

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY: MINUTES

Date: Thursday 6th February 2020

Time: 2.00 – 3.15pm

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: B Ashwood, I Gardener, J Gowing, L Harford, S Kindersley, M McGuire, K Reynolds (Chairman), T Rogers, M Shellens and M Smith

Peterborough City Council:

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

Officers Present: C Strickland, M Warren, S Ismail and D Cave

126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bywater, Giles and Scutt. Councillor McGuire would be late joining the meeting

127. MINUTES OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD 7TH NOVEMBER 2019

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 7th November 2019 were agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

128. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised that regrettably, the Fire Authority was still not in a position to decide where the new training centre and fire station should be built in Huntingdon. Despite intensive work, full costings for the proposal to build at St Johns if the collaboration opportunity at Monks Wood falls through were not yet available. The Interim Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), Ray Bisby, had formally advised the Fire Authority that the land offered at Monks Wood would most likely be needed for Police purposes.

It was hoped that matters would have progressed by March 2020, and a special meeting of the Authority would take place on 30th March to enable Members to discuss this. By this stage, there should be absolute certainty on the PCC's intentions, so that the Fire Authority could make the best decision.

In the event of any further delays, a Member asked if there was any merit in the Fire Authority giving delegated authority for the scheme, to allow it to be expedited. The Chairman commented that a major capital project of this magnitude needed to be signed off by the full Fire Authority, given it was a high priority for the workforce, who had not had adequate training facilities in the county for a long time. It was confirmed that the costs involved in what was likely to be a failed application for Monks Wood were being recorded, and the details would be passed on to the Fire Authority's barrister. It was confirmed that there had been a contingency in terms of training

facilities in the meantime, with staff sharing Northamptonshire's facilities. However, over £100K had been spent pursuing planning consent for Monks Wood, and this excluded officer time. The cost to the Fire Authority was further increased by the change in land values since the plans for St John's site had initially been explored in 2015, and officers were still in negotiation with the landowner regarding the land price. In addition, there was the increase in building costs since that date. If the same project was progressed as originally put forward, it was anticipated that costs would have risen by more than £900,000. Another issue was that the Fire Authority's capital reserves had not been producing returns that matched the inflation rates of land and build costs.

In response to a Member question, the Chairman confirmed that he was in dialogue with the Interim PCC, and several letters had been exchanged on the Monks Wood issue, recording the potential outcome and the likelihood that the Fire Authority would be seeking to reclaim costs. As Mr Bisby was only the Interim PCC, his view was that he would not make any major decisions, as the permanent PCC would be elected in May.

A Member commented that the whole situation with the former PCC and Monks Wood had been a deplorable waste of public money, and he very much hoped that the next PCC took a better attitude towards collaborative working, to ensure that taxpayers were not left short again. The Chairman and other Fire Authority Members supported these comments. He added that not only had this debacle been at taxpayers' expense, but also to the detriment of staff, who had not had the training facility they had been promised.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Interim PCC had given assurances in writing that he would be pushing ahead with existing collaborations with the Fire Authority, but as his position was interim, he could not commit significant additional public funds. He had also stated that should Monks Wood not be required by the operational side of the Constabulary, the Fire Service would have first refusal on the site. Members noted these comments but some expressed doubts, given the history between the PCC and the Fire Authority.

It was confirmed that staff were still being trained appropriately, with the training rated as "Good" in the HMICFRS inspection, which the Fire Service had ranked in the top four of all Fire Services in the country. The appropriate level of training was being maintained, although the situation was not ideal as there were issues in terms of geography i.e. staff having to travel to the Northamptonshire facilities, but these difficulties were not insurmountable. It was confirmed that the facilities in Northamptonshire were suitable for Cambridgeshire's needs, specifically providing all aspects of hot fire training.

The Chairman asked the Monitoring Officer to provide an update on the Judicial Review. It was noted that the first Judicial Review was still subject to an appeal to the Court of Appeal, and that the Court of Appeal had not set a date so far. The other Fire Authorities involved and the Home Office were not pushing for this to take place. The second and third Judicial Reviews had both been stayed. All time limits had been complied with, and there would be no hearings, and critically, no costs incurred, until the appeal was heard. The current view was that if the Monks Wood collaboration failed, from a Judicial Review perspective, the central plank of the PCC's business case fell away. At that point the PCC would be pressed to provide a view, as the appeal would almost be superfluous. For those reasons, the appeal was not being pushed at present, and it was reiterated that no additional costs were being incurred for the Judicial Review.

There was a discussion about keeping MPs and other Councillors updated with the latest progress in relation to the Judicial Review, and it was agreed that a briefing note could be produced, so that Fire Authority Members could keep other Councillors and MPs up to date. It was also noted that the position of Police & Crimes Commissioners may also be reviewed at a national level.

