

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 15th February 2024

Time: 3:22-4.23pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

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

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors: A Bond, W Fitzgerald, M Jamil (Vice Chair) and S Warren

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

102. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence, or declarations of interest.

103. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 20th December 2023 and Action Log

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 20th December 2023 were agreed as a correct record. The Action Log was noted.

104. Chair's Announcements

See Appendix 1 to these minutes.

The Chair spoke warmly about the valuable service of Councillor McGuire, who had sadly passed away in December. The Fire Authority observed a minute's silence to mark his passing.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Fitzgerald, who had replaced Cllr Over. The Chair thanked Cllr Over for his work for the Fire Authority over the years.

105. Fire Authority Budget 2024-25 and Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024-25

The Fire Authority considered a report on its budget requirement and precept for 2024/25 Council Tax. The budget had been considered at a Policy and Resources Committee meeting in January, and had been endorsed by that Committee. The proposed budget was based on a precept increase of 2.9%, with the increase predominantly relating to salaries. Notification had been received in January,

confirming Section 31 income totalling approximately £1.5M. However, it was stressed that this should be regarded as a one-off receipt, and it would not be included in the baseline budget going forward. The main budgetary risk was around pay, with the pay settlement not being negotiated until the summer. The level of Reserves should be sufficient to maintain services in the 2024/25 financial year.

In response to a Member request, officers explained how Reserves would be utilised for one-off projects, such as the upgrade of St Neots Fire Station, enhancing the Service without putting a burden on the long-term financial situation.

A number of Members praised officers, acknowledging that they had put an incredible amount of work into the preparation of the budget for these essential services. The Chair agreed, and thanked officers on behalf of the Fire Authority for keeping Members updated and for the extensive consultation.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a. approve the budget book attached at Appendix 1, including the following recommendations:
 - i. approve a Fire Authority budget (as detailed in Appendix 1) to the requirement of £35,591,539;
 - ii. approve a recommended Fire Authority precept for Tax from District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority of £25,242,649;
 - iii. approve 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 (306,864):

Band	2023/24	Authority Tax	2024/25	Band	2023/24	Authority Tax	2024/25
A	£53.28	+£1.56	£54.84	E	£97.68	+£2.86	£100.54
B	£62.16	+£1.82	£63.98	F	£115.44	+£3.38	£118.82
C	£71.04	+£2.08	£73.12	G	£133.20	+£3.90	£137.10
D	£79.92	+£2.34	£82.26	H	£159.84	+£4.68	£164.52

- iv. approve the Capital Programme detailed in Appendix 2.

- b. approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement at Appendix 2.

106. Community Risk Management Plan 2024 to 2029

The Fire Authority received a report which provided an overview of the consultation feedback for the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2024-29, along with the final version of the document, for approval for publication. The CRMP was effectively the strategic plan for the next five years, setting out how risks and opportunities had been identified. The current CRMP was due to expire at the end of March 2024.

Members were reminded how the CRMP had been developed, and that they had approved the draft version for consultation at the last Fire Authority meeting. There had been 22 internal and 42 external responses to that consultation, which had closed on 31/01/24. Those responses had been reviewed and changes made where appropriate. The main points raised in the consultation were that the CRMP was easy to read and understand; it included all significant risks for Cambridgeshire, and it included appropriate actions to address the identified risks and opportunities. It was noted that most comments received were around clarity and language, and how issues were defined. No substantive points had been raised around risks or actions to mitigate those risks.

Arising from the report, a Member thanked officers for the work in developing the CRMP and dealing with the consultation responses. He welcomed the inclusion of Climate Change concern, as this impacted significantly on both the frequency and severity of events that the Fire Service deals with. He also observed that there had been a lot of discussion in the report on the growth in population and its implications. He noted the announcement made by Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in relation to the Cambridge 2040 plan for an additional 250,000 homes across the region. As such rapid development was not alluded to in the CRMP, he suggested that preparing for such population growth may be best dealt with through a review by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Officers confirmed that they were aware of the announcement, but without detail e.g. exactly where the homes would be, or what funding would be available to mitigate risks, it was very difficult to prepare or respond.

