

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
21st March, 2018

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Brookes, Clark, Cusworth, Mallinder, Napper, Sheppard, Short, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Cowles and Evans.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

121. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

122. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

- 1) A member of the public asked “How many times have the specific individual aspects of the removal of the second fire appliance in Rotherham been scrutinised at the Fire Authority and where can I find the minutes of these meetings?”

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board indicated that he was unable to provide an answer to that, but would ask the Joint Authorities Governance Unit, which administered the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority to provide information for a response.

Response from South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority below:-

Changes to the staffing of the second fire appliance at Rotherham fire station, alongside other related issues, have been considered on at least six occasions by members of the Fire Authority. Minutes of Fire Authority meetings are publicly available at www.southyorks.gov.uk.

Link to Report & Minutes	Resolution
25/03/13 – Item 11	RESOLVED – That Members approved the consultation schedule at Appendix B to the report, to begin external public consultation on the development of the IRMP and Service Plan for 2013-15.
29/07/13 – Item 11	RESOLVED – That Members:- i) Scrutinised the IRMP consultation work that took

	<p>place earlier in 2013 and provided the Authority with assurance about the process which had been followed.</p> <p>ii) Considered proposals for a second phase of consultation later this year.</p> <p>iii) Considered learning points for future consultations.</p>
02/09/13 – Item 9	<p>RESOLVED – That Members:-</p> <p>a) Noted the key proposals outlined in paragraph 17 of the report, which had been developed after listening to feedback from staff and the public:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To remove the Service's Response time target, but to publish its performance in attending dwelling fires within 6 minutes, to provide a clear measure of the extent to which Government cuts are affecting the Service. • To implement a risk-based approach to community safety and fire prevention work, targeted at geographical areas and individual households at highest risk of fire. • To make no further reductions to the number of fire stations or rescue pumps during the lifetime of these plans (up to 2017). • To phase out the Combined Aerial Rescue Pumps at the earliest opportunity, to be replaced by 4 rescue pumps, and 2 new dedicated Aerial Appliances, one crewed on a wholtime 24x7 basis, and the other on a retained basis • To minimise impact on the public, and ensure no

	<p>further fire station closures before 2017, the second fire appliances at the four two-pump stations, Rotherham, Doncaster, Barnsley and the new Parkway station, will be crewed on a retained basis overnight, but will continue to be crewed on a whole-time basis during the day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To crew the new Birley station (which replaces the ageing Mosborough Station) on a retained basis, due to the lack of a collective agreement in respect of the Authority's previous decision to implement Close Proximity Crewing (a 24x7 staffing model). • Acknowledgement that riding five on a rescue pump would be the stated intent; however, four would be the accepted absolute minimum. <p>b) Agreed to re-open public consultation for an additional six week period to 14th October 2013.</p> <p>c) Agreed to make a final decision at the November 2013 meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority.</p> <p>d) Requested copies of Mosaic ward maps which identified high, medium, low and very low levels of risk in South Yorkshire, together with today's PowerPoint slides and the 'Super Output Area' information.</p>
25/11/13 – Item 10	<p>RESOLVED – That Members approved the Strategic and Operational Plans 2013-17. N.B. Councillors Satur and Richards abstained from the decision.</p>

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD – 21/03/18

13/02/17 – Item 15 <i>(Please see full minutes – reference made to 2nd pump at Rotherham)</i>	RESOLVED – That Members:- i) Approved the contents of the draft IRMP 2017-20. ii) Approved a six week consultation period on the proposals in the draft plan.
03/04/17 – Item 13 <i>(Please see full minutes – reference made to 2nd pump at Rotherham)</i>	RESOLVED – That Members:- i) Approved the contents of the IRMP 2017-20, and welcomed the commitment of the Service to explore opportunities around the proposal to retain the second appliance at Sheffield Fire Station. ii) Be provided with a point by point explanation correcting the factually inaccurate points raised within Councillor Cowles' letter.

- 2) A member of the public referred to a question at last full Council regarding underspends from 2006 to 2018 at the Fire Authority and queried whether the information had been supplied yet and when it would be made public?

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board indicated that he was unable to provide an answer to that, but would ask the Joint Authorities Governance Unit, which administered the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority to provide information for a response.

Response from South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority below:-

Underspend figures are available for the period 2010/11 to 2017/18 and are provided below for reference. These have previously been reported to the Fire Authority, which is a public meeting.

2010/11	£4.1m
2011/12	£3.3m
2012/13	£3.4m
2013/14	£0.4m
2014/15	£2.9m
2015/16	£0.2m
2016/17	£0.6m
2017/18	£0.7m (estimated)

Underspends against our operating budget, and the associated growth in reserves, are mainly a consequence of the retirement rate of operational staff outpacing the rate at which the service's funding has reduced, and our having no confidence to recruit new fire fighters (which are now a 40 year commitment) due to

uncertainty about the extent and duration of future cuts. A significant proportion of these reserves will now be spent over the next few years on necessary capital projects - including investments in equipment, vehicles and buildings for firefighters. This will leave a much smaller amount of other earmarked and general reserves (expected to be around £5 million), to provide for other initiatives and unexpected future costs, such as insurance and operational contingency.

