

Chief Fire Officer Steve Owen-Hughes
Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
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5 November 2019

Dear Steve,

SURREY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE INSPECTION REVISIT

Background

We conducted our second revisit to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) on 2–4 September 2019 to review progress against your action plan.

2. The focus of the revisit was around a cause of concern identified following our inspection of Surrey FRS in the week of 23 July 2018:

Surrey FRS doesn't have a robust and sustainable system to support its operational response model.

3. We also identified a separate cause of concern in relation to the service not using its resources efficiently to manage risk or its financial and physical resources effectively to keep people safe. Progress against this will be monitored as part of our ongoing inspection programme.

4. During the revisit we interviewed staff who were responsible for implementing your action plans. This included you as the chief fire officer (CFO). We also spoke to Councillor Turner-Stewart, the Surrey County Council (SCC) portfolio lead member for Surrey FRS. We spoke to operational managers and visited two stations. We concluded the revisit by giving feedback on our findings to you and Councillor Turner-Stewart.

Governance

5. We found appropriate and robust governance arrangements in place to monitor progress of your action plan.

6. The portfolio lead member attends monthly meetings with you and other service staff, where she monitors progress against the action plan, referred to as the Inspection Improvement Plan. In addition, the proposals for change contained within the Making Surrey Safer plan have been subject to overview and scrutiny through a SCC select committee.

7. The improvements we identified have been specified as a priority by both the SCC leader and the council's chief executive. SCC has approved providing approximately £925,000 additional funding over two years to support the improvement plan.

8. SCC and you have sought the support of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). As a result, an NFCC independent advisory board has been established to provide assurance to SCC and the necessary challenge and scrutiny to you and your leadership team in making service improvements. The panel consists of two CFOs from other services, the chief executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey, and a representative from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The value of the advice provided to support change and provide assurance has been widely commented upon. We see this panel as positive and commend the service and SCC for establishing such a group.

9. In addition, the service's progress against the Inspection Improvement Plan is being monitored by the transformation delivery board, chaired by the deputy CFO. Progress is also reviewed every month by the senior leadership team. The causes of concern are on the service's risk register.

10. You were substantively appointed as the CFO in May 2019. A number of other members of the senior leadership team are newly appointed or in temporary posts. There are promotion processes underway and you recognise the importance of bringing stability to the team as well as ensuring the right skills mix is present. We found that the lack of leadership stability has led to uncertainty and delays in some actions being progressed at the speed hoped.

Action plan

11. The service has an appropriate action plan covering the cause of concern. The Inspection Improvement Plan has senior responsible owners, deadlines and specific action owners. The plan includes updates on actions and a risk score.

12. Specific action plans have been developed to address the excessive use of overtime and the changes required with workforce planning, including recruitment and promotions.

13. A version of the Inspection Improvement Plan has been published on the service's website.

14. The additional funding from SCC is being used to provide programme management staff, organisational development staff, communications staff and additional HR support. The changes being proposed are significant. We found that this additional capacity has assisted the service develop robust plans with appropriate programme management disciplines.

Response plan based on assessment of risk

15. In February 2019, the service completed and published a community risk profile. The profile was developed using information about different types of incidents and risk that the service responds to. This assessment has provided the service with a greater understanding of risks using the previous five years of incident data. These risks relate to incidents such as fires,

road traffic collisions, water-related incidents and wildfires. In addition, some information on population characteristics has been used to identify those at greatest risk.

16. The Making Surrey Safer plan, published in February 2019, incorporated the requirements of the service's integrated risk management plan. It contained proposals for changes in the way the service provides its service. We found this to be a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of risk with considered options. It also provided an opportunity for the people of Surrey to have a say on the proposals. The proposals were linked to the findings from our inspection. These were summarised by the service as:

- To spend more time on community and business safety to help prevent emergencies occurring in the first place.
- To maintain the number of fire stations in Surrey and change how some are crewed.
- To recover costs from some non-emergencies to re-invest in Surrey FRS.

17. The plan included an assessment of risk to inform crew and vehicle placement across the county. It was established that a minimum of 20 fire engines were required during day-time and 16 during the night to provide effective cover. The proposals included building in resilience for larger or longer emergencies, conducting protection and prevention activities, and ensuring adequate training was provided for staff. The service concluded that there was a requirement for 25 fire engines during week day time, 30 at weekends and 23 during the night. These include a mix of wholetime and on-call fire engines.

18. Following a public consultation, the service is submitting options for change to SCC. These are being considered at a cabinet meeting on 24 September 2019. Any changes that are supported are proposed to commence being implemented from April 2020.

19. The service has a well-established engagement process with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The service is seeking to formalise engagement with other representative bodies, including the Fire Officers Association and the Fire and Rescue Services Association.

20. During the consultation period, members of the chief officer team attended all stations to brief staff about the proposals. In July 2019, you started monthly briefings for middle managers on the proposals and next steps. There is recognition among senior leaders that more work is needed to be done to prepare and support middle managers with any changes approved by SCC.

Resources to respond and managing resources and capabilities

21. Fire engine availability continues to be a challenge for the service. The present wholetime fire engine availability target is 22 for weekday day-time and 20 for all other times. Data provided by the service for the period April 2019 to July 2019 shows the average weekday day-time availability to be between 17 and 19, and for other times to range from 17 to 20. The service is regularly failing to meet its availability targets. The service should consider how it can improve performance management of availability targets.

22. The service has set its response standard for the first fire engine to arrive at critical incidents within 10 minutes 80 percent of the time. Data provided by the service for the period April 2018 to August 2019 shows it is achieving this between 74 percent and 75 percent of the time. The service told us it met this target 79 percent of the time in the year ending 31 March 2017, 78 percent of the time in the year ending 31 March 2018, and 75 percent of the time in the year ending 31 March 2019. As with availability targets, the service should consider what action it can take to meet its response standard.