It was resolved unanimously to:

approve, for publication, the Community Risk Management Plan for 2024 to 2029 attached at Appendix 1.

107. Review of Service Headquarters Use (Project P143)

The Fire Authority considered a report on the review being undertaken in relation to Service Headquarters (SHQ).

Service Headquarters was the Service's oldest building, and it was expensive to maintain, being the least sustainable building in the property portfolio, with the highest level of emissions. It was also used much less frequently than in the past. A review was currently taking place to assess options for the Service's future headquarters requirements, and further updates would be provided in due course.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the content of the report.

108. Report on the use of Lithium-ion Batteries and response by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

Members considered a report on the rising use of lithium-ion batteries, and specifically their use in increasingly popular micro mobility items such as e-scooters and e-bikes. The report set out the issues presented by these items in terms of fire risk.

The primary risk associated with lithium-ion batteries used in micro mobility products was thermal runaway. This resulted when a battery cell overheats and burns at extreme temperatures, without the need for oxygen or other ignition sources to sustain it. Whilst there was limited data nationally on the number of lithium-ion fires, London Fire Brigade had reported a 60% increase in the number of related fires, year on year. In Cambridgeshire, the most significant incident had tragically resulted in three fatalities.

A risk mitigation had been identified in the CRMP Action Plan, involving educational safety activity, and training was being provided to all operational staff on the risks and tactics for firefighting where lithium-ion batteries were involved. Nationally, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) had seconded an officer to lead the work around emerging technologies across the workstreams of prevention, protection and operations

A Member observed that the more traditional mobility scooters ran on these type of batteries, and that there may be a temptation to undertake quick fixes. She asked if the right sort of advice available for the users of mobility scooters? Officers agreed there were similar issues, with the same sort of chargers and batteries. However, the report focused on *emerging* risks, whereas mobility scooters had been around for many years. It was noted that the places where fires were occurring was changing, and that people of all ages and demographics were using micro mobility devices.

A Member asked whether the devices themselves or the batteries were the main cause of fires and thermal runaway? Officers confirmed that the main cause was off the market chargers, which were either substandard or not designed for that kind of product, and there was a lack of regulation around these products. Additionally, some people were undertaking DIY repairs.

A Member expressed concern around the lack of a national data due to the absence of an incident reporting system, which needed to be addressed. Officers confirmed that the data was currently not being captured, and the NFCC was trying to address this nationally. It was agreed that a letter from the Fire Authority would be helpful. It was agreed that a letter signed by the Fire Authority would be helpful, and it was also suggested that Members could explain the situation to their local MPs.

A Member suggested that there should be strong engagement with Peterborough landlords, given that these type of mobility devices were best suited to cities such as Peterborough and Cambridge. Officers agreed to check and action this if necessary.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the content of the report.

109. Financial Business Continuity Planning

Members considered an update on the Service's business continuity arrangements with regard to financial planning. It was important for a plan to be in place that would enable the organisation to downsize, if required, in a measured way, maintaining the best possible service for communities .

Financial business continuity planning has been conducted for the financial year 2024/25. This has identified that there are minimal savings to be taken at Impact 1 and 2. These would equate to £24K of Impact 1 savings and £62K of Impact 2 savings that could be taken over the next two years. If the Service experienced any further

reductions to its budget, in real terms, aspects of the Financial Business Continuity Plan would need to be implemented.

The decision of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service to withdraw from the Control Centre collaboration would have a significant financial impact on CFRS's ability to support and deliver core services.

