



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

**Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on Friday 2 July
2021 from 10:02am to 11:40am**

Membership

Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor John Lee
Councillor Toby Neal

Absent

Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Councillor Tom Hollis (Substitute for
Councillor Jason Zadrozny)

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

John Buckley - Chief Fire Officer
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Becky Smeathers - Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Fire Authority
Malcolm Townroe - Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Fire Authority
Damian West - Area Manager for Prevention

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jason Zadrozny

2 Declarations of Interests

None.

3 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

4 Update on the Service's Consultation Framework

Damien West, Area Manager for Prevention, presented a report on the amendments to the Service's Consultation Framework, ahead of the engagement relating to the new Strategic Plan. The following points were discussed:

- (a) as a public body, the Service must engage in consultation with communities, staff and partners as part of ensuring transparency and accountability. The Integrated Risk Management Plans must be easily accessible to the public and reflect effective consultation. The Service's Consultation Framework was published in January 2013 to align with the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation (2008). The Government produced an updated set of Consultation Principles in 2018, so the Service's Consultation Framework has now been reviewed to reflect these principles in preparation for the 2022 to 2025 Strategic Plan;
- (b) within the Framework, there is now an increased emphasis on the proportionality of consultations. This will enable shorter, more focussed consultation processes for certain activities, with full, 12-week consultations maintained for any proposed significant changes that would affect the delivery of services to communities. There will be pre-consultation processes with staff, stakeholders and partners. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been carried out in relation to the new Strategic Plan, to ensure that all communities have the opportunity to provide feedback in its development;
- (c) in replying to consultations, respondents are invited to provide contact details so that they can be sent future consultations directly. A collaborative database is also in place with the Police, which is very helpful for carrying out pre-consultations;
- (d) the Committee welcomed the new Framework and felt that it was positive that consultations would avoid time periods containing public holidays or elections. It encouraged the Service to seek to reach as many people as possible when it consulted, making use of a wide range of means to contact harder to reach communities (which may have limited access to the internet and social media) when required, including pre-engagement and taking advantage of partner links. It requested that, if it is not possible to acknowledge every response to a consultation in an individual way, consideration is given to a viable means of acknowledging all responses in a general way.

Resolved to endorse the Service's approach to consultation and approve the updated Consultation Framework.

5 Service Learning from Covid-19

Damien West, Area Manager for Prevention, presented a report on the learning arising from the Service's response to the Coronavirus pandemic to date. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the pandemic has had a significant impact upon the Service, but its response to supporting the needs of communities during the period has been strong, including the delivery by staff of tests and vaccinations, and working with partners in responding to community needs. In retuning to 'business as usual', the experiences of the pandemic can be used to improve service provision going forward;

- (b) during 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook thematic inspections of all Fire and Rescue Services in England, and it inspected the Service during October. Its report identified two areas of focus for the Service to consider: how it will adopt the new and innovative ways of working introduced during the pandemic for the longer term, to secure lasting improvements; and how it should update its plans, including business continuity plans, using the lessons it has learned from the pandemic to date;
- (c) a strategic debrief raised recommendations covering a range of areas including revising strategic, tactical and departmental Business Continuity Management (BCM) plans, utilising ICT transformation to enhance the BCM response of teams, revisiting mental health assessments and support in the light of Coronavirus, and embedding practices that were demonstrated to have worked well during the pandemic response. Key areas of good practice highlighted by the report were communications, engagement with representative bodies and minority groups within the workforce, liaison between teams and departments, and the use of Strategic Intent documents to focus Service direction;
- (d) the response rate to HMICFRS's staff survey was 22%, which matched the national average. Overall, 56% of respondents reported being satisfied with the level of development available to them (16% above national average) and 81% felt that their line manager had useful conversations about learning and development with them (36% above the national average). However, only 47% of respondents agreed that they had an appropriate level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to do their job safely, while 12% felt that they had been discriminated against at work in the last 12 months;
- (e) an action plan has been developed to address these areas for improvement, and a 'Lessons Learned' log has been compiled to inform ongoing development. The whole sector had to move to secure appropriate levels of PPE at the start of the pandemic, but the Service did hold stocks of effective respirators and disposable protective clothing before the pandemic began. Engagement with staff representative bodies is in place and will continue, to provide assurance that the right level of protective provision is available;
- (f) Coronavirus cases in the workforce have been relatively low, and nobody has been seriously ill. Cases are monitored daily and staff are experienced in infection control. The Service has carried out regular engagement with staff on getting the vaccine and attitudes have been positive, so the majority of staff are now vaccinated. Nevertheless, there can be occasional spikes in staff needing to self-isolate;
- (g) staff are concerned about exercising operational discretion to respond to an incident in a way not mandated in the standard operational policy and procedure. This is an issue of focus following the Grenfell Tower disaster and operational policy and procedure documents should seek to capture everything foreseeable that could occur at an incident. However, there can be exceptional circumstances, so it is important to work with staff so that they can be confident in exercising operational discretion when a situation requires it;
- (h) overall, 85% of the workforce are operational staff, and measures need to be in place to ensure a full organisational response to significant incidents – where support staff will often volunteer to assist operational staff directly. However, means of agile working will be used going forward, though with processes in place to enable collaboration across the organisation and avoid any development of silo working. The organisation's total amount

