

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 19 December 2024

Time: 2.00pm – 3.30pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: M Black, S Bywater, I Gardener, J Gowing, R Hathorn, E Murphy (Chair), R Hathorn, P Slatter, K Reynolds, P Slatter, M Smith and S Taylor

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors: A Bond and M Jamil (Vice Chair)

Officers present: J Anderson, U Bird, M Warren, S Ismail, T Oviatt-Ham, S Smith and S Thompson

128. Apologies for absence and declarations of Interest

Apologies were presented on behalf of Councillors Doug Dew, Neil Boyce, Wayne Fitzgerald, Sebastian Kindersley and Catherine Rae.

Councillor Simone Taylor declared an interest in item 9 on the agenda as she was the Director of a management company that owned a three-storey block, but it was under 11 metres.

129. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 20 June 2024 and Action Log

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held 20 June 2024, and the Action Log.

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 20 June 2024 were agreed as a correct record. The Action Log was noted.

130. Chair's Announcements

See Appendix 1 to these minutes.

131. Draft Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29

The Fire Authority received the draft medium term financial plan and the proposed draft budget and precept for consultation. The Chief Fire Officer explained that there had been a number of new pressures on the budget, one being the loss of the Suffolk control room collaboration which was significant in that it was an additional burden to the Fire Authority of £1.1m. Also, from January 2025 the unions had agreed a new pay scale structure for all On-Call operational employees. Assuming contracted hours were not reduced, the estimated increase in pay related costs amounted to circa £435k and this has been built into the plan. The Fire Authority had recently received details of its financial settlement, which was currently being worked through by officers and highlighted that currently there was no security around whether national insurances increases would be funded by government. He explained that there was a meeting scheduled with the Home Office in the new year to discuss the Suffolk situation.

A Member highlighted that the management and support budgets were almost 50% higher than the firefighter budget and queried how this could be justified and whether there was a national comparison. He also commented that the £5 rise in Council Tax could not be relied upon in future years. The Chief Fire Officer explained that these budgets could not be compared as the management and support budgets covered a large part of the organisation including supporting frontline services such as the community support officer. He commented that there was a need for more proactive management of risk around the county and that the costs across all budgets were under constant review. He stated that he was now the national lead for Chief Fire Officers on the Comprehensive Spending Review, and he hoped to influence decision making going forwards in this area. The Chair asked that the headings for all budgets be clearer going forwards to ensure that they were not misinterpreted. The Chief Fire Officer explained that sub-categories could be added in the budget book showing the break down of costs. **Action Required**

A Member highlighted the challenges of the increases to national insurance and queried what the financial impacts on the authority would be. The Chief Fire Officer explained that there was a specific grant from government to support the shortfall however this had been pitched at adult social care functions and the authority had calculated that it could have a shortfall of up to 50% but could not currently accurately project the figures.

A Member queried if government had taken the departure of Suffolk from the control centre agreement into consideration as part of the financial settlement. The Chief Fire Officers commented that he had met with all of the local MPs and was due to meet with the Head of Finance at the Home Office in the New Year to discuss the issue.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the proposed strategy and summary medium-term financial plan for consultation.

132. Annual Review of Constitutional Documents December 2024

Members considered a number of changes to the Fire Authorities key constitutional documents which were subject to review on an annual basis and were last reviewed at the Fire Authority meeting on 15 June 2023. Due to changes in strategic level post holders this year's review was postponed by six months.

A Member queried how long the Chief Fire Officer Delegation for Contract Approval had been at the £50,000 limit. The Chief Fire Officer stated that this limit had not been changed for a number of years.

A Member questioned how times of operational urgency would be defined and how officers would be accountable for the spend. Officers clarified that this would be any time where a Strategic Coordination Group was set up and there was a need to act quickly. The Chief Fire Officer explained that any decision taken under this delegation would be reported to the next Committee or Fire Authority meeting in the diary. He clarified that the Fire Service worked in partnership with other authorities through the Local Resilience Forum to understand how each partner played a role in emergency situations.

A Member queried why the Joint Consultative Committee had been stood down. The Monitoring Officer stated that she had spoken to all of the bodies involved and there had been no agreement from the three bodies involved to meet together therefore the forum had been disbanded.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- approve the changes identified by this annual review; and
- note the reasons for not making any change to the Members Code of Conduct and Members Allowances Scheme at this time.

