

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

Annual Audit Letter

1. The Authority has been advised of the positive Annual Audit Letter which summarised the key findings arising from the work that was carried out at Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority by the external auditor for the year ended 31 March 2017. The report provided a commentary on the results of the audit work to the Authority and its external stakeholders, and highlighted any issues that the Auditor would wish to draw to the attention of the Public.

Grant Thornton provided an unqualified opinion on 26 July 2017 (2 months ahead of the deadline), which was enabled by the excellent engagement between Finance and the Audit Team. The financial statements submitted for audit were, yet again, of good quality delivered by an effective close down process and supported by excellent working papers. The audit provided a positive value for money conclusion demonstrating that the Authority continues to provide Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. That the Authority's accounts showed a good financial position going forward, due to the appropriate level of reserves which formed part of the overall financial strategy and the ability to provide value for money.

Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards

2. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager Diane Dunlevey and the Safer Communities Community Interest Company were shortlisted for awards within the annual Excellence in Fire and Emergency Awards held by the Fire Magazine. Diane was shortlisted for the 'Most Influential Woman in Fire' award and the Safer Communities CIC was shortlisted for the 'Team of the Year' award specifically for their work with the Prince's Trust programme. This shortlisting brings external national recognition to some crucial areas of the Service. The awards event took place on 8 December 2017. Both nominees received highly commended awards and have been congratulated by the Authority.

Waste Sites

3. The Service continues to work with partner organisations to minimise the risks posed by a number of illicit waste sites across Stoke-on-Trent and the County. Working with The Environment Agency, Local Authorities, City and District Councils as well as the Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), the Water Authorities and the Police, sites are being identified, risk assessed and operational plans continue to be developed. There have been a couple of recent incidents at waste sites (both illicit and legal) across the County. Due to the multi-agency pre-planning that has taken place, these incidents were dealt with as effectively as possible, minimising the risks posed to both firefighters and members of the public. There have also been some sites that are now working back within their legal limits of waste or have had the waste removed. Work is also taking place with Staffordshire MPs to ensure they have a full understanding of the challenges posed by these sites and incidents. This includes development of the potential changes being sought in complex cross cutting legislation in order to support the collective efforts in dealing with these premises in the future. A meeting was held with MPs on 6 December 2017 to galvanise cross party support for the MPs to call for

a debate in Parliament and to seek support for primary and secondary legislation change.

Community Sprinkler Project

4. The Community Sprinkler Project aims to fit automatic fire sprinklers in all residential buildings with five or more storeys within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. Phase 1 saw the retro-fitting of automatic fire sprinklers into David Garrick Gardens, which consists of two eight storey towers and over 50 flats. .

The target date for Phase 2 completion of the Community Sprinkler Project for the four towers on Hobbs Road, Lichfield is 31 March 2018. The flats, communal areas and one of the two stairwells in each block will be fitted with sprinklers.

In addition, housing providers have contacted the Fire Engineer asking for technical support as they have decided to fit sprinklers and commitments have now been made from seven social housing providers. This means that over the next 3 to 5 years a potential 32 blocks will have been fitted with sprinklers and the majority are self-funding. SFRS funding support has been requested by two providers. In addition the Service was currently working with the owners of the remaining five blocks and aiming to also have those retro fitted too. The Service is also working with housing associations with regard to the other properties with less than five floors with the aim of these also being retro fitted with sprinklers.

Olive Branch

5. The Olive Branch training presentation, literature and branding is currently being updated ready for release in the New Year. This training proves very popular with partner agencies, providing them with useful information when working within communities. A working group consisting of Central Prevent and Protect (CPP) and local Prevent and Protect have re-designed the package to align with the Safe and Well offer, including hazard spotting around health issues such as falls etc.

Young Carers Hub Clubs

6. Young Carers Hub Clubs have been running since September 2017. This initiative has been commissioned by the Young Carers Association due to the CIC's expertise with young people around the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects, the Service's impressive community facilities and positive brand of the Fire and Rescue Service. Every month Safer Communities CIC run a respite session for young carers in six locations:- Lichfield, Codsall, Burton, Cannock, Stafford and Tamworth. The age of the young people who attend range from four to fifteen and the leaders of the sessions are supported by staff from local delivery groups across the County. Feedback has been excellent and the staff who run the programmes are thoroughly enjoying the worthwhile experience.

Prince's Trust Update

7. The Service has secured £144,000 funding from Building Better Opportunities (BBO) which will be used for the Prince's Trust Programmes. The Service in Staffordshire ran all four Princes Trust Programmes. HRH Prince Charles on his recent visit to Staffordshire was very complimentary about the work that SFRS does with young people. The Authority has also commented upon the positive impact these programmes were having on the young people involved.

Community Wellbeing Week

8. The Service took part in Community Wellbeing Week between 16 and 22 October which saw more than 1,000 activities take place throughout Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. There was a particular focus on CPR sessions as part of the national 'Restart a Heart' Week, which was open to the public as well as Service staff. The Service held events such as community walks, treasure hunts, exercise classes and tea dances, all to promote health and wellbeing and also battle social isolation. This was also a great opportunity for the staff to engage more with the communities they serve.

Tamworth Firefighters Commended for Bravery

9. Crews from Tamworth who attended the large incident at Standon House Care Home in April were recognised for their bravery at the fire which involved the evacuation of 25 elderly residents, seven of whom suffered with smoke inhalation. Many of the residents were trapped in their rooms and unable to escape during the active fire. As the first crews to arrive they wore several breathing apparatus and saved multiple lives.

Consultation on the proposed amendments to Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) combination schemes established under Sections 2 and 4 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 in England

10. The Authority has recently responded to a consultation exercise being held by Government to enact fully the section of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 which relates to the establishment of a representation model within a Fire and Rescue Authority area. This consultation sought views on the proposal to vary the combination schemes of Fire and Rescue Authorities established under Section 2 or continued in existence under Section 4 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) to implement the 'representation model' of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Issues have been raised with regard to whether the PCC would be eligible to take up Committee positions on the Authority, how the appointment would affect the political balance and clarification on the position of the PCCs representative speaking at meetings but not voting.

Ministers response to Grenfell Tower letter

14. The Authority has sent a letter to Central Government urging that, amongst other possible actions, any examination of the causes and consequences of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire, should include the consideration of whether sprinklers should be installed in all high rise residential premises. The letter was sent to the Fire Minister with copies to the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. A response was received from the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service which confirmed that the points raised in the Authority's letter would form a specific element of the responses being reviewed as part of Dame Judith Hackitt's examination of the wider regulatory regime surrounding the issue of high rise residential premises. The preliminary report on Grenfell Tower was released on 18 December. The Authority noted the indicative timescale for receiving reports from Dame Judith with a final version anticipated in spring 2018.

S J Sweeney
Chairman

D A Jellyman
Vice Chairman