Arising from the report:

- a Member asked what the budget gap was created as a result of Suffolk's departure. Officers confirmed that this would be a minimum of £700,000, and this would result in significant levels of reduction in the organisation. There was still some uncertainty around Suffolk's position, and it was hoped that they would reconsider their decision, given the good service delivered to them since 2010. Whilst the Command and Control system was changing, business continuity would be maintained and provided, and a very good service would continue to be provided. The Chair would be writing to Suffolk, highlighting the benefits of the collaborative arrangements, with a view to reopening those discussions. The rationale behind Suffolk's decision remained unclear. It was confirmed that there had been discussions with other Fire Services about potential collaborations, but no interest had been secured to date.
- In response to a Member question on risks, it was confirmed that Fire and Rescue Services' funding settlements were agreed annually, i.e. there was no security of funding going forward. A further risk was that the budget was agreed months before the staff pay increases were negotiated.
- A Member noted that the financial impact of the withdrawal of Suffolk was a *minimum* of £700k, but it could be as costly as £1.2M. It was confirmed that the impact level would be between Level 3 and 5, but Level 6 (inability to meet statutory responsibilities) was not anticipated. The Member commented that the Service needed to be explicit around that risk, and it was noted that Suffolk had set a timescale of withdrawal by December 2024, and the financial impact of that withdrawal would be felt shortly after. Any length of notice period after December would need to be negotiated.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the work completed and status of the financial business continuity plans.

110. Safeguarding Update

Members considered an update on the safeguarding arrangements within Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS).

CFRS carried out its first safeguarding self-assessments against the nine different protected characteristics in February 2022, resulting in 6 subsections being rated Red, 38 Amber and 17 Green. Since that initial assessment, there had been significant improvements. The current position was 2 Red, 20 Amber and 40 Green. It was noted that in July 2023 there had been a change of legislation to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (England & Wales) Order 2023, enabling fire and rescue authority employers to require a minimum of a standard DBS check for all employees. This change has been embraced and DBS checks have been rolled out for

all staff, focusing first on firefighters and public-facing staff. DBS checks were also automatically being taken up for all new entrants to the Fire Service.

A new e-learning sector-specific training package has been made available, and was mandatory training for all staff and volunteers, covering areas such as Domestic Abuse, Hoarding and Modern Slavery.

Arising from the report:

- It was confirmed that culture was a key part of the audit with regard to safeguarding;
- Members welcomed the progress made, as indicated by the improvements in the “RAG” indicators;
- Members noted how the reporting system worked when there was a safeguarding issue, and how this fed into national Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, with oversight by key individuals within the Service, including the Head of People, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Head of Safeguarding;
- A Member advised that the County Council now regarded *Experience of Care* as a protected characteristic.

It was resolved unanimously to note the contents of this report and in particular the progress to date and continued commitment to working towards a safeguarding culture and good practice throughout the organisation.

111. Dates of Fire Authority Meetings 2024-25

It was resolved unanimously to agree the schedule of meetings for 2024/25.

112. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies

Members considered an updated appointments schedule.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the updated schedule of appointments, as appended.

Chair

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS – THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2024

At the start of this meeting I would like to mark the sad passing of our colleague **Cllr Mac McGuire** who served the Fire Authority with distinction for many years. Many of us attended his funeral and more recently this week were able to witness him posthumously receiving the accolade of Honorary Alderman. We will miss him. For now let us mark his passing with a minute's silence.

I must also be the bearer of other sad news, the passing of Chief Fire Officer for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, **Wayne Brown**, who died at the end of January. Our own Chief Fire Officer has sent a letter to West Midlands to pass on the condolences of everyone here and let them know they are in our thoughts. I understand that Wayne was an inspirational leader and a great champion of inclusion and as such his loss will be felt hard across the wider fire and rescue service family. I have included a link to the book of condolence should anyone wish to send their individual condolences.

[Wayne Brown - West Midlands Fire Service \(wmfs.net\)](https://www.wmfs.net)

I would also like to welcome **Councillor Fitzgerald** who was appointed to the Authority following full Council at Peterborough last month. Cllr Fitzgerald takes the position previously held by Councillor David Over who has given a combined total of 15 years' service to the Authority and we thank him for his contributions.

