

FIRE AUTHORITY: MINUTES

Date: 11 February 2021

Time: 2.00 pm – 3.15 pm

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 Coles and D Over (Vice-Chairman)

Officers Present: C Strickland, M Warren, S Ismail, J Anderson, C Parker, D Cave, D Thompson

159. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were presented on behalf of Councillor Jamil.

160. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

161. Minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting held 22 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman when circumstances permitted.

162. Chairman's Announcements

Attached. The Chairman extended a warm welcome to the Fire Authority to Councillor Andy Coles, attending his first meeting.

163. Draft Fire Authority Budget 2021-22

The Fire Authority considered a report on its budget requirement and precept for 2021/22 Council Tax. The budget had been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in December 2020, and the Committee had endorsed

the proposed budget and associated precept increase of 2%. Members had considered the detail of the budget at a seminar earlier in the day.

It was noted that the Business Rate income for 2020/21 was predicted to be significantly reduced when compared to that forecast, due to the pandemic. Government has sought to mitigate the impact of lost Council Tax revenue on all public bodies by providing a special grant which would be used to reduce the shortfall over a three year period. The grant received for Cambridgeshire Fire was £312K. This would be kept in reserve and applied each year as the impact on collection rates became known. Nationally, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough continued to be one of the lowest funded authorities, which presented significant challenges. The historic reasons behind this were noted, and it was concluded that this was an issue unlikely to be addressed in the near future. Attention was drawn to the capital programme, including the move to the St John's land and the development of the training facility.

There were additional revenue cost pressures within the budget, which included continued pandemic related expenditure such as the cleaning contract, which had been brought back in house, partly because of the additional challenges of keeping all workplaces clean and Covid secure. There were also additional costs such as enhancing First Aid training for firefighters, as well as a major focus on the mental health and wellbeing of all employees.

There was a query relating to the modernisation of Kimbolton fire station. Officers outlined the work being undertaken to improve facilities for staff and also make the building more energy efficient.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. review the budget book attached at Appendix 1 to the report and approve the recommendations detailed on Page 19 within it;
2. note the Service's intended participation in a scheme to reduce council tax fraud.

164. Members' Allowance Scheme 2021-22

The Monitoring Officer advised that she had issued a dispensation for this item from the provisions of Part 2 of the Members' Code of Conduct, enabling Members to discuss this item without declaring a pecuniary interest.

The Fire Authority considered a report on Members Allowance Scheme. The current scheme ended in March. For several years, the Fire Authority had effectively repeated the previous arrangements, due to ongoing certainty regarding the future governance arrangements for the fire service. Given this, it was proposed to freeze allowances for a further year.

Historically, Member allowances had been reviewed by asking Cambridgeshire County Council to consider the Fire Authority's requirements as part of its own review, and this had been seen as prudent, especially when the future of the Fire Authority was in the balance. Whilst the direction and aspirations of the White Paper and incoming Police and Crime Commissioner were not yet known, the future of the Fire Authority was more certain than it had been previously. The Monitoring Officer suggested that rather than link in with the County Council's review, this may be a good opportunity 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 more fully could be presented to the next meeting of the Fire Authority.

In discussion

- it was confirmed that the Review Panel would be made up of external, independent individuals with expertise in these matters;
- One Member raised concerns that an independent review panel may be a waste of goodwill and tax payers' money, as Members often rejected findings from these panels. He agreed with the proposal to freeze allowances for the coming year, and a number of other Members also indicated their support for the freeze;
- A Member suggested waiting until the direction of the White Paper was known;
- Another Member expressed reservations regarding an independent review panel. He also cautioned that whilst the Fire Authority had frozen allowances for a number of years for good reasons, when allowances did increase, the eventual uplift may appear to be disproportionate, which could cause adverse publicity;
- A Member agreed that any increase at the present time would be insensitive and inappropriate. Whilst acknowledging concerns about an independent panel being potentially costly and wasteful, if its recommendations were not taken up, she commented that it would be difficult to demonstrate good governance without examining the processes that were in place. On balance, she supported the concept of external review, but felt that it was not the right time;

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments. He commented that whilst it never seemed to be the right time to review Members' allowances, he was reluctant to commit the new administration to considering an independent review panel in the summer, especially given the uncertainty around the White Paper and Police and Crime Commissioner. He therefore proposed that the Fire Authority approve the first recommendation, but change the second recommendation to "early in the life of the new Fire Authority", rather than at the next meeting.

