

## **CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY: MINUTES**

**Date:** Thursday 1 November 2018

**Time:** 2:00 - 2.50pm

**Present:** Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors I Gardener, D Giles, S Kindersley, J Gowing, L Harford, M McGuire, L Nethsingha, K Reynolds (Chairman), J Scutt, M Shellens and M Smith

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors A Bond, M Jamil and D Over (Vice-Chairman)

**Officers Present:** R Hylton, M Warren, S Ismail and D Cave

### **60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bywater, Goodwin and Rogers.

### **61. MINUTES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD 21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2018**

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 21<sup>st</sup> June were agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

### **62. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Lynda Harford to her first meeting. He highlighted the following issues:

- The 'On-Call' events in September, where every On-Call station was represented. Those attending had been updated on the unprecedented demand during the heatwave, and shown new equipment and appliances;
- There had been no news on the judicial review process since his recent communication to Fire Authority Members;
- The seminar originally planned immediately before the meeting had been rescheduled to the afternoon of 19<sup>th</sup> November. Members were strongly encouraged to attend. The Police & Crime Commissioner had also been invited;
- The inspection by HM Inspector of Police and Fire had concluded, and the final report was eagerly anticipated;
- He had met with the Chairman of Bedfordshire Fire Authority: the two Services already have an ongoing working partnership in IT provision;

- The Governance Review Working Group had planned to present its report to this meeting, but was not currently in a position to do so: the report would be presented to a future meeting of the Fire Authority;
- The fire service had been involved in a public awareness campaign on fostering;
- Members were strongly encouraged to attend one of the LGA Diversity and Inclusion in the Fire and Rescue Service Masterclasses; details had previously been circulated;
- The Vice Chairman had been representing the Fire Authority at meetings of the Combined Authority.

### **63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **64. FIRE BRIGADES UNION NATIONAL BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY OFFICER**

The Fire Authority considered a report on the arrangements being put in place to support the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) National Black and Ethnic Minority Officer.

The report highlighted the benefits associated with this prestigious position being held by a member of CFRS staff, raising the profile of the Service at a national level, and helping attract a diverse workforce. It was clarified that the role would be split 50/50, i.e. the Officer working in this role half the time, whilst working as a firefighter the rest of the time. The arrangements had been considered and agreed by the Policy & Resources Committee.

Arising from the report:

- it was confirmed that such arrangements would be considered and offered to other Unions, if requested;
- noting the statement that the employee could “provide CFRS with access to his contacts”, a Member asked whether this was in line with GDPR arrangements. Officers confirmed that GDPR was being taken into consideration and any such networking would be managed in a sensitive and compliant way;
- it was confirmed that the Officer involved would continue his front line duties on a part-time basis, and a job share position may be offered. These arrangements would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Members asked for their congratulations to be passed on to the Officer concerned for his appointment to this important national role, which reflected well on both him and the Service. The Chairman confirmed that he had personally contacted the Officer and thanked him.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the contents of the report.

## 65. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2019/20 TO 2023/24

The Fire Authority received a report providing an overview of the current position regarding the proposed draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2019/20 to 2023/24.

Members noted the significant uncertainty for the fire service, including the pension scheme: the government had recently changed the mechanism impacting on unfunded public sector pension schemes, and whilst the full details were not yet known, the impact could be significant. The Treasury had indicated that it would be filling the gap for the first year, but the position after that was uncertain. It was anticipated that further information would follow in December when confirmation was received on the financial settlement.

The MTFS was predicated on a 2% pay award, but any settlement above 2% would impact on the Service's bottom line. The assumption was that the fire service would be able to increase Council Tax up to a 3% cap. There were healthy reserves, but these would be reducing over the coming years, as planned.

Arising from the report:

- a Member noted that Business Rates were likely to remain the same for the next four years, and he asked how this would be incorporated. Officers advised it was anticipated that offset grant would go to Districts, acting as a safety net for those authorities, so there should be no impact on fire services;
- a Member noted that a number of police forces were looking at bankruptcy due to pension deficits, and asked if Cambridgeshire Constabulary was one of those. Officers advised that this was not anticipated at this stage;
- a Member queried if the assumption of predicted housing growth of 1% was sensible. Officers commented that this was prudent, advising that housing growth for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was around 1.3% in the previous year;
- it was noted that the Appendix to the report referred to the "remaining cut to be found" of £28,000, and asked if Officers were confident that this saving would be secured. Officers confirmed that since the publication of the agenda, £30,000 of savings had been identified from the vehicle insurance renewal. This was partly due to being part of a vehicle insurance procurement consortium, and also because the Service had secured a rebate resulting from its claims history and fitting CCTV to all of its fleet. A report on the insurance consortium would be presented to a future meeting;
- a Member observed that the maximum 3% increase corresponded to an extra 4p a week for council taxpayers. He also expressed scepticism around Business Rates, suggesting the government may attempt to access these in future;
- in relation to the statement "*the government offered authorities a four year 'minimum' financial settlement, if it chooses to share its efficiency plans with Government*", it was confirmed that 2019/20 was the final year of that arrangement;

- Members discussed reserves, noting that whatever the outcome of the judicial review, both the police and fire services would continue as two separate and distinct organisations;
- Members noted that the final version of the MTFS would go to Policy & Resources Committee in December, before being presented to the February Fire Authority meeting;
- a Member asked for sight of the Efficiency Plan, referenced in the document. It was noted that this was available on the Fire Service's website at [http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/Efficiency\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/Efficiency_Plan.pdf) ;
- a Member thanked Officers involved in the MTFS, and commented that it was a pleasure to read the Fire Authority's financial plans. Other Members agreed that the fire service had always been very good at financial management.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the draft position regarding the MTFS 2019 to 2024, attached at Appendix A to the report.

