



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE
AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the Dorset Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee held at 10:00am on 19 February 2026 at the Poundbury offices, Conference Room, Peverell Avenue West, Poundbury, Dorset

Members present:

Cllr Duncan Sowry-House (Chair)
Cllr Richard Biggs

Cllr Clare Weight (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Member in attendance)

Officer attendance:

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Response, Darren Langdown
Group Manager (GM), Dave Adamson
Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), Director of Corporate Services
and Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority, Vikki Shearing
Democratic Services Manager, David Shaw

26/01 Welcome

26/01.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Members and officers.

26/02 Apologies

26/02.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Byron Quayle. Cllr Laura Beddow was not in attendance.

26/03 Code of Conduct, Declaration of Interests

26/03.1 The Chair asked the meeting for any disclosures of pecuniary interests under the Localism Act. There were no disclosures.

26/04 Public Questions

26/04.1 Mr Micheal Smith read questions from Katie Millar and himself regarding public consultation on the station review of Charmouth Fire Station, as set out in Appendix A to the Minutes. A question from Lisa Clark was also submitted as also set out in Appendix A.

26/04.2 The Chair commented that a written response would be provided within 28 days from the officers and that the questions would be considered as part of the station reviews consultation process.

26/04.3 RESOLVED: Members noted the public questions.

26/05 Review and approve minutes of the Dorset Local Performance and Scrutiny (LPS) meeting on 20 November 2025

26/05.1 The Chair asked Members to review and approve the minutes from the previous meeting.

26/05.2 RESOLVED: That the minutes be confirmed and be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

26/06 Action Progress Report

26/06.1 The Committee noted actions 370, 371, 372 and 373 that had been taken at the meeting held on 20 November 2025, as set out in the report.

26/06.2 RESOLVED: Members noted that actions 370, 371, 372 and 373 had been closed as set out in the report and there were no actions outstanding.

26/07 Performance monitoring and briefing quarter 3

26/07.1 Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), Response, Darren Langdown and Group Manager (GM), Dave Adamson presented to Members the Performance Monitoring and Briefing for quarter 3, which covered the three priority areas overseen by this Committee:

Priority 1 Help you to make safer and healthier choices

Priority 2 Protect you and the environment from harm, and

Priority 3 Be there when you need us.

A link to the presentation can be found [here](#).

It was noted that Performance Monitoring and Briefing was presented to the Committee by way of a Performance Dashboard for each of the priority areas supported by a presentation of the highlights of the service provision for the quarter. The data for year to date referred to quarter 3 – 1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025 and was compared with the corresponding quarter in the previous year. When necessary, officers would provide additional detail to the Committee on an exception basis. It was clarified that the data presented was in Minutes and Seconds and included a five-year history. The quarterly data was discussed as set out in the dashboard.

26/07.2 **Priority 1 - Help you to make safer and healthier choices.**

26/07.3	Title	Current Year-to-Date	Last Year-to-Date
	Number of accidental dwelling fires - Dorset Council	47	43
	Number of home fire safety visits Quarterly – Dorset Council	533	Not Applicable
	Number of safeguarding referrals from DWFRS- Dorset Council	56	Not Applicable

26/07.4 Arising out of consideration for the dashboard data for Priority 1, Members asked the following questions which were answered by the officers.

26/07.5 In reply to a question from Cllr Richard Briggs as to whether referrals from partner agencies on home fire safety checks added value, the officers explained that referrals came from energy and water suppliers and other agencies. The data provided was risk assessed with the highest risk cases referred to the Prevention Team. There were targets for the number of home fire safety visits, the level of intervention and the frequency of attendance. Repeat visits were carried out if it was deemed necessary due to the fire risk. Information obtained was kept on a risk register and was available to fire crews immediately via Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) held on appliances. Partner agencies were kept informed if the Service encountered a safeguarding issue and there were protocols on sharing information.

