

Report of the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority 15 February 2016

1. Blue Light Time to Change Pledge

Mental health problems affect 1 in 4 people every year, and 9 in 10 of those experiencing a mental health problem say they have faced negative treatment from others as a result.

The Chairman of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer have signed the “Blue Light Time to Change Pledge”. This is supported by an action plan which details some of the activity and objectives the Service is going to do to support mental health and mental wellbeing amongst staff and their families.

A programme of training for managers through the “Managing Mental Health at Work” course provided by the mental health charity MIND has already been delivered and the Service supported the “Time to Talk Day” on the 4 February to help spread the word that you don’t have to be an expert around mental health to talk about it. Sometimes a text, a walk or a simple ‘how are you?’ can make a real difference.

2. Revenue Budget 2016/17 - 2019/20

The Authority considered a report of the Treasurer that presented a gross revenue budget requirement for 2016/17 of £55.611m. After allowing for a council tax increase of 0.99% and allowing for the increase in council tax base and improved council tax collection rates, this resulted in a net budget requirement of £55.176m for 2016/17 and a council tax of £65.50 per Band D Property.

3. Government Response to Consultation on Emergency Services Collaboration

On 11 September the Government commenced a six week consultation entitled ‘Enabling Closer Working between Emergency Services’. This was considered by the Resources Committee on 25 September 2015 and a position statement established. Delegated authority was given to the CFA Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Leader of the main opposition party to agree a final response. This was subsequently agreed and returned before the close of the consultation.

In addition, a meeting was held between the CFA Chairman, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and chief officers of the Police and Fire in Lancashire to establish a common understanding and agree a direction of travel. This recognised both services were high performing and were collaborating effectively. As such there was no evidence that a change in governance structures would deliver any tangible benefits. The position of being content with current governance arrangements was also endorsed by Lancashire County Council on 22 October 2015.

It is, however, recognised that different parts of the country with different economic, geographical or political pressure may seek alternative solutions. The CFA position was clearly that any changes to governance structure must be agreed between the Fire Authority and the PCC, rather than as the result of independent action.

The Government has now considered the 318 responses to the consultation commenting on some or all of the 16 questions posed. Their intention is to:

- introduce a high level duty to collaborate on all three emergency services, to improve efficiency or effectiveness;
- enable PCCs to take on the functions of fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), where a local case is made;
- where a PCC takes on the responsibilities of their local FRA, further enabling him or her to create a single employer for police and fire personnel;
- in areas where a PCC has not become responsible for fire and rescue services, enabling them to have representation on their local FRA with voting rights, where the local FRA agrees; and
- abolish the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and give the Mayor of London direct responsibility for the fire and rescue service in London.

Implications for the Authority include a new duty to collaborate between all three emergency services. This would not be exclusive and existing partnerships with other agencies could still continue. The Government's intention was to enable the PCC to have representation on the CFA or its committees with voting rights. This would be subject to the PCC making clear their reasons for seeking membership and the CFA agreeing the request. There would be further implications if the PCC moved to independently make a case to take control of fire. This position would need to be reviewed in light of the forthcoming PCC elections in May 2016.

4. Fire Related Prosecutions

The Authority received a report detailing prosecutions in respect of fire safety management failures and arson related incidents within the period 1 October 2015 to 31 December 2015. One fire safety conviction was noted with 11 further cases / investigations ongoing.

In addition, fire protection and business support information had now been included in the report. This included an update for Members on the support provided by the Service to landlords to support their responsibilities in line with the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations which required landlords to install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in their properties from 1 October 2015.

There were no completed arson cases to report on this occasion. Members noted that arson detection rates for Lancashire continued to stay at over 3 – 4 times the national average. The continually improving standard of stage 1 fire reports submitted to the Police was resulting in early guilty pleas which negated the need for officers to present evidence in court. This report informed Members of only the cases that went to a full hearing. It was noted therefore that during the last fiscal year 19 cases had been reported to Members however an additional 136 cases had realised an early guilty plea.

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