

## **COMMUNITIES & TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Meeting: 29 June 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Joe Barratt (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Matt Wynne (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Steve Gribbon, Yvonne Guariento, Helen Hibbert, Tom Morrison,  
Rachel Wise, Jake Austin and Will Dawson.

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following interest was declared:-

#### Personal

#### Councillor

#### Interest

Stephen Gribbon

Agenda Item 3 – ‘Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service: Fire Cover Review and Special Appliances Review 2023’ and Agenda Item 4 – ‘Scrutiny of the Proposed Changes Contained Within the 2023-2024 GMFRS Fire Cover Review to the Operation of Offerton Community Fire station’ as an ex-serving Fire Officer at Offerton Fire Station and his partner was a current serving Fire Officer at Stalybridge.

### **2. CALL-IN**

There were no call-in items to consider.

### **3. GREATER MANCHESTER FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE: FIRE COVER REVIEW AND SPECIAL APPLIANCES REVIEW 2023**

The Director of Place Management submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) informing the Committee of the proposed changes for the fire service in Stockport and seeking Members’ views.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

### **4. SCRUTINY OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES CONTAINED WITHIN THE 2023-2024 GMFRS FIRE COVER REVIEW TO THE OPERATION OF OFFERTON COMMUNITY FIRE STATION**

The Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer of the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service presented a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the proposals contained within the Fire Cover Review Consultation.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:

- It was noted that the proposal of the GMFRS was to extend day crewing to two further stations, Offerton and Sale which, if agreed, would alter the response from fire fighters at the stations to on-call arrangements within a four minute boundary.
- GMFRS representatives stated that a recalibration of its resources would result in more prevention and protection capabilities and a more resilient emergency response with the addition of two wholetime fire engines.
- It was noted that a consultation was currently ongoing to seek views on those proposals.
- Members queried the level of consultation that had taken place with the staff at Offerton Fire Station.
- It was reported that the Chief Fire Officer had visited the station and had an open session with the staff and that a further session was planned. Nonetheless it was not intended to ask for staff's views on the proposal itself as it was data-driven. GMFRS was confident that it would be able to find 13 staff to run the station and, ideally, many would come from Offerton.
- It was further reported that the day crewing model had proved popular among staff at other stations due to a 17.5 per cent pay uplift; the service currently had a waiting list for posts at stations operating the day crewing model.
- The performance of current day crewing stations was constantly monitored in terms of turnout to the station, training and levels of activity; GMFRS reported that there were no indications that the system was failing.
- The GMFRS reported that the day crewing proposals would have an impact on the speed of night-time responses which, including a four minute response into the fire station, would result in slower response times. However, GMFRS stated that the fire appliance at Offerton was not turning out every hour throughout the night; call-outs were infrequent and the proposal provided fire service cover in a more efficient and effective way. The service was not being removed, although the response times would increase.
- The night time response had been calculated at being two minutes and 20 seconds longer, on average, under the new proposals.
- The GMFRS stated that the impact of the increase in response time was worth the gain of additional fire appliances elsewhere in Greater Manchester.
- It was noted that in the context of the review there were no alternative proposals considered although GMFRS looked at which localities were suitable for day crewing. After applying a data lens and professional judgement Offerton and Sale were chosen.
- Members reported that they had spoken to residents in Offerton and, anecdotally, approximately 99 per cent were deeply concerned about the proposed changes and queried the level at which GMFRS planned to take account of residents' views when making its decision.
- GMFRS reported that residents' views would be taken into full account and that the consultation period had been extended by a further two weeks. It was noted that online responses totalled approximately 600 and were mainly made up of Stockport and Trafford Residents. It was acknowledged that the general consensus within the respondents of the consultation were mainly unsupportive of the proposal.

