

## FIRE AUTHORITY: MINUTES

Date: Thursday 22 October 2020

Time: 2.00 pm – 4.00pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: B Ashwood, S Bywater, I Gardener, D Giles, J Gowing, L Harford, B Hunt, S Kindersley, M McGuire, K Reynolds (Chairman), J Scutt, M Shellens and M Smith

Peterborough City Council:

Councillors: A Bond, M Jamil and D Over (Vice-Chairman)

Officers Present: C Strickland, M Warren, S Ismail, J Anderson, C Parker, D Cave, R Brittain (BDO) and M Weller (BDO)

### 150. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were given on behalf of Councillor Goodwin, who was unwell. Councillor Reynolds advised that he would be writing to Councillor Goodwin on behalf of the Fire Authority, passing on Members' best wishes.

### 151. Minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting held 25 June 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman when circumstances permitted.

### 152. Chairman's Announcements

Appended.

### 153. Property Update

The Fire Authority received an update on progress against Police and Fire collaborative property schemes.

The Fire Station and Training Centre at the St John's site was moving forward, with the planning decision expected on 24/12/20, and work expected to start on site March/April 2021. Legal agreements were all on track. Once work commenced formally on site, the Service would formally market the existing Huntingdon site and also consider options for St Ives, working with the NHS regarding the site at St Ives, as the NHS owns adjacent land. This

work needed to be progressed as soon as possible due to the delays already experienced.

The design had finally been agreed for the joint Police and Fire site at St Neots, and completion at that location would enable the Police to sell their current site, subject to planning permission being granted on the fire station site. All the relevant parties had been consulted regarding the Planning Application.

A Member asked if there was any news on possible collaboration with the Ambulance service. Officers confirmed that some discussions had taken place with the Ambulance service, who at that time were looking to have a major hub in Huntingdon with a number of satellite sites. Officers agreed to contact the Ambulance Service again to inform them what was happening, but were keen that this project should not be delayed any longer than necessary. Action required: Matthew Warren.

In Cambridge, the Police were looking to relocate their main Police station away from Parkside, whilst still retaining a city centre presence. Discussions were ongoing as to what the Police's requirements were in terms of joint occupancy of a site. It was confirmed that there was parking at this site, and that if the Police opted out, it would not be an issue, as the freehold of the Parkside site belonged to the Fire Service.

The review of potential collaboration with Police teams was also being refreshed, e.g. having a joint property team, and an update on this would be presented to the December meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee.

A Member commented that whilst there was now a requirement for Emergency Services to collaborate, the Fire Service would *continue* to collaborate, as it had been ahead of the game in terms of collaboration. It was agreed that the list of collaborations with the Police over the last 4-5 years would be refreshed and updated to include all collaborative projects, including the most recent collaborations, such as the work with the Police on drones.

It was noted that the Police intended to build a new Cambridge site in Milton, and a Member asked if it would be prudent to approach them to see if there were any collaborative opportunities on that site. Officers advised that the Fire Service already had a training facility in Milton, but it may be worth a discussion at this early stage. Action required: Matthew Warren.

It was resolved unanimously to

1. note the progress made to date;
2. approve the next steps.

## 154. National Fire Chiefs Council Building Risk Review Grant and Protection Uplift - Update

The Fire Authority considered an update on the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Building Risk Review, and the planned use of the grant funding provided by central Government. Members had received a presentation on this issue at a recent seminar.

The Service was engaged in a Building Risk Review Programme following the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower. Initially the focus had been on those buildings clad in ACM (Aluminium Composite Material), but the second phase was to look at all high rise buildings over 18 metres. This was an additional burden to the Fire & Rescue Service in terms of resources, and the grant had been provided to resource the Building Risk Review Programme.

The grant of £60K was to support services to deliver a review of fire safety arrangements of all high rise residential buildings, which should be subject to an initial assessment and depending on the outcome, visited or audited by the end of December 2021. The protection team could achieve this at the expense of the existing risk based audit programme by December 2020. Even by extending this to the 2021 deadline, it would have some impact on day to day activity.

The chosen approach was to continue to invest in Level 3 fire safety training for watch based staff, enabling watches to relieve pressure on the risk based audit programme and provide ongoing capacity after the grant was spent. Fire Safety Advisors within the protection team could also be used for the building risk review work, and the grant would also be used to provide specialist upskilling for these staff in cladding, compartmentation and fire stopping.

Members noted that throughout the period of austerity, the Service had continued to invest in its protection teams whilst some Fire & Rescue Services had made cuts in this area. This gave the Service a solid foundation to build further capacity with modest investment. The grant would be used to strengthen career pathways into fire protection, develop existing data systems to work better, develop existing products to provide a stable digital platform to share information between prevention, protection and response. This would all be closely managed through Digital Strategy Board in terms of both resources and interdependencies.

