

## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority: Minutes

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Time: 2:00-3.30pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Cambridgeshire County Council:

Councillors: S Bywater, I Gardener, B Goodliffe, J Gowing, S Kindersley, P McDonald, 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: M Warren, J Anderson, S Ismail, S Smith, S Newton and D Cave;

Officers attending virtually: C Strickland

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

Apologies for absence were presented on behalf of Councillor Kevin Reynolds.

Councillor Smith declared a non pecuniary interest in item 30 as Local Member for Papworth.

The Monitoring Officer advised that Simon Newton would withdraw from the meeting for item 32, as he had an interest in that item.

The Monitoring Officer issued a dispensation to all Fire Authority Members in relation to the proposed Council Tax increase, in item 25.

### 23. Minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021

The minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

### 24. Chair's announcements

Appended.

The Chair formally welcomed Councillor Catherine Rae to her first Fire Authority meeting, and thanked Councillor Cox Condon for her work on the Fire Authority.

The Chair spoke favourably on the pleasing result for the Service following the HMICFRS Inspection. She advised that she had written to Lord Greenhalgh, Minister of State for Building Safety and Fire, requesting a review of funding methodologies, as

Cambridgeshire was a high performing but low funded Fire Authority, and the funding mechanisms in place today do not allow the Fire Authority to plan effectively in the medium term. It was agreed that the Chair would, on behalf of the Fire Authority, write to all local MPs, highlighting these issues. Action required.

## 25. Draft Fire Authority Budget 2022-23 and Medium Term Financial Plan

The Fire Authority considered a report on its budget requirement and precept for 2022/23 Council Tax. The budget had been presented to Policy and Resources Committee meetings in December 2021 and January 2022, and updated to reflect comments made at those meetings, where a majority of Members had endorsed the proposed budget and associated precept increase of 2%, an additional £1.44 on the average Band D property in Cambridgeshire. Members had also considered the detail of the budget at a seminar earlier in the day.

The Business Plan presented was essentially a carry forward budget, built on a like for like basis with previous years. The main pressure was the assumed 2% pay award, as well as significant inflationary pressures on fuel and energy. It was stressed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy was very much in draft for the foreseeable future, until there was certainty on future income.

A Member asked what would happen if Council Tax was not increased by 2%, specifically in terms of the impact in cutting the number of firefighters employed. It was confirmed that the 2% increase equated to around £440,000-450,000, which was the salaries of 10-12 firefighters or 12-14 professional support staff members.

A Member commented that a standstill budget was not a viable option unless inflation was zero, and he supported the proposed 2% increase in Council Tax. However, with regard to Peterborough, he expressed doubts as to whether sufficient income would be generated, as only around 50% of Peterborough residents pay Council Tax. He also queried how the anticipated population increase through housing developments would impact on Council Tax, and expressed concerns on Council Tax collection.

In terms of Council Tax collection, officers advised that they were looking at ways to maximise this, including a project that was being led by the County Council, in partnership with the District authorities and Fire Service. It was stressed that the Fire Authority was capped to a 2% increase, but if Cambridgeshire was in the lower quartile it would have £10 flexibility. Officers did have concerns regarding the financial years post 2022/23. Whilst a 2% increase in housing was anticipated in 2022/23, 1% growth was forecast for each successive year.

A Member asked about the 10% anticipated inflationary increase in fuel costs, and asked whether alternative fuels were being considered. Officers confirmed that alternatives were being considered, including cleaner options such as biofuels and biodiesels. The phasing of these new technologies would be critical.

A Member thanked the senior officer team for their input into the process to date, and the information and responses provided to Members on the proposed budget at both Committee meetings and the seminar. He commented that his priority was for the Service to keep the people of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough safe, and for that reason he would be supporting the proposed budget. However, he expressed concerns regarding non-pay inflation, which had been limited to 2% in the budget, and also about

general inflation, as he felt these were areas of risk going forward. In relation to the General Reserves, he was pleased to note that this would be revisited later in the year.

