

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

Rising Brook Community Fire Station

1. Rising Brook Community Fire Station in Stafford was opened on 3 September 2010 by the Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Authority, Cllr Len Bloomer. The opening ceremony was attended by local dignitaries, including Borough and County Councillors, community leaders and MP Jeremy Lefroy. The firefighters based at the station and their families were also invited to the event, which included a tour of the new facility.

Since "going live" on 2 August firefighters have already attended over 100 incidents and over 550 members of the public have passed through the doors, as part of the "meet the neighbours" events that have been held.

The state of the art facility is the first of ten brand new community fire stations to open in Staffordshire being built under a private finance initiative (PFI) project. The building comes complete with a community room and houses one fire engine. The new station is staffed by firefighters contracted to the retained duty system, meaning that they are within five minutes of the station and respond to incidents when their pager alerts them. A total of 18 firefighters are working from the station.

Rising Brook Community Fire Station is one of only two fire stations nationally to receive the 'Secured By Design' Award. The Award recognises buildings which are designed to help combat crime by identifying and designing-out any potential crime opportunities, it pays particular attention to windows, doors, car park layout, landscaping as well as security measures such as cameras and locks. Research has proven that certain buildings are more susceptible to crime than others and that risk and the fear of crime are significantly reduced where Secured By Design standards are applied. This standard is supported and managed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and has the backing of the Home Office. Staffordshire Police had worked very closely with officers from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service throughout the build process and were delighted to present this award.

Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

2. Fire casualties for the period April 2009 to March 2010 saw an increase of three when compared to 2008/09. As a result, the seasonally adjusted target had not been reached for this year. There were six fire deaths and 35 injuries in 2009/10, with two separate incidents resulting in nine of the casualties.

Primary fire activity between April 2009 and March 2010 saw a decrease of 50 when compared to the same period in 2008/09. Although the figures had reduced by 2.46%, the seasonally adjusted target had not been reached for 2009/10. The performance at year end was 1984 primary fires. By comparison in 2003/04 there were 3183 incidents.

2009/10 saw an increase of 82 accidental dwelling fires when compared with 2008/09, a 27% increase. Consequently, the seasonally adjusted target had not been met this year. During 2009/10, there had been a 47% increase in cooking fires (excluding chip pans) from 134 to 197. This was the highest figure for the last seven years. Although there was no particular trend in the types of fires, most were occurring in vulnerable/disadvantaged households ie the elderly and families with young children. The work of the 0800 Team was therefore being targeted at these vulnerable households.

Grass fires increased by 147 in 2009/10 when compared to 2008/09. However, small fire activity (excluding grass fires) saw a decrease of 291 when compared to 2008/09. With regard to secondary fires, 2009/10 saw a reduction on the previous year of 290 incidents (a 14% decrease).

An increased number of Home Fire Risks Checks (HFRCs) have been carried out in each Area Command although, as indicated above, fire deaths and injuries have, unfortunately, seen an increase. The need for HFRCs to be targeted at the most vulnerable groups has therefore been reaffirmed.

The target for unwanted fire detection signals (UwFDs) has been met. A further reduction in these calls will mean reduced cost, lower risk to the public and firefighters, and better protection to communities.

2009/10 saw an increase in the number of attacks on firefighters. There were 11 physical and 13 verbal attacks. A profile of types of offenders included persons from areas of deprivation, alcohol abuse, exclusion etc.

The Authority has also discussed Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) and the various measures that had been undertaken to reduce them. Approximately 3000 people die per year on Britain's roads compared to around 350 people who die in fires. The Service is involved in partnership working with the County Council at high risk locations to give road safety advice ie Biker Breakfasts. Crash Course, which is used in Schools and colleges, is another partnership initiative showing real life experiences and real footage of accidents and plays an important part in reducing RTCs. Other examples of partnership working include the identification of accident black spots, an example of which was on the Lichfield A38 road where a number of trees were removed in order to improve road safety.

