

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – MINUTES**

Date: 21st July 2016

Time: 10.30am – 11.35am

Place: Fire & Rescue Service HQ, Hinchbrook Cottage, Brampton Road, Huntingdon

Present: Councillors P Brown, D Divine, D Giles, L Nethsingha (Chairwoman), P Sales, J Schumann and M Shellens

Officers: R Hylton, S Ismail, C Strickland, M Warren and D Cave

Apologies: Councillor D Over

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Giles and Shellens declared non-pecuniary interests as Members of the Crime and Police Panel. It was confirmed that there was no conflict of interest as these appointments were made via the County Council.

69. MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 30th JUNE 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 30th June 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairwoman.

70. HUNTINGDON HUB PROPERTY RATIONALISATION – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report on progress with the Huntingdon Hub property rationalisation project, specifically a report from the Police & Crime Commissioner on options for constructing the new Combined Fire Station, Training Centre, Combined Fire Control and Headquarters building on land owned by the Police.

The Police and Crime Commissioner, Councillor Ablewhite, was invited to present his report and respond to Members' questions.

Councillor Ablewhite acknowledged that the Fire Authority had been on an eight year journey to find a solution to their future accommodation needs in Huntingdon. However, over those eight years there had a fundamental shift and change in the environment the Fire Service operated within, not least austerity and a whole range of other operational issues. It was clear to Councillor Ablewhite that any opportunities that could be utilised in terms of collaboration and closer working across all agencies should be embraced, and such options needed to be explored in greater detail so that mutually beneficial solutions could be identified. Whilst understanding Members' frustrations that the Police offer had not been on the table earlier, he stressed that it was now, and regardless of the proposed legislation, the public sector had a collective duty to work together and make the best use of taxpayer's resources. The Police had capacity in terms of training facilities and Headquarters building, and the space identified in the report could provide initial savings of £750,000. Given the current uncertain and challenging times, and the potential for Brexit to lead to further constraints, government may have less money centrally and be looking to

make further cuts in terms of public services. The proposal would ensure Police and Fire services were prepared for those challenges, and through working closer together and making the most out of these types of opportunities, do the right thing by the taxpayer.

The Chairwoman thanked Councillor Ablewhite for his presentation. She commented that when he had attended the meeting on 30th June, he appeared to have a specific piece of land in mind, but this was not reflected in the report. Was the original proposal no longer an option? Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that that option was still there, and the Police had sizable estates, and it would be better to utilise publically owned land to fulfil the Fire Service's objectives.

Another Member was under the impression the land discussed at the last meeting had been promised to another organisation. Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that there had been discussions with Hinchingbrooke Hospital regarding another piece of land, and a different parcel of land was already identified for the link road (which would be the subject of a Compulsory Purchase Order), but neither of those arrangements made any difference to the land proposed for the Fire Service's Huntingdon Hub. The Chairwoman commented that she was surprised that the identification of the five acre site was not made explicit in the report.

A Member asked Councillor Ablewhite and officers what the legal arrangement would be, and also the cost to the Fire Service of acquiring the land. Councillor Ablewhite commented that the main advantage from his perspective was the knowledge that the tax payer was getting the best possible deal, and that all options had been explored by the Fire Service. A Member observed that if the Fire Service bought land elsewhere e.g. the original site at St John's, and the Police sold its proposed land to another organisation/developer, this would be cost neutral to the tax payer. It was confirmed that the Police Estates owned the land in question, and that service was the under the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, and any returns from land sales would go directly to the Police and Crime Commissioner's budget, and not to the government. It was suggested that an alternative approach would be for the Police Service to move to the new St John's site with the Fire Service. Councillor Ablewhite responded that the existing site was perfectly adequate for the Police. A Member asked if any land purchase would be required from the Fire Service. Councillor Ablewhite responded that the legislation would enable Police & Crime Commissioners to take over Fire Services, and his intention would be for Cambridgeshire to be an early adopter of that approach, so effectively the whole of the Fire service estate would go to the Police and Crime Commissioner. He added that this had been his intention since his appointment. A Member pointed out that this would be dependent on a public consultation and asked if the PCC would have regard to such consultation, given that he appeared to have already decided on his plans. Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that he would.

A Member asked why the current proposals had not come forward in previous discussions with the Police, i.e. what had changed the Police's position. Councillor Ablewhite replied that the current offer resulted from his appointment as the new Police and Crime Commissioner, and his long record of collaborative working. A Member commented that whilst welcoming the offer, there were a number of different routes the legislation may follow, and these would have different impacts on the role of Police and Crime Commissioner. The business case for the proposal therefore depended on how collaboration between Police and Fire Services was perceived. Councillor Ablewhite commented that the business case would depend on the legislation, which was likely to be issued before the end of the year.

A Member asked what the land tenure would be if the legislation did not go through as Councillor Ablewhite envisaged. He replied that his proposal was based on public land, and there would be no cost.

A Member asked how Councillor Ablewhite saw collaboration of Police and Fire Services working following the introduction of the legislation, and when he would share the business case detailing his proposals with the Fire Authority. Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that the business case would not be prepared prior to the legislation being enacted.

It was noted that there were issues in the Police proposal of displacing car parking, and this would require a longer term solution, but there would not be a cost to the Fire Service.

