

# **Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **Periodic Report of the Chairman on Authority Matters**

### **Appointment of Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director**

1. The Appointments Committee which met on 29 November have, on behalf of the Authority, appointed Ms Rebecca Bryant, currently the Director of Organisational Development to the post of Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director. The vacancy has arisen due to the restructure of the Executive Leadership Team and the retirement of the current post holder Mr Chris Enness.

Becci started her career with Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service in 1992. She then worked for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service from 2002 to 2005 and started her employment with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service in November 2005 as Assistant Area Commander in Newcastle-under-Lyme. She has progressed through a variety of roles, including working as part of the Business Transformation Team and took up the position of Director of Organisational Development in 2011.

Ms Bryant will take up her new position of Deputy Chief Executive / Executive Director with effect from 1 January 2014.

### **Appointment of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive as Vice President of the Chief Fire Officers Association**

2. Peter Dartford, the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive has been appointed as Vice President of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). Over the past twelve months he has undertaken the role of Vice President elect. Peter will support Paul Fuller in his role as President during 2013-2014 before taking on the position himself in 2014/15. As part of his role Peter will help to shape the future of the fire service at a national level, influencing key decisions and steering it through challenging times. The Authority has congratulated Peter on this prestigious appointment.

### **Report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive**

3. The Authority have noted that the performance of the Service overall was very pleasing. There were three injuries and two deaths in accidental dwelling fires for the period July to September 2013 compared to 7 injuries and 1 death for the same period in 2012/13. This was a 37.5% reduction in casualties which was a good performance but caution was exercised with the numbers being so low and the Service will not ease up on its efforts to keep the number of casualties down.

The number of fires involving property and casualties for July to September was 372, which showed a decrease of 46 (an 11% reduction) when compared to the same quarter in 2012/13. This has been driven down by the proactive work undertaken by the Service and its partners, including the voluntary sector.

There were 121 accidental dwelling fires between July and September 2013, a decrease of 19 (a 13.5% reduction) when compared to the same period in 2012/13. This showed a positive endorsement of the work in progress by the Service.

The number of small fires excluding grass had increased by 80 between July to September 2013 from 308 to 388 when compared to the same period in 2012/13.

Grass fires between July and September 2013 had increased by 173, from 106 to 279, when compared to 2012/13.

Although the number of both small fires and grass fires had increased compared to the same period in the previous year they were still much lower than in 2011/12 where they stood at 1162 for small fires and 654 for grass fires. Given the weather conditions the figures would have been expected to have been much higher as the weather had been similar to that experienced in 2011/12.

**Fatal Fire – Lichfield Road, Stone** – On 24 September 2013 the Service was called to a house fire in Lichfield Road, Stone. Two appliances from Stone were mobilised to the incident. On arrival crews found a fire confined to a first floor rear bedroom; the fire had self extinguished prior to discovery. The crew removed the casualties from the property and attempted resuscitation but the elderly couple were pronounced dead at the scene. It was believed that the fire had occurred approximately 24 hours before the Service received the call and had burnt itself out. Early indications were that the fire started accidentally and was confined to a fitted wardrobe in a rear bedroom. The fire was due to items of clothing coming into contact with a fluorescent light mounted inside the wardrobe. Battery powered smoke alarms were fitted in the property but it was not known if they actuated. The incident was subject to a Coroner's inquest and more details would be provided to the Authority once this had been held. Following the fire, firefighters from Stone offered the residents of Lichfield Road free Home Fire Risk Checks to help prevent further tragedies happening by identifying fire hazards, discussing escape plans and fitting safety equipment.

**Safety Town** – Safety Town was launched at the beginning of June in partnership with Staffordshire Police, British Transport Police, West Midlands Ambulance, Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership, and Royal National Lifeboat Institute. Approximately 500 children from 14 schools across Lichfield and Tamworth learned about the dangers of playing with fire, water safety, road safety and rail safety at a series of events that took place at Tamworth Community Fire Station. The aim of the campaign was to reduce the number of accidents involving children during the summer holiday period. Following an evaluation the partnership is looking to roll out Safety Town throughout the Authority's area under the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) and will develop a template of the programme which will provide a consistent delivery in all areas. All organisations involved in Safety Town were impressed with the event and are keen to explore their long term commitment to rolling this out throughout Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

**Royal Mail** - The Royal Mail approached the Service with regards to some road safety work that they were looking to complete, with the Service's assistance. They were looking to develop a number of short, high impacting films for their front line delivery and collection staff. They provided one of their vans for the extrication along with casualties and a film crew. To add realism to the filming Royal Mail also arranged for a professional makeup artist to provide the actors with convincing injuries. An ambulance was also in attendance for authenticity. An expert commentator from East Midlands Ambulance Service was used to provide detailed information on impact injuries caused by Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs). The Service is awaiting a copy of the film for local use and was hopeful that the successful partnership would not be a one-off but would encourage other companies to explore partnership working.

