



## Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority - Policy and Strategy Committee

**Date:** Friday, 1 May 2020                      **Time:** 10.00 am

**Venue:** To be held remotely and streamed:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCt4VuYp8JJJvXCLRmSRJ1mw/featured>

### Coronavirus Act 2020

This meeting is held via remote participation, in compliance regulations issued under section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

**Members are requested to attend the above meeting to be held at the time, place and date mentioned to transact the following business**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. J. [unclear]'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Clerk to the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority**

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**Any councillor who is unable to attend the meeting and wishes to submit apologies should do so via the Governance Officer listed below.**

**If you need any advice on declaring an interest in any item above, please contact the Governance Officer shown on this agenda, if possible before the day of the meeting.**

Governance Officer: Cath Ziane-Pryor  
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<https://committee.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=219&Year=0>

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## **Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority Policy and Strategy Committee**

**Minutes of the meeting held at Fire and Rescue Services HQ, Bestwood Lodge, Arnold  
Nottingham NG5 8PD on 31 January 2020 from 10.01 am - 10.39 am**

### **Membership**

#### Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)  
Councillor Andrew Brown  
Councillor Sybil Fielding  
Councillor John Clarke  
Councillor Toby Neal  
Councillor Stuart Wallace (as substitute for Councillor Jonathan Wheeler)

#### Absent

Councillor Jonathan Wheeler

### **Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:**

John Buckley - Chief Fire Officer  
Charlotte Radford - Treasurer to the Authority  
Malcolm Townroe - Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority  
Becky Smeathers - Head of Finance  
Catherine Ziane-Pryor - Governance Officer

### **14 Apologies for absence**

Councillor Jonathan Wheeler – Councillor Stuart Wallace substituting

### **15 Declarations of interests**

None.

### **16 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2019 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### **17 HMICFRS Update: Publication of the State of Fire And Rescue Report**

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides members with an overview of the newly published HMICFRS State of Fire and Rescue report which refers to all 45 Fire and Rescue Services.

In addition to the link within the report, a complete paper version is available for members of the Authority to view.

It is noted that the report is not legally binding on Fire and Rescue Services nor Central Government, and is clear that it has been issued in an advisory role, although there will be further consideration of the recommendations.

The following points were highlighted:

- a) Four main recommendations have been made to the sector as a whole, which are summarised as follows:
  - i. review with precision and determine the roles of: (a) FRSs; and (b) those who work in them. (by June 2020);
  - ii. consideration of the current pay negotiation machinery and whether an independent pay review body and the future of the 'grey book' should be revised. (by June 2020);
  - iii. consideration of whether Chief Fire Officers should have operational independence. In the meantime, clear guidance on demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the Chief Fire Officer. (by September 2020);
  - iv. production of a code of ethics for all FRSs to be considered as part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal. (by December 2020).
- b) Recommendation 'i' refers to co-responding and the broadening role of firefighters and the services which they deliver. Not all Services had diversified and as there is an element of localisation whereby Services can adapt to serve the needs of their specific communities, so there are different models operating but not all Services which have diversified have met their statutory requirements;
- c) With regard to 'iii', CFOs having operational independence, currently the statutory powers are in the control of the Fire Authority and the CFO works on behalf of the Authority. It is clear that the report is written with a Policing background whereby the Chief Police Officer has the overriding responsibility and control. Across Services procedures vary greatly, to the extent that one CFO is not authorised to spend above £500 outside the agreed budget without the authorisation of the Authority. This target completion date of September 2020 is extremely tight and may not be achieved;
- d) Establishment of the code of ethics (recommendation 'iv') has resulted from finding some 'toxic' cultures within the Sector. NFRS is working with the LGA and is expected to be a consultee in formulating the code;
- e) HMICFRS will undertake a full audit of all Services, which will start for NFRS in July 2020 with a self assessment and then an inspection which is predicted for November/December. Members will be kept informed;
- f) Appendices A and B to the report provide bullet point summaries of the overall findings from the inspection of the sector.

Members' questions were responded to and comments made as follows:

- g) With regard to 'toxic cultures' it is known that there have been some issues identified (in other Services) with overbearing management styles which leaves individuals feeling oppressed. 'Closed watch cultures' can emerge where small watch teams experience very little change. This can be a strength, but it can also create independent cultures. In addition, the overt nature of some aggression expressed on some social media sites has been raised as an issue by respondents to the National Survey who have said that they have been the victim of, or witnessed, bullying in the past year;
- h) Localisation means that each Fire Service can agree terms with their own population and there is no standard definition of what a Fire Service does. Front line service and demands in the City vary significantly from those in rural areas. In addition, the way in which risk is assessed varies from Service to Service. Standardisation across the Sector of common tools such as risk assessment and recording of incidents will make overall monitoring, tracking and comparisons much easier;
- i) To prevent the embedding of watch cultures, the Service moves trainees around to gain experience at different stations. It is not possible to move established staff around, although when this has been done, despite initial resistance and even registering of grievances, the outcome has been positive. A lot of staff have perceptions that other stations and sites are not as good as their own, but once they have experienced other stations/sites, have found this not to be the case. The Service is working hard to promote its values and where some staff do act inappropriately, this is addressed. It's reassuring that staff do challenge behaviours and feel confident to raise concerns;
- j) Staff Conferences, which are attended by Senior Officers and sometimes elected members, are working well at bringing staff together who they may otherwise not encounter, with activities to encourage verbalisation, break bias, and re-enforce confidence that where issues are raised, the Chief Officer Team will respond;
- k) Apart from the use of confrontational language, which is not necessary, clarity is required of some of the points made, such as the comment on trades' union influence not always being in the interest of the public. Although in some services the relationship with trades unions vary significantly to that of this Service, Trade Unions such as the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) are partners to this Service so such comments are not helpful, particularly without elaboration and possibly direction;
- l) The comment that better performance and talent management is needed, seems strange when it is common practice within the Police Service that once a member of staff reaches 30 years' service (and therefore experience) they are then 'let go';
- m) The timelines given to address the points raised are unrealistically tight but the Service is happy to engage in the required work, many of which is already underway.