It was resolved unanimously to

1. agree and apply the allowance rates within Appendix 1 for the period April 2021 to 31 March 2022;

2. the Authority receives, early in the life of the new Fire Authority, options and costs for a review of its allowances scheme to commence on 1 April 2022.

165. Draft Pay Policy Statement 2021-22

Members considered a report on the Pay Policy Statement for 2021-22, 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 in terms not only of its remuneration for Principal Officers, but also the lowest paid employees. The current pay multiple ratio between the highest and lowest earners was steadily reducing.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

166. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan Update

Members of the Fire Authority received an update regarding the mental health and wellbeing work of the People Strategy. Key areas of work were highlighted, especially around processes, support available and communications with staff. The Wellbeing Strategy focused on the three pillars of maintaining good mental health, which were prevention, protection and response.

Arising from the presentation:

- A Member applauded the work undertaken over recent years, which filled him with confidence on how the Service treated colleagues, and he hoped other authorities would take such a proactive approach to mental health and wellbeing, and he looked forward to future updates;
- Another Member asked how support would be provided to the wider family of the staff member? Officers advised that many services were available to families, including those provided by the Fire Service Charity;
- A Member applauded this exemplar which should be replicated in other services. It was noted that whilst the report made a commitment to evaluating activities, there was no evidence of delivering that commitment. Whilst Members had oversight of this work so knew what was happening,

the Member suggested that this evidence should be made clearer for anyone examining this work externally;

- A Member raised the issue of mental health in relation to remote working as a result of the pandemic, noting there had been steps taken to allow people to come back in to a Covid safe workplace. She suggested the damage to individuals from mental health issues arising from remote working was probably being underestimated in general.

Concluding, the Chairman thanked Members for their positive comments on this important work. Tribute was paid to all of the officers involved, especially Jon Anderson and Amy Jackson.

It was resolved unanimously to:

The Authority is asked to consider and approve the Wellbeing Strategy and supporting documents to be communicated out to all staff.

167. Annual Review of the operation of the ICT Shared Service

Members considered the outcome of an Annual Review in to the operation of the ICT Shared Service with Bedfordshire.

The period covered by the review had been very different to previous years, due to the lockdown and restrictions on working arrangements enforced by the pandemic. Throughout this period, the ICT Shared Service had provided a stable and reliable ICT infrastructure. Performance against incident management had dropped slightly, but this was largely due to increased fix times for some faults, given the large number of staff remote working in both organisations. ICT staff had provided advice and guidance with personal ICT equipment and also conducted some home visits to deliver equipment where necessary, which had been well received by staff.

Costs were subject to each organisation's own approval process, including ICT Shared Service joint projects and temporary agency staff. A framework for accounting for time and costs was in place, and end of year procedures for cross charging were undertaken and reviewed by the ICT Shared Service Board.

Progress had been made throughout the year migrating services on to Microsoft 365 in the cloud environment. The migration to cloud services would continue in the coming year.

A Member observed that in the Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register report included joint administration of the ICT shared service. Officers advised that the governance model was reviewed twelve months ago, due to concerns about the divergence of strategies of the two organisations. These strategies had been realigned, and as a result the risk had reduced.

Praise was given to the ICT team by both Members and officers.

It was resolved unanimously to:

1. consider the outcomes of the annual review of the operation of the ICT Shared Service Agreement;
2. note the progress in achieving the aims of improved resilience, flexibility, cover, quality and customer focus.