**Product Recalls** - Following the 'Tonight' programme which was shown on TV on 4 July 2013 with the theme 'how safe is your kitchen' and the increased number of faulty appliance incidents the Service had attended, an information card was designed to hand out to occupiers during a Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC) highlighting the dangers of appliances and providing recall information. The initial production of 3,000 cards was also incorporated into electrical safety week from 24 to 30 September 2013. Since 2011, manufacturers have failed to trace more than a million potentially lethal appliances and companies had declared 49 products faulty and in urgent need of repair. This involved 1.5 to 2 million household goods, which included cookers, ovens, fridges and washing machines. Worst of all, 80% of the reasons for recalls were potentially fatal, with a risk of fire, electrocution or carbon monoxide poisoning. On average the success rate for recall products was between 10% and 20% which was unacceptable but this new card 'Did you know?' will go some way to highlighting the dangers of faulty appliances. A large proportion of the accidental dwelling fires the Service attended were due to appliances. This work was being looked at in the current Accidental Dwelling Fires Working Group. There was also a call for action from Fire Chiefs, backed by the Electrical Safety Council, which says there were "potentially millions" of faulty products in use in homes. CFOA are working with manufacturers to see if they could get funding to develop HFRCs to check for recalled appliances. Hundreds of thousands of HFRCs were carried out each year by fire and rescue services and personnel could identify faulty appliances. CFOA is working with manufacturers to try to simplify the guarantee cards so that more people fill them in. More can be done by retailers to encourage purchasers to complete the guarantee / purchaser details.

**Chequered Flag** – The Service's latest safety movie, *Chequered Flag*, was launched at Yarnfield Park Training and Conference Centre on 1 August 2013. It is a hard-hitting short film which used the age-old 'boy needs to impress girl' story line to address the issues of negative peer pressure and incidents of anti-social behaviour associated with motorcycles. The project was not yet complete as a resource toolkit to accompany the movie, still had to be produced. The completed project would be used in schools, colleges, youth centres, Youth Offending Service sessions, trainee motorcycle rider sessions and other appropriate settings.

**Review of Enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** - Last autumn a review was carried out on enforcement of fire safety and evidence was gathered from businesses across the country about their experiences of enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. John Berrisford, Business Support Manager hosted the team that carried out the Focus on Enforcement in Staffordshire and took members of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to meet a number of businesses across the Authority's areas. The team met small businesses that had worked with and benefited from Business Support's guidance and showcased the Service's approach to businesses. The Team were very impressed by the work done in the Service area with small businesses. In addition the team reported that SFRS's approach to business outreach work and small business support effectively married the needs of fire safety and legal compliance to an approach designed to help businesses succeed and prosper. The national report was published on 8 August 2013 and key findings included evidence of good enforcement practice but across some services they identified: inconsistency of approach and advice; enforcement notices were sometimes vague; confusing guidance was given and there was no obvious route for businesses to appeal decisions. CFOA now plan to work with businesses and fire and rescue authorities to address these findings.

**Community Facilities** - Community room use remains high with 1,640 uses, equating to 4,803 hours during July – September 2013. A diverse range of groups are using the facilities including Health and Wellbeing groups such as Diabetes, Stop Smoking, Cancer Support, Hearing Loss, through to Bereavement Support. The engagement with users of the facilities was at the heart of the strategy to improve the lives, health and wellbeing of communities.

**Engagement through Staffordshire's Community Fire Stations – Time Banking** - Five timebank members have been recruited to date and as a group they have a wide skill set including:- Fire Safety advice, Health & Safety advice, Squash, Cooking, Housework, Form filling, Plant watering, Simple Decorating, Computer skills, Letter writing, Dog walking, Gardening, Leafleting, Errands, Shopping, Companionship, Listening, Visiting and Craft work. There were a number of events programmed to further promote the timebank which will be supported by Michael Smith, a Fire Service volunteer and timebank member. The Service was looking at the possibility of the creation of “trusted” timebank members who could more closely complement the volunteer scheme with opportunities, for example, to carry out meet and greets on Community Fire Stations, working with Street Stadia etc. Timebanking now formed part of the Safer Communities Pledge which has been introduced in Service Delivery Groups.

**Street Stadia** - Over the summer months July – September 2013, Street Stadia has been used 30 times, with the focus having been mainly in the Western Service Delivery Group area (25 events). The Stadia was used at Cannock Chase High School on 4 and 6 July providing an opportunity to interact with 218 young people. Plans were already in place for a number of events in 2014 including the National Fire Cadets' three day event in the Northern Service Delivery Group area.

**National Extrication Competition** Brewood Extrication Team took part in the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation challenge which was held in Merseyside on 7 - 9 July 2013. At the end of the first day the team were placed 12<sup>th</sup> out of a total of 43 teams, which meant they qualified for the second day. Day two of the competition involved the top 20 teams facing complex casualty entrapment scenarios. At the close of the two day challenge Brewood finished in 17<sup>th</sup> position which was a fantastic achievement and would no doubt serve to spur the team on in readiness for next year's event. A letter of congratulations has been sent to the Team on behalf of the Authority.