- 3) A member of the public put the following question “Reference was also made at the last full Council in respect of a bleeper system to call in reserve help for Rotherham Fire Station – can you describe how this process works and has it been used yet?”

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board indicated that he was unable to provide an answer to that, but would ask the Joint Authorities Governance Unit, which administered the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority to provide information for a response.

Response from South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority below:-

Currently, when the first fire engine at Rotherham is mobilised to an incident at night time (between the hours of 7pm and 8am), the retained fire engine from Birley Moor fire station is brought across to provide cover in Rotherham area. This arrangement will remain in place until the end of the month when the ‘Night Time Cover’ model will be up and running. A similar model has been in place at Barnsley fire station for a number of months. Under this system:

- Surplus Retained Duty System (RDS) Firefighters are identified on the availability system from Dearne and Birley Moor fire stations
- When sufficient numbers allow for a full crew (1 x Officer In Charge, 1 x Driver, 2 x Firefighters minimum) they are deemed available for use
- If required (due to ongoing incidents, large scale incident in other parts of the county, etc.) Control then activate the pagers of the available crews
- The available crews respond to Rotherham fire station and staff the second appliance for as long as is required

123. TO CONSIDER WHETHER THE PRESS AND PUBLIC SHOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF ANY PART OF THE AGENDA.

The Chair reported that there were no items of business on the agenda which would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

124. OPERATION OF SECOND FIRE ENGINE AT ROTHERHAM FIRE STATION

Following the Council's resolution in respect of Rotherham Fire Station on 24 January 2018, the Chief Fire Officer for South Yorkshire, Mr. James Courtney, and the Vice-Chair of the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, Councillor Alan Atkin, attended the meeting to provide information in respect of the reasons supporting the decision taken by the Fire and Rescue Authority in 2013 to change the operational staffing of the second fire engine at Rotherham Fire Station.

In his opening remarks, Mr Courtney reminded Members of the impact of austerity which had been felt since April 2011, with a 27% reduction in the overall operating budget since that time. This has led to inevitable reductions in the number of staff employed by the Fire and Rescue Service, but he had sought to work with Fire Authority Members to identify how to maintain the best service possible within the available budget. Part of the process involved the development of an Integrated Risk Management Plan, which required a re-evaluation of the extent of risk from fire and other circumstances across South Yorkshire and across individual areas in South Yorkshire.

Furthermore, Mr Courtney explained that whilst South Yorkshire was considered a metropolitan county, it should be regarded as lean in relation to the level of resource it had compared to the other metropolitan fire services. Regrettably the government had not taken that into account in respect of funding decisions. The extent of leanness had meant that there were already fewer fire stations across the area. In determining future levels of cover, it was explained that first pump response had been protected to provide immediate response, but this had meant that efficiency savings had to be found from the second pump provision. The government's planning criteria made it clear that resource provision should vary according to demand and a 'one size fits all' model was not considered to be appropriate or viable.

Mr Courtney raised the constant reference to underspends and build-up of financial reserves. He explained that, whilst the whole situation had been driven by reducing budget, the pace of change had been dictated by the rate at which firefighters retire. This factor had outstripped the rate by which the service's budget had reduced. The recruitment of fire fighters represented a 40 year commitment to the service because of changes made to pension scheme. The service was now operating five crewing systems, which provided the flexibility to deploy resources when required. In the context of Rotherham Fire Station, the Fire Authority had consulted extensively on proposals in run up to publication of 2014-17 Integrated Risk Management Plan. There were currently two pumps operational during day, whose focus was mainly on preventative work. During the night time, Rotherham was no worse off than 14 other fire stations in South Yorkshire, who have the same provision of one operational pump.

With respect to reserves, Mr Courtney explained that there was no capital grant and no supportive borrowing available to the authority. Therefore it was necessary to find a means to invest in infrastructure, as the need to provide the best equipment remained and the need for fire stations to be fit for purpose also remained. In addition, he commented that reserves gave no indication to the extent to which the budget had reduced and should not be used to pay overtime.

Members queried whether more fire fatalities occurred in domestic properties or at commercial/industrial premises. In response, Mr Courtney confirmed that fire fatalities were more prevalent at domestic properties. Members then sought assurances in respect of the cover provided in the borough in the view of significant housing development expected, as that could present a risk to safety under the current operational provision. Mr Courtney explained that development was occurring across the country and modern building techniques in the construction industry meant that fires at domestic properties were much less likely to happen. He outlined the current position in respect of night time cover in Rotherham and accepted that the stations providing cover were further apart, but were covered with a five person crew, rather than a four person crew. He referenced the work done with trade unions in the past year to introduce a new resourcing system which meant that fire fighters were not wedded to a single watch and this had provided a degree of flexibility.

