

## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Time: 2:00-3.22pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: M Atkins, S Bywater, B Goodliffe, S Kindersley, M McGuire, E Murphy (Chair), C Rae, P Slatter, M Smith and 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

### 35. Election of the Chair

The Monitoring Officer called for nominations for Chair.

Councillor Jamil nominated Councillor Murphy, and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Kindersley. There were no further nominations. Following a show of hands, the Monitoring Officer announced that Councillor Murphy was therefore elected as Chair of the Fire Authority for the municipal year 2022-23.

### 36. Election of the Vice Chair

The Chair called for nominations for Vice Chair.

Councillor Kindersley nominated Councillor Jamil, and this nomination was seconded by Councillor Goodliffe. There were no further nominations. Following a show of hands, the Chair announced that Councillor Jamil was therefore elected as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority for the municipal year 2022-23.

### 37. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Councillors Gardener, Gowing and Reynolds.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 38. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chair advised that with the assistance of officers, she had followed up on the action to write to all MPs in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, to enlist their support regarding the funding situation. She had met with Daniel Zeichner MP, who had written to Lucy Frazer on behalf of the Fire Authority, and Lucy Frazer's officer had sought further information. The Chair had also discussed the situation in depth with Councillor Reynolds, who had experience in the past of raising these matters with MPs. No tangible feedback had been received to date apart from Daniel Zeichner MP, and the Chair confirmed that not all MPs had even responded.

Councillor Kindersley confirmed that the budget review was programmed for a future meeting of that Committee.

### 39. Chair's announcements

Appended.

### 40. Annual Review of Integrated Risk Management Plan Performance

The Fire Authority received a report on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for 2020-2024. The Plan covers four key areas for management and monitoring, specifically People Excellence, Community Safety Excellence, Operational Delivery and Value for Money.

The following points were drawn to Members' attention:

- a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor had been welcomed into the Service during this year. Her role was being embedded and a dedicated action plan developed to underpin the Service's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- in terms of Community Safety, resources continued to be targeted at the most vulnerable members of the Service's communities. A new partnership had been established with Anglian Water, and further opportunities for collaborations with other utility providers were being pursued;
- work continued to be undertaken following the Grenfell Tower disaster, and the related fire safety legislation;
- further improvements were being implemented and explored to support the working experience for On-Call firefighters;
- the move to the new operational station at Cambourne had been completed.

Members noted performance against the IRMP performance measures for 2021/22, which included five year rolling figures:

- average attendance in urban areas was well below the nine minute target, at 7 minutes 36 seconds. Rural response times were slightly over the 12 minute target at 12 minutes 14 seconds. The challenges relating to rural response times were noted, including the problem of non-addressable locations;
- the Service had exceeded the 95% target for responding to all incidents within 18 minutes;
- the total number of fires had increased in 2021/22, but was down 9% on the rolling five year figure. Similarly primary and secondary fires were 11% and 5% down respectively on the rolling five year figure;

- regrettably, there had five fire fatalities in the year, three in dwellings and two in vehicles. Fire casualties, Road Traffic Collisions and Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) on roads remained relatively consistent;
- There had been a 37% increase in the number of special services incidents responded to in 2021/22. The largest contributors to this were an increase in co-responding and assisting other agencies (particularly the Ambulance service), non-environmental flooding, rescue of trapped wild animals and attempted suicides;
- in terms of workforce diversity, the number of applicants from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities was not translating to appointment. Progress was being made on female recruits to operational roles.

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

- all paid tribute to all staff, noting that the five year data indicated that colleagues were putting in a huge amount of work and effort into making the Service better, especially in light of the increasing population and increasing traffic volumes;
- noted with concern the 34% increase in colleagues attending incidents of attempted suicides, commenting that it was very regrettable that people were in such desperate circumstances. However, the Member was pleased to note that the appointment of the Mental Health and Wellbeing advisor has been well received, and that there was wider recognition of the mental health impact of the work, especially on firefighters. He suggested that it would be good to build upon that work by appointing another Advisor;
- Asked if the Service had links with uniformed youth organisations, and noted the work of the Children & Young People team, a dedicated team led by a Station Commander;
- Members were disappointed to note that the national Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) continued to be delayed, and was unlikely to be operational before 2026-27. Airwave was still reliable, and the Service had decided to scale back on its commitment to the ESMCP project until it was in a position to start delivering;
- with regard to the Fire Safety Act, noted that there were around 20 “in scope” tall buildings in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Service was working with partners on data sharing arrangements so that it knew floor plans, etc, for those buildings. The legislation essentially put the onus on the individual to share this information;
- in response to a question on why many BAME applicants were not appointed, it was noted that this was a sector wide phenomenon and there did not appear to be any common themes. It was envisaged that engagement with communities would be stepped up now that Covid-19 was less of an issue, but there was no quick fix to this issue. It was confirmed that there was a team that attended career events;
- discussed apprenticeships and the focus on the Service training its own staff;

- noted that advice had been taken from the Service's Data Protection Officer in respect of GDPR and sharing data on vulnerable residents with third parties;
- discussed school fires, noting that nationally there were fewer than 500 per year, and 90% of those were limited to one room. However, officers held the view that there were significant benefits in fitting sprinklers, in terms of limiting damage. It was noted that even where fires were confined to one area, often the smoke and heat damage caused problems elsewhere in school buildings.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report and make comments.