168. Budget update report

Members received an update on the revenue and capital spending as at 31st December 2020.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted a number of deviations from the budget:

- The overspend on firefighters, which was partly pre-empting some significant turnover in firefighters due to retirement in the coming year;
- An overspend for allowances paid to flexible duty officers, and expenditure against control room employees. This overspend related to providing cover on the operational rota and within the control room for sickness;
- The underspend in property maintenance, some of which was Covid related, or where work could not be completed as quickly as originally anticipated;
- The underspend in fuel, due to BP providing free fuel to appliances throughout the pandemic: this offer had been extended to the end of the financial year. In response to a Member question, it was noted that this generous offer had been extended nationally by BP to all blue light services;
- An adjustment in the budget relating to carried forward funding for aerial appliances. These devices had been delivered and would be fully operational by the end of the financial year.

Arising from the report, it was observed that the issue of sporadic recruitment/retirement patterns of firefighters was historic, and would be smoothed out going forward. It was also noted that the more efficient operational staffing arrangements implemented over recent years meant that there was little capacity when a number of firefighters retired at the same time.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the position on revenue and capital spending.

169. Strategic Risk and Opportunity Management Register – Monitoring Report

Fire Authority Members considered an update on the Strategic Risk Register. The Risk Register had been refreshed with the current risks reviewed and assessed for their current validity and the mitigation actions have been updated or amended as necessary.

One of the major risks continued to be that the ESMCP (Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme) solution being offered would not be sustainable, leading to the government having to renegotiate with Airwave and an increase in costs to the Service. A Member noted that the government had been lobbied repeatedly on ESMCP, and asked how much the continued delay was costing. Officers advised that ESMCP was originally supposed to be a cost saving, or a solution that would incur no extra costs, but this was looking increasingly unlikely.

Members discussed the perennial risk of cybercrime, noting that every effort was being taken to mitigate that risk. A Member observed that for emergency services, there was a lot of reliance on technology for timing and communications, and asked whether specialist advice had been taken. Officers confirmed that they had a penetration testing programme, and regularly engage specialists who try to infiltrate the Service's system. The most vulnerable area remained people e.g. staff responding to spam emails. The Member commented that positive staff relations was critical when dealing with these type of issues.

It was resolved unanimously:

to review and note the strategic risk report and the risk distribution scoring matrix at Appendix 1 to the report.

170. Public minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 17 December 2020

The Fire Authority noted the public minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee held 17 December 2020.

171. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held 1 October 2020 and 7 January 2021

Members noted the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held 1 October 2020 and 7 January 2021.

172. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies

Members agreed the revised schedule of appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies. The relevant changes were the appointment of Councillor Coles to both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and the Joint Consultative Committee.

CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Janet Goodwin

It is with great sadness that I must report the passing, just before Christmas, of Councillor Janet Goodwin. Janet was most recently appointed by Peterborough City Council to the Fire Authority in May 2018, but had served on the Fire Authority, on and off, for many years.

Many of us knew Janet, she was an excellent contributor to Fire Authority meetings and staunch supporter of the fire service. She was also a good friend with a great sense of humour and I would like to send condolences to her family and friends on behalf of the Fire Authority. She will be sadly missed by us all.

HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection Outcome

On 22 January 2021 the outcomes of the HMICFRS COVID-19 inspections of all fire and rescue services in England were published.

Our report is extremely positive and the inspection team was 'impressed' with how we had adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively and how we had put the health, safety and wellbeing of our people at the forefront of decision making. It has been an incredibly challenging year for everyone yet we have continued to deliver our own statutory responsibilities as well as assist our partners where we could and I am delighted that the efforts of everyone in the Service have been recognised in the report.

The inspection team assessed us across a number of areas and formed their opinion on how well we had responded from talking to senior leaders, union representatives and other managers as well as analysing our documents, data and a staff survey. Like the Chief Fire Officer, it makes me immensely proud reading the report and as we move into the next wave of the fight against the virus with the vaccination programme, it is good to see that so many of our staff have already volunteered to support NHS partners with the challenge of getting the nation vaccinated.