Members of the Committee commented that the language used in the HMICFRS is unnecessarily insulting and confrontational and terms such as 'toxic' are very emotive, and suggested that the Inspection report authors actually meet the staff on the front line and then reconsider if such language is appropriate.

Members of the Committee requested that a seminar be held specifically to look at the points raised by the inspection, and how they are to be addressed.

## **Resolved**

- 1) to note the report;**
- 2) to endorse the approach to consider the recommendations contained within the State of Fire and Rescue Report;**
- 3) for a members seminar to be arranged to consider the recommendations of the inspection and how they are to be addressed within this Service;**
- 4) to agree to receive any additions to the formal HMICFRS action plans through the Fire Authority Committees.**

## **18 Collaboration Update**

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which updates members on the progress of collaboration activities.

The following points were highlighted:

- a) Planning permission has been passed for the new Joint Headquarters. Enabling work has started and a contractor for the building work is being sought. It is noted that with regard to traffic safety concerns, the A60 junction will be modified but details are yet to be confirmed;
- b) Work is ongoing with regard to the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) agreement which will be submitted to the Fire Authority for final approval;
- c) Collaboration with the Police Service continues to develop, as can be seen by the draft 'info-graphic' which was available to view at the meeting. Collaboration is not just about sharing buildings and resources but is much broader, for the benefit of citizens;
- d) The West Bridgford joint Police and Fire and Rescue site is progressing. Parking issues were initially a concern for the Planning Authority but this has now been resolved. Once completed all police operational resources will move into site and the current central City base will close;
- e) Police colleagues will move into the shared service Hucknall site along with East Midlands Ambulance Service colleagues within the next few weeks and establish the first operational tri-service hub in the country. A formal opening ceremony will be held in March. Consideration is taking place with regard to options for disposal of the former Hucknall Fire Station site;
- f) Joint prevention work is ongoing with consideration for a joint safeguarding operation;
- g) The Police and Fire Services' shared drone was deployed at a water rescue incident in Gunthorpe last week, and with its HD and thermal imaging, proved an excellent

resource which prevented putting firefighters in danger of having to enter the water, as the drone was able to search the riverbanks;

- h) The Service already has border sharing arrangements in place with the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, by which the nearest available appliance is mobilised, now work is underway to share appliance availability between respective control rooms.

**Resolved**

- 1) to note the report;**
- 2) to endorse the Service's proactive approach to collaboration.**

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Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Policy and Strategy Committee

# **FINANCIAL IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 01 May 2020

**Purpose of Report:**

To update Members on the impact of the Covid-19 situation on the financial function of the Authority and to recommend actions required to maintain financial security until the governance arrangements return to normal.

**Recommendations:**

That Members approve:

- Increasing the operational boundary from £31,850m to £33,850m (Section 2.6);
- Increasing the authorised limit from £35,035m to £37,035m (Section 2.6);
- Increase the loan maturity profile limit from 20% to 30% (Section 2.7);
- The transfer of £309k from general reserves to an earmarked reserve to cover any additional costs related to the Covid-19 outbreak that cannot be contained within the grant awarded by central government (Section 2.16);
- The write-off of £95k second hand PPE out of the stock account (Section 2.23).

## CONTACT OFFICER

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## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 In response to the worsening Covid-19 outbreak in the UK, the Government has introduced the following measures and financial support packages to those affected:

- Everybody to stay at home and only go outside for food, health reasons or work if it is not possible to work from home;
- £330bn worth of Government-backed loans and more than £20bn in tax cuts and grants for companies threatened with collapse (including business rate relief);
- £25bn of financial support for individuals and businesses experiencing financial difficulties, including a £500m hardship fund for Council Tax payers;
- £5bn response fund to provide any extra resources needed by the NHS and other public services to tackle the virus – Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has received £191k grant as part of this package;
- The creation of new legal powers enabling it to offer whatever further financial support it thinks necessary to support business.

1.2 The impact on NFRS has been significant, both on its ability to deliver frontline services and the governance of the organisation. This report reviews the impact on, and some necessary changes to, the following financial areas:

- Treasury Management Strategy;
- Prudential indicators for capital financing;
- Revenue and capital budgets for 2020/21;
- Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- Internal and external audit;
- 2019/20 Statement of Accounts.

## 2. REPORT

### TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

2.1 The Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Limits were approved by Fire Authority on 28 February 2020. These included:

- Prudential and treasury indicators;
- The borrowing strategy and borrowing requirement;
- Cash management arrangements;
- Creditworthiness policy, including counterparty limits.