26/07.6 The officers provided additional detail on the recruitment of on-call firefighters and actions taken to reduce the period of qualification as a firefighter from 12 months to three months. Also explained were the skill sets required for a firefighter including the issues pertaining to driver training, particularly providing blue light night driving training for on-call firefighters. This subject was being given considerable consideration with night driving now being risk assessed to overcome on-call having to provide substantial time to undertake nighttime driving.

26/07.7 **Priority 2 - Protect you and the environment from harm**

26/07.8	Title	Current Year-to-Date	Last Year-to-Date
	Automatic fire alarms which result in a false alarm Quarterly - Dorset Council	368	321

Automatic fire alarms which result in a false alarm - non domestic premises - Dorset Council (year to date)	81	109
Number of business fire safety checks undertaken crews - Dorset Council	45	Not Applicable

26/07.9 The officers answered Members' questions regarding the Service's response to commercial smoke alarms, including call challenge. It was explained that repeat cases of false alarms were monitored by the Protection Team who would visit the premises involved. It was noted that for the Dorset area Weymouth and Dorchester were the only wholetime stations available to carry out fire safety checks.

26/07.10 **Priority 3 - Be there when you need us**

26/07.11 ACFO Langdown stated that the dashboard data regarding fire rescues would be reconsidered to more accurately reflect the intervention by the Service, for example to include persons who were led to safety following a fire.

26/07.12 In reply to a question from Cllr Biggs, the officers provided information on Road Traffic Collisions and whether causational trends could be determined, for example related to particular months of the year or events. It was explained that issues of causation, for example in high accident areas, were monitored by the Prevention Team and studied with partner agencies and that Service publicity followed seasonal campaigns that were held nationally and there was liaison with the police on prevention. In addition, the officers replied to Cllr Biggs on preparations for flooding and the role that the Service undertook in flooding incidents, including water rescue and the use of pumps for flooded properties. The work undertaken to train firefighters in the use of breathing apparatus and to keep their competencies up to date was also explained to Cllr Biggs.

26/07.13 **Demand summary**

26/07.14	Title	Current Year-to-Date	Last Year-to-Date
	Number of fires attended - Dorset Council	187	182
	Number of special services incidents attended - Dorset Council	830	982
	Number of incidents attended which turned	474	393

out to be false alarms - Dorset Council		
--	--	--

- 26/07.15 The quarterly data for the Demand Summary was discussed as set out in the dashboard.
- 26/07.16 The Chair enquired about the use of the term 'good' within performance reports and whether it aligned with the Service's strategic priorities. ACFO Langdown observed that it aligned with the criteria of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), but as there was no consistency on national measurement, for example in what constituted an average response time to an incident. The Service was giving further consideration to the terminology used. The Chair commented that presentation could be improved by a visual representation within a traffic light system rather than use of the term 'good'. If adopted, this terminology would be standardised across all Local Performance and Scrutiny Committees.
- 26/07.17 In reply to further questions, the officers explained that the increase in accidental dwelling fires was principally due to the risk of lithium-ion battery fires, in addition to traditional risks such as unattended cooking. There was also an increase in mental health related incidents, for example in attempted suicides and work with partner agencies for those in crisis was on-going. In addition, due to the high cost of living, there had also been an increase in the use of open flame heaters within properties that led to a higher fire risk. Following discussion, it was agreed that the three key areas of greatest service demand could be added to the dashboard report by means of a comments box, with an explanation of the Service's response to that risk, for example fire risks relating to air fryers.
- 26/07.18 The Chair also asked for the support of the Service in canvassing other Fire and Rescue Services in obtaining a change to building regulations legislation to ensure that lithium-ion battery safe charging boxes be included in all new buildings to reduce the risk of fire through thermal runaway. ACFO Langdown stated that he would meet with Area Manager Marc House, Prevention and Protection - Community Safety, to establish the priority of this subject with the National Fire Chiefs Council. The Chair added that there was considerable new build planned for the Dorset area and housing associations where a lithium-ion battery safe charging box could improve fire safety.
- 26/07.19 The officers also provided details on the challenges to on-call recruitment. The actions that were being taken both locally and nationally to address the issues arising were explained. Locally, selective alerting was used to provide a more focused response and nationally lessons were shared, for example on cross-border recruitment. Initiatives such as on-call firefighters working from fire stations during the day were also discussed. The Chair added that working with supermarkets such as Tesco's, for positive brand association could be of benefit.