of office space is relatively small, and it is shared with partners as much as possible, for collaborative work;

- (i) there was a good relationship between officers and Authority members on the exercise of emergency decision-making powers during the pandemic, through the mechanism of Group Leaders' meetings. The operation of governance processes during the pandemic will be reviewed and reflected upon, and formal arrangements will be put in place for how effective governance will be carried out in the event of a future pandemic. Careful planning for the coming periods of transition between the stages of the national recovery roadmap are required, as re-opening may have an impact on cases during the summer, with the normal winter pressures beginning to rise again later in the year;
- (j) the Committee recommended that the Service is more explicit in reporting the engagement that it has carried out with minority groups, and sets out the specific needs identified by these groups and how they are addressed. It hoped that the Service's Communications team can draw together positive stories about its performance arising from the pandemic, as these are of interest to the media;
- (k) the Committee requested that an annual report is produced on the Service's preparedness for any future pandemic, including on how the Coronavirus-related learning will be applied;
- (l) the Committee thanked the whole Service and its partners for its strong performance and vital work with communities during the pandemic, and moved that this should be recognised formally by the Authority.

Resolved:

- (1) to note the contents of the report and endorse the Service's approach to learning arising from the response to Covid-19;**
- (2) to agree that the Authority's thanks to all staff and partners that have contributed to the Service's response to the pandemic be recorded, and to ask the Chief Fire Officer to communicate this appropriately.**

6 Collaboration Update

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the Service's collaboration activity, including the new Joint Headquarters Programme. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the Service has a number of collaborative partnerships. The current major initiative to relocate to a joint headquarters with the Police is underway and progressing to timetable and budget, for completion by the end of March 2022. A full range of options for the disposal of the current Service headquarters are being considered and will be presented to the full Authority later in July. Joint personnel forums are developing well and branding for the joint headquarters is being developed. Service Fire and Police Crime Scene Investigation Officers will be moving to co-locate shortly;
- (b) the move to the joint headquarters will have the greatest impact on support staff, and some concern is being expressed by employees in both Services – with the potential for redundancy being a primary worry. However, there are no proposals to rationalise posts

as part of the headquarters transfer process, and existing roles in the Service will not be taken over by staff in the Police. A great deal of work is underway to bring the teams in both Services together, and it will be vital to ensure that staff can meet each other and form connections;

- (c) shared estate collaborations with other partners are progressing well, and a drone that was procured jointly with the Police is proving extremely helpful in managing major incidents. The Joint Fire Control Room continues to operate as the emergency response function for both Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and is performing beyond the expected standards. A number of collaborative 'prevention' initiatives are also in place, and collaboration to improve community outcomes is an important area of strategic focus;
- (d) the Service works closely with its neighbouring Fire Authorities on alignment and risk management plans, to provide mutual support in filling any gaps in coverage. The Service will always only deliver collaboration for the purposes of serving the best interests of communities. Although the Service seeks appropriate partnership approaches for all major estates projects, it was not possible to achieve this in relation to the new Worksop fire station;
- (e) the Committee acknowledged the valuable work carried out by Service staff and suggested that members of the Authority could be asked to support the integration process for the joint headquarters project directly, as appropriate. It noted that care should be taken to ensure that the Service does not lose any of the mechanisms that enable it to operate effectively as part of this collaboration, so the standard of service provision to the public is not impacted negatively.

The Committee noted the report.

7 Exclusion of the Public

The Committee decided to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining agenda items in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the basis that, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

8 Resilience Update

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented a report on the national issues that have the potential to impact the Service, and the resilience arrangements in place to ensure that critical response activities can be maintained.

Resolved to approve the recommendations as set out in the exempt report.