- The GMFRS stated that it had expected a negative response to a proposal for fire engine call outs to take longer.
- The GMFRS stated that it was committed to listening to the views of local residents and that once the consultation closed, it would look carefully at responses and balance those against the final decision taken in respect of the proposals.
- GMFRS acknowledged that there might be a scenario whereby local residents, Councillors, Cabinet and local fire station crews were all opposed to the proposals but they went ahead in any event. That was based upon the interests of the people of Greater Manchester as a whole in order to configure the Fire and Rescue Service.
- Post consultation, the decision would ultimately be one for the Mayor of Greater Manchester.
- It was noted that in terms of Fire Service response times, the target was seven minutes 30 seconds and the average response time for Greater Manchester as a whole was seven minutes and 21 seconds.
- Whilst it was acknowledged that response times in Offerton would be higher than the Greater Manchester average, GMFRS was of the view that, in the context of it being a low activity, low risk area the day crewing model was a suitable system in terms of levels of activity and risk.
- GMFRS reported that the key data looked at was around attendance at life-risk incidents where it was most important for crews to attend as quickly as possible. The data for Offerton station showed that in the past three years there had been 104 life risk incidents at night. Whilst ideally the station would have a full crew overnight waiting for a call, in the circumstances where there had been fewer than one incident per week, the service had arrived at the conclusion that it could accept a delay in the level of response; the crux of the proposal was that a reduction in service at Offerton station would see a gain elsewhere in the service.
- Members queried the terminology used within the consultation document, in particular whether the use of the word 'additional' could be misleading in terms of the proposed changes to the service provision at Offerton station.
- Members also referred to the proposal stating that night-time call outs were infrequent when the data showed a call-out every other night.
- GMFRS strongly refuted that suggestion and stated that they had been honest about the fact that the proposal would lead to a delay in night-time response times.
- Members queried whether there would be an increased threat to life under these proposals and reference was made to a recent fire in a pub in Hazel Grove where three members of the public had been critically injured and questioned whether the outcome might have been worse with a further two-minute delay.
- In response, GMFRS accepted that there would be a delay in response times acknowledged that seconds and minutes are important, however they stated that from a life risk perspective the Offerton fire engine was not mobilising on several nights and the service was attempting to deploy its resources to the best effect.
- It was felt that the proposals were unjustified based on a loss in response time of two minutes 20 seconds in Stockport, for an average saving of 17 seconds in Moss Side and Manchester City Centre.
- GMFRS stated that heavy workload and complexity of the environment in Manchester City Centre was a key part of the reasoning behind the redeployment of resources and that the seconds gained was not a factor.

- GMFRS acknowledged that there were pockets of high and medium risk areas within Offerton but that in terms of demand and activity it had the lowest percentage of very high-risk incidents out of all Greater Manchester full-time stations.
- Members queried the data presented within the proposal, pointing out that nearby stations such as Marple and Poynton work under the day crewing model and questioned whether crucial data had been omitted for wider areas.
- GMFRS felt that the proposal had been data driven and reiterated that the service had endeavoured to be as transparent as possible in presenting the proposal and the consultation; it was of the view that the proposals would create a stronger, more resilient service.
- Members referred to the work that the crew at Offerton station had undertaken to engage with the local community which had been paramount in bringing down the number of night-time incidents; Members queried how that work would continue with a reduced crew and circumstances in which other local crews would be unable to resource that work.
- GMFRS acknowledged that Offerton Station's community engagement work would not continue under the proposed model. However, £340,000 would be reinvested in prevention and protection services and the majority of prevention work took place during daytime hours.
- Members referred to the mitigations contained within the proposal and noted that it had referred to four fire crews being available within ten minutes. However, it also noted that a day crewing system was in place at nearby Marple Fire Station and expressed concern about the whole of East Stockport having a reduced fire service which could impact the entire Borough.
- GMFRS acknowledged that Marple Fire Station was included as one of the four nearby stations referred to within the proposal but stated that it was also a low activity and low risk station.
- Members queried the proposal's reference to two additional pumps when six had been removed in past years.
- GMFRS stated that six engines had been removed as a result of cuts in Government funding and under the current proposal Greater Manchester would go from having 50 to 52 fire engines.
- Members queried whether, as part of the review, GMFRS investigated changes and growth in local population. Reference was made to a proposed additional 4,000 extra houses planned for the area.
- GMFRS acknowledged a growth in the population but stated that there were fewer call outs because of factors such as fewer smokers and more fire-retardant building materials in newer dwellings; it was stated that there was no parity between an increase in the number of incidents and the number of new houses built.
- Members referred to the features of the Borough which included canals, rivers and a motorway network with the potential for road traffic accidents. Concern was expressed about a proposed reduction of a service which would lead to an inherent risk for residents.
- Members queried whether the four minute response time from call-out to crews arriving at the station was an average or a target and whether it was included in the eight minute and 56 seconds expected response time.