#### 41. Final Revenue and Capital Budget Position 2021-22 and Treasury Management Statement

The Fire Authority considered the final 2021-22 revenue and capital budget outturn position. Key differences between the budget and outturn position on both Revenue and Capital budgets were noted, including the overspend on full-time firefighters, and more than expected grant income from various sources. The year end position was a £35,000 underspend, which would be transferred to the General Reserve.

For the Capital budget, Vehicles remained an issue: expenditure had been committed for service cars, vans and fire appliances, but due to ongoing supply chain issues and other delays, this budget remained underspent. In response to a Member question it was confirmed there was no significant risk in relation to fleet management, and that whilst vehicles were being retained for longer than usual, they were being kept well serviced and new vehicles were coming through.

In terms of Treasury Management, there was £5.7M debt at year end, but a capital financing requirement of £8.6M currently. The majority of this was being held to fund the St John's development.

Members discussed energy usage, noting that this remained low. Hybrid working was now becoming the norm for office based staff after the pandemic, which resulted in offices not being fully occupied. It was stressed that Fire Control had remained at SHQ throughout the pandemic period.

A Member asked officers what they saw as a sustainable cash balance going forward. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that once the St John's scheme was completed, they expected the reserve to reduce to almost zero, but this would be followed by a number of site sales which would replenish the reserve level, and it was expected that a level of around £3-4M would be retained going forward, in addition to £5M long term debt. The debt charges closer to £1M broke down into a Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (~£600K), with the remainder being made up of Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and interest payments. The Member commented that it was important that Members understand that detail when lobbying for additional funding.

Members were pleased to note that although there had been a significant turnover in the Finance team this year, the team had finalised all accounts within two months and well ahead of schedule, ready for external audit.

The Chief Executive highlighted that the budget for full-time firefighters was overspent slightly at year-end, but whilst being establishment had been overbudgeted at the beginning of the year, this had been managed down to the current underestablished position. However, this meant that the Service did not have as many operational staff as it would like, and it took up to nine months to recruit. The Service was looking to move to a more flexible model of recruitment and workforce planning.

Members sought assurances that there was not a “perfect storm” arising, against the increasing demand for service. The Chief Fire Officer said that was not the case, because as a risk based organisation, the Service had the capacity to deal with demand. The major concern was the lack of funding, and not having enough to fund a payrise.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. Note the revenue and capital budget outturn position;
2. Note the Treasury Management Statement attached at Appendix 3;
3. Approve the requested budget holder carry forwards.

#### 42. Business Continuity – Financial Contingency Plan

Members considered an overview of the Service’s proposed approach to managing business continuity with regards to financial planning.

Members noted the business continuity arrangements in place for a wide range of events, including financial difficulty. Pay for staff was clearly a key issue, especially as pay rises were agreed after the budget had been set. It was noted that the proposal for Grey Book staff was an RPI increase, but that was dependent on further discussions, and may require Member involvement.

A Member commented that this was a worrying item, and commended the senior management team for having an eye to the future. He also commented that it would be good for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review this issue. The Chair agreed, commenting that this was an important report and an even more important process.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the progress made to date and the proposed timing of next steps (paragraph 4 refers).

#### 43. Relocation of Papworth to Cambourne Community Fire Station - Update

Members were updated on the work undertaken in relation to the relocation of Papworth Community Fire and Rescue Station to Cambourne.

Officers advised that they had continued to engage with Papworth and Cambourne residents, including attendance at Parish Council meetings and letters to residents. A lot of work had also been undertaken on recruitment of on-call firefighters in the

Cambourne area, and there had been good social media engagement. Community Safety officers had been providing reassurance, especially in Papworth.

The move had taken place on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, and nine incidents had taken place to date, which had been attended to from that location. Advice had been sought on the disposal of the site, which would be via auction, which would require delegated powers above a certain sum.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the ideal manning for an on-call station was twelve, but this was seldom achieved in practice. On-call firefighters had to be able to get to the station within four minutes, and there were some stations where this had been extended to seven minutes, but ideally they should live as close as possible. This was less of a problem at night, but was an issue during daytime. Members discussed the tremendous commitment required for on call work, and noted the balance that needed to be struck between the window given for on-call firefighters to reach the station, and the importance of attending calls in good time, and minimising loss of life.

It was resolved unanimously that:

1. Note the contents of this report and the work the Service has undertaken with its staff and communities that were affected by the move,
2. Approve the proposal to sell the site as detailed in Paragraph 5 of the report.

#### 44. Fire Authority Programme Management – Monitoring Report

Members were provided with an update against the projects for 2022/23

With regard to project P108 (Replacement ICCS and Mobilising Solution), the Project Manager had had a successful visit to the supplier. Good progress was made, but there were some delays due to the current system.