**Chief Fire Officer Commendations** – Two members of the public have been presented with a Chief Fire Officers Commendation. Andy Murray and Steve Lindop were presented with the award for their actions following a road traffic collision that occurred in Bramshall last year. Their prompt and selfless actions undoubtedly saved the lives of both drivers.

Staff from the Sainsbury's store in Biddulph have also been presented with a Chief Fire Officers Commendation which was presented in recognition of the prompt and safe evacuation of more than 700 people from the store which took place earlier in the year when staff noticed the store had become full of smoke. The store manager, Mr Duncan Thomson and his team acted quickly by raising the alarm and fully evacuating the store within two minutes. Not knowing what had caused the smoke the staff followed their procedures and training to ensure the safety of their customers. Following the evacuation the cause was found to be a discharged smoke bomb but had there been a fire situation the sensible actions of the staff would have avoided any injuries or loss of life.

**Cadet Scheme** - The official launch of the new pioneering Fire Cadets programme took place at Sandyford Community Fire Station on 29 August 2013. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service are the first Fire Service in the country to run the revamped cadet programme, which will see more than 30 young people aged 14-17 years learn fire fighting skills such as hose running, breathing apparatus techniques and casualty handling. They will also be taught life skills including healthy life styles, managing money and completing job applications during a 39 week course that started in September. The aim of the programme is to help reduce anti-social behaviour by engaging young people in structured community based activities which has the backing of the Department for Communities and Local Government, Youth United Foundation, Chief Fire Officers Association and the Fire Services Youth Training Association. The feedback so far had been very positive and the young people had been performing well and enjoying the experience. The scheme has featured on Midlands Today.

**Apprenticeship Award Scheme** - The North West Finals of the 2013 Apprenticeship Awards took place in Manchester on 11 September. James Russell from the Service's Business Intelligence Team was presented with a Highly Commended in the Higher Apprentice Award category with an added referral to his work as an Apprenticeship Ambassador. This was a tremendous achievement by James given the many thousands of nominations that were put forward for an award. The Authority has congratulated James on his achievement.

**The 'Gumpers' Charity Challenge** - After 9 days and 270 gruelling miles around Staffordshire the "Gumpers" finally arrived back home on 19 September 2013 having successfully completed their charity challenge. They raised an amazing £5,500 for the Firefighters Charity and Children in need. The challenge was inspired by the film Forest Gump. A team of staff from Tamworth Belgrave Community Fire Station visited every fire station in the County by running or walking the entire distance. Congratulations have been expressed to everyone who took part.

### **Members Champion for Children and Young People**

4. The Authority has appointed Mr C Wileman to the role of Members Champion for Children and Young People. The Service is developing and co-producing a Children and Young Peoples Strategy to coincide with the next Corporate Safety Plan for 2014-2017. The role is being developed but will include adding a level of scrutiny to the Children and Young Persons Strategy.

### **Code of Conduct for Operational PFI / PPP Contracts**

5. On 21 August 2013, Kashif Butt at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) drew the Authority's attention to the launch of a voluntary code of conduct for public bodies and their private sector partners covering how to make savings from public private partnership contracts, including PFI deals. The code set out commitments from both public and private sector parties on constructive engagement, flexibility and improving operational efficiency. These commitments will help support an overall improvement in contract management relationships. DCLG were encouraging all Fire Sector PFI Projects to seek the signing of this Code with their contractors and funders. The Authority has now signed up to this Code.

## **Staffordshire Public Sector Network (PSN)**

6. A contract has been entered into with KCom communications utilising the Service's status as a partner organisation to Staffordshire County Council with regard to the Staffordshire Public Sector Network (PSN). The Network links schools, the County Council, Fire and the Police and should prove beneficial to the Service and the Authority going forward.

### **Terms of Reference of Committees and the size of the Authority**

7. The Authority has recently reviewed its Committee Structure and Terms of Reference of Committees to ensure that they were efficient, effective and fit for purpose going forward. Following a long and detailed discussion the amendments to the Terms of Reference were approved with some suggested changes for immediate implementation with the revised structure being implemented after the annual meeting of the Authority in June 2014. The Independent Remuneration Panel will be consulted to look at the Special Responsibilities attached to the new Committee structure.

The Authority has also considered whether the presently stated size of the Membership of the Authority, currently 25, was appropriate going forward and made a number of points in relation to this. Any proposal will have to ensure that the Authority can continue to discharge its work in an effective and appropriate fashion and ensure appropriate representation in connection with both the constituent Authorities and the communities of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire. Should the Authority propose a reduction in the number of Members and if this is endorsed by both the respective Councils then the amendment to numbers can be made without recourse to the Secretary of State for final approval. A further report will be put to the Authority in due course to consider the matter further.

**L W Bloomer**  
**Chairman**