## **66. RESOURCING FOR SPATE CONDITIONS**

Members considered a report advising on the Service's response to the spate conditions in the summer of 2018 and the associated impact on resourcing and financing. 'Spate conditions' in a fire service context refers to prolonged periods of extreme weather that can place an exceptionally high level of demand on operational resources. Members had expressed a great deal of interest in this issue and the impact on the Service. The key concern would always be if the number of calls coming in to Combined Control began to outstrip the resources available.

Members noted the breakdown of figures for the spate period as set out in the report, and some updated figures which were tabled, showing the whole of the summer period. The majority of fires were open and field fires, and because these types of fire tend to spread quickly and over large area, they were very resource intensive.

The report sets out the actions taken to manage the spate conditions, including an increase in the number of fire appliances usually available. The Service also operated a "recall to duty" policy in these conditions. At the beginning of August, demand outstripped resources available, but once the spate conditions protocol had been put in place, resources could match demand, mainly due to the willingness and flexibility of staff. The additional cost to the Service was around £70,000, due mainly to the mobilisation of On-Call staff. The report set out some of the learning and areas for improvement resulting from the spate conditions.

Arising from the report:

- a Member noted that on 26/07/18, 24 appliances were required to meet demand, and 24 appliances had been delivered as a result of the Spate Protocol: he asked what would have happened if an additional appliance had been required? Officers confirmed that there had been considerable joint working with neighbouring fire services, especially Suffolk, and if demand had exceeded Cambridgeshire's

requirements at any time, appliances from neighbouring services could have been brought in;

- a Member observed that the flexibility and goodwill of staff could not be relied on for extended periods, and spate conditions were likely to occur more frequently;
- a Member commented that it was regrettable that there were costs associated with the spate conditions, and questioned whether there was any kind of national recognition of challenges faced by fire services, e.g. grants? It was also noted that many fires were in crop fields, which were insured to a greater or lesser extent. A Member asked if landowners could be encouraged to claim through their insurance companies and reimburse the fire service. Officers advised that the fire service had a statutory duty to attend fires, and could not claim reimbursement. The Service did work with the NFU to encourage farmers to maintain and check their equipment, to minimise preventable fires. It was confirmed that the vast majority of fires were accidental;
- it was confirmed that many of the smaller fire stations had been busy dealing with call-outs during the spate conditions. It was also noted that whilst senior officers had been called out to provide support for shortfalls to frontline staff previously e.g. for periods of industrial action, this had not been necessary for this period;
- in response to a Member question, it was confirmed that plans were being worked out through the local resilience forum in terms of contingency arrangements for Brexit in March 2019, including the availability of fuel;
- noting the number of incidents in the spate period, a Member asked how these broke down between urban and rural areas. Officers confirmed there were far more incidents in rural areas, and urban areas had provided support for those incidents: it was very much a Service-wide/regional response;
- a Member noted the acknowledgement in the report that spate conditions were becoming more and more common due to climate change, and asked what plans were in place to address that issue, i.e. what measures could be taken by the Fire Authority that could lessen the impact of climate change in terms of potential fires. Officers confirmed that they were looking at what equipment the Service could benefit from having, and acknowledged that climate change was having an impact, both summer and winter. The Member suggested that there needed to be more collaboration with fire services internationally, to see how fire services around the world were dealing with these challenges;
- in terms of resourcing, Officers explained that Combined Control had worked closely with the Major Incident Command Area (MICA), as this was a very dynamic situation which required close collaboration i.e. physically co-located and electronically compatible to enable information sharing. Suffolk Fire Service had sent a manager over to Cambridgeshire every day during the spate conditions;
- a Member queried if the weather conditions had triggered the Bellwin Scheme, whereby the government offered emergency financial assistance in disaster or emergency conditions. Officers advised that the Bellwin Scheme usually applied in response to a single event, which cost more than 0.5% of the total budget. The Cambridgeshire spate conditions had not reached this level but other fire services,

e.g. the Manchester Moor Fires, may be close to triggering it. Bellwin was a government led policy, and Officers were unaware of any review or challenge to it;

- a Member asked if there had been any occasions where crews had struggled to secure water for appliances. It was confirmed that this was not the case, but in the event of water shortages, the fire service does take priority over the public in terms of access to water. If any such problems were encountered, Members would be kept fully informed.

Fire Authority Members asked for their thanks to be passed on to all staff, for their hard work and commitment during the spare conditions, including operational staff and back office staff who took calls and supported their frontline colleagues.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the contents of the report.

## **67. PROPOSED DATES OF FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS 2019-20**

The Fire Authority considered a schedule of proposed dates for 2019/20.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the schedule of meetings for 2019/20.

## **68. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER BODIES**

Members considered a report on changes to Committees, Outside Organisations and Other Bodies, following a change to membership, with Councillor Lynda Harford replacing Councillor Paul Raynes. The revised schedule is attached at **Appendix 1** to these minutes.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the updated schedule of appointments, as appended.

## **69. REPLACEMENT MOBILISING SYSTEM UPDATE**

Members considered a report on the position with regard to the replacement mobilising system.

Replacement of the system had been approved at the November 2017 Fire Authority meeting. Since that decision, Officers had been working with Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service on the joint procurement of a solution. The technical specific for that solution was nearing completion. Once approved the formal tender process would commence, with an anticipated 'go live' date in 2020.

It was resolved unanimously to note the position with regard to the replacement of the mobilising system.

**70. FIRE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES 26<sup>TH</sup> JULY AND 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2018**

Members noted the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meetings held on 26<sup>th</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

**71. FIRE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES – 24<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2018**

Members noted the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

Chairman