



Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority

MINUTES of the meeting held at Joint Fire / Police HQ, Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on 15 December 2023 from 10.30 am - 11.48 am

Membership

Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)
Councillor Callum Bailey
Councillor John Clarke MBE
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora (Vice Chair)
Councillor John Lee
Councillor Nick Raine
Councillor Jason Zadrozny
Commissioner Caroline Henry
Councillor Roger Upton
Councillor Jonathan Wheeler
Councillor Nigel Turner
Councillor Richard Butler
Councillor Liaqat Ali
Councillor Anwar Khan
Councillor Devontay Okure
Councillor Jay Hayes

Absent

Councillor Robert Corden

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

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32 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Robert Corden - unwell
Councillor John Lee - predicted lateness
Councillor John Clarke - predicted lateness

33 Change in Membership

Resolved to note that Nottingham City Council has appointed Councillor Jay Hayes in the place of Councillor Gul Khan.

34 Declarations of Interest

Mick Sharman, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Strategic Collaboration for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Services), declared an interest in agenda item 7, minute 39, (Appointment of Assistant Chief Fire Officer), insofar as the decision of the Authority affected him directly, and so would withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the Authority's consideration of the item.

Craig Parkin, Chief Fire Officer, declared a personal interest in agenda item 9, minute 42, (Principal Officer Pay Review), but due to the nature of the report, did not intend to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of the items.

35 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 July 2023, and 22 September 2023, were confirmed as true records and signed by the Chair.

36 Chair's Announcements

The Chair, Councillor Michael Payne, made the following announcements:

- a) The Service is proud to support the aims and values of White Ribbon Day on 25 November, in action against domestic violence, for which Andy Macey and all officers involved are thanked for their contribution to this work;
- b) The Central Government response to the sector reform white paper has been issued and will be emailed to all members. As expected, it focuses around people, governance and professionalism and culture. The Service is already working on many of these points, but also referenced was the operational independence of Chief Fire Officers. It is proposed that the reply informs an Authority debate;
- c) The Home Office has been written to requesting authorisation for the Service to consider setting a potential Council Tax precept of £5, however it is believed from the policy statement from Central Government that this will not be granted. This is a significant disappointment and lobbying will continue as it will result in a significant gap in the MTFP which is likely to result in front-line service cuts. Council tax isn't the only answer with regard to funding but cross member consensus and lobbying for increased funding options would be welcomed, alongside a consensus on budgetary decisions;
- d) The Annual Service Awards Ceremony was held on 29 October recognised hard work, and outstanding achievements of Service employees and the bravery of members of the public;
- e) In the period until the new Treasurer and Head of Finance starts with the Service, Mark Kimberley, Treasurer and Section 150 Officer to the Police Force has kindly temporarily taken on the role of Section 150 Officer and Interim Treasurer to the Authority, for which

the Service is grateful. Tracy Stevenson has stepped up as temporary Head of Finance and is also welcomed to the meeting;

- f) The Emergency Services Carol Service will be held on 19 December at Southwell Minster. All members of the Authority are invited to attend;
- g) Having been a challenging year, the Chair wished all Service employees and members of the Authority a happy Christmas.

37 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 and Budget Guidelines 2024/25

Mark Kimberly, Interim Treasurer, and Tracy Stevenson, Temporary Head of Finance, presented the report which provides an update on the predicted budget position for 2024/25 and to request that the Fire Authority set general guidelines within which the Finance and Resources Committee will develop a detailed budget proposal for 2024/25.

The following points were highlighted and member's questions responded to:

- a) Whilst the settlement will not be announced until 19 December, the Service is unlikely to be allowed to increase on Council Tax by £5, as it did last year, which will result in a budget deficit, meaning that the Authority will need to review the budget and find further efficiencies. However, as that work has already been very thorough, the only option will be to cut services;
- b) There is some scope to help balance the budget with use of reserves but this is a limited capability and reserves would be best used towards initiatives that deliver future efficiencies;
- c) A lot of financial uncertainties remain such as inflation, pensions and international events, including those which impact on supply chain issues, mainly around vehicles and parts;
- d) This coming year is likely to be the toughest budget year that the Public Sector, including this Service, will have ever experienced. There are options for this Service to investigate, but they are limited and as finances are very tight, and so difficult decisions will need to be made;
- e) Once the Service produces a balanced budget, there will need to be an on-going focus for future years efficiencies and reductions;
- f) Pay awards for firefighters are set nationally and are currently gauged in the budget at an estimated maximum of at 5% for 2024/25, 3% for 2025/26 and 2% for 2026/27. As Central Government did not cover the full value of the pay increase this year, to address the risk of the same happening next year, the estimated maximum increase has been budgeted for this year by the Service. Any pay increase above the estimated values will cost the Service an £350k per additional 1%, with Authorities bound by the National Joint Council determination;
- g) The report sets out the potential income to the Service from a 1.95% increase in Council Tax precept, a 2.95% increase and no increase. Without the £5 increase, the Service will need to consider the 2.95% increase, but will still need to apply efficiency savings;

- h) Reserves currently total £9.4m, as set out in the report, and it is proposed that reserves and strategies are reviewed. Some earmarked reserves are proposed to be re-prioritised following discussions with budget holders, including £485k to the mobilising system as an area of risk for the organisation, plus a £10k efficiency programme;
- i) The Capital programme looks at the affordability of the Service, including where stations and appliances are sited. 17 new appliances were due to be purchased, but this has been delayed into 2029/30 to ensure affordability. The purchase may be brought forward if interest rates reduce;
- j) Risks to the Service will continued to be monitored and responded to.

