

GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2015/16 – BUSINESS SAFETY REVIEW OUTCOMES

SUMMARY

1. The Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 2 November 2015 considered a report by the Chairperson of that Committee (copy attached at Appendix 1) detailing the outcomes from scrutiny undertaken by the Committee in respect of Business Safety.
2. The attention of the Authority is drawn to the recommendations of the GAS Committee as set out below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. That the Authority considers the recommendations of the GAS Committee.

SCRUTINY OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Following scoping discussions it was subsequently agreed that two aspects should be scrutinised in more detail:
 - Technical fire safety
 - Unwanted fire signals

The scrutiny outcomes are detailed in the report at Appendix 1.

5. The GAS Committee (Minute 4971 refers) agreed to recommend to the Authority that:
 - (i) the Authority takes assurance that the Business Safety team, supported by colleagues in the Directorate of Emergency Response, is proactive in seeking to continually improve the technical fire safety provision, work in the most effective ways and add value through partnership working;
 - (ii) the Authority support the running of additional Business Safety seminars as a cost effective way of reaching a number of businesses;
 - (iii) the Authority consider asking the Corporate Management Team to present, at a Member Day, on the range of approaches taken nationwide to address unwanted fire signals;
 - (iv) that a small piece of work be carried out by the Business Safety team to review unwanted fire signals activity at the level of business type e.g. agricultural, small retail etc. to:
 - Establish if there are any patterns
 - Evaluate whether there may be merit in sector specific education initiatives.
 - (v) the Authority consider requesting that the Corporate Management Team specify aspirational positioning against other fire and rescue services in some of the outcome measures in the next strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPATIBILITY

6. None arising directly.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCES/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

7. As outlined above.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8. As outlined above.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/HR IMPLICATIONS

9. None arising.

CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10. None arising.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11. None arising.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS ARISING

12. None.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

13. None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AVAILABLE FOR ACCESS

14. None.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESTATED

15. That the Authority considers the recommendations of the GAS Committee.

M BUCKLEY

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GAS COMMITTEE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2015/16 – BUSINESS SAFETY

REPORT BY CHAIRPERSON

1. Recommendations

The committee is asked to approve the five recommendations to the Authority as set out in paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of this report.

2. Scrutiny Overview

As part of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2015/16, discussed at the Governance, Audit & Scrutiny Committee of 2nd March 2015, it was agreed business safety would be a topic for scrutiny by the Committee. Following scoping discussions it was agreed two aspects should be scrutinised in more detail:

- Technical fire safety
- Unwanted fire signals

3. Background

The first of the core functions of a Fire Authority is to promote fire safety in its area:

“A fire and rescue authority must ...make arrangements for
a) the provision of information, publicity and encouragement in respect of steps to be taken to prevent fires and death or injury by fire;
b) the giving of advice, on request, about
i) how to prevent fires and restrict their spread in buildings and other property
ii) the means of escape from buildings and other property in case of fire”.¹

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is committed to “Safer Communities, Safer Firefighters”. No fire is a better service outcome than fire injuries minimised.

Scrutiny findings and recommendations

4. Technical fire safety

Business safety inspections performance figures in the Annual Report 2014/15 were notably below target at 1925 (combined level 1 & level 2 inspections) and this was a key driver in selecting the area for scrutiny.

Discussion with and information provided by the business safety team however reveals this is not a fair reflection of actual performance by those present. The number of inspections was significantly affected by long-term sickness absence within the team which has and continues to be addressed. Number of inspections is quite a blunt instrument to assess performance and this is addressed further in paragraph 6 below headed Benchmarking.

There are a number of improvements to service delivery in progress or planned in the short-term:

- An upskilling of operational crews in business community safety led by one watch manager per CPU. This will enable them to follow up incidents directly with a business.
- Level 3 training will be offered to crew and watch managers which will expand the number of hours in which there is access to such knowledge. Technical fire safety expertise is not available 24/7.
- Better use of skill mix with more level one audits being carried out by business safety advocates.
- The recent move to house business safety staff adjacent to planning officers in Hull City Hall should prove efficient from a service delivery perspective and improve accessibility to expert advice for business community clients.
- The team plans to implement recently released guidance from CFOA reducing the data gathering during audits on businesses meeting the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Act 2005. CFOA estimates the new short audit may be appropriate in up to 70% of regulatory visits.²

Members of GAS attended a business safety seminar for small businesses put on by the team in September. The presentation was well received and it was notable a number of people then sought to speak directly to a member of the team. All four seminars were oversubscribed very quickly with approximately 200 people attending in total. It is reasonable to conclude there is unmet demand for this service.

