



Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority

Policy and Strategy Committee

Minutes of the meeting held remotely and streamed on 1 May 2020 from 10.05 am - 11.50 am

Membership

Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)
Councillor Andrew Brown
Councillor Jonathan Wheeler
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor John Clarke (minutes 23-30 inclusive)
Councillor Toby Neal

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

John Buckley	- Chief Fire Officer
Craig Parkin	- Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Ian Pritchard	- Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Malcolm Townroe	- Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority
Charlotte Radford	- Treasurer to the Authority
Becky Smeathers	- Head of Finance
Gavin Harris	- Head of Digital Transformation
Tracy Crump	- Head of People and organisational Development
Terry Scott	- Estates Manager
Bryn Coleman	- Area Manager
Catherine Ziane-Pryor	- Governance Officer

19 Apologies for Absence

None.

20 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

21 Declarations of Interests

None.

22 Chair's Announcements

Although not listed on the agenda, the Chair was of the opinion that the item could be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, because of the developing circumstances around Covid-19, a brief general introduction update was appropriate.

With the ongoing social distancing requirements, it is necessary to establish interim arrangements for Fire and Rescue Authority meetings and governance. With cross-party agreement, the Authority AGM will be delayed, in line with Central Government arrangements.

This Policy and Strategy Committee virtual meeting is a trial of virtual arrangements, and if successful, further virtual meetings may be held.

Thanks are extended to all Fire and Rescue Service staff for stepping up in support of communities, providing a range of assistance including voluntarily roles supporting increased mortuary capacity, supporting food banks, deliveries of medications and preparedness in assisting the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) with moving patients between hospitals. Thanks are given to all staff across the Service on behalf of members of the whole Authority, including back office staff who have changed their working practices and enabled continued functioning, including the IT Team who have worked hard to support home working, and those potentially putting themselves at further risk to support communities on the front line.

Thanks also to the Trades Unions which have worked alongside staff.

Particular tribute is paid to John Buckley as the Chief Fire Officer, whose national level role as Finance Lead on the National Fire Chief's Council is paying dividends for the Service and the whole sector from the good relationships built throughout the sector and in Central Government, which have provided a significant uplift for this Service and the whole sector.

The Chair has been working with the LGA's National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

Good cross-party collaboration is providing confidence in the work of the Authority. Particular thanks are extended to Councillor Andrew Brown as Leader of the Opposition on the Authority, and Councillor Jonathan Wheeler.

23 Financial Impact of the Covid-19 Outbreak

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, introduced the item and highlighted that circumstances have changed since the publication of the agenda, and a substantive change is to be made to the recommendation.

Becky Smeathers, Head of Finance, presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) Since the budget was set in February 2020, global financial circumstances have changed significantly due to the impact of Covid-19 and there is now significant

pressure on the Fire and Rescue Service Budget. Appropriate amendments to the budget have been identified and approval is sought for a temporary increase in borrowing limits if required. Any additional borrowing will be applied short-term follow the established approval process;

- b) Whilst initially a Central Government grant to the Service of £191k was received in March to assist with the cost of additional Covid-19 response work, a further £867k has now been received, giving a total of £1,058k. As such, it is not anticipated that the Service will need to draw on general reserves, so the fourth recommendation is now withdrawn, but the ongoing financial position will continue to be closely monitored;
- c) Budgets continued to be monitored and the Service is currently spending less on training although alternative online training will need to be established to ensure that training standards are maintained. 'Safe and well' visits have been temporarily halted;
- d) It is anticipated that council tax and business rates collection will be substantially impacted. The budget contains a surplus in the collection fund of £94k. This is now not expected to materialise, with significance financial strains on many business and citizens. The ongoing effects will not be apparent for some time, but updates will be provided to members of the Finance and Resources Committee and to the Policy and Strategy Committee in July if required;
- e) With regard to next year's budget, national circumstances will be monitored carefully and considered prior to any proposals;
- f) The new firefighting personal protective equipment (PPE) has now been delivered to stations and authorisation is sought to write off the value of the old withdrawn PPE, which will be temporarily retained as backup;
- g) The interim external audit of accounts will be completed remotely. Whilst the final submission deadline has been extended to the end of November, the Service must have the accounts available on its website by the end of August. The external auditors, Ernst and Young, are reviewing timetables as their NHS audit of accounts has been understandably postponed, the Fire Service's audit will be prioritised.

In response to members' questions, it is noted that the Service replaces all PPE at the same time to ensure that all firefighters have the same level and standard of equipment. PPE generally has a life expectancy of 10 years, after which time it is not considered suitable for protective use and does not have any second-hand monetary value, although it may be gifted to charities for display.

