



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.**