

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 3rd November 2022

Time: 2:00-4.25pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: M Atkins, S Bywater, I Gardener, B Goodliffe, J Gowing, S Kindersley, M McGuire, E Murphy (Chair), K Reynolds, P Slatter, M Smith and S Taylor

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors: M Jamil (Vice Chair) and S Warren

Officers present: J Anderson, D Cave, C Doody (items 47-52), S Ismail, C Strickland and M Warren

47. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Councillors Bond, Over and Rae.

There were no declarations of interest.

48. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 16th June 2022

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 16th June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

49. Chair's announcements

Appended.

The Vice-Chair paid tribute to former County Councillor Ralph Butcher, who had sadly passed away recently. Councillor Butcher had served as an active and valued Fire Authority Member who always acted in the best interest of the Fire Service. The Vice-Chair passed on condolences to Councillor Butcher's family and gave thanks for his years of service. All present observed a minute's silence.

50. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report 2021-22

Members considered a report which set out progress with equality, diversity and inclusion issues in the year 2021/22, including the gender pay gap as at March 2022. The purpose of the annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report was to ensure the Authority met the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2011 and 2017. The period covered by the report (April

2021-March 2022) was during the coronavirus pandemic, which was a time where the Service was working with restrictions, and community activity specifically was reduced, as activities were adapted to comply with those restrictions.

A number of points were drawn to Members' attention, including:

- CFRS had one of the highest number of female employees compared to peer services, and this continued to grow in all areas of the organisation, especially operational and On-Call roles, and compared very well with the national benchmark. No female colleagues who were on or had been on maternity leave during the period covered had left the Service;
- The menopause working group continued to be a fantastic success, and the group had developed a menopause risk assessment, and raised awareness through various channels, including welcoming external speakers;
- Recruitment improvements focused on meeting a commitment to the "Disability Confident" scheme, which aimed to encourage and keep disabled people in work;
- A new governance framework for EQIAs (Equality Impact Assessments) had been developed, and 85 employees trained, including managers and the Chief Officers Advisory Group;
- Census data, once available, would be used to improve engagement by accurately informing on diversity within the Service's communities;
- A face to face interactive discussion-based session had been developed on "An Introduction to Inclusion", which would be rolled out to every team. This covered the inclusion plan, unconscious bias, inclusive language, protected characteristics and organisational values;
- The recruitment process across all areas continued to evolve amidst the cost-of-living crisis and the 'Great Resignation', showcasing the Service as an employer of choice.

Members commented favourably on the report generally, and raised the following issues:

- noting the reference to exploring topics such as menopause with local community groups, a Member commented that she was working on this issue with Huntingdonshire District Council, and she would welcome the opportunity to work alongside the Service on these issues;
- it was confirmed that both Equality and Inclusion Champions, Councillors Smith and Jamil, had had opportunity to input into the Report;
- commented favourably on the Firebreak scheme, observing that many young people benefitted from attendance, and that it was a considerable time commitment from the firefighters involved;

- asked about the Officer employed at Peterborough to focus on diversity. It was confirmed that the original Positive Action Officer had left the Service but had been replaced;
- asked about the “Great Resignation” and whether this would have had a knock on impact on the gender pay gap. Officers advised that it was too early to tell but they would continue to monitor this.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the content of the report, attached at Appendix 1, or request any changes as deemed necessary. Once content is approved, the final design work and incorporation of appropriate images will be undertaken before publication.

51. Fire Authority Annual Report and Statement of Assurance 2021/22

Members of the Fire Authority considered the draft Annual Report and Statement of Assurance for 2021/22.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer highlighted that the report covered the period as the country emerged from the second COVID-19 lockdown and there were still many COVID-19 precautions, and also the second Inspection by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), both of which presented challenges.

The format of the report had changed slightly, and the graphs, photos and charts would be included in the final version. All of the performance data within the document had been included in previous reports to the Fire Authority. The audit information was draft only, as final information would not be available until 2023.

Members made the following comments:

- thanked Officers for the very detailed report, which was a great summary of the work undertaken by the Service, and praised the changed format;
- noted Group Commander Simon Thompson’s impressive completion of 44,597 press-ups for the Fire Fighters Charity;
- paid tribute to the Monitoring Officer and those involved in the work around the possible transfer of governance to the Police and Crime Commissioner;
- agreed that if the external audit had not been completed by the time of publication, it was acceptable to use the draft audit results in the public facing document, noting that the figures were not the final figures;
- commented favourably on the detail of the report, noting that where equipment had been upgraded, old equipment had been put to good use e.g. donated to medics in Ukraine;
- sought clarification on the bottom line variances, specifically the additional funding received from government grants. It was confirmed that these were

predominantly COVID-19 grants, and also increased collection of Business Rates.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the draft Annual Report and Statement of Assurance 2021/22, attached at Appendix 1, subject to the additions highlighted in Paragraph 4.4 of the report.

52. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service – Financial Business Continuity Plan

Members considered the outline service financial business continuity plans approach to managing business continuity with regards to financial planning.

The Chief Fire Officer advised how the current financial situation facing the fire service was the most difficult he had experienced in his 39 years with the Service. Reductions of over £7M had been overseen in recent years, without closing any fire stations and whilst continuing to improve the quality of services provided. However, given how lean the Service now was, the economic situation now being faced was even more challenging. He drew attention to the following points:

- Government grant had reduced from £16M in 2010 to £9M currently. 64% of the Service's budget came from Council Tax;
- Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service had seen grant funding reduce by £7M but experienced a real term budget reduction of over £8M;
- Cambridgeshire was judged to be a Good service by HMICFRS and was high performing despite its relatively low income;
- How the current and emerging economic situation was providing further challenges, especially inflation. Last year's budget had been based on a 2% estimate of inflation;
- Reserves were less than some other fire services;
- Council Tax increases in excess of 2% were only permitted following agreement by a referendum. The only comparable referendum that had been held in recent years, seeking a level of increase above 2% was Bedfordshire Police, which had been rejected by the public and had cost that service £600,000;
- Stressed that the £1.1M was the deficit for one year only. The Chair and Chief Fire Officer had been very clear when then had participated in discussions with the NJC in London that the Service could not afford more than 2% as an increase in pay across the organisation. Without precept flexibility, a 5% increase in inflation next financial year would increase the deficit to £2.5M. Discussions were taking place with the relevant government departments to see if it would be feasible to increase the 2% precept level to 10% (£7.50 per year per council tax payer);
- How all managers had been tasked to identify savings and opportunities to downsize whilst maintaining statutory functions across all protection, prevention and response functions. There had been an unfunded 1.5% pay increase last year when

there had been a public sector pay freeze. Most professional support services had been reduced as far as possible without impacting on delivery of service or performance;

- Outlined possible savings options and the different savings options that could be taken from professional support, operational support and operational services, graded by increasing levels of impact;
- Outlined discussions that had taken place with HMICFRS on how reductions in budgets would be factored in when the Inspectorate was reviewing performance. The response had been that the bar would not be lowered but the narrative in the Inspectorate's reports would reflect and recognise the resourcing position.

The Chair welcomed Mark Harriss, a fire service employee and an elected FBU official, who had requested to speak. Mr Harriss commented that he welcomed the Chief Fire Officer's recent statement recognising that the fire service required investment from central government following more than a decade's worth of reductions in funding, and commented that Cambridgeshire was one of the leanest fire services in the UK, and repeated reductions were not sustainable. The cost of living pay awards alluded to in the report suggested pay awards were an either/or situation, which was not the case. A properly funded fire service required fairly paid professional fire fighters and sufficient resources to deal with modern challenges. If a firefighter had joined the Service in 2009, and had received wage increases that were in line with inflation, they would have received an additional £55,000 in total. Almost all firefighters were forced to have second or even third jobs, and some were still forced to use food banks or were at risk of losing their homes. The report sets out five levels of impact, but all proposals put forward would impact on services. Cambridgeshire was a growing county and attendance times were increasing. There had been multiple major incidents over the summer and seasonal extremes were becoming the norm. He asked Fire Authority Members if they would be willing to tell their constituents that they agreed to reduce the number of fire stations and firefighters, and increase the risk of harm in their communities.

Responding to the points raised, the Chief Fire Officer said the comments were fair and mainly accurate, although he offered clarification on a number of the issues raised. He stressed that none of the points raised in the report were considered lightly, and that every effort was being made to preserve not only front line services, but also prevention and protection services too. Whilst agreeing that pay should keep pace with inflation, the Service could only afford pay rises in line with the funding available. CFRS was a well regarded service in a very challenging position, and he welcomed any opportunity to raise awareness on these issues, but the reality was the Service needed to be prepared for any eventuality.