Members queried whether the Chief Fire Officer would make the same decision as was made in 2013 regarding the removal of the second pump from Rotherham Fire Station. Mr Courtney reminded Members of his earlier comments in respect of increasing development and the government's requirements for service provision. He outlined that the future financial position was not clear and added that this could lead to further changes to the crewing of second pumps across South Yorkshire, however the risk based approach to deploying and managing resources would still require cover to be provided in Sheffield and Doncaster where there was a higher prevalence of high-rise premises. Mr Courtney explained that he had invited the new Director of Support Services to review the financial assumptions and planning to identify whether previous decisions had been correct. The outcome of the review had indicated that previous decisions in respect of budgetary management had been correct. He indicated that the Fire Authority would continue to re-evaluate the situation and if there were any opportunity to review the situation in Rotherham then this would happen. Ultimately, with circumstances being as they were, Mr Courtney indicated that he would recommend the same decision to remove the second pump from Rotherham again.

In response to a query as to how the people of Rotherham should feel about subsidising cover for other areas of South Yorkshire whilst their own cover had been reduced, Mr Courtney outlined the risks associated with providing cover across South Yorkshire, making specific reference to the requirements for Sheffield and Doncaster due to the number of high-rise buildings in those local authority areas. The reality was that there

would always be a part of the county that would feel potentially aggrieved at the way in which operational cover was arranged. Information was constantly being collated and analysed to inform operational decisions, but the reality was that the budget no longer enabled the previous level of cover provided.

Members sought clarification as to why the Fire and Rescue Service would not use its reserves to maintain the Rotherham pump. Mr Courtney confirmed that such an approach would not be financially prudent with a view to the unknown funding arrangements after 2020. Whilst the Fire and Rescue Service was fortunate to have healthy levels of reserves, that money should not be used to pay for staff and would be a financially responsible approach to adopt for the Fire Authority.

Members noted that the night time resilience plan that was due to be implemented after the loss of the second night time pump at Rotherham Fire Station had not yet occurred. Mr Courtney explained that an alternative retained appliance at Birley Fire Station was providing cover presently. Members sought clarification in respect of the response time from Birley. In response, Mr Courtney confirmed that the response time was less than five minutes into the fire station and then a further ten minutes into Rotherham, but this was to provide cover at Rotherham Fire Station rather than responding to an incident. It was explained that recruitment processes had delayed the introduction of the night time resilience plan.

Assurances were sought in respect of the process in respect of developing the Integrated Risk Management Plan. Mr Courtney explained that it was developed in accordance with the process required under the national framework, which is live document and under review constantly, irrespective of the three year period. Planning had commenced a year before the date that the plan came into effect. Consultation had taken place with the Scrutiny Committee at the South Yorkshire Fire Authority and Mr Courtney was assured that a comprehensive process had taken place to consult on the contents of the plan. Members referred to the minutes of a seminar that had taken place in Rotherham and the absence of any mention of the removal of the second appliance in Rotherham.

With reference to the ongoing financial situation, Mr Courtney confirmed the intention to contribute to reserves again as this was considered to be the most prudent approach in view of the uncertainty in respect of funding after 2020. He also remarked that had the Fire Authority been afforded the same flexibility given to the police in respect of the precept, there was a possibility that it could have been specifically invested in Rotherham. However, there was a need to look at South Yorkshire as a whole and Rotherham would be re-visited as part of the continued re-evaluation of operational requirements.

Having reflected on the information provided by the Chief Fire Officer and the Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority, OSMB:

Resolved:-

1. That the following recommendations be agreed to referral to the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
 - (a) That the Fire Authority consider the reinstatement of the second night time pump at Rotherham Fire Station to ensure that there is equality and consistency of cover with Sheffield and Doncaster. In the meantime, priority should be given to resolving the night time resilience provision for Rotherham.
 - (b) That when the Fire and Rescue Service is consulting on future IRMPs it should be considered by the constituent authority's Scrutiny Committees to receive considered feedback.
 - (c) That future iterations of the IRMP detail crewing arrangements to provide greater public confidence in service cover.
2. That the following recommendations be agreed for submission to the Leader of the Council:-
 - (a) That the Council receives minutes of the Combined Authority and Joint Committees and a verbal update from designated spokespersons at every other meeting with effect from May 2018.
 - (b) That the Leader of the Council write to the Fire Minister expressing the concerns of this authority in respect of the continued cuts to SYFRS budgets and the detrimental impact on the level of cover provided.

125. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 11 April 2018 commencing at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.