Members noted that around 130 responses had been received during the public consultation, and whilst more responses would have been welcomed, 76% of respondents supported the proposed increase in Council Tax. A Member suggested that targeted social media could be used to consult more residents in future.

In response to a Member question, it was noted that in 2010 the budget was approximately £30.2M, and twelve years later it was only £31.2M. Had the 2010 budget been subject to successive inflationary increases, it would be nearer £37.2M. The Fire Authority had made some very difficult decisions since 2010, saving the jobs of both firefighters and support staff through efficiencies, against a shrinking budget. However, there were now few opportunities to reduce the budget further without impacting on services.

Councillor Kindersley, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, suggested that it would be appropriate in future for the budget to be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee prior to its presentation to the full Fire Authority meeting. This proposal was supported by other Members of the Fire Authority and it was agreed that this would be scheduled into the Committee's Work Programme. Action required.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. approve the budget book attached at Appendix 1 including the recommendations detailed on Page 22:
  - (i) that approval is given to a Fire Authority budget requirement of £31,226,300;
  - (ii) that approval is given to a recommended Fire Authority precept for Authority Tax from District Authorities and Peterborough City Authority of £22,214,110;
  - (iii) That approval be given to 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 (296,307):

| Band | Authority Tax | Band | Authority Tax |
|------|---------------|------|---------------|
| A    | £49.98        | E    | £91.63        |
| B    | £58.31        | F    | £108.29       |
| C    | £66.64        | G    | £124.95       |
| D    | £74.97        | H    | £149.94       |

- (iv) That approval is given to the Prudential and Treasury Indicators as set out on page 11 of the report;
- (v) that approval is given to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement on pages 10 to 17 of the report;
- (vi) That approval is given to the Capital Programme detailed at page 9 of the report;

- (vii) That approval is given to the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement detailed on page 18 of the report.

2. approve the medium term financial strategy at Appendix 2.

## 26. Draft Pay Policy Statement 2022-23

Members considered a report on the Pay Policy Statement for 2022-23, in line with the duty under the Localism Act 2011 for Fire Authorities to produce Pay Policy Statements.

In addition to meeting the relevant legal requirements, the Statement clearly set out the Authority's position, highlights the comparison between its remuneration for Principal Officers, compared to the lowest paid and median employees.

A Member noted that there had been a Member Led Review of the Pay Policy in 2014, and commented that it may be useful to repeat that exercise. Officers agreed that it may be timely to repeat such a review, and agreed to schedule this on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme. **Action required.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

## 27. Proposed Changes to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority Members' Code of Conduct

The Fire Authority considered a report proposing a move from the current Code of Conduct to the LGA's Model Code. The Model Code was more detailed, defined key terms such as bullying and harassment more closely, and was much more granular when compared to the Fire Authority's current Code, which was broadly based on the Nolan principles.

The Monitoring Officer had reviewed other authorities' Codes, and found that some had chosen to adopt the LGA's Model Code, while some had not. On balance, she believed that the Model Code was an improvement on the current version as it provided greater clarity.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted an error in paragraph 6.2 of the report which stated "... *includes a rebuttable presumption that a Member is acting in their official capacity*", and advised that this was not quite correct, as Members were only ever acting in their capacity as Councillors or as private individuals – there was no assumption that Members were "always on duty".

It was suggested that if the Authority did adopt the new Code, that a Member seminar could be arranged to explore the implications of the Code and how it differed to the Codes for Cambridgeshire County and Peterborough City Councils.

A Member commented that he was always disappointed that there was a need for this type of document, but acknowledged that it was necessary, and gave an example of

where a new Councillor within his authority had been subject to harassment and inappropriate comments.

A Member spoke in support of the adoption of the model code, and suggested that it may be appropriate for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review how it was working after a few years of implementation.

A number of Members welcomed the Code of Conduct, observing that it also acted as protection for Members, and thanked the Monitoring Officer for her work on this matter.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. consider the contents of this report;
2. note that all local authorities (including fire and rescue authorities) are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct;
3. adopt the LGA Model Code in its entirety, subject to minor local additions as set out in Paragraph 7.3 of the report.