The provision of sprinklers in housing where there are vulnerable people has been discussed by the Authority. Members have expressed their concerns that there is currently no legislative requirement for these premises to contain sprinklers. As a result, the Service's influence can only go so far in requesting that sprinklers be fitted at the build stage. However, the Authority is working with Lord Harrison of Chester to progress a Private Members Bill through the House of Lords seeking updated research on the cost benefit of sprinklers which it is expected will assist in achieving a change in Building Regulations.

Corporate Plan and Strategic Objective Review

3. The Authority has considered its approach to reviewing the current Strategic Objectives within the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority Strategic Plan 2008/11 and developing a new Corporate Plan for 2011/13. The new Corporate Plan will be developed to provide overarching strategic direction and performance management to the Authority. The current planning assumptions and timelines align the Corporate Plan with the development of the Safety Plan to provide an integrated approach *'...to protect, support and respond to the needs of our communities to make them stronger and safer...'*

Members of the Authority's Strategy and Resources Committee have attended an inclusive and participative joint Members' and Principal/Senior managers' workshop to undertake a review of the existing strategic objectives and develop a set of draft objectives for the new Corporate Plan. This workshop also reviewed the outcomes of preliminary work from two additional workshops held for managers and employees representing a cross section of the organisation to ensure the appropriate strategic level leadership.

The new Corporate Plan will provide the required performance management framework to:

1. Ensure that the Authority's approach to corporate planning embraces and is driven by the Leadership Message
2. Provide and define the processes for managing and reporting performance against strategic objectives
3. Provide and define a framework for informed decision-making and prioritisation of resources at strategic, area command and department/station level
4. Provide the framework for local and individual performance plans to align planning and day-to-day activities to achieving the Authority's strategic outcomes

The current Strategic Plan articulates a 'two tier' approach to its objectives. There are a suite of Core Objectives (for Community Protection, Staff Centered and Organisational Performance, Development and Communications) in addition to Strategic Objectives which are more transactional in their nature. Indeed, there have been a number of internal and external impacts on the Authority and the public sector as a whole which are not reflected within the existing Strategic Plan.

The process to review the Strategic Objectives has been based on extensive consultation from around the organisation, in line with the Leadership Message. A preliminary workshop was held in May to gain the views of members of staff from across the organisation. A further Strategic Workshop took place on 8 July for Senior Managers, Department Heads, Area Commanders and Area Managers to build upon the feedback received from the preliminary workshop. .

The workshops have considered the implications of a number of pertinent factors on the Strategic Objectives such as the Safety Plan, National Framework and Local Area Agreements. The outcomes from these preliminary workshops was distilled and consolidated and was considered at the workshop which took place in August for Members and Principal Officers. The workshop was facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency with support from Officers. A Peer Member also assisted in facilitating the day.

The draft Corporate Plan once developed will be presented to the full Fire and Rescue Authority prior to going out for consultation

Business Transformation Sounding Board

4. The Business Transformation Sounding Board (“the Board”) has been set up to challenge the work carried out by the Business Transformation Team (“the Team”) which will make proposals for improvements to service delivery and deliver efficiency savings. The Team is led by Mr. Bob Russell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Assistant Chief Executive (Service Delivery) and it has a wide range of skills and experience to successfully drive the future requirements of the Service in line with the budget. The Board consists of officers and representative bodies which will meet on a monthly basis. The benefit of having an Authority Member as part of the Board has been recognised and due to the nature of the work of the Team Mr. Russell, formally requested that the Chairman of the Service Development Panel, Mr. Finn be put forward as the Member as he is aware of both the Service’s current and proposed service provision through the Safety Plan and comprehensively understands the Area Command structures and community needs. Changes recommended by the Team will be reported to the Authority in due course.

Proposed Abolition of the ‘Standards for England’ organisation

5. There has been no detail as to the process that will replace Standards for England to oversee the Code of Conduct and ethical issues connected with the role of Members however it is thought extremely unlikely that the Code of Conduct will be removed and until such time as any detailed proposal is know Authority Members have been reminded that the Code remains in full operation.

**L. W. BLOOMER
CHAIRMAN**