Members will know that Chris Strickland has announced his plans to retire from the Service later this year. There is a lot we could say but let us save that for another opportunity when we can properly highlight and celebrate Chris' many achievements in the Service over 41 years, during which he has served with distinction. For now it is obvious that he will be a tough act to follow and we will need to turn our attention to recruiting his successor – of which more details will be forthcoming soon.

MEMBER SEMINAR

May I also thank those Members that were able to, for giving up their time to attend the very informative seminar this morning on our On-Call service. It is imperative that we all understand it fully. For those not able to attend this morning there is another seminar scheduled for 6 March 2024.

LGBT+ HISTORY MONTH

As we are in February, we turn our minds towards LGBT+ History Month. Like other years, the month carries a specific theme throughout and this year the focus is medicine, **#UnderTheScope**, celebrating LGBT+ peoples' contribution to the field of medicine and healthcare both historically and today.

As an organisation, we are members of the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI). This membership opens the door to a plethora of resources and I encourage everyone to visit enei.org.uk or lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk.

As always, we will be supporting the month by flying the LGBT+ progress flag at SHQ and new for 2024, a small number of badges any colleagues can opt to wear to show support for the LGBT+ community will be available, free of charge via the BSG ServiceDesk SHQReception@cambsfire.gov.uk

Finally, the Service are considering the creation of an LGBT+ network for colleagues. If any Councillor would like to take part, please make yourself known at any time to ACFO Anderson.

Date for your diary – Cambridge Pride is returning to Jesus Green in the city centre on Saturday 15 June 2024; the event is in the early planning stages and updates can be found on cambridgepride.co.uk.

Enjoy the month, access the resources and we hope you learn something you previously didn't know regarding the LGBT+ community.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The mental health and wellbeing of everyone in our organisation is of paramount importance and the Service has further demonstrated its commitment to the wellbeing of staff by signing the **Dying to Work Charter**. The campaign, organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), is pressing for additional employment protection for terminally ill workers who may require time off, often many months, to get treatment or recover. Guidance has been produced by the TUC and others to deal with cases of long-term illness or return to work for those who are disabled as a result of an illness or injury. The Service does its best to offer a wide variety of support for its colleagues and their families and has signed the Charter to show how it will continue to support colleagues should they have the tragic diagnosis of a terminal illness.

COLLABORATIVE NEW ROLE – COMMUNITY WELLBEING OFFICER

I wanted to take this opportunity to let you all know about a new role within Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The **Community Wellbeing Officer** (CWO) role is a collaboration between the Service and the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST), with a primary aim to deliver a blend of response, preventative and protective intervention.

The trial role will be completely funded by EEAST, with no cost to the Service, for an initial 12 months. Two Community Wellbeing Officers, Megan Cantwell (Business Support Group) and Joshua Berrisford (Peterborough Volunteer Firefighter) have completed their three-week training course with EEAST, along with training from the community safety team, to be able to also carry out preventative work.

They will respond to calls via EEAST dispatch, while simultaneously identifying any preventive and protective needs of each patient attended. They will also attend Category 1 life threatening calls if they are the closest resource available. When not carrying out this vital work they will be completing safe and well visits to help reach the most vulnerable people in our communities.

By working and responding together, EEAST and the Service will save lives, enhance patient experiences and subsequently improve community welfare. This is yet another example of our continued commitment to collaborative blue light working and we wish Megan and Joshua all the best in their new role.

COMBINED FIRE CONTROL

Although we do not have a substantive agenda item today relating to our Combined Fire Control and no further status update from Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, as promised under Minute 93 of our last meeting on 20 December 2023, I am pleased to report that we are aiming to start the transition process to go live by March 2024. Once we are assured that the new system is ready, we will begin the process of transition, but we won't move over until we are certain our staff are confident in using the new system.