## 28. Members' Allowance Scheme 2022-23

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that she had issued a dispensation for this item from the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct, enabling Members to discuss this item without declaring a pecuniary interest.

The Fire Authority considered a report on the Members' Allowance Scheme, which proposed no increase to existing Members' Allowances. It was noted that historically, Members' allowances had been reviewed by asking Cambridgeshire County Council to consider the Fire Authority's requirements as part of its own review of Members' allowances. The Monitoring Officer suggested that rather than link in with the County Council's review, it may be more appropriate for the Fire Authority to arrange its own review based on Members' specific duties in relation to the Fire Authority, and benchmark against other Fire Authorities. A report exploring these options and mechanisms more fully, and likely costs, could be presented to the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

It was resolved unanimously that:

1. the allowance rates within appendix 1 are agreed and applied for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023;
2. the authority receives a further report at its next meeting on the options and costs of an independent review panel or other mechanism to determine future allowances as soon as practicable.

## 29. Draft Sustainability Strategy

Members considered a draft Sustainability Strategy. It was noted that the Service had implemented a number of sustainable solutions over a significant period of time,

including building and fleet standards, but a more strategic and ambitious approach was proposed, focusing on the Service reducing its carbon footprint.

The Fire Service was working with Anglian Water, a local leader on sustainability issues, to see what good practice and lessons could be learned. The challenging target was to be net zero by 2030. Key themes included:

- People - changing behaviour;
- Transport – including reconsidering journeys;
- Fleet – including alternative fuels;
- Property – continuing the programme of property improvements.

Officers were also taking advice from the Carbon Trust, and aimed to bring back its detailed plans to the Fire Authority at the end of the year.

There was a query on electric vehicle (EV) charging points. It was confirmed that these were rolled out to stations and the most strategic sites and fleet first, but this could then be rolled out to staff, who would pay for charging at the workplace. A Member stressed the importance of applying for grants, where these were available. It was noted that many of the EV charging points would be grant funded.

Noting the focus on understanding the current position, a Member observed that the Service was a highly respected part of the community across a wide geographic area, and he hoped that the Sustainability Strategy would be an opportunity for the Service to be agents of change, e.g. when visiting homes in the community, as advice from Fire professionals often carried considerable weight.

A Member noted that in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, five year Equipment Upgrades were scheduled, and he hoped that suppliers would be asked to evidence their sustainability credentials.

It was resolved unanimously to:

review the proposed Strategy at Appendix 1 to the report and approve the principles so that the Service can begin to construct a detailed plan and roadmap through to 2030.

### 30. Update on the Relocation of Papworth to Cambourne Fire Station

The Fire Authority considered a report on work being undertaken in relation to the relocation of Papworth Community Fire station to the fire station in Cambourne.

Officers explained that at an early stage of the Cambourne development, the Fire Service had secured Section 106 funding for a fire station. At that time there was still a significant risk in nearby Papworth due to the hospital being operational, but the hospital had since moved to the Addenbrookes site. There was now an excellent new fire station in Cambourne, but currently no operational crew. The opportunities available in Cambourne, especially in terms of more staff, was noted.

Speaking as Local Member, Councillor Smith commented that whilst she was broadly supportive, she would like to see an update on the engagement with stakeholders and

the provision of information to them, and also a full business case, presented to the next meeting of the Fire Authority. This proposal was seconded by Cllr McGuire.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members discussed the use of the term ‘consultation’, which had a specific legal meaning, and implied that something could be raised which may change the decision. Officers confirmed that this was not the case for the proposed move, and that it would essentially be an information sharing exercise, advising local communities that the station was being moved. The proposed methods of disseminating information were noted;
- A Member commented that whilst the report did not provide the views of the respective Parish/Town Council or communities, ultimately this was an operational issue, and one that had been widely known about for a long time. The Member did not oppose receiving an update report at a future meeting, but he felt that this should not slow down the process;
- Another Member commented that the Fire Authority was different from the Police, and that a number of operational issues did come under the remit of the Fire Authority. Whilst agreeing that this had been planned for many years and there was widespread awareness in the communities involved, he highlighted the statement in the report that “*The need to clearly communicate the rationale for this change and the benefits it will deliver is vitally important*”. He therefore felt it was reasonable to receive a further update following the engagement with residents;
- It was suggested that a more constructive way forward may be to have a report on the public information programme that was undertaken by the Service in relation to the move.