Councillor Reynolds proposed an amendment. Whilst acknowledging the points raised by both the Chief Fire Officer and Mr Harriss, he stressed that there were a lot of unknowns at this stage, including the forthcoming announcement regarding public sector finance by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He felt strongly that there should be no use of Reserves, and any final plan that comes forward should go through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being presented to the Fire Authority for a decision.

He proposed the following amendment to the second recommendation, which sought to clarify the Fire Authority's position and give staff reassurances that every attempt would be made to avoid reductions to operational services:

“note that the Service will immediately commence making savings that do not include compulsory staff redundancies or reduction in the operational arena (staff, premises, equipment).”

The Chief Fire Officer commented that the recommendations reflected that reductions were already being made where possible, as highlighted in the report, but no redundancies would be made without reference to the Fire Authority. Any operational savings needed to be balanced e.g. potential On-Call station closures against other operational priorities. He highlighted the difficulties of the Amendment if it fettered the advice that Chief Officers could provide to Fire Authority Members.

On the point of General Reserves, the Deputy Chief Executive reminded Members that £1M had been earmarked by Fire Authority earlier in the year for this type of event. This did not fetter the financial position of the Authority as the General Reserves would be untouched.

Councillor Kindersley proposed the following amendment:

“Agree that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be summoned to examine the financial situation as it develops on an ad hoc basis, to which all Members of the Fire Authority are invited”.

The Monitoring Officer provided procedural advice on both amendments.

Councillor Reynolds’ amendment was seconded by Councillor McGuire.

The Monitoring Officer recommended the following addition to Councillor Reynolds’ amendment, to make it clear that the Chief Fire Officer’s current delegated powers would not be restricted, and this was agreed by Councillors Reynolds and McGuire: “note that the Service will immediately commence making savings that fall within the Chief Fire Officer’s delegated powers that do not include compulsory staff redundancies, or reductions in the operational areas of staff, premises or equipment.”

In being put to the vote, the amendment fell (seven votes in favour, seven votes against plus the Chair’s casting vote).

Councillor Kindersley proposed the following amendment:

“Agree that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be summoned to examine the financial situation as it develops on an ad hoc basis, to which all Members of the Fire Authority are invited”.

It was agreed that this would not be taken as a formal amendment to the report recommendations, but an agile approach would be taken and Committee dates (either Overview and Scrutiny or Policy and Resources) used to discuss these matters as more information came forward, with all Fire Authority Members invited.

Noting the focus on the coming year, a Member observed that the report covered business continuity over three years, and asked what assumptions were being made about future years, as a longer timeline needed to be scrutinised, and inflation was likely to persist. Officers confirmed they were looking at the medium term situation.

Referring back to the Public Question from Mr Harriss, a Member commented that the Fire Authority would be doing everything it could to avoid making redundancies, and that the ability to raise Council Tax by more than 2% would be central to this, and he suggested that the Conservative Members could use their influence with their MPs to highlight these issues. Another Member commented that when she talked to residents, she was quite prepared to justify any increase in Council Tax represented good value for money.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note the content of the report and that Officers will bring further detailed information back to Members when clarity over the next financial years' funding situation becomes clear;
2. note that the Service will immediately commence making savings that do not include compulsory staff redundancies.

53. Appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel

It was agreed that this item be deferred to a future meeting.

54. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report

The Fire Authority considered an update on revenue and capital spending as at 30 September 2022.

Introducing the report, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that whilst figures looked healthy, pay inflation had not been applied to expenditure figures. Members noted that the line "Local Government employees" was currently showing an £87K underspend, but it was now known the additional burden for that budget was effectively approaching £200K, with about £140K being additional pressure from the Green Book Pay Award that had been agreed, and Grey Book and senior managers' awards would also need to be added.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the position on revenue and capital spending.

55. Estate Projects update

The Fire Authority considered an update on current and proposed estate projects.

Huntingdon Fire Station and Training Centre was very close to completion, and it was envisaged that the Service would take ownership mid November. With regard to the sale of the current Huntingdon site, the Service was working with District Council colleagues on pre-application advice. The latest advice was that whilst the current site was in a Conservation Area, a dense residential scheme was being considered, in line with other homes in the area.

In St Neots, where the proposal was to have a co-located site with Cambridgeshire Constabulary, quotes had been received but these were quite high due to price inflation

on building materials, so a decision would need to be made as to whether this site represented value for money for both organisations.

The Service was also working with District Council colleagues on pre-application advice regarding the St Ives site, and also working with the NHS who were looking to sell the adjacent Health Centre.

