationship with West Midlands Fire Service.

S J Sweeney
Chairman

R A Irving
Vice Chairman