Councillor Smith commented that local stakeholders needed to be fully involved, as they had not been kept informed to date, and she felt strongly that more information needed to be shared with the communities and an update presented to the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the decision to move from Papworth to Cambourne had been made some time ago, but agreed that more information needed to be shared with the local communities. As there were more people living and working in Cambourne, the likelihood was that there was a bigger recruitment pool, but this was not guaranteed. From an operational perspective, Cambourne was the best place to have an appliance, and a better service could be provided to both local communities and the county as a whole from that location.

It was agreed that a further report, feeding back on the information sharing process, would be presented to the next meeting of the Fire Authority. This report would also detail more fully the resource implications e.g. the likely capital receipt from Papworth Fire Station.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. note the contents of this report and the work the Service is undertaking with its staff and communities that will be affected by this move;

2. make comment on any opportunity to improve our approach;
3. receive a further update at the next Fire Authority meeting.

### 31. Fire Safety Legislation Update and Improvements

Members considered a report on additional burdens on fire and rescue services when new legislation came into force.

The Building Safety Bill was drafted in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster and focused on high rise buildings of 18 metres and above. It would provide the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) with the power to direct fire and rescue services to provide them with resources to assist their work. It was anticipated that there would need to be, nationally, a 30% increase in fire safety inspectors to provide the BSR functions. Whilst a chargeback system would be established with the BSR, upfront costs would need to be met by Fire and Rescue Services, and it was suggested that only 70% of costs would be recouped in the first two years. There were only 20 high rise buildings in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, but it was likely that there would be a call on resources regionally, so the Service's inspectors were likely to be deployed in neighbouring counties. On 9<sup>th</sup> February it had been announced that a further grant would be available in 2022/23, but this would be a one off grant, and could not be guaranteed going forward.

A Member queried the reference to "regional hubs", and also asked if there would be a requirement or obligation for inspectors to work in adjacent counties. Officers explained that the "regional hubs" aimed to build capacity across fire services, especially as well trained inspectors often secured more lucrative opportunities in the private sector. Currently, assessors had no enforcement powers, but the legislation would probably permit this. It was also likely that 11-18 metre buildings would come within the scope of the legislation.

It was resolved unanimously to:

note the information within Appendix 1 of the report and the associated risks/issues noted within this report.

### 32. Re-engagement of Area Commander S Newton

*(Area Commander Newton withdrew from the meeting)*

The Fire Authority considered a report on the decision by the Chief Officer Group to re-engage Area Commander Simon Newton on a fixed term contract.

Members noted that the success of the Service's senior officers in appointments to other Fire Services had led to a loss of organisational experience and knowledge at the middle and strategic management levels. One way to address this imbalance was to re-engage recently retired staff for fixed periods of time. Area Commander Simon Newton was due to retire later in 2022, having completed 30 years' service. The rest of the group command team was relatively inexperienced. The Chief Officer Group had therefore asked Area Commander Newton to re-engage on a fixed term, two year contract.

A Member asked about the significant numbers of firefighters reaching retirement age, which Members had been alerted to some years ago, and whether this had now peaked? Officers confirmed that they were seeing the tail end of that phenomenon.

It was resolved to:

note the decision and make comment as appropriate.

### 33. Results of Consultation with Representative Bodies - Changes to Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

The Fire Authority received a report on the consultation with representative bodies undertaken during November and December 2021, regarding proposed changes to the Discipline Policy and Procedure, specifically changes relating to the procedures for hearing appeals against dismissal. This related directly to the proposed changes to the Fire Authority's Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation, which had been discussed at the Fire Authority meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

Noting a summary of the main issues raised in the consultation, it was confirmed that whilst the representative bodies had expressed some concerns, they did not fundamentally alter the view of the Monitoring Officer that the proposals were fair, legally compliant and aligned with the principles within the legislation that support operational decision making should be retained under the remit of the Chief Fire Officer.