133. Annual Governance Statement 2023-24

The Fire Authority received the Annual Governance Statement 2023-24.

A Member questioned whether the Fire Authority had been included in the consultation by Government on virtual attendance at meetings. The Monitoring Officer explained that Fire Authorities had not been included as stakeholders in the Government consultation on the potential changes to legislation. She explained that there was support from Fire Authorities for hybrid meetings.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the Annual Governance Statement for external publication.

134. Appointment of S151 Officer and Deputy Statutory Officers

Members considered a report that recommended the appointment of a new statutory Section 151 Officer and two deputy statutory officers, namely a Deputy Section 151 Officer and a Deputy Monitoring Officer.

A Member queried whether the appointment of the statutory officers was increasing the number of posts. The Chief Fire Officer clarified that the statutory posts were additional responsibilities to the current roles of the officers identified to take on the roles.

A Member queried if the statutory officer posts would receive an increase in pay. The Chief Fire Officer stated that those posts would receive a small increase in pay in recognition of the additional responsibilities entailed.

It was resolved unanimously to approve the appointments of:

- Ursula Bird (ACMA) to the role of Section 151 Officer for the Fire Authority;
- Josh Muir to the role of Deputy Section 151 Officer for the Fire Authority;
- Tamsin Mirfin as Deputy Monitoring Officer for the Fire Authority.

135. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report 2023-24 (including Gender Pay Gap)

The Fire Authority received the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report 2023-24. Officers highlighted that the report highlighted that there was the lowest gender pay gap since reporting started and that the Fire Authority was the 9th highest ranking fire and rescue services for female employees.

The Chair stated that it was encouraging to hear about the decrease in pay gap and number of women employed within the service.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- note progress against equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives;
- note the Gender Pay Gap data;
- agree the content of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report
- approve publication of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Compliance Report subject to final design work and incorporation of appropriate images.

136. Grenfell Tower Inquiry - Service Action Plan Update

Members received a report on the Grenfell Tower Inquiry - Service Action Plan Update. Officers explained that there were two phases of the inquiry. The Fire Authority had made good progress against the recommendations highlighted in phase one with one outstanding action remaining. Work was progressing well on the recommendations from the second phase of the inquiry with the requirement of work on the recommendations being completed by September 2025. In December 2024 Government published a remediation acceleration plan. The plan laid out the Government's position to remediate all unsafe cladding for buildings over 18 metres by 2029 and to remove or have a time defined plan to remediate all unsafe cladding for buildings 11 to 17 metres in height. It was stated that the plan would be backed by funding for enforcement. Cambridgeshire currently had 27 residential buildings over 18 metres or seven storeys in height. Fire Protection Officers had completed inspections at all of these premises and were on track to meet the 2029 deadline set for these buildings.

A Member queried how much funding the Fire Authority had received to support work on the remediation plan. Officers explained that the authority already received between £160,000-180,000 funding for fire protection and that they were working with the Mayor who was leading on the action plan. Officers explained that there had been a further

ask for funding to support the plan and that there would be enforcement action if remediation work did not take place.

A Member commented that the Combined Authority were not the planning authority and questioned if planning authorities were seeing a change in relation to ensuring that building met the required safety requirements. Officers commented that the legislation had not yet changed in relation to buildings between 11-17 meters however there were two fire protection officers embedded within the service who had been working to ensure that all building over 18 metres had been inspected and were going through the mediation process. Officers explained that funding for enforcement would be through the government's remediation plan.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- note and comment on the progress to date,
- approve the planned activities to meet the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry reports.

137. Policy and Resources Committee Minutes - 23 October 2024 (for noting)

The draft minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 23 October 2024 were noted.

138. Overview and Scrutiny Minutes - 9 October 2024 (for noting)

The draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held 29 October 2024 were noted.

139. Exclusion of Press and Public

It was resolved unanimously:

to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the grounds that the agenda contained exempt information under Paragraphs 1 & 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

140. Estates Portfolio Update

The Fire Authority received an update report on the estate's portfolio

It was resolved unanimously to approve the report recommendations.

CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS – THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER 2024

Firstly, I would like to thank those Members who were able, for their attendance at this morning's very informative **Vision 2030 seminar**. I know the Chief Fire Officer and his team will be conducting a series of roadshow events around the Service in the new year to share this vision with colleagues, a vision that centres on the county remaining one of the fastest growing counties in the country and our ability to meet demand in the future, as well as looking at the technology we need to be more efficient and how we continue our drive for sustainability and achieving our net zero target. We will face the depth and breadth of these challenges together.

END OF OUR ANNIVERSARY YEAR(S) APPROACHES

This time last year, we were looking forward to celebrating the **50th anniversary** of when Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Fire Brigade and Huntingdonshire and Peterborough County Fire Service joined together to create Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service and our colleagues in Peterborough Volunteer Fire Brigade, having been formed by a group of businessmen in 1884, were looking forward to celebrating their 140th anniversary as the only volunteer fire service in the country.

I know many have enjoyed the various ways in which our anniversary has been celebrated and as the end of this calendar year approaches, I would like to thank all those involved for their contributions and sustained efforts to mark this special event.

TODAYS AGENDA AND RELATED ANNOUNCEMENTS

As there is a sizeable agenda before us, I have purposely kept my announcements brief but I would just like to single out a few related achievements

May I congratulate our community wellbeing Officer team on winning not only the **Partnership Working Award at the National Fire Chiefs Council Prevention Awards 2024** but also the **Emergency Services Collaboration of the Year Award at the Excellence in Fire 2024 Awards**. Members will recall from previous reporting and announcements that our collaboration trial with Bedfordshire and Essex Fire and Rescue Services and the East of England Ambulance Service has delivered measurable improvements in both health and home fire safety through innovative multi-agency working.

We have a budget item on our agenda today, prepared by our outstanding finance team who recently scooped the '**Digital Finance Project of the Year**' award at the **Public Finance Awards 2024**. This award reflects the team's exceptional work to improve operations across the Service with the successful implementation and launch of a new finance system in time and under budget. Judges said that they *"were impressed that the team implemented a new finance system in super-quick time, eight months, and unusually it was done under budget."* The panel also highlighted that *"the finance manager made sure that no team member was left behind, and all staff played a crucial role in the implementation of the new system."* Our congratulations to all involved on your well-deserved win!

Members had the opportunity this morning to view the new concept appliance and have recently received several reports on our silver fleet where significant changes have been made to how we procure and manage our assets with efficiency and sustainability in mind. At the **Excellence in Fire 2024 Awards** our Fleet and Equipment Services Manager, Graham Wiggins, received an **Outstanding Contribution to the Fire and Rescue Service Award**;

rightful recognition for someone who has overseen all matters fleet and equipment for more years than he cares to remember! Well done Graham!!

These are just a few examples ... it is so pleasing to see those who have worked hard, and with constant enthusiasm, be recognised for what they achieve, and how we as a service rightfully sit as one of the best amongst many.

Whilst we have an update report on our action plan relating to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry on today's agenda, Members may be aware that our Operational Support Group working with Combined Fire Control and crews from Dogsthorpe and across the county, recently conducted an exercise aimed at testing the use of our electronic fire survival board (EFSB) and fire survival guidance (FSG) procedure in a simulated fire on the ninth floor of an eleventh storey building (Cumberland House, Peterborough).

The exercise was a success and whilst deeper analysis of the results is ongoing this activity further demonstrates our commitment to keep our firefighters and residents as safe as possible and organisational continuous improvement.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

A quick mention about our latest employee engagement survey. People Insight have presented the survey findings to the strategic leadership team and these have been shared with managers. Whilst the overall engagement score has risen seven points from last year and scoring across most questions has improved, further analysis is required to better understand those areas where there was lower dissatisfaction. A full report and any action plan will be presented to the Authority early next year. Suffice to say, it is a very positive set of results, and we continue to sit above the sector average score.

Finally as we approach a seasonal break may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very safe and happy time with family and friends. On behalf of the Authority, I hope you will take some time to reflect on all your individual and collective achievements, no matter how small, and come back in 2025 refreshed and ready for the challenges ahead.