Members of the Authority commented as follows:

- k) The Fire and Rescue Service cannot be compared to the Police Force which doesn't pay bargain on a national scale. The Police do not have the available funds to budget for a 5% pay increase and so have budgeted for a 2.5% pay increase and expect that if it the figure is greater than this, Central Government will cover the difference, although this may not be the case;
- l) There has been an indication that whilst the ability of a £5 Council Tax increase will not be granted, there are other, positive arrangements to be proposed by Central Government, the details of which are yet to be made public;
- m) The Authority is tasking the Finance and Resources Committee to consider and debate the options and make a recommendation to the Authority for the Authority to further debate and determine. It would be highly surprising if the recommendation to the Authority wasn't for the highest possible level available, but that is a decision for the members of that Committee;
- n) If Central Government don't provide additional flexibility with the option of a £5 precept rise, Authority members will need to review front line services and possibly discontinue some services. It is vital that a consistent opinion is expressed by all members of the Authority, cross-party and across all forums, including persistent lobbying MPs and Central Government.

Resolved to

- 1) approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as set out in Appendix A to the report;**
- 2) approve the Capital Strategy and Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy contained within the MTFS;**
- 3) approve the Reserves Strategy contained within the MTFS;**
- 4) approve the proposed minimum level of general fund reserves of £4.1m as set out in the Reserves Strategy;**

- 5) **approve the re-allocation of Earmarked Reserve as detailed in the Reserves Strategy and set out in the table below:**

Re-allocation of Earmarked Reserve				
Current Reserve	Balance 01-Apr-23 £'000	Required 2023/24 £'000	Required 2024/25 to 2026/27 £'000	To be Reallocated £'000
Tri Service Control / Mobilising System	350	0	0	(350)
Fire Cover Review	10	0	0	(10)
Remedial Fire Risk Assessment	30	0	0	(30)
Headquarters Move	49	0	0	(49)
Covid-19 2019/20 unused grant	15	0	0	(15)
Joint HQ Comms officer	1	0	0	(1)
Transformation and Collaboration	30	0	0	(30)
Total	485	0	0	(485)
Replacement Mobilising System				475
Efficiency Programme				10
Total				0

- 6) **task the Finance and Resources Committee with providing guidance to the Fire Authority in February in respect of:**
- i. **the options for council tax limited to either a council tax freeze or an increase in Council Tax within the referendum limit;**
 - ii. **The options for addressing any budget deficit to enable the Fire Authority to approve a balanced budget, as required by law.**

38 Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24

Mark Kimberley, Interim Treasurer presented the report which provides an update on treasury management activity during the first half of the 2023/24 financial year, as required under the Local Government Act 2003.

The following points were highlighted:

- a) The report sets out cashflow forecasting and investment decisions. With the potential for interest rates to rise further, investing in high interest rate paying facilities, using funds borrowed at a much lower interest rate, is a sensible approach and will provide £200k additional income next year;
- b) It is anticipated that at the end of this financial cycle, interest rates will start to drop and so the approach to investments will be reviewed;

- c) None of the indicators set by the Authority, or the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice on Treasury Management, have been breached and there is no intention to propose any alternative arrangements at this time;
- d) The Service currently has £5.5m invested, as set out in the report;

Resolved to note the update on treasury management activity during the 2023/24 financial year as required under the Local Government Act 2003.

39 Appointment of Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Having previously declared a personal interest, Mick Sharman withdrew from the meeting prior to the Authority's consideration of the item and did not return until the item had concluded.

Craig Parkin, Chief Fire Officer, presented report and highlighted the following points:

- a) Retiring Assistant Chief Fire Officer Candida Brudenell will leave a massive legacy of her work and achievements with the Service, for which she is thanked;
- b) Following a robust selection process, 5 candidates were shortlisted, 3 of whom were interviewed by the Appointments Committee;
- c) Interviews were held on 1 December 2023, concluding with a unanimous decision to recommend the appointment of Mick Sharman with effect from 15 January 2024, with Area Manager Leila Henry proposed to be appointed to ACFO for a temporary 4 month period to provide strategic leadership and ensure continuity and resilience for the Service.