A full report on the sale of the former Papworth Fire Station site and move to Cambourne had been considered at the Fire Authority meeting in June 2022. The Papworth site was originally scheduled for auction in September, however this had been delayed, and the sale should now take place in December.

In response to a Member question on the St Ives site, Officers explained that the current site was no longer suitable. In addition to housing one fire appliance, the current St Ives site housed the secondary control function, which would be moving to Dogsthorpe, and Occupational Health, which was moving to Huntingdon. The proposal was to move the St Ives appliance to a more economic location in St Ives.

A Member queried planning consents, particularly in relation to the Huntingdon site, and whether any discussion was taking place about key worker housing. Officers agreed to pick this up as part of their pre-application discussions.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report.

56. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

Members considered the Draft Annual Governance Statement, which was required by the Local Government Act. Members noted progress made against governance issues identified in 2020/21, and the key governance issues for 2021/22, which were Sickness Absence and Fleet Management.

It was resolved unanimously to:

approve the Annual Governance Statement, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, for external publication.

57. Member-led Review of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Consultation with Representative Bodies

Presenting the outcome of this Member-led review to the Fire Authority, Councillor Kindersley, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, referred to the draft minutes of the October Committee, which were a later agenda item, which detailed the discussion on this item. Members were aware that the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) process had been in existence for many years, and the reasons it had not been meeting recently. Councillors Gowing and McGuire undertook the review and had recommended a number of proposals. The key proposal was that the JCC was dissolved, and that discussion takes place to ensure there was a flow of communications between Members and the representative bodies. The proposed process was outlined.

Councillor McGuire thanked the Scrutiny and Assurance Manager, who had put in a great deal of work into this review, for which he and Councillor Gowing were very grateful.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- i. endorse the dissolution of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC);
- ii. discuss and agree what, after such dissolution, will enable two way communication(s) between Members and the representative bodies.

58. Sustainability Strategy – Update

The Fire Authority considered an update to the Sustainability Strategy. The carbon footprint report showed where the particular challenges for the Service were, and the Service was working with the Carbon Trust on an action plan to make it carbon neutral by 2030.

It was resolved unanimously to note the report.

59. Dates of Fire Authority meetings 2023/24

Members considered a schedule of Fire Authority meetings for the municipal year 2023/24.

In response to a Member query on the location of meetings, it was confirmed that New Shire Hall had been pre-booked for Fire Authority meetings in 2022/23 due to the restrictions in place during the pandemic period, and it was confirmed that Fire Service Headquarters would be used, where feasible, in future.

It was resolved unanimously to agree the schedule of meetings for 2023/24.

60. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies

Members noted an updated schedule of appointments, which now included a Labour substitute on the Performance Review Committee. The other three Member Committees would also be updated to reflect the change in proportionality, so that there was a substitute identified for each political group. It was also noted that the Joint Consultative Committee needed to be removed from the schedule of appointments.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the updated schedule of appointments.

61. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 6th October 2022

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 6th October were noted.

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS – THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2022

In my announcements this time last year I was highlighting the fact that our Combined Fire Control (CFC) had celebrated its tenth anniversary in October 2021.

In these announcements I would like to start by thanking, on behalf of the Authority, not only those of our people employed in CFC* but everyone employed by the Service for their contribution, no matter how large or small, to provide a first-class response to the major incidents declared over the summer months. A staggering 1000 incidents were dealt with in July alone when normally the Service would expect 300! The way in which the sector responded to the extreme conditions has been commented on nationally and I can only hope that it provides further evidence (if any were required) that our people deserve to be appropriately recognised.

Those of you that attended the Cambridgeshire County Council meeting on 18 October 2022, may recall that I brought to Council's attention a number of items including how the Service was celebrating World Menopause Day and updates on the Operational Response Review Project, the Home Office White Paper Consultation, the latest HMICFRS inspection results and more detailed information on the major incidents. For those that were not in attendance further information can be found on the County Council website here:

https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccc_live/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1879/Committee/20/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx

Whilst the Chief Fire Officer and I, on your behalf, continue to lobby local MPs and other stakeholders of influence on key challenges facing the Service, several issues continue to cause us grave concern. I would hope that the agenda we have today will allow for open and honest discussion to help ensure we can navigate through them and agree on the actions required to minimise their impact.

* 24 to 30 October was International Control Room week. The Service celebrated our CFC heroes and shone a light on their incredible life-saving work by hosting a journalist from Cambridgeshire Live; she spent a morning finding out about working in CFC and the many facets to the role.