

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 10th February 2023

Time: 2:00-2.45pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: D Dew, I Gardener, B Goodliffe, J Gowing, S Kindersley, M McGuire, E Murphy (Chair), C Rae, K Reynolds, P Slatter, M Smith, S Taylor

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors: A Bond, M Jamil (Vice Chair), D Over and S Warren

Officers present: J Anderson, D Cave, S Ismail, S Smith, C Strickland and M Warren

There was a minute's silence for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Firefighter Barry Martin who tragically lost his life after attending a fire in Edinburgh. The Chair said that the thoughts of Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service were with the family and colleagues of Mr Martin at this sad time.

62. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Councillor Bywater.

There were no declarations of interest.

63. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 3rd November 2022

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 3rd November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

64. Chair's Announcements

Appended.

The Chair's announcements included the recent appointment of County Councillor Doug Dew to the Fire Authority. With the Fire Authority's consent, the Chair agreed to add an item to the end of the agenda to appoint Councillor Dew to various Committees.

Councillor Kindersley advised that at the Cambridgeshire Apprenticeship Awards 2023 earlier in the week, Michael Burrell of CFRS was named as Cambridgeshire Apprentice of the Year. Councillor Kindersley commented that this was a great honour, and Michael was a credit to himself and the Service as a whole. Members of the Fire Authority passed on their congratulations to Michael.

65. Fire Authority Budget 2023-24 and Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023-24

Members considered a report which presented the Fire Authority budget and precept for 2023-24, and the Treasury Management Statement for the same period. The budget had been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in December 2022, and then to both Overview and Scrutiny and Policy and Resources Committees in January 2023. Both Committees had endorsed the proposed budget and the associated precept increase, with no changes suggested.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had recently suspended strike action nationally whilst an improved pay awards of 7% (2022-23) and 5% (2023-24) were being considered by the FBU membership. However, as those 7% and 5% increases were beyond what had been identified for pay increases in the Budget presented.

At the recent Policy and Resources Committee, Reserves had been discussed, and Members had been made aware that if Reserves were required for other purposes, any planned service improvements would need to be curtailed. This was likely to be the case if the 7% and 5% pay increases went ahead. Whilst not problematic in the short term, this was potentially an issue going forward, if investments were required in the Service. If that transpired, Business Continuity planning would need to be reviewed.

The Treasury Management Statement set out the borrowing and investments required to ensure good cashflow. This needed to stay quite flexible, as currently the rate of return available on investments was around 4-5% annually, whereas inflation was higher, so there were currently diminishing returns to investments. As a result there was a preference to using cash rather than keeping money on deposit. This may change as the wider economic situation changes.

In response to a query about the new Holmatro rescue equipment, it was confirmed that the cost was £27K per set, which was an increase to previous kit costs, but these were battery operated.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the current negotiations between the National Joint Council and FBU National Executive. Along with the Chair, he had attended the most recent consultation meeting. The view expressed by the Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Finance Committee was that the significant majority of Fire and Rescue Services could not afford more than the original 5% and 4% pay awards proposed, and there was surprise when the 7% and 5% increases had been put forward. Given that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were experiencing considerable population growth, this would constrain resources. Discussions would need to take place with the relevant government department about how these pay awards would impact on next year's grant settlements, and the precept ceiling going forward.

A Member queried the various Reserves referred to in the budget book. It was noted that the Operational Firefighter Reserve was the amount set aside to smooth out peaks and troughs, so that the right level of establishment of firefighters could be managed. The Finance Business Continuity Reserve of £1M, from revenue savings in 2021/22, had specifically been set aside for the pay award, and this would almost certainly be spent. It was confirmed that this was enough to fund the 7% pay award for the current year if this was agreed. In terms of 2023-24, there would be a knock-on effect of £460K of the 2022-23 pay award, and this was the gap that needed to be filled. In conclusion,

there was currently sufficient funding in General Reserves to fund the pay rise for one year, but this left little flexibility elsewhere.