Members of the Committee thanked Becky Smeathers and the Finance Team for their prompt response in extreme circumstances, and welcomed the level of the Central Government grant, which may be a reflection of the Chief Fire Officer's work to raise the profile of this Service and the sector as a whole.

Resolved to

- 1) increase the operational boundary from £31,850m to £33,850m;**
- 2) increase the authorised limit from £35,035m to £37,035m;**

- 3) increase the 12 month loan maturity profile limit from 20% to 30%;**
- 4) write-off £95k second hand PPE out of the stock account.**

24 Authority Governance

Malcolm Townroe, Clerk to the Authority, presented the report which updates members on the legislative changes affecting governance brought in by the Coronavirus Act 2020, and requests that the Authority adopts the proposed temporary changes to governance and meeting arrangements. If approved, the arrangements can be reviewed at the Policy and Strategy Committee at its next scheduled meeting on 10 July 2020.

The emphasis remains on ensuring that business is continued to be undertaken in a transparent manner with the use of virtual meetings which are publicly accessible via YouTube.

Confirmation will be sought from both City and County Councils that it is their intention for appointments to the Fire Authority to continue until a time when respective Annual General Meetings (AGMs) can be held.

Resolved to:

- 1) note the legislative changes brought in by s78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the regulations issued under that section;**
- 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;**
- 3) authorise the Clerk to the Authority to take all and any such steps as may be reasonable and necessary to ensure that online meetings can be delivered in accordance with the legislative requirements and in a secure and safe manner;**
- 4) agree to cancel the Annual General Meeting of the Authority due to be held on 12 June 2020;**
- 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;**
- 6) agree to receive a further report regarding future meetings and meeting arrangements at this Committee on 10 July 2020.**

25 Service Response to the Covid-19 Outbreak

Prior to the Committee's consideration of this item, the following written question has been submitted by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and was read to members by Malcolm Townroe, Clerk to the Authority:

The FBU would like to thank all members and all departments for their part in providing a swift response to Covid-19. We understand the difficulty that working remotely can

bring however as a service we have adapted to the circumstances and overcome the obstacles and challenges that we have all faced. With this in mind the FBU request that all additional work is in line with the current triparty agreement, and the extra work will cease when the triparty agreement ends.

The following response was provided by the Chair:

Thank you for recognising the positive work being done by all within the Service and to all representative bodies for their engagement. These are unprecedented times where our communities look to us for leadership, support and compassion. I am immensely proud of how we have risen to that challenge which is echoed by all members of this Authority and by many from within our communities.

You will be aware that staff from all areas of the Service are undertaking this invaluable work on a voluntary basis, and that the tripartite agreement is only applicable to FBU members. The Service will want to remain engaged in this work whilst ever the community needs us, and where we can provide vital support to ease the hardship and suffering being felt by many citizens. I hope that the FBU will fully support us in those endeavours, providing assistance to people when they need us the most, as they have been for the past few weeks.

John Buckley, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) The Service has temporarily been unable to operate within the formal governance structure while being unable to hold meetings, but members have been kept fully informed and consulted where appropriate. Their support has been much appreciated;
- b) The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) has been aware of the potential for a pandemic for some time and all Emergency Services reviewed their arrangements once the crisis in China became apparent;
- c) The Service's investment in ICT has proved invaluable for enabling remote working;
- d) All staff have been confirmed as key workers and have been able to access key worker child care and now virus testing. Staff who are shielding are being supported;
- e) Initially there was a Service absence rate of 9%, which has now dropped (across the sector) to about 3%, possibly due to the discipline of staff and an understanding of contamination;
- f) Service delivery has been maintained and excellent availability of on-call assets of nearly 100% 24/7 achieved. There has been a low level increase of garden and rubbish fires, which have not caused any strain to the Service. On-call staff are thanked for their availability and responsiveness;
- g) The Service's work continues with the National Joint Council (NJC) and the triparty agreement, whereby firefighters support partners including the East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS), Coroners and support for vulnerable citizens. Additional, broader support has been made available for other partners, including risk assessments and Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, has been providing support at a local, regional and national level;