At the seminar Members had asked about the promotion of sprinklers, particularly in residential buildings. The Sprinkler Strategy asked developers to consider the installation of sprinklers, even when they were not mandatory. The Service had had some success with sprinklers in Peterborough, where a developer retrofitted sprinklers.

A Member thanked officers and commented that she fully supported the allocation of the grant to further training of existing personnel, especially as the grant was time limited to one year. On the subject of sprinklers, she

advised that as a member of various planning committees, she was aware that Members were greatly concerned, and asked where the Service made its views on sprinklers known, as it did not usually feature on the Fire Service's planning responses, which generally only referred to fire hydrants. Responding, officers advised that they could only mandate sprinklers for buildings over 30 metres, of which there were very few in Cambridgeshire. Sprinklers were always recommended for schools and residential homes, and the Fire Service actively engaged with Local Authority Building Control teams in a number of areas. The Member responded that it would be incredibly helpful if a comment was included in planning responses, encouraging applicants to consider the installation of sprinklers, and that Planning Committees Members would really welcome that type of expert advice. Officers agreed to pick this up, and it was suggested that this issue could be further explored at the Policy & Resources Committee. **Action required.**

Whilst there was a requirement for buildings in excess of 30 metres to have sprinklers, for non-residential buildings it depended on what part of the Fire Safety Order was being implemented, as the priority was people and their ability to evacuate. Again, the Chairman commented that this could be picked up by the Policy & Resources Committee.

A Member supported the issue of sprinklers and misters coming to Policy & Resources Committee, and outlined his experience with the Peterborough City Council Planning Committee, and the reluctance of developers to install sprinklers, which was of particular concern, especially in areas where buildings were close together.

A Member asked what the impetus had been for developers to retrofit the building in Peterborough, referred to by officers. Responding, officers advised that the organisation in question felt they had a moral obligation, and there were also clearly business/financial benefits in the event of a fire controlled by sprinklers. It was acknowledged that individual success stories were probably more compelling if the impetus was coming from developers.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that there were fewer than 100 buildings in Cambridgeshire which met the relevant height limit.

A Member commented that the County Council's Planning Committee effectively managed its own development control for schools, libraries, etc. It had been previously agreed that sprinklers would be fitted in all new schools, whilst fire suppression was more appropriate for libraries. He asked if officers could check that this remained the County Council's policy on fire suppression. Another Member advised that the County Council was currently looking at its specification for school buildings and asked officers to get in touch with County Council officer Ian Trafford who was leading on this specification.

The Chairman agreed that an information paper could be considered by both Policy & Resources Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee on sprinklers so that all Members were involved and fully updated.

It was resolved unanimously to note the update.

## 155. Update on the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services response to the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic

The Fire Authority considered an update on the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic, focusing on activities moving forward.

The crewing model had reverted to the pre-pandemic arrangements, with roving appliances and crews of five. Modelling work was taking place on potential impact of Covid-19 moving forward, in terms of the ongoing risk, looking at a variety of measures to continue to deliver the service in the event of an outbreak of Covid-19 among Fire Service staff.

The outcome of the external Covid-19 inspection was still awaited. This had examined preparation and planning, including the Service's Flu Plan, and how the Service had maintained its statutory duties throughout the pandemic, how it had responded to incidents, prevention and protection activities, and also the requirement to collaborate with other services. The Service continued to look at opportunities moving forward e.g. with the Ambulance Service. Health and Safety and Staff Wellbeing had been priorities for the Service throughout the pandemic. Where possible, savings had been made e.g. utilising the fuel savings initiative for emergency services at the height of the pandemic. The final area examined was ways of working, i.e. what lessons the organisation had learned and lessons that could be taken forward across the Service.

Those interventions requiring face to face contact had been more problematic. The most serious cases had been dealt with, but work was now restarting with vulnerable communities on engagement work such as fire safety.

Training had also been limited during Lockdown, as the Service was quite dependent on other Fire Services' training facilities, most of which had closed. The benefits of digital technology had allowed the Service to connect, but there had been an acknowledgement that face to face connections within organisations were invaluable, and the only way to do this was to make all our premises Covid secure. Fire Headquarters were now open, giving staff the ability to work back on site, but staff were being advised to work at home where possible. Going forward, a more localised approach to Covid, with some flexibility, was required, to continue to provide service to the public.

A Member commended the Service for the care and concern in supporting staff during the first lockdown. However, she expressed concern regarding five man crews on fire appliances, in terms of whether social distancing could be complied with. It was confirmed that it was not possible to practice social distancing with five man crews, but measures would be taken e.g. PPE provision, face covering in appliances and travelling with windows open. The key issue was balancing those risks against *not* riding with five people on an appliance. It was noted that different Fire Services had taken different

approaches, and these were outlined. The crew of four on appliance was to enable one person to be isolated from the rest of the crew, should there be an outbreak and 30% of crews were not available due to the virus. Fortunately, that situation had not arisen. Other measures being taken to reduce the risk of transmission were outlined.