A Member asked officers what their recommendation was, as the covering report did not give any clear indication. Officers responded that this was a decision for the Committee, and officers felt that Members needed more information to make a properly informed decision. It was noted that in terms of the St John's site, a decision could be delayed until September, but no further as to do would risk the land being placed on the open market again. One option would be to await more detailed information from the Police and Crime Commissioner and make a final decision in September.

A Member asked the Monitoring Officer if it would be prudent to proceed without knowing the final outcome of the Police & Crime Act. The Monitoring Officer responded that at the moment this was the Fire Authority's decision. Fire and Police Services were at the start of a collaborative journey, and even in the absence of this specific legislation, there was an obligation for public sector bodies to collaborate. In his paper, the Police and Crime Commissioner referred to the duty to act reasonably and take into consideration all relevant considerations, so as not to be susceptible to legal challenge. There had been an eight year process to identify a suitable combined Headquarters and Huntingdon Fire Station site, although the work on the St John's site were more recent. The Police Estates team had been consulted comparatively recently, but no options had come forward. The potential for that site needed to be balanced against the risk of the existing site falling through, and those costs were not just financial, but also operational and reputational. There were a number of questions which had not been answered e.g. was there a cost saving to public of the Police proposal? The land appeared to be offered at nil cost, and would release the current site for sale, but there would be knock on effects for the Police site e.g. car parking. There were also issues of operational efficacy for Fire and Police, and the impact on land holdings. It was still unclear what the legislation would say - it may favour 'light' collaboration, or a full takeover situation. This could have very different implications on the legality of land ownership and future budgetary planning.

A Member applauded the success and track record of Councillor Ablewhite at Huntingdonshire District Council on collaborative working e.g. shared services, and welcomed continued collaboration between Fire and Police services in future. However, he felt it was important to recognise the large number of collaborative working projects that the Fire Service was already involved in, and invited officers to briefly outline recent examples of collaboration with the Police and other partners. Officers mentioned the Police unit working from the Fire Station at Dogsthorpe, and also collaborative work with the Police at Linton and Wisbech fire stations. Similarly the Fire Service was working with the Ambulance service at a number of sites, as well as work on the co-responding project. Work with other Fire Services included the electronic system called STEP, and ongoing shared ICT and insurance projects. Work with local authorities included Cambridgeshire County Council (legal and democratic services) and the Safer Peterborough Partnership with Peterborough City Council and the Police. Members also noted a number of extensive operational partnerships, including Operation Pheasant with the Police, targeting

gangmasters and houses of multiple occupation, CSPs, and Safe and Well visits with the County Council's Adult Social Care team. The Fire Service was also engaged with the strategic transformation programme with the NHS. A Member commented that the Fire Service appeared more collaborative than the Police, but there were plenty of opportunities for further collaborative working by both organisations.

The Chairwoman reminded Members that they needed to make the best decision for the Fire Authority. There was a balance of risk to be considered: pausing may mean that the St John's opportunity was lost, but the alternative risk was that lose the opportunity of taking forward a different project. There was clearly an option to delay until September, but after that point the risk was significantly higher, as the St John's land would be actively marketed. However, between now and September the risk was low. More information needed to be provided by the Police & Crime Commissioner to enable Members to understand the potential of the site better – a fully evidenced business case needed to be built, although this would not be possible by September. A Member observed that buying the St John's land was not a significant risk – the value of the land would be preserved or more likely, enhanced, over time.

A Member commented that generally, major purchasing decisions e.g. for computer systems were often delayed as new developments or better deals were awaited. However, decisions needed to be taken at some point – if delayed past September, the St John's site would no longer be an option, and the process would be much more protracted if it transpired that the Police site was not suitable. Whilst the legislation was expected in November, this could be delayed, and then the public consultation would need to be factored in. Whilst one of the arguments for using the Police land was that it was a reduced cost to the public purse, there was an opportunity cost to that land i.e. if sold on the open market, it was likely to realise £750K or more.

Councillor Schumann observed that any potential saving from the Police proposal would need to be balanced against the costs of delaying a major building project. A major consideration was that this was more than just a headquarters building, it also had an operational impact. The Committee had been very definite about steering officers towards potential partnership working opportunities, and exploring those thoroughly. He also felt that it was shortsighted to view this as the only opportunity to work closely together with the Police, and there would be many other opportunities to work collaboratively. He therefore proposed that the original proposal, for the St John's site, was pursued unless there was significant information prior to the September deadline. It was confirmed that the option on the St John's site expired at the end of September.

Councillor Schumann proposed, seconded by Councillor Shellens, that the Committee:

- (1) Note the report;
- (2) Agree to pursue the development proposal for a new Hub Station at St John's, but to delay signing purchase of land until the end of September, unless significant information comes forward from the office of the Police & Crime Commissioner to justify an alternative decisions.

Following a show of hands, the above proposal was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

71. DATE OF NEXT MEETING AND FUTURE MEETINGS

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee would take place on Thursday 22nd September 2016 at 2pm.

It was also agreed that the following meeting, scheduled for 8th December, would change from a 10.30am start to a 2pm start at Shire Hall, Cambridge. **ACTION: Dawn Cave/Rob Sanderson to confirm September and December dates with Committee and officers.**

Chairwoman
22nd September 2016