A Member observed that December's Policy and Resources Committee had been happy to support the balanced budget and associated precept presented to that meeting, which was effectively for one year only because of the change in the precept allowance. However, concerns had been expressed at that meeting regarding inflation. Officers had given reassurance that there was some "rainy day" money if "Plan B" needed to be progressed. It now appeared that most of that contingency would be used on the increased pay award, and the Member asked if there was a "Plan C"? Officers confirmed that this would be through the Business Continuity planning, to identify where savings could be made in the worst case. Any such changes would be brought back to Members for agreement.

In terms of consultation, it was noted that a number of news releases had been published, and the public had been asked for their comments. Senior officers had participated in interviews, all of which had been positively received, albeit with little public feedback.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. approve the budget book attached at Appendix 1 and endorse the recommendations detailed on Page 17 within it:

- (i) that approval is given to a Fire Authority budget (as detailed in Appendix 1) to the requirement of £33,671,520;
- (ii) that approval is given to a recommended Fire Authority precept for Tax from District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority of £24,136,692;
- (iii) that approval be given to an Authority Tax for each band of property, based on the number of Band D equivalent properties notified to the Fire Authority by the District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority (302,011):

| Band | 2022/23 | Authority Tax | 2023/24 | Band | 2022/23 | Authority Tax | 2023/24 |
|------|---------|---------------|---------|------|---------|---------------|---------|
| A | £49.98 | +£3.30 | £53.28 | E | £91.63 | +£6.05 | £97.68 |
| B | £58.31 | +£3.85 | £62.16 | F | £108.29 | +£7.15 | £115.44 |
| C | £66.64 | +£4.40 | £71.04 | G | £124.95 | +£8.25 | £133.20 |
| D | £74.97 | +£4.95 | £79.92 | H | £149.94 | +£9.90 | £159.84 |

- (iv) that approval is given to the Capital Programme detailed in Appendix 2;
- (v) approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement at Appendix 2.

66. Draft Pay Policy Statement 2023-24

Members considered a report on the Pay Policy Statement for 2023-24, in line with the duty under the Localism Act 2011 for Fire Authorities to produce Pay Policy Statements.

In addition to meeting the relevant legal requirements, the Statement clearly set out the Authority's position, and highlighted the comparison between its remuneration for Principal Officers, compared to the lowest paid and median employees.

A Member noted that the highest paid member of staff received £153,828 per annum, compared to the lowest paid who received £20,258 (full time equivalent) per annum. She asked how many employees were paid £20,258 pa? It was agreed that this information would be circulated to Members. Action required: Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

It was resolved unanimously to:

approve the draft Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 1.

67. P126 Project – Update on relocation of Huntingdon Fire Station and Service Training Centre

Members were updated on the work undertaken by CFRS in relation to the relocation of Huntingdon Fire Station and Service Training Centre to St John's, Percy Road, Huntingdon.

Most Fire Authority Members had undertaken a visit to the new Fire Station and Training Centre that morning. The Service was very proud of what had been achieved at the new site, and the facilities had received a lot of positive feedback, both within and outside of the Service. Special mention was made of those staff involved in the project, especially Jodie Housego, Simon Thompson and Stocker Standen.

Members were advised that the build had taken place throughout 2021 and 2022. Both of the main contractors, Artisan and Crofton Engineering, had worked very diligently and kept to schedule in a period that saw unprecedented impacts from the pandemic, and adverse economic conditions including a global market collapse in the availability of raw materials, such as steel, fuelled by the war in Ukraine. Members were reminded of other challenges during the project, such as the archaeological survey discovering a Roman settlement, and issues with the upgrade required to the sprinkler system.

The total spend for the training facilities came in over budget by £114,726, mainly due to increased costs of build materials, particularly steel, as well as fabrication cost increases. Crofton Engineering had been proactive in purchasing as much as they could physically store in advance of price increases.

It was noted that the project would be independently assessed.