2.2 Circumstances have changed significantly since the Strategy and Prudential Limits were approved. In particular, the measures that local councils are putting in place to support business rates and Council Tax along with the response from central government may impact on the timings and amounts of income received. This, along with additional expenditure being incurred, could impact on the Service's short-term cash flow. In order that the Service is able to maintain a positive cashflow, the following amendments to the prudential limits are recommended:

### **OPERATIONAL BOUNDARY AUTHORISED LIMIT**

2.3 The operational boundary (currently £31,850m) is the Authority's estimate of its likely maximum external debt during the year. It is possible for the operational boundary to be temporarily breached to take account of unusual movements in cash flow, but this should not be a regular occurrence. A variation from the operational boundary is permissible, but will be reported to the Fire Authority.

2.4 The authorised limit (currently £35,035m) is essentially the same as the operational boundary, but allows headroom over and above it to take account of unusual movements in cash flow and therefore should be the maximum amount of external debt that the Authority is exposed to at any given time. Any proposed variation from the authorised limit must be authorised by the Fire Authority.

2.5 It is proposed to increase both these limits by £2m to provide additional flexibility regarding short-term borrowing should it be required for cashflow purposes during the Covid-19 crisis.

2.6 This would increase these limits as follows:

<b>Limit</b>	<b>2020/21 Current Limit £'m</b>	<b>2020/21 Revised Limit £'m</b>
Operational Boundary	31,850	33,850
Authorised Limit	35,035	37,035

2.7 Any additional borrowing will be of a short-term nature and will therefore impact on the maturity structure of the Authority's borrowing. The upper limit for borrowing under 12 months is currently 20% of total borrowing. It is proposed that this is increased to 30% for the remainder of 2020/21.

### **COUNTERPARTY LIMITS**

2.8 The risks associated with investing are minimised by limiting the amount of investment with a single counterparty to £4m. Whilst officers will adhere to this limit wherever possible, there may be some occasions where this limit is

breached with the Authority's bankers. This may occur, for example, where grant is unexpectedly paid early and not invested until the following day. If this occurs the Treasurer and Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee will be informed at the next available opportunity.

## **COUNTRY LIMITS**

2.9 The Authority only uses approved counterparties from countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AA from Fitch Ratings (or equivalent). An exception is identified in the Treasury Management Strategy for the UK in the event that its credit rating is downgraded to AA-. Given the current global crisis, there is a risk that all countries could be downgraded. If this occurs, this limit may need to be revised in line with the arrangements set out in Section 2.12.

## **COUNTERPARTY LIMITS**

2.10 Similarly, the ratings of the counterparties that the Authority currently invests in may be affected by the current economic situation. These are monitored by the Authority's treasury advisors, Link Asset Services. Should the downgrading require that investments are withdrawn from the counterparty, this will be acted upon with immediate effect.

## **BANK OVERDRAFT**

2.11 The bank overdraft level is £200,000 and this is usually sufficient. There are occasions when the overdraft exceeds £200,000 and temporary arrangements are made with the bank to increase the limit to £500,000. This may be further extended as a last resort should the need arise. Temporary borrowing from other sources will be investigated in the first instance.

2.12 Should any of the Authority's treasury management and prudential limits require further revision, this will be approved under existing urgent powers in consultation with group leaders and the Chair of Finance and Resources Committee

2.13 Any amendments or breaches of limits will be reported back to Members at the next available committee meeting.

## **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

2.14 The 2019/20 revenue and capital expenditure is expected to be largely unaffected by the Covid-19 outbreak which began to significantly impact on the Service in mid-March. The Home Office (HO) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are collating costs on a monthly basis.

- 2.15 At the end of March, the Service submitted a return of £13k. This comprised of ICT equipment to enable home working for key members of staff, personal protective equipment (PPE) and additional cleaning.
- 2.16 The Service has received a grant from central government of £191k. This is intended to cover both the additional costs to this Service and the costs of supporting other organisations such as East Midlands Ambulance Service. At present, expenditure is expected to exceed the grant and it is not yet known whether further funding will be made available to cover costs. Approval is sought to create an earmarked reserve from general fund reserves to the value of £309k to create a total available budget of £500k to fund additional Covid-19 related expenditure. The earmarked reserve will only be utilised if further funding is not available from central government or expenditure cannot be funded from underspends elsewhere in the budget.
- 2.17 The Nottinghamshire Local Authorities are expecting the financial hardship being felt by some households to have an impact on Council Tax collection. The Government announced a £500m hardship fund for Council Tax payers and this is being used to provide relief to support economically vulnerable people. This is in addition to existing local Council Tax support schemes run by local authorities, the costs of which are met by the collection fund.
- 2.18 The 2020/21 budget includes an anticipated surplus in the Council Tax collection fund of £94k, which is based on estimates from the precepting authorities. It is still too early to tell what the total impact on collection rates will be, but it is expected that there will be an impact and the collection fund will most likely run at a deficit this year. NFRS will take its proportionate share of this deficit. The impact of this will be monitored as part of the budget monitoring process.
- 2.19 The Government also announced National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) relief for many businesses. Whilst the Service will be compensated for loss of income, it is unclear whether this will be at the assumed collection levels or actual income not received, which is higher. This could impact on income levels to a maximum level of £208k.
- 2.20 Underspends on some budgets are expected where activity has either significantly reduced or halted, such as training, prevention and protection work. The capital budget is expected to be delayed which will result in a likely underspend in the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). Any underspends will be used in the first instance to offset reductions in Council Tax and NNDR income and then to fund any excess expenditure on Covid-19 related expenditure.
- 2.21 Under normal circumstances, budget monitoring reports are considered by the Finance and Resources Committee at each meeting. The monitoring position was due to be reported to the cancelled Finance and Resources Committee on 3 April 2020. It was predicting an underspend position of £781k, which is largely in line with previous forecasts. Capital expenditure to the end of January was £1.072m against a total budget of £6.467m. Slippage of £2.6m was already expected for the new station at Worksop, but there