- GMFRS responded that the crew-call out time had been factored in using an isochrone of a four minute boundary around Offerton station. It was acknowledged that fire crews had views on how achievable the four minute call out time was, however both an online commercial tool and GMFRS's own data had been used to create the isochrone.
- GMFRS acknowledged that the modelling on the four minute isochrone had not yet happened, but would do so should the proposals be implemented.
- Members queried the data contained within the review which suggested that there were no high rise flats in Stockport, and stated that was not the case.
- In response, it was stated that a fire in a high rise building required a minimum of five fire engines and that crews would provide support from Stockport, or the wider Greater Manchester Area.
- Members questioned the impact of the proposal upon weekend cover.
- GMFRS stated that staff would cover the station from 8.30 am until 1 pm and if all risk critical activity had been completed, they could leave for home and provide on-call cover thereafter.
- Members commented that the fire service had been impacted by austerity.
- If the proposal was to go ahead, GMFRS stated that any date for implementation remains unknown and other factors would impact upon it. For example, the redevelopment of King Street Fire Station may delay the changes depending upon whether a temporary site can be found.
- Members commented that investment in the King Street Fire Station was necessary in order to account for the increase in buildings and population in Stockport. A request was made for GMFRS to consider an increase in fire service cover throughout the Borough.
- In response, the GMFRS commented that ideally more new fire stations with more capacity, that was two bays rather than one, would be built, but that the cost of the building was significant and the service has to work within the limitations of funding within the capital programme.

Representatives from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) were then given an opportunity to address the Committee.

- The FBU stated that they represented approximately 95 to 96 per cent of all fire crews.
- The position of the FBU was that a reduction in fire service cover could not be accepted and whilst the need for additional pumps and crews in Manchester City Centre was acknowledged, that provision should not come at the expense of service cover in Offerton and Stockport.
- The FBU stated that the fire service attended a whole range of incidents, many of which were not life-risk incidents but where time remained critical; it also referred to the stated 104 life-risk incidents referred to within the proposal which amount to more than 30 per year.
- The FBU stated that Marple station currently operated under the day crewing model and expressed concern at having two day crew stations adjacent. In terms of the geography, there was only one road in and out of the areas and if a night call-out was to occur, both crews would be rested the following day, leading to both pumps being out of action.
- In terms of the adjacent day crew stations (Marple and Offerton) Members queried whether, under the proposals, that would be the only area within Greater Manchester where that was the case.

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- The FBU agreed that it would be the case and stated that there was an element of uncertainty in terms of the proposed downgrade and the full implications could not yet be known.
- Members asked whether the FBU felt that there had been an appropriate level of consultation with crew members in relation to the isochrone and whether it meant some crew members would be required to move house to live within its boundaries.
- The FBU expressed concern about the impact upon its members having to move house to make the system work.
- The FBU also expressed concern about the suggested average call-out time of four minutes and expressed that the figure was optimistic.
- It also stated that longer response times put the public and fire fighters at risk; the risk to society was expected to grow as the community grew.
- Overall, the view of the FBU was that the proposal should not be implemented and that the current status quo for resourcing should remain.
- The FBU requested the support of Members and the Council help prevent this downgrade and ensure a quick response from the fire service within the community.

RESOLVED – (1) That representatives of the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and representatives of the Fire Brigades Union be thanked for their attendance and their contribution to the discussion.

(2) That the comments of Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Sport for consideration.

The meeting closed at 8.49 pm