A number of Members spoke very favourably on the project, having visited the site, and said they had been impressed with presentations from key staff involved, and the way in which staff had expertly dealt with their queries. A Member commented that Artisan coming in on time and on budget for such a public sector project was particularly noteworthy, especially given the protracted timescales of the project initially. Another Member commented that it was pleasing to see credit deservedly being given to the project manager, Jodie Housego.

It was noted that the new centre had received recognition nationally, and a number of other Fire Services were very interested in the facilities. Whilst the Service's own operational staff were the priority in terms of training, there may be some scope to involve other organisations.

Officers advised that the contractor Crofton Engineering had been very impressed with Stocker Standen's commitment and attention to detail in his contributions to the design of the Training Centre. Tribute was also paid by the Chair, Members and senior Officers, to Councillor Reynolds, who had played a huge role in championing this project despite considerable challenges and setbacks. It was noted that staff were very pleased with the new facilities, and were also very appreciative of Fire Authority Members' support in realising this project.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that an additional site visit could be arranged for those Members who had been unable to join the 10th February visit.

Action required: Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the report.

68. Appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel

Members considered a report on the proposed process for the appointment of an independent remuneration panel (IRP) to review the Fire Authority's scheme of allowances.

The Fire Authority was required to review the scheme of allowances every four years. This had previously been done by asking Cambridgeshire County Council to consider Fire Authority requirements as part of its own review cycle. At their meeting in February 2022, Fire Authority Members had agreed to receive a report from the Monitoring Officer on the options and costs of a separate IRP, or other mechanism, to determine future allowances.

The costed proposal presented would involve a panel of three independent individuals forming a panel, led by Mark Palmer. Mr Palmer had experience in this area of work and had worked successfully with both primary authorities locally, and several other fire and rescue services, and could draw on a small pool of individuals who had similar experience. Together they would conduct the review, based on the specific duties required of the Fire Authority's Members, and benchmark against other Fire Authorities and the wider sector.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. agree the appointment of an IRP to review the scheme of allowances and note the associated costs;
2. extend the current Members' Allowances Scheme until the outcome(s) of the IRP are known and agreed.

69. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 19th January 2023

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 19th January were noted.

70. Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 20th December 2022

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 20th December 2022 were noted.

71. Appointments to Committees

With the agreement of Members, the Chair had agreed an urgent item to appoint Councillor Doug Dew to the following Committees:

- Substantive Member of the Policy and Resources Committee
- Substitute Member of the Performance Review Committee
- Substitute Member of the Fire Authority Appeals Committee

It was resolved unanimously to appoint Councillor Dew to the above Committees.

New Fire Authority Member Councillor Doug Dew - I would like to extend a special welcome to Councillor Doug Dew, who was appointed to the Fire Authority at Tuesday's full County Council meeting. Councillor Dew replaces Councillor Atkins, and I would like to also thank Councillor Atkins for his time on the Authority. Given that the appointment was only made on Tuesday, the appointments to Committee item was not added to the agenda, so with the consent of the authority, I propose to deal with this as an urgent item at the end of the meeting. Are Members in agreement with this proposal?

St John's Business Park – Member Site Visit

I hope those Members that were able to visit the site at St John's this morning were impressed by the new facility from which operational crews started to respond from on 1 February 2023. We have an agenda item on the project today which provides an overall update but I understand from the Chief Fire Officer that there will be an official opening ceremony soon to mark this monumental achievement.

Fire Authority Budget 2023/24

It seems that the budget and future finances have been the dominating subjects for many months and today, Members will be asked to approve the budget for 2023/24.

Our lobbying of local MP's and other influential stakeholders on the key challenges facing the Service seems to have had the desired impact. The final government financial statement, received in December 2022, confirmed that we will receive sufficient funds to offset this year's deficit and if the economic situation improves, we will be in a good place to deal with any inflationary pressures we face next financial year. This means that the Authority will not now need to implement the Financial Business Continuity Plan (FBCP) and Officers can get back to focusing on improving the services they provide to our communities.