It was resolved to:

- i. note the outcome of the consultation process undertaken with all representative bodies;
- ii. note the resultant changes to the Authority's Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation, at Appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

### 34. Appointments to Committees

Two minor changes to appointments to Committees, whereby Councillor Rae was appointed to those positions vacated by Councillor Cox Condron, on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Discipline Committee, were agreed unanimously.

It was also noted that as a consequence of the changes to the Fire Authority's constitutional documents, membership of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) had reduced by two Members. **Postscript:** The Conservative Group Leader had subsequently informed Democratic Services that Councillors Bywater and Reynolds would be removed from the JCC membership.

On a general point, in relation to the reports considered at the meeting, a Member asked that officers ensure that gender neutral language was used wherever possible in reports.

## **CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS – THURSDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2022**

### **HMICFRS INSPECTION OUTCOME – DECEMBER 2021**

Since our last meeting in November, I have been delighted to learn that the Service has once again been assessed as **Good** across all three of the main inspection pillars; how efficient and effective it is and how well it looks after our people. It also scored **Good** in 10 of the 11 sub-categories too, which is fantastic news and a real achievement as the bar was set higher this year. This outcome will undoubtedly put the Service amongst the best fire and rescue services in the country again.

Being one of the first to undergo a second assessment and for it to take place in the midst of the pandemic, just as we were coming out of another lockdown, makes the outcome even more pleasing. COVID has hit people hard and everyone, whether they are still coming into work or working from home, has seen significant changes to their working environment and how they interact with colleagues. To achieve these scores despite all the additional challenges of COVID is incredible and testament to all the hard work, continued perseverance and unwavering commitment our people have to the Service and their communities.

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As you would expect the report details much of the good work undertaken and many areas where improvements have been made since the last inspection, as well as some areas where further improvement could be made; we welcome these comments. I'm sure Members will join me in congratulating all those within the Service on their collective achievement and we look forward to working with them as we pursue continuous improvement.

The full report can be found [here](#).

### **TOPPING OUT CEREMONY – NEW COMMUNITY FIRE STATION AND TRAINING CENTRE HUNTINGDON**

Members will be aware that construction on the new site of the training facility and community fire station in Huntingdon began in September 2021 and by way of an update on progress, I can report that an official 'topping out' ceremony was held last week to mark a key milestone in the project; completion of the highest point of the main building.

Our Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Matthew, joined project team colleagues and Artisan representatives to view the progress and has been very enthusiastic about how much progress has been made and that you can actually now visualise the excellent facility it will become for our firefighters, support staff and local community.

The building work is anticipated to be completed in late 2022, with occupation by staff expected by early 2023.

### **LGBT+ HISTORY MONTH**

This month marks the start of LGBT+ History Month, a month to promote equality and diversity for the benefit of all, by increasing the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ("LGBT+") people, their history, lives and their experiences and raising awareness and advancing education on matters affecting the LGBT+ community. It's also about working to

make everywhere a safe space for all LGBT+ communities while promoting the welfare of LGBT+ people.

During February, the Service traditionally turns its focus to recognising the community, much as it does for Black History Month in October. It considers it important that time is taken to focus on the underrepresented communities to ensure it can truly uphold its vision of people being at the centre of everything it does, whether that be colleagues or the wider community (making CFRS a place where everyone feels welcome, respected and where they can be their true self at work).

Our LGBTQIA+ ambassador will be leading activities be that updates throughout the month via Yammer and Our Week, making available a whole host of materials to order and/or wear for example, email/social media banners, wallcharts of LGBT+ historical figures, lanyards, laces, badges, bugs and stickers or ensuring we fly the “progress flag” from those CFRS locations that have a flag pole. The progress flag builds on the well-known rainbow flag but has a more defined recognition of the trans community and those from underrepresent minority groups too.

If any Member would like further information please contact one of our Equality and Inclusion Member Champions (Councillors Jamil and Smith) in the first instance.