Members comments included:

- d) All 3 candidates were of outstanding quality;
- e) Both appointees are congratulated;
- f) The Chair thanked retiring ACFO Candida Brudenell for her outstanding work during her time with the Service and the significant value she had added to the Service, including around her work culture change, and equality, diversity and inclusion. She will be missed. This opinion was echoed by other members;
- g) The achievements of ACFO Brudenell had confirmed that the decision to appoint a ACFO without the frontline experience of the Service, was correct.

Resolved to

- 1) formally thank retiring ACFO Candida Brudenell for her hard work and dedication during her time with the Service;**
- 2) appoint Area Manager Michael Sharman substantively to the role of Assistant Chief Fire Officer effective from 15 January 2024;**

- 3) appoint Area Manager Leila Henry to the role of temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer effective from 15 January 2024 until May 2024.**

40 Appointment of Treasurer and Head of Finance to the Authority

Craig Parkin, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which informs the Authority of the Appointment's Committee's recommendation to appoint Beverley Bull as Treasurer and Head of Finance to the Service following a robust selection and interview process.

The Chair thanked Mark Kimberly for acting as the Interim Treasurer, and the Commissioner for loaning him to the Fire and Rescue Service in the spirit of collaboration. Thanks too were given to Tracy Stevenson for stepping up as Temporary Head of Finance.

Resolved to:

- 1) approve the Service Level Agreement with Nottinghamshire Police for support in the provision of Treasurer to satisfy the statutory duties of the Fire Authority;**
- 2) approve the recommendation of the Appointments Committee to substantiate Beverley Bull as the Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Fire Authority with effect from 04 March 2024.**

41 Principal Officer Pay Review

Malcolm Townroe, Clerk and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report which presents the outcomes from the Principal Officer Pay Review which is undertaken on a two-yearly basis, benchmarking against the Principle Officer pay of other 'group' Services, in line with the Authority's Pay Policy.

Resolved to support the recommendation that pay levels for Principal Officer roles are maintained at their current rate.

42 Environmental and Sustainability Policy Statement

Damien West, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which informs members of the recently reviewed and updated written Environmental and Sustainability Policy Statement, to reflect best practice.

A copy of the policy, which sets out the Service's environmental and sustainability ambitions, is attached to the report.

Resolved to endorse the policy statement to reaffirm the Authority's commitment to matters relating to the environment and sustainability.

43 Health and Safety Policy - Statement of Intent

Damien West, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which updates members on the annually revised and updated written Health and Safety Policy 'Statement of Intent' to ensure the working environment as safe as it can be.

The statement of intent is attached to the report and will reference December 2023 as the issue date, and not November 2023, if endorsed.

Resolved to endorse the content of the updated Statement of Intent to reaffirm The Authority's commitment to effective health and safety risk management for employees and others who are affected by the Service's activities.

44 Implementation of Resourcing to Risk

Damien West, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which includes an update to the reinstatement of Ashfield Fire Station to 24-hour Whole-Time crewing as of 7am on 29 November 2023.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) The process has been complex, required staff and stakeholder consultation, and resulted in changes across the whole organisation with direct impact on 30 members of staff, including four posts which have been reallocated as of January 2024;
- b) The proactive approach of managers individuals and Trades Unions is appreciated in facilitating the whole process;
- c) Recruitment to firefighter apprenticeship roles has been successful, with 12 to start in January 2024, with a large intake of firefighters planned for next year. Of the large number of applications received, 9% were female and 14% BAME;
- d) With regard to the wider resourcing to risk, mitigation arrangements are in place for occasions of four crew appliances, as set out in the report;
- e) Ongoing evaluations of the new arrangements will be undertaken and reported to the Community Safety Committee.

Members commented as follows:

- f) the impact of the change at the Ashfield station has reach far beyond, but thanks are extended to everyone affected, including the trade trades Unions, for the constructive way of approaching the situation. Thanks also extended to the Chief Fire Officer this was a difficult issue which benefited from constructive extensive engagement. The community local to Ashfield have provided very positive responses to the change;
- g) collaboration has been vital in providing quality evidence for a positive outcome, which is much appreciated by citizens of the Ashfield District area;
- h) With the financial challenges to the Service acknowledged, the outcome of returning to full time crewing at the Ashfield Station is correct for such a strategic site close to the M1 and A38. This is an example of how the Authority listens and responds by placing resources where they are needed. Thanks are given to everyone involved;

- i) Ongoing monitoring would be welcomed, along with continued annual reporting to members;
- j) As above, thanks are extended to everyone involved in returning Ashfield Station to Whole-Time crewing, particularly ACFO Damien West for his work and commitment;
- k) It's clear that the Authority has followed the evidence in resourcing to meet the risk, and not acted with political motive.

Resolved to note the report.

45 Committee Outcomes

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

46 Exclusion of The Public

Resolved to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining item in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, under Schedule 12A, Part 1, on the basis that, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

47 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.