have been delays in some other projects which were due to be completed in March which will affect the outturn position and required slippage into 2020/21.

- 2.22 One of the capital projects related to the purchase of new PPE. This has now been delivered to stations. The old PPE is no longer being used and is being disposed of for further use by the museum, preservation society and overseas services.
- 2.23 When used PPE is returned to stores it is given a notional value (currently £95k) and added back to the stock account. This represents the use it has left to the Service rather than the resale value, which is negligible. Now that it is no longer being used it needs writing out of the stock account. This requires the authorisation of Finance and Resources Committee due to the value being over £10k. Approval is therefore requested from this Committee given that the Finance and Resources Committee on 3 April 2020 was cancelled.
- 2.24 The 2019/20 outturn position was due to be considered by Finance and Resources Committee on 26 June 2020, as was the revenue, capital and prudential code monitoring report to the end of May 2020. It is anticipated that this meeting will be cancelled. All reports that are reported for information only will be circulated to all members of the Finance and Resources Committee by Thursday 18 June 2020 in line with normal practice.
- 2.25 The Finance and Resources Committee are responsible for approving:
- Slippage in the capital programme;
  - Variation of tender values in excess of 5% or £50,000;
  - Variation in capital project costs in excess of 5% or £50,000;
  - Creation of earmarked reserves;
  - Virements between budgets with a value in excess of £50,000;
  - Stock adjustments above the value of £10,000;
  - Write-off of bad debts in excess of £10,000;
  - Acquisition and disposal of land.
- 2.26 Prior to the resumption of Finance and Resources Committee meetings, urgent powers will be used to make any required decisions in consultation with group leaders and Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee.

## **AUDIT**

- 2.27 The Finance and Resources Committee is responsible for reviewing audits. The internal audit annual report is normally presented to the June meeting of this Committee. This report will be circulated to members of the Committee, the Treasurer and the Clerk. It will also be considered by the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). It is unlikely that there will be any outcomes requiring decisions from the Committee.
- 2.28 The External Audit Plan has been provided to the Authority by its external auditors, Ernst Young. This would normally also be considered by Finance

and Resources Committee at the June meeting. This will similarly be circulated amongst members of the Committee. The audit consists of two parts – an interim and a final audit. The interim audit was successfully completed remotely during April. This indicates that the final audit can also be completed remotely should circumstances require this.

## **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

- 2.29 The deadline for approving the audited 2019/20 statement of accounts by Fire Authority has been extended until 30 November 2020 (from 31 July 2020). The deadline for publishing the unaudited statement of accounts for public scrutiny has similarly been extended to 31 August 2020 (from 31 May 2020). The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) had put forward proposals to accept simplified 2019/20 accounts, but this was rejected by the regulators and auditor bodies.
- 2.30 The Finance Team is working effectively from home and are intending to complete as much work as is practically possible in line with the original timetable. It still may not be possible to finalise the accounts until August given that the deadline for the precepting authorities to submit business rates final collection figures to the Service has also been extended until 31 July. Any significant delays in completing the statement of accounts will have a significant impact on the team’s ability to develop the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the budget for 2021/22 and beyond. The 2021/22 budget process will in itself be more challenging given that the Comprehensive Spending Review has already been delayed from the Spring to the Autumn and Covid-19 has increased uncertainty in the economy.
- 2.31 Discussions with the External Auditors, Ernst Young (EY), are ongoing regarding audit dates. Members will be aware that the 2018/19 audit was delayed due to EY resourcing issues and the audited 2019/20 Statement of Accounts were not approved until December 2019. The Service had already been made aware that the 2019/20 audit was unlikely to take place before September 2020, and this will clearly be impacted by the current situation.
- 2.32 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that the Statement of Accounts must be considered and approved “by way of a committee or by the members meeting as a whole”. The approval of the accounts cannot be delegated. Should it not be possible to hold such a meeting the approval of the statement of accounts will need to be delayed.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Financial issues are set out in the body of this report.

#### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no human resources or learning and development implications arising directly from this report.

#### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because this report is not associated with a policy, function or service.

#### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations of this report should ensure that all required decisions are made in accordance with the Authority's governance structure.

#### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The Covid-19 situation has created an environment of heightened financial risk. The recommendations in this report will ensure that decisions can be made to react to the changing circumstances where possible.

#### **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

#### **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members approve:

- 10.1 Increasing the operational boundary from £31,850m to £33,850m (Section 2.6).
- 10.2 Increasing the authorised limit from £35,035m to £37,035m (Section 2.6).
- 10.3 Increase the loan maturity profile limit from 20% to 30% (Section 2.7).