A Member commented that in Cambridge city, there was a lot of concern about the return of students, and steps were being taken by both universities, although there were issues when students lived off campus, and the potential impact on the wider county from individuals who worked in Cambridge but lived further afield.

A Member was pleased to note that throughout this challenging time, the Service continued in its commitment to the health and wellbeing of staff. With regard to testing and the Track and Trace systems in place nationally, the Member asked what the Service's experience was, especially of the timescales involved. Officers advised that really good links had been developed with Public Health England, and there was a mechanism by which the Service could offer tests to staff and their families, and had therefore not seen the impact others have across the country, with tests results available in 24-48 hours.

A Member commented that personal interrelationship should not be underestimated, and many younger people could not have an office in their flat or house share. He also expressed concern that working at home led to a temptation not to put in the required number of hours in a day. Many people thrived on human interaction, and he suggested that much could be learned from the example of the House of Commons, who were continuing to meet in a Covid secure way, whilst acknowledging there were circumstances where virtual meetings were more appropriate. Another Member disagreed strongly with these comments, commenting that it needed to be recognised by Members that all local government staff were working hard in very difficult circumstances, and Members should be more flexible in their expectations. Moreover, he did not feel the House of Commons was an exemplar in these times, and commented that any such association was unwelcome. Another Member commented that people who worked from home often worked longer hours than they were required to do.

With regard to the economic recovery cost, a Member asked what would happen in the event the funding was unspent. Officers reassured the Member that there was no risk of the funding being unspent.

With regard to the arrangements for Bonfire Night, it was confirmed that arrangements would be very different this year. Bonfire Night itself was usually relatively quiet for the Service due to organised displays, but this year, there would be more bonfires at home, and there was therefore going to be a concerted communications campaign, promoting fire safety.

In terms of staff affected by Covid-19, Members noted that whilst the exact figures were not available, the figures were low, and there had been an outbreak at March fire station.

Noting the reduction in the numbers who had to man engines, a Member asked if this would benefit rural stations. Officers advised that availability of fire engines continued to be an issue, but during Lockdown, many retained firefighters were furloughed, so there was actually increased availability. Post Covid, the intention was to go back to crews of five, but there was a danger that the casual observer may feel that a crew of four was adequate. This was a real concern, because in rural areas with longer attendance times, a crew of four was not ideal. If the current shift system was not conducive to a crew of five, a change to a mixed shift system may be required, which was also undesirable. It was therefore important to work with staff and carefully monitor the rate of the virus and respond accordingly, as it would be detrimental to change the shift system unnecessarily.

A Member commended the report, commenting that it was an indication of the sterling work being done by teams across the organisation. The Member highlighted the potential issue with adjacent areas, where Covid-19 rates may be increasing at a greater pace e.g. Gamlingay Fire Station was just across the border from Potton, a relatively small community which had recorded eight cases in a week. Calls from adjacent areas could potentially increase the risk of transmission to staff, and the Member felt that this needed to be recognised and the risk addressed. The Chairman agreed that this was a good point that needed to be picked up. Officers advised that the Corkers Crisp fire in the summer was the first major incident with appliances attending from other Fire Services. There had been regional work with Fire & Rescue Services to make them aware of Cambridgeshire's procedures and requirements in terms of individuals working at incidents in the county, as some did not have the same PPE requirements. There was now a good understanding by adjacent Fire Services.

The Chief Fire Officer commented that whilst the priority was keeping staff safe, the points made about maintaining human contact were really important, and this had been lacking during lockdown. The senior team had been visiting stations and taking actions to strike a balance, maintaining staff safety whilst at the same time maximising opportunities for human contact

It was resolved unanimously to note the content of the update.

#### 156. Equality and Inclusion Compliance Report 2019-2020 (including Gender Pay Gap)

Members of the Fire Authority received a report about equality progress in the year 2019/20 and the gender pay gap as at March 2020. The annual Equality and Inclusion Compliance Report ensured the Authority met the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations

2011 and 2017.

Members noted key statistics relating to gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and religious belief in relation to areas such as recruitment, retention and career progression. Examples were given of actions that had been taken to promote diversity across the Service.

A Member commented favourably on the scope of the report and suggested the wide range of areas covered confirmed that the Service had an extremely wide range of concerns about the staff it employed. With regard to the "... limited English language of attendees", he suggested that it would be better to monitor the ethnicity of *non* attendees. Officers acknowledged this point, but commented that this would be difficult to determine accurately, and instead the focus was on encouraging attendance and therefore engagement of a wide range people to a variety of events.

