



Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority

MINUTES of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters - Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on 23 July 2021 from 10.31 am - 12.37 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)
Councillor Toby Neal (Vice Chair)
Councillor Callum Bailey
Councillor Steve Battlemuch
Councillor Scott Carlton
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Eddie Cubley
Councillor Bethan Eddy
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor John Lee
Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Absent

Councillor John Clarke
Councillor Chantal Lee
Councillor Nick Raine
Commissioner Caroline Henry

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Candida Brudenell - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Craig Parkin - Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Ian Pritchard - Planning Specialist
Becky Smeathers - FA Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Fire Authority
Malcolm Townroe - Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the the Fire Authority
Kate Morris - Governance Officer

8 Apologies for Absence

Chief Fire Officer John Buckley
Councillor John Clarke
Commissioner Caroline Henry
Councillor Chantal Lee
Councillor Nick Raine

9 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Payne declared an interest in agenda item 12 The Disposal of Property Assets (exempt minute 19) because he is Deputy Leader of Gedling Council, the relevant planning authority. He left the meeting prior to discussion and voting on this item.

Councillor Jason Zadrozny declared an interest in agenda item 12 The Disposal of Property Assets (exempt minute 19) as a member of the planning committee of the relevant planning authority. This did not preclude him from speaking on the matter and he did not leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.

10 Minutes

The Authority confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair

11 Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements

- (a) Despite a national relaxing of Covid restrictions some measures remain in place on Service sites, including face coverings to be worn when moving around the building, hand hygiene, twice weekly testing encouraged for all staff, and 50% basis return to offices. These are being regularly reviewed and communicated;
- (b) Following a request to Luke Hall MP to consider extending the ability to hold virtual meetings a response was received refusing the request. The government is consulting further on this but as yet no response has been made.
- (c) Dates for the next HMICFRS inspection have been set. This will start week commencing 20 September 2021 and will last for 6 to 8 weeks. Further details will be provided in the upcoming weeks.
- (d) A members seminar will take place on 10 September 2021. Further details will be communicated closer to the time.
- (e) 30 July 2021 a Garden Party will be held at 2pm at Service HQ to reflect on the impact of Covid and recognise the great work done by the Service to support communities through the pandemic. All members are invited.

12 Draft Final Accounts 2020/21

Becky Smeathers, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Fire Authority, presented the Draft Final Accounts for 2020/21 to the Authority. She informed the Authority that the deadline for publishing the accounts online was 31st July 2021 and once published they will be sent to the auditors. She confirmed that the accounts had been prepared in line with CIPFA guidance and that audited accounts will be brought to a future meeting for formal approval. She went on to highlight the following:

- (a) On 2 July 2021 The Finance and Resources committee received a report detailing the provisional Outturn position for 2020/21 reporting a £1.6m surplus. £0.5million of the underspend was allocated to the capital programme to reduce borrowing levels and just over £1million was transferred to the Earmarked Reserves for pressures going forward.

Since this report was received, there have been 2 amendments, £60,000 provision to fund additional costs relating to the McLeod case falling to the Authority rather than the pensions provider, and £36,000 additional cost for auditors. This reduced the remaining £98,000 to just over £2,000;

- (b) These adjustments mean that there is no increase to the General Fund Reserve, which remains at £4.989million;
- (c) The Statement of accounts provided the cost of provision of service, rather than the cost through Council Tax and grants. The highlighted pension liability will reduce in coming years. The deficit will be met partly by scheme members and Fire Authority contributions and a top up grant from central government;

Following questions and comments from Members the following additional information was provided:

- (d) The Auditors are expected to start work in November, but there may be delays due to additional requirements and extra work. There have been a number of issues in recent years with audits being increasingly delayed. There has also been sector wide issues with prices for audits coming in well above quoted figures leaving authorities with little room for manoeuvre. This is a well known issue and is not specific to Nottinghamshire and has been raised with the LGA. The issues are compounded by a limited number of auditing firms being large enough to work with Authorities and the PSAA is looking to improve the situation with the next contract, procurement exercises are already beginning;
- (e) The pension liability is not an imminent risk to the Authority. It is valued every three years and changes can result in a change to employer rates, this cost falls to the Authority. Following the last increase in value the Authority received a central government grant. This is a national issue and is reducing as affected staff members transfer into the new pension scheme.