- 10.4 The transfer of £309k from general reserves to an earmarked reserve to cover any additional costs related to the Covid-19 outbreak that cannot be contained within the grant awarded by central government (Section 2.16);
- 10.5 The write-off of £95k second hand PPE out of the stock account (Section 2.23).

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

John Buckley  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
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Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Policy and Strategy Committee

# **AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE**

Report of the Clerk to the Authority

**Date:** 01 May 2020

**Purpose of Report:**

To update Members on the legislative changes affecting governance brought in by the Coronavirus Act 2020, and the regulations issued thereunder, and to seek approval to proposed temporary changes to Authority governance and meeting arrangements.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the legislative changes brought in by s78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued under that section;
- Agree that, as permitted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued thereunder, all continuing meetings of the Authority will be held by way of online meeting;
- Authorise the Clerk to the Authority to take all and any such steps as may be reasonable necessary to ensure that online meetings can be delivered in accordance with the legislative requirements and in a secure and safe manner;
- Agree to cancel the Annual General Meeting of the Authority due to be held on 12 June 2020;
- Agree to cancel all future meetings of the Authority, other than meetings of the Policy and Strategy Committee, due to be held before 10 July 2020;
- Agree to receive a further report regarding future meetings and meeting arrangements at this committee on 10 July 2020.

**CONTACT OFFICER**

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Clerk to the Authority

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued under s78 of that act make time limited changes to the requirements placed on local authorities in respect of public meetings.
- 1.2 In order to ensure that the Authority maintains proper and transparent governance arrangements in the short to medium term, it is proposed to conduct the majority of the Authority's formal business through the Policy and Strategy Committee. This committee, under its terms of reference, is responsible for dealing with urgent matters. The intention is to deliver meetings using online media channels.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 were laid before Parliament on 2 April 2020 and came into force on 4 April 2020. The Authority is caught by these regulations.
- 2.2 The main effects of the regulations are as follows:
  - Regulation 4 (1) empowers local authorities to alter the frequency of meetings, move or cancel meetings without notice;
  - Regulation 5 provides that local authority meetings may take place through digital means. A meeting summons does not need to specify a physical location and a meeting may take place entirely online or by conference call, subject to certain conditions set out below;
  - Councillors may participate in meetings remotely. There is no requirement for a quorum of councillors to be present in the meeting room because the regulations make it clear that a councillor "attends" the meeting if they are able to participate remotely. The following conditions must be met for a councillor to be defined as participating remotely:
    - The councillor must be able to hear and, where possible, see other councillors attending the meeting. The councillor must also be heard and, where possible, seen by those other councillors;
    - The councillor must be able to hear and, where possible, see members of the public who are attending the meeting to exercise their right to speak. The councillor must also be heard and, where possible, seen by those members of the public; and
    - The councillor must be heard and, where possible, seen by other members of the public who are attending the meeting (remotely).

Councillors in remote attendance must be able to hear, and be heard by, other members in remote attendance.

- Regulation 5 also empowers local authorities to make standing order or rules governing remote attendance, which may include provision for:
  - Voting;
  - Member and public access to documents; and
  - Remote access of public and press to a local authority meeting to enable them to attend or participate in that meeting by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.
- Regulation 6 removes the requirement for local authorities to hold an annual meeting between now and 7th May 2021. Regulation 4 (2) clarifies that appointments made at the annual meeting continue until such time as the authority determines, or until the next annual meeting;
- Regulation 6 also allows notice of a meeting to be published on the Authority's website as though it were published at the offices. The publication, posting or making available of agendas, reports and supporting information may be via the Authority's website instead of at the offices.

2.3 Some of these provisions will not affect the Authority, as it does not allow public participation in any meetings. Representatives from recognised Trade Unions will still be able to submit questions in the same manner as is currently provided for in the Standing Orders i.e. in writing to the Clerk at least 3 working days before the meeting.

2.4 Currently where a question is received from recognised Trade Unions the question is tabled without discussion and the Union representative present at the meeting reads out the question. Provided that the question has been tabled there is no reason why the question should not be read out by the Chair of the meeting or the Clerk to the Authority.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no significant financial implications arising out of the proposals contained in this report.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The proposals set out in the report mean that both members and officers will need to adapt to new ways of working, which may highlight the need for further training and support.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no equalities implications arising from this report however further consideration will be given to this requirement in the event that any issues are raised by meeting participants or by the viewing public.

## **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report other than those referred to in the section on risk management.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The legal implications of the proposals are set out in the body of the report.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The risks associated with the proposals outlined in the report mainly relate to technology failure or online security breaches. The technology which will be used to deliver the online meeting provision is starting to be used widely across the UK and, inevitably, as the new method of meeting delivery becomes more embedded lessons will be learned and good practice shared. It is not proposed to share any confidential or sensitive data through visual media.
- 8.2 There have been instances where meetings have been “hijacked” by online trolls but this seems to have occurred where proper IT controls have not been put in place. In order to mitigate this risk the IT manager will sit in on all online meetings to ensure that if anything untoward were to occur immediate action could be taken.

## **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

There are no collaboration implications arising out of the proposals contained in the report.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Note the legislative changes brought in by s78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued under that section.
- 10.2 Agree that, as permitted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued thereunder, all continuing meetings of the Authority will be held by way of online meeting.