For project P126 (Huntingdon Relocation), this was progressing well but internal work delays had resulted in delays to the overall timescale.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Programme Status Report, as at April 2022, attached at Appendix 1.

#### 45. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies

Members noted that there had been one minor change to appointments to Committees, which was to appoint Councillor Atkins to those Committee places vacated by Councillor McDonald.

One additional appointment not noted in the schedule was the appointment of Councillor Jamil as Substitute to the non-voting place on the Combined Authority Board. This would mean that Councillor Jamil could attend Combined Authority meetings in Councillor Murphy's absence.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the updated schedule of appointments, with the addition detailed above.

#### 46. Appointment of Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs

It was proposed by Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Jamil and agreed to reappoint Councillor Goodliffe as Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee for the municipal year 2022-23.

It was proposed by Councillor Goodliffe, seconded by Councillor Slatter and agreed to reappoint Councillor Jamil as Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee for the municipal year 2022-23.

It was proposed by Councillor Jamil, seconded by Councillor Taylor and agreed unanimously to reappoint Councillor Kindersley as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2022-23. No further nominations.

It was proposed by Councillor Kindersley, seconded by Councillor Jamil and agreed unanimously to reappoint Councillor Taylor as Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2022-23.

## **CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS – THURSDAY 16 JUNE 2022**

Firstly, I would like to formally welcome Councillor Michael Atkins to the Authority and thank Councillor Peter McDonald, whom he replaces, for his contributions to our work during his tenure.

### **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 progress being made to ensure the Service has a future proofed, state of the art, fire and rescue community station and training facility.

Another visit for Authority Members will be scheduled in due course; it is still anticipated that the building work will be completed in late 2022, with occupation by staff expected by early 2023.

### **Polite Reminder – Statement of Accounts Related Party Transaction Form**

The Accounting Code of Practice requires the Authority to disclose in the Accounts of any given financial year any payments made by the Authority to "related parties". This term includes those who have served as Members or senior Officers of the Authority and their immediate families and any businesses owned or controlled by them or their immediate families.

This is an important document and there are currently six outstanding from Members of the Authority. If you have a form to fill out please do it today and hand to either Dawn or Deb for processing.

### **Home Office Open Consultation – Authority Response**

Members will be aware that the long awaited Home Office open consultation seeking views on '*proposals to introduce system wide reform that will strengthen fire and rescue services in England*' recently went live. The Government says it wants to ensure that fire and rescue services are given the tools and support to tackle the ever-changing challenges that communities face and the reform is explained in three sections;

- **People** - proposals seek to clarify the role of the firefighter and to build a culture that welcomes every member of our community,
- **Professionalism** - to provide greater development and leadership opportunities to all fire service staff, no matter how experienced they are,
- **Governance** - to explore the potential in providing operational independence to Chief Fire Officers.

I strongly believe not only that the Authority, as well as the Service, should respond but also that the Authority response should represent all Members views on the (48) questions posed. An email was sent, on my behalf, early last week asking for your input and I would like to take this opportunity to urge you all to respond fully or partially by the requested date. At the LGA meeting this matter was discussed, and it was felt important that as many members responded as possible, and that whole authorities such as ours responded with a consolidated view if possible.

### **LGA Related Announcements**

#### **LGA Fire Commission - Feedback**



I attended an LGA Fire Commission Meeting last Friday; an interesting meeting mostly in person. The main point of discussion was the paper on fire service reform.

There were many aspects of the paper which were welcomed universally including the College of Fire and many were happy with the oath and welcomed the various workforce measures. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, there was almost universal condemnation of the governance proposals. Essentially the proposal is that fire services join in with the Mayoral combined authority along with the police. There were a lot of concerns including:

- How will this work given there are different models for governance of fire services
- There is virtually nothing about the costs of such a major transaction, and no indication of how the change could be managed – and no indication from Home Office staff that there were even ideas in the pipeline about this
- There was no acceptance of the premise that governance reform was needed, it was seen as ideological or at least not evidence based – many fire services had good governance and in any case there was a rigorous inspection process which was aimed at addressing poor performance
- There was a point made that the obvious blue light performance problems were with ambulance services, not police or fire, so it was not logical to focus on the latter and force unnecessary and unfunded organisational change when they were not broken and didn't need fixing
- There was a question about what happens if a local area decides they do not want to go down this route, the Home Office official described a 'process' would start – the process is that the Home Office would look at the arguments and decide whether the fire service merger would happen or not – so ultimately this decision will not be taken locally

The LGA is taking the comments on board and looking to lobby for a couple of options which would ultimately give local areas the final decision about whether to adopt the proposals or not but there was such strong opposition that it may need to consider other options.

### **LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition**

For the first time in three years, the LGA will be hosting the biggest event in the local government calendar, their Annual Conference and Exhibition, in person at the end of the month. Our Vice Chair, Councillor Jamil, is attending on behalf of the Authority and we look forward to hearing from him about any highlights from the event.