A Member asked if the Service compared information on numbers and recruitment practices with Police colleagues, to see if any lessons could be learned. Officers confirmed that the Police had had more success with recruitment from a more diverse range of people. A Member observed that the Police started its proactive approach to recruitment from diverse communities about ten years before the Fire Service, and therefore the Service's figures should continue to improve going forward. Officers agreed, adding that there was a long period of time where the Service had not been recruiting, and this would have exacerbated the problem.

A Member observed that for the Safe and Well visits, only 3% of those engaged were from BAME communities, which was less than the local BAME demographic. She queried whether there was any indication on how this related to the percentage of incidents affecting BAME communities, and whether there was therefore a priority to increase Safe and Well visits to those groups. Responding, officers advised that incidents affected people in certain demographics more than others, but identification and engagement could be difficult e.g. as some people in BAME communities were not registered with GPs.

It was resolved unanimously to:

agree the content of the report (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.

## 157. Audit Completion Report 2019-20

Members considered an update on the outcome of the appointed auditors' annual audit and audit completion report for 2019/20. BDO representatives outlined the processes to date, and advised that the large majority of the audit had now been done. The main item outstanding related to Pension Fund

Members noted:

- the materiality thresholds, the material misstatement identified and a material adjustment made to the accounts in relation to the McCloud judgement;
- each of the audit risks identified, the risk rating against each of these and findings against these, and the conclusion that there was no evidence of management override or bias;
- there had been a few minor misstatements in accounts which had been addressed. Within the valuation report, the valuer had raised a materiality uncertainty statement, which was entirely driven by Covid-19;
- a response was awaited from the Pension Fund auditor with regard to the evaluation of pension liabilities;
- quite a significant value adjustment was required for the McCloud judgement. The actuary had previously been over prudent in the provision for this, assuming an additional liability in the pension fund with regard to all members, whereas it would only impact on staff employed at or before 2012;
- the “Big red button” CIPFA software tool had been used to produce the accounts, there had been significant improvement this year but there had still been some narrative issues;
- the Going Concern assessment had subsequently been received from management, and BDO agreed with this Going Concern assessment;
- the unadjusted misstatements were relatively low value and these related to (i) issues on property valuations for the prior years (ii) movement in pension fund value relating to the Pension year end (31<sup>st</sup> December) being different to the year end for the Accounts (31<sup>st</sup> March); (iii) the impact of McCloud on LGPS and firefighters’ pension scheme;
- pension liability numbers had been produced by the actuary, which were reviewed by the Authority, but it was not documented that that review had taken place, so the auditors were required to make a recommendation.

Members raised the following points:

- the Cambridgeshire Pension Fund accounts were relatively straightforward compared to the County Council’s accounts, and the Fire Authority’s account were even more straightforward;
- queried the level of Reserves which seemed quite high at 10%. Officers agreed, but advised there were plans to run down those Reserves to a reasonable level of around 5-7%;

- observed that good progress had been made since the Policy & Resources Committee meeting in July, and thanked officers and auditors for their hard work in challenging times. The Member commented that Fire Authority Members needed to lead by example, and submit their related declaration forms. It was confirmed that all current Fire Authority Members had now returned their forms;
- asked whether the land material valuations were regularly reviewed. It was confirmed that all properties had been revalued as at 31/03/20 and the appropriate audit procedures had been undertaken;
- asked whether the assurances from Pension Fund auditors had been received. BDO confirmed that it was just the Audit for the Pension Fund accounts that was currently outstanding, as a result of a few unresolved issues, but this was expected imminently.

The Deputy Chief Executive thanked the BDO for their support and assistance in completing their audit work through the pandemic crisis, and commented that their common sense and practical approach had resulted in a smooth process despite the difficult circumstances.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the audit completion report for 2019/20 attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

## 158. Dates of Fire Authority meetings 2021-2022

It was agreed to defer this item.

Chairman

**CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Fire Authority would like to add its sincere congratulations to Jaqui Gavin, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisor, on her award of the British Empire Medal for services towards transgender equality in the Queen's Birthday Honours List which had been postponed from June until October to allow recognition of the COVID-19 heroes to be documented. Although Jaqui has said she feels "humbled beyond belief to have been recognised by my country" we believe it is well deserved recognition for a lifetime of commitment, perseverance and passion to transgender equality.

Members will note that there is an agenda item on the activities the Service has taken with regard to COVID-19. The recent HMICFRS inspection involved the submission of a self-assessment and interviews with key stakeholders. From my own interview, which lasted almost one hour, I gained the impression that we are well placed to come out well when compared with other authorities. Hopefully this is the case as an incredible amount of work has gone on behind the scenes and continues to do so while we prepare for most eventualities. Although SHQ is now a COVID-19 secure workplace it does not have the capacity to host a physical Fire Authority meeting and until such time as guidance allows, Members are advised that, all Authority meetings (including Committees) will continue to be held virtually.