- 10.3 Authorise the Clerk to the Authority to take all and any such steps as may be reasonable necessary to ensure that online meetings can be delivered in accordance with the legislative requirements and in a secure and safe manner.
- 10.4 Agree to cancel the Annual General Meeting of the Authority due to be held on 12 June 2020.
- 10.5 Agree to cancel all future meetings of the Authority, other than meetings of the Policy and Strategy Committee, due to be held before 10 July 2020.
- 10.6 Agree to receive a further report regarding future meetings and meeting arrangements at this committee on 10 July 2020.

<b>11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)</b>
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None.

Malcolm R. Townroe  
**CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER TO THE AUTHORITY**



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Policy and Strategy Committee

# **SERVICE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 01 May 2020

**Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update to Members on the Service's response to the Covid-19 situation.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that Members:

- Endorse the approach taken by the Chief Fire Officer in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak;
- Approve the short-term re-engagement of operational staff to be utilised as part of a blended approach to maintaining critical staffing levels.

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The potential for a flu-pandemic has been part of the Service's and Local Resilience Forum (LRF) business continuity plans for a number of years. The Service and partners are therefore well prepared for the eventualities that have emerged over the past few weeks. However, it cannot be underestimated how significant the impact has been on the Service, its partners and the communities it serves.
- 1.2 As the scale of impact of COVID-19 increased across Category One responders, the Nottinghamshire LRF, along with many others, declared a major incident and activated the systems and processes in place to support partners and the communities.
- 1.3 This report provides Members with an overview of the current operating environment and the broader impact on Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1 During the early part of the year, as the outbreak of COVID-19 in China was publicised, the Service undertook a review of its pandemic business continuity plan. This was replicated within the LRF as all organisations began to realise the potential for the spread of the disease to the UK.

### WORKFORCE

- 2.2 This timely review enabled the Service to react very quickly when restrictions were introduced in March. Within a week, the majority of officers, support and day-duty staff were working from home, or provided the opportunity for social distancing within the workplace. This was largely due to the investment in the ICT infrastructure over the last few years resulting in the availability of remote working through Office 365, Skype and SharePoint etc.
- 2.3 All operational staff are considered 'key workers'. Furthermore, all other staff can be nominated as 'key workers' by the Chief Fire Officer dependant on their specific role. This has ensured staff are able to access child care during the school closures and remain at work where required. This will also enable staff and their family home members to access testing if required.
- 2.4 A small number of staff, or their close family members, are considered at high risk from the disease and require shielding. These individuals have been considered on a case by case basis by the Occupational Health Department and tailored solutions put in place to support them.
- 2.5 Recorded absence related to the disease peaked at around 9% in the early stages due to self and/or family isolation, with some of those members of staff still able to continue working from home. At the time of writing the report

(21 April 2020) related absence is 3% with only two members of staff reporting actual sickness from the virus.

- 2.6 There has not been the need to furlough any members of staff at this time, neither is the intention to do so unless circumstances change significantly.

## **SERVICE DELIVERY**

- 2.7 Due to the restrictions in place, and in recognition that on-call firefighters' availability has increased, availability of operational assets has been significantly better than normal. This, coupled with the very low level of current absence being experienced, means the operational resilience of the Service is at a very high level.
- 2.8 Incident numbers are stable and there are no related incident types of any significance that are unduly impacting upon the Service.
- 2.9 In the context that national work within the NJC to enable firefighters to undertake broader activities was moving slowly, the Chief Fire Office made a personal plea to staff to step forward and engage in supporting their communities. This was a resounding success and has resulted in almost 100 individuals volunteering to undertake work in support of partners and has also encouraged crews across the county to reach out to communities and offer support in areas such as the delivery of food, medication and other essential items. The District Prevention Officers have adapted their normal ways of working to co-ordinate this work and capture the activities being undertaken for future reference.
- 2.10 The Prevention Team has amended the delivery of their activities to ensure that the Service continues to support those who are most vulnerable in the community. With the cessation of prevention activities by response crews, the Persons at Risk (PAR) Team have modified their normal working arrangements to triage all referrals from partner agencies, and the public, for safe and well visits. Over 700 referrals have still been received in the first three weeks of business continuity measures being adopted.
- 2.11 These referrals are assessed and those deemed to be high or very high risk are attended by members of the PAR Team, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Those which are assessed to be medium risk are contacted by telephone. These calls enable members of the PAR Team to speak with the individual about fire safety, offer support and also inform them that a full safe and well visit will be completed on return to normal activities. The PAR Team continue to respond to requests for deaf alarms, threats of arson and to referrals for young fire-setters.
- 2.12 The Protection Team has continued its statutory role of regulation, but has amended their ways of working in line with guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). The Service has adopted remote-auditing where possible, to engage with those premises which are deemed to have the highest risk from fire, to ensure that businesses continue to operate in a safe and compliant manner. The team continues to respond to referrals relating to

fire safety concerns, complaints and building regulation submissions, including visits to businesses when required, utilising appropriate PPE and processes to minimise risk to personnel.