26/07.20 Following comments from Cllr Biggs on the number of fires attended, the officers stated that consideration would be given to improve in the display of information within the dashboard, for example by including mean trend lines.

26/07.21 **Presentation**

26/07.22 GM Adamson provided a presentation on the Service's engagement in quarter 3. This included community engagement, multi-agency exercises attended and notable incidents attended.

26/07.23 The officers answered questions from the Chair on the learning obtained from multi agency exercises. Partners were debriefed following an exercise with learning captured on operational databases and forwarded for national learning.

26/07.24 The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation.

26/07.25 RESOLVED: Members scrutinised and noted the performance for quarter 3 2026.

26/08 Matters raised by Members (agreed with the Chair)

26/08.1 The Chair commented on the absence of some Dorset Council Members from the meeting and requested that the issue be raised with the Dorset Council political group leaders. The matter would also be brought to the attention of the Clerk to the Authority and the Monitoring Officer.

26/09 Date of Next Meeting

26/09.1 The Chair confirmed the date of the next Dorset Local Performance and Scrutiny Committee meeting as 20 August 2026 at 10:00am to be held at the Conference Room, Poundbury offices, Peverell Avenue West, Poundbury, Dorset.

The meeting closed at 11:50

Signed: _____

Dorset Local Performance & Scrutiny Committee meeting – 19 February 2026**26/10 Public Questions****26/10.1 Public Questions. Michael Smith:**

My name is Michael Smith, and I am a longstanding resident of Charmouth Dorset and a retired Chartered Accountant. I am of course aware of the plans to consider closing the Fire station at Charmouth which has currently just commenced a period of Public Consultation.

Question One

The Charmouth Fire station covers a large mainly rural area including the Jurassic Coast from Lyme Regis to Golden Cap.

Although the actual population is relatively small it increases dramatically with the influx of holiday and day visitors throughout the year not just in the main summer holiday season.

In just Charmouth alone there are 4 permanent large caravan parks/camp sites as well as small hotels and numerous holiday-let properties, which probably at least triple the population at peak times.

In addition, there are numerous other camp and caravan sites in the inland areas and properties providing holiday accommodation.

The unstable cliffs and mud flows on the coast and numerous steep coastal paths add to the risk areas in the Charmouth Station area.

The Charmouth Station are often called out to assist the coastguard or Ambulance Service to help recovered trapped or injured people.

The extremely busy, particularly in the summer months, main A35 trunk road passes close to Charmouth and has a history of numerous serious accidents and car fires etc which are a serious risk which need prompt action and they are regularly called out to deal with these.

What steps are being taken to fully assess the overall risk level in the Charmouth Station area for the many special factors which apply to this area in addition to the very basic population and housing numbers which appear to be being used?

Question Two

I appreciate that the financial situation is not the specific concern of the committee meeting today 19th February 2026.

However, when assessing the risk factors and as a result what service you provide this must surely have to be considered.

The Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority as a whole, have the responsibility to safeguard the people of the two counties.

The present arguments for closing Charmouth Fire Station are all financially based but surely the general safety and wellbeing of the population and people passing through the area should be the priority.

It is being said that the present wonderful service provided by Charmouth can be replaced by adjoining stations, but frankly this does not appear to be true.

Particularly when you consider the geography of the area with its many minor narrow roads and the difficulties of the serious influx of extra traffic in the summer months, especially in the town areas of Bridport and Lyme Regis with the centre of Lyme Regis, where their Fire Station is, often being gridlocked making movement almost impossible even for a fire engine.

Another factor is local knowledge of the area, which can at times be the difference between getting somewhere quickly and safely which Crews coming in from adjoining towns will not have.