Like the inspection team we recognise that the arrangements for managing the pandemic may carry on for some time and that we should plan for the future. In order to be as efficient and effective as possible, Officers have already started to look at and work on some aspects of the three recommended focus areas from the inspection.

The full report can be found at

<https://www.cambsfire.gov.uk/media/2997/cambridgeshire-frs-covid-19-inspection.pdf>

HMICFRS UPCOMING INSPECTION – WEEK COMMENCING 22 FEBRUARY 2021

Last month the Service found out that it will be one of the first services in Tranche 1 of the follow up round of the HMICFRS inspection programme to be inspected this year. This is slightly earlier than we anticipated however it does give us a great

chance to reflect and share our story with the team at the Inspectorate. Over the past few weeks Officers and staff have compiled document returns, data returns and prepared a self-assessment. Staff briefings have also started to be delivered to ensure that everyone across the Service is prepared and this is supported by briefing notes and regular updates on Workplace. As the Chairman of the Authority, I have seen the Service continue to evolve and improve since our last inspection even during the ongoing global pandemic. This inspection gives us the opportunity to share our stories of success but also demonstrate how we can learn and have learnt from what we could do better, so as the inspection draws nearer, if you are asked to participate please seize the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences.

QFSM AWARD

Members will be aware that in late December last year we received the wonderful news that Chief Fire Officer Chris Strickland was to receive the Queens Fire Service Medal in the New Year Honours List. Chris has provided outstanding leadership throughout his career in Cambridgeshire, which has been particularly prevalent during the pandemic and has certainly been a contributing factor in us being recognised as one of the top performing services in the country. An obviously great and very well deserved achievement for Chris and one I'm sure you will join me in publicly congratulating him.

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

Linked to our HMICFRS COVID-19 inspection outcome, our staff have helped out in many ways to assist blue light colleagues and the most vulnerable in our communities for example, driving ambulances, training staff to drive ambulances, face fitting masks to be used by frontline NHS and clinical care staff working with COVID-19 patients, and welfare visits to the vulnerable who were shielding. To enable this our resources had to be and were well managed; our financial position was largely unaffected, reserves didn't have to be used to cover extra costs, the organisation was able to respond quickly to staff absences and implemented work to build resilience. As the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme gathers pace around the country, those staff that wish to are volunteering to support NHS colleagues. Indeed, at the time of writing, in excess of 500 hours had been given to vaccination centres across Cambridgeshire.

As the Chief Fire Officer said in a recent communication "The pandemic has been such a challenging time for everyone, across the country and the rest of the world. From the very start we have been seeing where we can provide help and ensure we are there for our communities, in particular those most vulnerable residents. With vaccination centres now being set up across the country, we want to ensure we are standing with the NHS to help protect as many people as possible, as quickly as possible".

It is important to recognise that, although this is a national crisis and the sector is there to help in the fight against COVID-19, our staff are at the heart of everything that we do and we wouldn't put them at any unnecessary risk. The National Fire Chiefs Council has released a range of updated risk assessments allowing fire service staff to continue work on COVID-19 related activities, while also taking on

more and different responsibilities and Officers will ensure that we are offering staff the right protection if we are carrying out these new duties.

CO-RESPONDING UPDATE

Members of the Authority are aware that since 2016, the Service has provided a medical response to cardiac arrest calls (co-responding) from its fire stations in March and Ramsey. Our evaluation of this work in January 2020 demonstrated benefits to both the local communities and the crews at those stations. It also proved to be excellent value for money. The Service has plans to expand these benefits by introducing more stations in areas where our ambulance service colleagues have challenges meeting their attendance times. More recently, the stress on the capacity of the NHS caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has meant the Service has been formally asked to bring forward these plans. Officers are now working closely with ambulance service colleagues to bring on a further six co-responding stations in our rural areas; great news for our communities, crews and collaboration.

St JOHNS DEVELOPMENT

And finally, I am delighted to report that the Authority has received planning consent for the proposed development at St Johns in Huntingdon. We are now seeking to complete on the land purchase by the end of the month with work on-site to commence early April.