- 2.13 The team is also engaging with the remaining premises which are undergoing remediation for ACM cladding in Nottingham, ensuring that progress is maintained, in line with agreed remediation plans, to remove this risk.
- 2.14 The Service has used the opportunity of a reduced workload for its Fire Safety Inspectors (FSIs) to temporarily redirect further resources to the collaborative project with Nottingham City Council (NCC). Members will be aware of the joint approach with NCC that is addressing the risk from Multi-Occupancy Residential Buildings (MORBs) in the City where a FSI has been seconded for a period of two years to form part of a Joint Inspection Team. A further FSI has been seconded for an initial period of two months to the Team in order to maximise the opportunity of many MORBs being currently empty, or at limited capacity, due to the absence of the student population. This will enable the Team to make swift progress in inspecting these premises and ensuring that they are safe and compliant for when the occupants return.

## **PREPAREDNESS**

- 2.15 When initial restrictions were put in place, training (drill) periods for on-call staff and other training was stopped. This is being restarted as each element of the training is risk assessed and mitigation put in place to support social distancing. This has resulted in the development of more on-line education and the prioritisation of training types.
- 2.16 Operational crews are also maintaining preparedness for high risk premises with appropriate familiarisation and training continuing. The levels of PPE and other supplies within the Service are also sufficient.

## **PARTNER ASSISTANCE**

- 2.17 Through the LRF and local relationships, the Service is supporting a number of other organisations during the crisis with the provision of staff who have volunteered to undertake additional duties in support of communities.
- 2.18 East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS). 12 members of staff have been deployed from each fire service in the region to support the transport of acute patients between hospitals, and also support with the delivery of PPE across their stations. This may be expanded if demand escalates.
- 2.19 Nottinghamshire LRF. Staff have been trained to support the temporary mortuary being prepared should this be required, and preparatory work is being undertaken to support with the delivery of pharmacy items.
- 2.20 Bassetlaw General Hospital. The potential to provide face-fit testing for PPE is being explored.

## **LOCAL AND NATIONAL INTERACTION**

- 2.21 Regular virtual meetings are taking place through the LRF at the strategic and tactical levels. These are attended by nominated strategic and middle managers to maintain consistency, and feed in to the twice weekly internal business continuity management (BCM) meetings.
- 2.22 The Chief Executive of the County Council hosts a weekly meeting for all Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Chief Officers to share knowledge, information and learning, and to maintain regular support and communication at the most senior level within the County.
- 2.23 The Chief Fire Officer hosts a weekly meeting involving all the regional Fire Chiefs and the Chief Executive of EMAS. This meeting ensures local consistency in approach, has enabled the development of the assistance to EMAS, creates the opportunity to share learning and provides a support mechanism which has been established over many years.
- 2.24 The Chief Fire Officer is also the national lead for Finance within the NFCC and is part of the Gold Group that has been established at the national level to work directly in support of the Home Office to deliver fire and rescue, and wider partner, statutory functions. This requires regular interaction on national issues and a weekly virtual meeting of the Gold Group regularly attended by Home Office Civil Servants and Ministers.

## **COMMUNICATION**

- 2.25 Internal Communications. Significant work has been undertaken to ensure staff have been informed and supported through the changes required to adapt the Service to operate under the current restrictions.
- 2.26 Twice weekly briefing papers are provided to staff and a regular skype briefing is conducted by either the Chief or Deputy Chief Fire Officer to all staff, which sees around 200 participants tune in and raise concerns or ask questions. There is a dedicated page on the Intranet which provides one location for all information which staff can easily access.
- 2.27 There is also other communication taking place to ensure that staff remain socially connected whilst working from home and observing social distancing protocols. This has involved online fitness classes, meditation and mindfulness sessions, regular one to one contact by line managers, and where required, occupational health staff and the Peer Support Team.
- 2.28 The Chief Fire Officer and Chair wrote to staff to thank them for their efforts on behalf of the Fire Authority and citizens across the City and County. Members will also be aware that the Chief Fire Officer has provided regular informal briefings to Members of the Authority to keep them updated within this fast-moving environment.
- 2.29 External Communications. The establishment of the local and national interaction above ensures that formal communication is undertaken across all

partner agencies at the local, regional and national level. The Communications Manager is also engaged in the LRF communications cell for updates and co-ordination of messages with partners.

- 2.30 In terms of communication with the general public, the initial phase was focused on re-assuring communities that the Service is still there for them and that response to emergencies is operating normally. This has moved to focus on the work the Service is continuing to do in communities, and also supports the additional activity being undertaken through the delivery of essential items such as food and medication etc.
- 2.31 The Prevention and Protection Teams have embedded a member of each team in to the Corporate Communications team in order to ensure that communication with communities is as effective as possible at this time; engaging with local communities to offer support and safety advice for domestic and non-domestic premises.