There are times being quoted for Lyme Regis and Bridport crews to come over to the Charmouth area, if that station were to be closed, to cover the shouts previously dealt with by them, which seem totally unrealistic and do not take into account the longer time taken to get away from their stations compared to Charmouth's exceptional record and then the length of the trip into the Charmouth area in particular when the traffic is heavy in the summer, in the case of Bridport the regular holdups in Chideock, with no way through for a Fire Engine even with blue lights on.

What serious consideration has been given as to how you will cover all the many real health and risk factors in the area, not just estimates based on the basic winter population, to ensure that cuts are not being made for financial reasons only, without due consideration to the serious effect it will have on the local population's health and safety and well-being including in particular the worries of the elderly population that they will no longer feel safe.

Katie Millar, as read by Micheal Smith:

Question 1

Please could you explain the reasoning behind not taking into account ALL of the relevant data in deciding which stations to close. Particularly for Charmouth Fire Station, being located the closest station to 3 county borders means statistically a significant proportion of the call outs are across border, which

under the current metrics are not included in the data. As well as the increased standby requests and support to other areas increasing due to the wildfire and flooding risks all have an impact on responses to local emergencies. Also, the average availability of the neighbouring stations over the last few years, surely should be taken into consideration when assessing the community risk of a station closure. How can there be any confidence in the results when the data has been selectively chosen?

Question 2

How have the calculations been made with regard to the affect on response times following a station closure. For example, late 2025, Charmouth had a house fire in a rural location with persons reported. Charmouth attended and were on scene within 6 minutes of the call. Two elderly residents were rescued from the property by the crew wearing BA and the fire was successfully extinguished. This was only successful due to the quick response time. The nearest other fire station would be Lyme Regis, 5.2 miles away from the fire. If Lyme Regis had been the first pump, they would have to drive approx 62 miles an hour to achieve a 5 minute response time, this is not even taking into consideration the time for the crew to reach the station from the initial call, if in fact they even had a crew available. Lyme Regis Fire Station is located in a network of narrow lanes and they would have to drive through the town which is extremely busy due to tourist traffic most months of the year. Bridport is the next closest station, 9.8 miles from the fire, along the A35 which is an extremely congested stretch of road. I would challenge, how on earth have DWFS come to the conclusion the response times wouldn't be affected by Charmouth Station closure? It is a prime example, of which there are many more, that would without doubt result in loss of life, if Charmouth were to close.

Lisa Clark resident of Charmouth

The past is history

The present is the here and now

And the future is yet to be written

Over the coming months specifically the day after the proposed closure of Charmouth Fire Station on 30th June, the population of Charmouth increases tenfold

Post Covid, year on year the influx of holidaymakers has increased and we all know that when on holiday we tend to leave our inhibitions and commonsense at home.

Charmouth doesn't have an on site Lifeguard and many visitors are ignorant or unaware of the risks posed to life through,

Tide times

Strong sea currents, of which one such incident was highlighted last Christmas, when two lives were lost at the Budleigh Salterton annual family funday Christmas Day Swim

This week its Half-term in Charmouth

And following last week's major cliff fall incident on Charmouth East Beach and the collapse and closure of the South West Coastal Path at Stonebarrow

Many holidaymakers and Fossilers are ignorant of the risk to life. They don't heed the warning signs. They don't know how to react when slowly being sucked into a mudflow, or the perils of fossilling at the base of the unstable cliffs

Once Charmouth Fire Station is no longer our first responder in our village and the surrounding rural villages of Catherston Leweston, Wootton Fitzpaine, Marshwood Vale, Whitchurch Canonicorium, Morecombelake, Chideock, Seatown and Ryall to name but a few, how long will we now have to wait, following increased response times during the A35 holiday traffic rat race from Bridport Fire Station and not forgetting the disruption that will be caused by the installation of the roundabout on the A35 at Miles Cross and the Foundry Lea development, or Lyme Regis Fire Station, or across the border from Axminster Fire Station, providing they have on call firefighters available to respond and are not deployed out of county to attend the ever increasing floods and heath fires?