Recommendations

The Authority takes assurance that the business safety team, supported by colleagues in the directorate of emergency response, is proactive in seeking to continually improve the technical fire safety provision, work in the most effective ways and add value through partnership working.

The Authority support the running of additional business safety seminars as a cost effective way of reaching a number of businesses.

5. Unwanted fire signals

In 2014/15 HFRS recorded attendance at 1387 incidents categorised as False Alarm due to Apparatus at business premises. False Alarm due to Good Intent generated another 131 attendances to such premises.

Undesirable consequences of unwanted fire signals include;

- Unnecessary blue light journeys (and attendant risk of injuries to firefighters and the public)
- Reduced availability for actual incidents
- Reduced availability for provision of education and training.

The financial cost is however, only marginal (as most of the cost comes from fixed overheads).

The business safety team interrogates data at the level of individual business premise to establish outliers. Historically however, there has been no analysis at a level in-between.

The number of unwanted fire signals has come down significantly and consistently over the last five years. This is in line with the national trend (of a 42% fall over ten years³). Further work on this is ongoing within HFRS but at this time there are no individual businesses which stand out as a cause for concern. Scope for quick wins appears limited.

There is a protocol of talking to businesses to guide them to better practice and only if that fails is there an escalation to fire safety inspection. Much of the work is carried out by fire safety advocates; reflecting a good use of skill mix and efficient delivery by the team.

Some fire services around the UK have adopted additional approaches with a higher degree of risk to minimise responses to unwanted fire signals. Examples include;

- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service do not respond to an automatic fire alarm between 9am – 5pm until there is a call confirming there is a fire (excludes COMAH sites & sleeping risks premises).⁴
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue have adopted a call challenge protocol for commercial premises: The caller is asked whether or not they actually have a fire or signs of a fire. If not, the caller is asked to investigate the cause of the alarm and call back on 999 if there is a fire. If no further call is received the service does not attend.⁵

HFRS currently challenge the call but will always send at least one appliance even if the answer is that a fire is not confirmed (see appendix 1). Any future discussion around this approach would need to be mindful of potential impact on response outcomes.

Recommendations:

The Authority consider asking the Corporate Management Team to present, at a member day, on the range of approaches taken nationwide to address unwanted fire signals.

A small piece of work be carried out by the business safety team to review unwanted fire signals activity at the level of business type eg agricultural, small retail etc to:

- Establish if there any patterns
- Evaluate whether there may be merit in sector specific education initiatives.

6. Benchmarking

Whilst undertaking this scrutiny exercise it has become apparent some performance measures could be viewed as outdated and that there is further data available that could be of value to the service in determining best outcome measures.

The performance measure for business safety audits is based upon the number of staff and covering all identified premises in a five year period. It is not related in a meaningful way to performance in the previous year and there is no reporting of the split between proactive visits and reactive visits (following up a complaint from the public or after an incident).

It is recognised that it is hard to assess performance in preventative work. A fall in the number of incidents is at best a proxy for number of incidents prevented.

Once an organisation has progressed beyond establishing a baseline position and the setting of targets, the natural progression is to benchmark performance against similar organisations. HFRS has access to data on the performance of other Fire and Rescue Services. There is an opportunity to go forward with a more meaningful measure set for a timescale more appropriate to the pace of change within the organisation.

Recommendation

The Authority consider requesting that the Corporate Management Team specify aspirational positioning against other fire and rescue services in some of the outcome measures in the next strategic plan.

7. Strategic plan compatibility.

The work of the business safety team is essential to meeting strategic objectives 1- 3:

1. Preventing loss of life, injuries and the community impact from emergency incidents.
2. Responding quickly and effectively to emergency incidents when requested.
3. Reducing risk in our communities.

8. Financial/Resource/Value For Money Implications

No financial or quantifiable information is submitted with this report.

9. Corporate Risk Management Implications

None arising directly at this time.

10. Legal Implications

None arising directly at this time.

11. Health and Safety Implications

None arising directly at this time.

References

1. Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
2. CFOA Business Fire Safety Activity – Engagement, Evaluation and Audit 2015
3. Fire Statistics Monitor: England April 2013 to March 2014
4. www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/business-safety/reducing-false-alarms/automatic-fire-alarms-our-response
5. www.lancsfirerescue.org.uk/unwanted-fire-alarm-signals-policy/

Appendix 1 – Flowchart for dealing with calls for commercial premises received from AFAs and/or 999