23. Since September 2018, the service has recruited 82 new wholetime staff. These comprise 37 new trainees, 26 inter-service transferees, 17 existing on-call staff transferring to wholetime and 2 part-time posts. The establishment of wholetime staff is 417 posts. By mid-September 2019, the actual numbers of wholetime staff will have risen by 40 staff, from 358 in September 2018 to 398. This is positive and reflects considerable effort by the service.

24. However, of the 82 new starters, less than 5 percent were female or from a black, Asian or minority ethnic group. We found the recruitment process to be an opportunity missed by the service. The service should consider what action it can take to attract and recruit a more representative workforce.

25. All new trainees have completed a 11-week initial training course. These courses have required additional staff being seconded to the training school to facilitate this increased demand.

26. Since April 2019, the service has increased its on-call fire engine availability target from 70 percent to 95 percent. The new target has not been achieved, with data provided by the service for the months April to June 2019 showing availability of 70 percent, 68 percent and 59 percent.

27. The service informs us that the current vacancy rate for on-call staff is 24 percent. Two initial training courses are scheduled for September 2019 and January 2020, with a total of 20 new on-call trainees predicted to attend. We found greater priority has been given to the recruitment of wholetime firefighters. We did not find the same leadership drive and determination in relation to increasing the recruitment of on-call firefighters.

28. The service has appointed two wholetime managers to support on-call staff. In addition, three wholetime on-call liaison officers have also recently been appointed. The service is exploring contractual arrangements to attract more on-call staff. A focus group with on-call staff has recently been held, with others planned for this month, to support this work and help develop more flexible working practices. The service should consider giving greater priority to on-call recruitment.

29. Considerable work has been carried out by the service in relation to ensuring there is better management of overtime. We received consistent feedback from managers that there had been a lack of effective controls at the time of our initial inspection. This had a negative effect on some staff's wellbeing, with excessive hours being worked. We found this situation has now improved with effective controls in place.

30. The service has issued a number of communications to managers and staff regarding the use and authorisation of overtime. Revised processes have been implemented to approve and monitor its use. The service has moved from paper-based records to electronic. This enables

better management oversight through the availability of information. We found evidence of management action to ensure compliance. In addition, we found dip-sampling processes to provide assurance for senior leaders that the revised processes are being used.

31. The amount of overtime permitted per member of staff through local agreement with the FBU has reduced from 72 hours per month at the time of our inspection, to 39 hours from March 2019, to 24 hours in August 2019. The service will need to ensure it can monitor any impact this has on fire engine availability and meeting the targets set.

32. The service predicts the use of overtime to ensure fire engine availability will reduce. Overtime has reduced when compared to the time of our initial inspection. The service attributes this to better controls on the use of overtime, the new limits on the amount of overtime able to be worked and the recruitment of new starters, both trainees and experienced firefighters.

33. In June 2019 the service re-launched its resourcing policy, which provides guidance on the recruitment and selection of staff. The service has processes in place to address short-term succession planning. We found that more still needs to be done to improve its longer-term succession planning. Plans are being made to address this recognised gap.

34. We found the service has improved frontline supervisors' awareness of the system used to manage operational competencies. New guidance has been issued and trainers have provided support for frontline supervisors. Monthly reports on the maintenance of competencies are produced and these are used by station managers. In addition, there are dip-sampling and quarterly audits to monitor awareness and use of the system.

Communication with the people of Surrey

35. The service, with the support of SCC, developed a communication and engagement plan to support the consultation process for the proposals contained in the Making Surrey Safer plan. The three-month public consultation concluded on 26 May 2019. Specific efforts were taken to engage hard-to-reach groups, using SCC networks such as the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People. In total, 1,687 responses were received to the consultation. This is a higher rate of response to similar consultations than seen in most other services.

36. The service recognises it needs to be more proactive with communications to the public. For example, concerns were raised through the consultation regarding the proposed reduction in night-time fire engine cover. The service may wish to consider how it can better communicate and inform the public.

Conclusion

37. The service has an action plan with senior responsible owners, deadlines and specific action owners. We found appropriate governance structures both within the service and through SCC, which provides scrutiny of progress.

38. The establishment of an advisory group to provide assurance and challenge is commendable. The additional funding provided by SCC has enabled the service to bring in specialist staff to support the action plan.

39. In relation to the actions, we found significant progress has been made against a number of areas we had previously identified. However, more needs to be done in respect of some areas.

40. The Making Surrey Safer plan, published in February 2019, contained proposals for changes in the way the service provides its service. We found this to be a comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of risk with considered options.

41. Fire engine availability for both wholetime and on-call continues to be a challenge for the service. The service should consider how it can improve performance management of availability targets.

42. Since September 2018, the service has recruited 82 new wholetime staff. By mid-September 2019, the actual numbers of wholetime staff will have risen by 40. This is positive and reflects considerable effort by the service. However, we found more needs to be done in relation to on-call recruitment, and to attract and recruit a more representative workforce.

43. Considerable work has been carried out in relation to ensuring there is better management of overtime. We found this situation has now improved with effective controls in place.

44. The service has processes in place to address short-term workforce succession planning. We found that more still needs to be done to improve its longer-term succession planning.

45. The service has improved frontline supervisors' awareness of the system used to manage operational competencies.

46. The service recognises it needs to be more proactive with communications to the public.

47. We will continue to monitor progress through updates from the service and data returns. When we next inspect the service in 2020, we will further assess progress against this recommendation.

Yours sincerely,



Dru Sharpling

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Her Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services