That said, Officers remain acutely aware of the need to progress our efficiency planning as we won't necessarily have spare cash to invest in areas where we can improve our services further. Therefore if things can be done more efficiently for less, then we still need to drive through those changes. At least we remain in control and what we do is done by choice and not because the Authority is having its hands forced by budget pressures. The Service will also have to keep an eye on future years as funding for 2024/25 and beyond is still uncertain with several factors still to play out that could significantly impact our budget.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that the preparation of the FBCP was a tough piece of work for those involved (but we do feel our publicly expressed concerns about funding have been listened to) and as such I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed. The work will stand us in good stead moving forward; Officers will continue to review these plans each year in line with normal business continuity planning and update the Authority as appropriate.

Fire and Rescue Service Culture in the Media

I'm sure many of you will have seen the reports in the media highlighting the review of **London Fire Brigade** (LFB) and the conclusions following the year-long cultural investigation and more

recently the nationally reported appalling behaviour and harassment suffered by women firefighters in **Dorset and Wiltshire**.

The LFB [report](#) is a shocking and extremely difficult report to read for anyone in the sector and many I know struggle to comprehend that such extreme behaviour still exists in the modern day fire and rescue service. The review clearly shows that fire and rescue services are at different stages of their cultural journey. At CFRS a lot of emphasis has been put on our values and one team behaviours over the last couple of decades; they underpin everything the Service does as it strives to be a place where everyone feels welcome for who they are and can be themselves at work.

Many people comment on how different it feels here and that is because our people are supportive, welcoming and care about their community and each other. The feedback we receive from colleagues suggests this is the case and this was also reflected in the feedback the HMICFRS received. However if anyone doesn't think that's where we are and that they are being subjected to bullying or offensive behaviour or that they are witnessing negative behaviour towards others, then please come forward and as the Chair of this Authority I assure you the matter will be investigated and you will have my support every step of the way.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

In December we received notification of the dates for our next HMICFRS inspection. We are again one of the first two fire and rescue services to be inspected and this comes even earlier than we were anticipating. The process began in January with the document return, self-assessment and staff survey; the inspection team are due to visit from the third week of February.

This has meant that Officers weren't given much time to prepare but I know that we have continued to improve since our last inspection and that we have a good story to tell. The challenge has been to consolidate everything we have done into a concise self-assessment, focusing on improvements in the areas the inspectorate team are particularly interested in.

Of note, there are some changes to the inspection scoring this time with a new category of 'Adequate' being added. As we were awarded 'Good' across the board in all but one of the 11 categories last time, our challenge will be to demonstrate we still belong in 'Good'.

Often the news of the HMICFRS coming in brings nervousness or the thought of the extra work brings a groan or two, but this really is an opportunity to demonstrate all the fantastic work everyone has been doing and the improvements the organisation continues to make despite everything else coming in to challenge us. I have every confidence what is said will be well received.

LGBTQIA+ History Month

The month of February is LGBTQIA+ History Month and provides a great opportunity for colleagues to learn and to show their support to an under-represented group, recognising how far the Service has come and what can be done to improve.

The issues relating to the World Cup being hosted in Qatar, the media coverage around pronouns and the recent controversy surrounding the Gender Recognition Bill only confirm we

still have much to learn. The theme of this year's LGBT+ History Month is "Behind the Lens" which celebrates LGBT+ people's contribution to cinema and film from behind the lens. Throughout the month CFRS will be promoting various films and series that have strong LGBTQIA+ themes running throughout, for example, the superb 'It's A Sin'. There will be many other opportunities for learning and sharing and I was particularly delighted to hear that some of our employees from the LGBT+ community have expressed an interest in telling their story. It is an important marker for us as an Authority that people feel we provide a safe space for them to bring their whole selves to our workplace.

Officers are also in the process of developing a bespoke CFRS Pride helmet for use at the various community functions we attend; I look forward to seeing what is created!