- h) Initially there was a delay in staff volunteering for additional community support responsibilities, but then there was an overwhelming response offering a range of support, including for food banks, supporting delivery of food and community supplies. Thanks to the staff who have been involved and showed willing;
- i) All of the usual visits to business premises and citizens' homes have been stopped with the exception of those at high risk. Consideration is taking place as to how this, and general preventative work, can start again but with appropriate protection measures in place. Statutory consultation and work streams have continued;
- j) The Service holds its own stocks of PPE and maintains a high level of resilience;
- k) Resources have been flexed to provide inspection support to the City Council to progress protection work. It is acknowledged that during this period, there will be other areas of work which have slowed or halted and a catch-up period will be required once the pandemic is over. Online training is being provided where possible;
- l) The worst scenario for EMAS has not materialised but staff are trained and available and prepared for the potential for further infection spikes. Although not yet deployed, 16 staff are trained to support the LRF with mortuary transfer and management if required, and face-fit testing for PPE is also being explored in the north of the county;
- m) All local Government Chief Executives across the county regularly meet virtually with lead emergency service partner organisations to share information, seek and provide support and ensure consistent messages;
- n) Regional Chief Fire Officers meet virtually weekly with the Chief Executive of EMAS;
- o) National Chief Fire Officers Council hold a weekly gold meeting, often including ministers and civil servants which feeds into Central Government's 'gold lead'. The Service maintains a high profile with Chief Officers actively providing support regionally and nationally;
- p) Communication and engagement with staff is regular, consistent and maintains social connections, including Occupational Healthsupport for the mental strain of isolation;
- q) Recovery and returning to business as usual is the next stage of planning and includes recruitment which is likely to be more protracted than usual, although some staff who had submitted resignations have withdrawn them so they can continue to support the Service and their communities through this period, for which thanks are given. Staffing strain is likely to become apparent towards the end of the year so in preparation, it is requested that re-engagement of a small number of former firefighters is considered;
- r) Social distancing is likely to be required for some time yet and must be planned for all activity.

Members' comments included:

- s) Thanks to the Chief Fire Officer and all of his team for the work being done. There needs to be some consideration of how Authority members' appreciation to staff can be shown;

- t) Thanks to staff who are responding to community need, such as the Fire Officers who, due to issues in a small area of the city, are delivering controlled medicines. The Service as a whole has been very responsive and it's very much appreciated;
- u) The support of Fire Officers at community hubs, ensuring they can continue to operate to support the most vulnerable citizens, is very much appreciated.

Resolved to:

- 1) endorse the approach taken by the Chief Fire Officer in responding to the Covid-19 outbreak;**
- 2) formerly thank the Chief Fire Officer and all members of the Fire Service for their efforts during the Covid-19 outbreak;**
- 3) approve the short-term re-engagement of operational staff to be utilised as part of a blended approach to maintaining critical staffing levels.**

26 Establishment of a Fire Engineer Post

Prior to consideration of the item, Malcolm Townroe, Clerk to the Authority, read the following question from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU):

The FBU requests that the Authority makes the fire engineer post an equivalent Grey Book role in line with current ranks and relevant qualifications. If a Grey Book employee is successful at applying for the post then the FBU request that this would be offered as a Grey Book role.

The Chair responded as follows:

For clarity, the role was previously undertaken by a Group Manager who by coincidence held the qualification, and as that individual retired, the Group Manager post has been filled to maintain the role within the establishment. The proposal being considered today is to increase the numbers in the establishment in direct response to the need to develop and expand the professional knowledge, expertise and capacity of the Service. The Chief Fire Officer does not believe that any further operational expertise is required in the Fire Protection Department, and he also recognises that Grey Book roles are compromised by the need to maintain operational competence, generally have higher turnover in such posts, and have higher costs associated with them.

Furthermore, the post will also provide greater career progression for current Fire Protection professionals, and demonstrates the Authority's desire to offer opportunities to all.

The post will be open to anyone with skills, knowledge and expertise. The most suitable candidate will be offered the role regardless of their current conditions of service, on the basis of it being a Green Book role going forward.

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which seeks approval to establish a fire engineer post.

Following the Hackitt Enquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire, there is a greater focus on fire prevention and safety. The establishment of this post will provide greater flexibility to meet the requirements of the competency framework for fire regulators, as specified by National Fire Chiefs Council.

Operational staff are being trained to undertake low level assessments, which will release capacity for higher level assessments to be undertaken by the Fire Engineer who will identify risk and respond accordingly.

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

27 Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining 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 outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

28 Update on the Proposed New Worksop Fire Station Project

Ian Pritchard, Assistant Chief Officer, presented the report which updates members on the proposed new Worksop Fire Station Project.

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

29 Restructure of the Procurement and Resources Department

Ian Pritchard, Assistant Chief Officer, presented the report which sets out the proposed restructure of the Procurement and Resources Department, as part of the ongoing review cycle.

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

30 Corporate Support Restructure

Ian Pritchard, Assistant Chief Officer, presented the report which sets out the proposed restructure of the Corporate Support Department, to meet organisational requirements and priorities and deliver Service objectives in 2020-22.

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