## **RECOVERY AND RETURNING TO BUSINESS AS USUAL**

- 2.32 Responding to the impact of the crisis is now embedded and strategic focus is moving to the recovery phase. This is part of the regular BCM meetings taking place, and a lead officer has been nominated to work specifically on this issue.
- 2.33 One area of particular concern is the ability to maintain the operational establishment in both wholetime and on-call areas, as staff continue to retire and leave the Service through other means. This is complicated by the need to ensure the Service continues its excellent work on positive action to drive the diversification of the workforce.
- 2.34 Work is being undertaken to identify how recruitment can continue, but this is likely to increase the lead-in time and has the potential to present problems long after the disease has been dealt with. One option that may assist in this area is the ability to re-engage staff who have previously retired from the service. This is currently outside the normal recruitment policy; however, the Chief Fire Officer is seeking the ability to use this option as part of a blended approach to provide short-term support to the Service. Other options will include additional working hours and contracts for on-call staff, overtime and employment of transferees.
- 2.35 The current level of operational resilience is high; however, it is likely that as normality returns, on-call availability will reduce, and there is the potential that wholetime operational assets may be removed from service until establishment levels recover. If required, this will be managed in-line with the degradation policy and local mitigation put in place to maintain appropriate operational response.
- 2.36 The Service was due to engage in an LGA Equalities Peer Assessment during the Summer, and an HMI inspection during November. Both of these have now been suspended and further information will be provided to Members when it is available.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The financial implications regarding the Service's response to COVID-19 are significant and are dealt with explicitly elsewhere on this agenda.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The human resources and learning and development implications are dealt with in the main body of the report.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because this report is not associated with a policy, function or service.

### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Where the Service is operating outside of its normal operational arena, it is doing so under Part 2, Section 11 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which provides 'power to respond to other eventualities'. Furthermore, all staff engaged in that work are doing so under the direction of the Chief Fire Officer and therefore have the full protection of the Fire Authority as they would in their normal duties

### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The COVID-19 situation has created an environment of heightened risk. The steps taken by the Service to respond to and recover from those risks should mitigate any long term lasting implications.

### **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

The collaboration implications are dealt with in the main body of the report.

### **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Endorse the approach taken by the Chief Fire Officer in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

10.2 Approve the short-term re-engagement of operational staff to be utilised as part of a blended approach to maintaining critical staffing levels.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

John Buckley  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**



**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**  
**Fire & Rescue Service**  
*Creating Safer Communities*

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham  
Fire and Rescue Authority  
Policy and Strategy Committee

# **ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRE ENGINEER POST**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

**Date:** 01 May 2020

**Purpose of Report:**

To present Members with the proposal to increase the establishment and create a Fire Engineer role.

**Recommendations:**

That Members approve an increase to the permanent establishment with the creation and recruitment of a Fire Engineer role.

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has a statutory duty as the Fire Safety Regulator under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, 2005.
- 1.2 Since the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in 2017, the sector has seen a greater focus on fire safety in the built environment. The Hackett Review and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry have been instrumental in driving change within this area.
- 1.3 Changes have been consulted on in relation to fire safety legislation, regulatory processes and requirements of fire and rescue services. The forthcoming Fire Safety Bill and further changes to legislation are due during 2020.
- 1.4 The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has, in February 2020, published the Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators. This stipulates that all Fire Safety Regulators (which includes NFRS) must have access to the services of a competent Fire Safety Engineer.
- 1.5 NFRS has observed a recent increase in the requirement to engage a Fire Engineer in relation to complex constructions within the county, consultancy for HS2 and enforcement issues relating to building conversions in the city.
- 1.6 At the February meeting of the full Fire Authority, Members approved the Transformation and Efficiency Strategy which outlined the Service's ambition to establish a Fire Engineer role.

## **2. REPORT**

- 2.1 Due to the retirement of a Group Manager who was qualified as a Fire Engineer, the Service does not currently have a qualified Fire Engineer role within the establishment. Current fire engineering advice is therefore procured from Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service or from the private sector on an 'as and when required' basis.
- 2.2 Whilst it is not a statutory requirement for fire and rescue services to employ a qualified Fire Engineer, the Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators stipulates that a competent Fire Engineer is someone who holds a degree in fire safety engineering, or equivalent, and can advise Fire Safety Regulators on scientific and engineering principles related to fire safety.
- 2.3 It details their role of reviewing all building control consultations, including fire engineering submissions, and providing guidance to Fire Safety Regulators on fire engineered buildings. This does not preclude fire safety engineers who do not have an operational background.

- 2.4 In addition, the provision of a qualified Fire Engineer enhances corporate knowledge and applicable fire safety experience within the organisation. It is envisaged that this will enhance the development of other personnel within the Service and enable a greater level of competence in relation to fire safety.
- 2.5 As the Service continues to increase the number of fire safety activities across Service Delivery, it is proposed that the additional capacity and support that a Fire Engineer role would bring to the Service would assist in the delivery of the aims outlined in the Safer Communities Strategy and the Corporate Plan.
- 2.6 In order to ensure future resilience and enhance recruitment options, it is proposed that a new post is established as a Green Book (support) role within the Fire Protection department.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The proposed role has been assessed by the Job Evaluation Panel and has been graded as a Grade 7 role.
- 3.2 Including on-costs, this role attracts costs of between £47,242 and £52,431 dependent upon the experience of the individual.
- 3.3 Funding for the post was built into the base revenue budget and agreed by Members in February.

### **4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The proposed role would be advertised in line with the recruitment policy.

### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

The Service will advertise the role through a range of external platforms in order to attract a diverse group of applicants and to engage with all parts of the community.

### **6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

## **9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS**

NFRS is a signatory of the regional memorandum of understanding (MOU) for fire engineering. This MOU outlines the sharing of fire engineering resources between Services. The proposed role would enable the Service to contribute to this MOU and would allow the Service to reclaim any costs associated with providing fire engineering advice to neighbouring Services.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Members approve an increase to the permanent establishment with the creation and recruitment of a Fire Engineer role.

## **.11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)**

None.

John Buckley  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

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