The Chairman advised that the Home Secretary had agreed in January to schedule the next round of inspections by HMICFRS. Cambridgeshire's inspection would start with a discovery week in late April 2020, followed by the actual inspection week commencing 18th May 2020. This was earlier than anticipated, however, officers have already started working through how available resources could best be utilised. It was likely that the inspection regime would then be every two years. It was confirmed that the Service did not receive funding for undergoing this process, which was very resource intensive. Whilst it was a positive exercise, there was considerable effort required, and it was a distraction to those involved from their regular work for many months. Members expressed some concerns, given that the Service's budget was very tight, and the inspection regime was introducing additional costs and pressures. The expectation from the Home Office was that these costs would need to be absorbed by the Fire Service. Officers confirmed that those involved did record the time they spent undertaking duties relating to the Inspection process.

The Chairman paid tribute to Christine Carter, a Labour County Councillor with a Cambridge City division who had served as an active and valued Fire Authority Member from 2001-2009. Christine had passed away recently, and a uniformed representative of the Fire Service had attended her funeral. Christine's family had been very grateful to see a uniformed officer attend the funeral, recognising Christine's valuable contributions to the Fire Service.

Members were advised that a car park barrier would be erected prior to the next Fire Authority meeting in March, and they would need to use their access cards to gain entry.

129. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Shellens declared an interest as a Member of the Police & Crime Panel.

130. DRAFT FIRE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2020-21

The Fire Authority considered a report on its budget requirement and precept for 2020/21 Council Tax. The budget had been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in December 2019, and the Committee had endorsed the proposed budget and associated precept increase of 2%. It was noted that the budget included the additional burden related to changes to the Firefighter Pension Scheme SCAPE (superannuation contributions adjusted for past experience) rate. Any shortfall would be funded from the Pension Reserve. The Budget also included a contribution to the Council Tax Fraud Reduction Initiative

There had been 765 responses to the budget consultation, and 78% had indicated support for the proposed increase. There had been many positive comments, but some respondents also felt strongly that there should be no increase in Council Tax as a whole.

Members received an update on the District authorities' Non-Domestic Rates Tax Base, set on 31 January, which was after the publication of the Fire Authority agenda. This had a slightly favourable impact on the Fire Service's budget, and whilst it did not change the bottom line, it did mean that it was possible to put an additional allocation in the Capital budget. It was also noted that because the location of the new training facility was still to be confirmed, no estimate was included in the budget. The new training facility would be funded from Reserves, and therefore would not contribute to any debt burden in the short term.

In discussion, individual Members raised the following points:

- Noted that the Business Rates pooling process did not include Peterborough, and the same was true for the Council Tax Fraud initiative. With regard to the latter scheme, it was acknowledged that the County and District Councils would benefit most, but that the Fire Service's £10,000 contribution should result in at least a £40,000 return. A similar exercise had been carried out in Essex, where the benefits had been considerably greater. Officers were happy to share the business case for the project with Member;
- A Member queried why the proposed Council Tax increase was 1.91% rather than 1.99%. Officers advised that the percentage applied needed to result in whole number increases for all Council Tax banding rates;
- A Member queried the reduction in Capital financing, from £1.273M in 2019/20 to £1.036M in 2020/21. Officers advised that this resulted from the estimated efficiency savings and this would be reinstated now that the Council Tax Base figures had been confirmed;
- A Member queried the inflation estimate for 2020/21 (£428,000) compared to the increased for 2021/22 (£550,000). Officers advised that the 2020/21 figure was much more granular and certain, whereas the 2021/22 figure was based on a 2% inflation estimate on all areas. It was anticipated that the latter would reduce as the figures firmed up;
- A Member observed that there was a steady increase in the impact on Band D properties. Officers explained that this was because the Fire Service was taking more debt on, which had historically been low;
- Members noted that the increase in firefighter pay had been assumed at 2% but was not known. It would be backdated to 1st July;
- In response to a Member question, it was noted that there were some references in the budget e.g. Capital Financing, that needed updating following the confirmation of the Council Tax base, and the reduced burden on Reserves;
- A Member was pleased to note the Property Maintenance budget, and the commitment to a rolling programme of refurbishment and modernisation of fire stations;
- Observing the commitment of the County Council and District Councils to tackle climate change, a Member asked officers what steps had been taken to reduce the Fire Service's impact on the environment. Officers reassured Members that

the organisation was taking numerous actions e.g. reviewing the fleet, so the next time new vehicles were bought, they would be replaced with electric or hybrid vehicles: there was also a commitment to fundamentally challenge the way things were done e.g. the need for journeys in fleet vehicles in the first place. One of major fire appliance manufacturers was looking to develop all electric vehicles. Other issues such as the use of LED lighting was being reviewed. All these aspects would be brought together in a Strategy, which would be presented for the Fire Authority's consideration in the summer. The Member commented that there were many simple "quick wins", e.g. the installation of solar panels when fire stations were being refurbished, and the installation of ground source heat pumps.

A number of Members commented favourably on the budget compared to other organisations' financial documents, commenting that it was very straightforward and easy to understand.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. Approve a Fire Authority budget requirement of £30,279,440;
2. Approve a recommended Fire Authority precept for Authority Tax from District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority of £20,907,619;
3. 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 (290,021):

| Band | Authority Tax | Band | Authority Tax |
|------|---------------|------|---------------|
| A | £48.06 | E | £88.11 |
| B | £56.07 | F | £104.13 |
| C | £64.08 | G | £120.15 |
| D | £72.09 | H | £144.18 |

4. Approve the Prudential and Treasury Indicators as set out on page 9 of the Budget Book;
5. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement on pages 8 to 13 of the Budget Book;
6. Approve the Capital Programme detailed at page 6 of the Budget Book;
7. Approve the Minimum Reserve Provision Policy Statement detailed at page 14 of the Budget Book.

131. EQUAL PAY AUDIT – NEW MANAGEMENT BAND PAY STRUCTURE

The Fire Authority considered a report on the work being done to progress the main recommendation made in the 2019 equal pay audit. Approval was sought for the proposed new management band pay structure for professional support staff and the proposed implementation plan, which had been a key recommendation of the audit.

This was because the existing system caused some disparities, whereby an individual on a higher grade could be paid less than someone on a lower grade. It was confirmed that no current employee's pay would be reduced as a result, but the pay scale if they left and were replaced may reduce. In some cases, job descriptions had been reviewed, and resulted in a small increase in pay for some employees. £25,000 had been budgeted for this across the structure.

Members again thanked officers for providing such a clear report.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the proposed new pay structure for management band professional support staff and the proposed implementation plan.

132. DRAFT PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Members considered a report on the Pay Policy Statement for 2020-21, in line with the duty under the Localism Act 2011 for Fire Authorities to produce Pay Policy Statements.

Officers highlighted the key changes in the document, and reminded Members that there had been a fundamental review three years previously, led by Councillor Bywater, of the Pay Policy, to ensure that it complied with best practice.

It was noted that the current pay multiple ratio – comparing the organisation's top earner compared to the lowest – was currently 1:7.75, and this was reducing steadily.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the draft Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

133. LOCAL PENSION BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

Fire Authority Members considered the annual update from the Local Pension Board for the financial year 2018/19.

Members were pleased to note that the Annual Report was positive, and concluded that the Pension scheme was complying with all relevant legislation. There were a number of challenges facing Pension schemes, specifically the implications of the McCloud and Sargeant cases in relation to age discrimination. From a firefighter perspective, an interim remedy was in place, and the full remedy was expected to come through later in the year. The implications were unknown, as guidance had not yet been issued by the Treasury. It was confirmed that the consultation sessions with uniformed staff were being carried out.

It was resolved unanimously to.

Note the Local Pension Board Annual report at Appendix 1 to the report.

134. FIRE AUTHORITY PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT

Fire Authority Members considered an update against the projects for 2019-20.

A Member queried progress with P093 (Co-responding), which had last been updated in November 2017. Officers reminded Members that the Co-responding project was subject to national negotiations over several years, and had been withdrawn in a number of areas. Co-responding was still taking place at both March and Ramsey stations, and the issue would be discussed at the next Programme Board meeting. It was essential to understand all the implications of co-responding: whilst it was clearly a great service to communities, it could have a negative impact on staff, and this needed to be properly understood and mitigated where possible, before agreeing a way forward. The Member suggested that the entry on the Monitoring Report be updated to reflect the current position.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Programme Status Report, as at January 2020, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

135. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2019-20

Members received an update on the revenue and capital spending as at 31st December 2019.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted a number of overspends, which had all been anticipated:

- The overspend on firefighters was due to the recruitment of new WTE firefighters in September 2019. This was partly to pre-empt the retirement of some turnover in firefighters in the coming year, and was reflected in the establishment;
- The overspend in Control Room staff, mainly resulting from sickness absences;
- The overspend on Senior Officer's pay was due to the ACFO's secondment to Essex: income from Essex was included in the Income section.

There had been a supplier delay in purchasing a number of new vehicles, but this should be spent by year end.

Arising from the report:

- A Member queried the 98% variance in External Interest. Officers agreed to check this and report back to Members. **Action required.**
- A Member asked why there was an assumption that challenging changes in rateable values would lead to reductions. Officers advised that the ones being challenged were ones where a reduction was expected.
- Members discussed the timing of expenditure, noting there were a number of carry forwards from the previous year's budget;
- Noted that budget and actual expenditure figures were so closely aligned due to close profiling against known government grants;
- Noted issues due to a number of retirements and ongoing sickness of Duty Station Commanders, and the importance of succession planning for those

operational roles. This was a particular issue, which was exacerbated because of the Pension Remedy issue.

It was resolved unanimously to

Note the position on revenue and capital spending.

136. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES FROM 17TH OCTOBER AND 19TH DECEMBER 2019

Members noted the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meetings held 17th October and 19th December 2019.

Chairman