Resolved to note the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21

13 Annual Statement of Assurance 2020 - 21

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, introduced the report presenting the Annual Statement of Assurance 2020/21 to members for approval. She advised the Authority that it is a statutory requirement for the Authority to provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and the production of this statement contributed to that requirement, increasing transparency and data accessibility to the public. She highlighted the following points:

- (a) The document focuses on celebrating the achievements of the service and performance against the ambitions set out in the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, in what has been a very difficult year. This format has been improved to ensure better accessibility to the information;
- (b) Key achievements highlighted include reduction of incidents, improved sickness absence and improved availability of on-call appliances. The report also highlights the additional work done by staff in response to the Covid 19 pandemic, including urgent work with ambulance crews, medicine and food parcel deliveries to vulnerable citizens and vaccination roll out;

- (c) Safe and Well visits to those most at risk were maintained as Protection activities.

During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- (d) Thanks were formally offered to the Chief Fire Officer for strong leadership through the pandemic, and to all staff, who have continued to support communities through work, not usually associated with the Service, throughout the pandemic and still ongoing;
- (e) Reduction in the number of Unwanted Fire Signals is a difficult balance to achieve, however the number of properties attended been reduced. Coordination across the tri-control area has helped to achieve the reduction further. This has worked along side a reassessment of appliances sent, enforcement action and continued business safety activity;
- (f) On-Call availability is being impacted by the longer term changes in demographic across communities. The Service is working to make On-Call opportunities more available and attractive to the changing population. The issue is not only a local issue but is recognised nationally as a challenge for Fire Authorities. As community leaders Elected Members are ideally placed to help promote opportunities to the community that they may otherwise not know exist;
- (g) A more detailed report on On-Call recruitment and retention is due to be taken to both the Human Resources and Community Safety Committees in the coming year;
- (h) Committee members felt that better use of social media, across all authorities would help to promote the work of Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service more. Developing a more structured use of Comms across the authorities would maximise the impact members can make when promoting opportunities within the Service;

Resolved to

- (1) Approve the Annual statement of Assurance 2020-21 for publication.**

14 Strategic Plan Pre-Consultation

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report updating members on engagement around the new Strategic Plan and informal consultation being undertaken with communities staff and stakeholders. She advised the Committee that implementation is planned for April 2022 and highlighted the following points:

- (a) The final version of the Strategic plan for 2022-2025 will return to this committee in February 2022 following a period of formal consultation to be formally approved. The version presented at this meeting is the pre consultation version and will be amended and updated as appropriate over the coming months as a result of the consultation process;
- (b) The report outlines the initial communication with staff, communities and stakeholders that will be used to shape the plan through the pre consultation phase. Response rates have been a little disappointing from Parish Councils with no responses to requests for information about planned increase in housing stock and the Service will need to follow up key areas to develop the plan;

- (c) Responses from the staff survey are positive and encourage further work with community groups, improved understanding of needs of the community, a focus on being a data led organisation and improving the mobilising system;

Following comments and questions from Committee members further information was highlighted:

- (d) The Fire Service will be looking at methods of communication to establish if alternative means would produce a better response from Local Authorities and Parish Councils. More targeted consultation through different formats may need to be explored to ensure community wide representation in responses;
- (e) Committee members pointed out that it has been a challenging time for Parish Councils recently, just as it has for Local Authorities, but as Parish Council meetings move back to face to face there will be more opportunities for them to table matters such as consultations and respond;

Resolved to endorse the approach to consultation being undertaken

15 Statement of Pay Policy

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the report presenting the Pay Policy Statement to the Fire Authority for approval in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- (a) Main changes from the previous Statement of Pay Policy includes reference to the gender pay reporting outcome showing a difference of 9.8%. This is due to the higher proportion of men filling operational roles and is also seen nationally;
- (b) There are a number of work streams focusing on diversity in the workforce to address this gap although it will take time to address the disparity in numbers. Of the last two recruitment rounds one quarter of recruits were female, however it takes time for new staff to come through to leadership roles;

Resolved to approve the Statement of Pay Policy

16 Grenfell Tower Inquiry

Craig Parkin, Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report updating Members with developments in relation to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the publication of the Governments response to recommendations. He highlighted the following points:

- (a) Of the 47 recommendations made by the Phase One report the Service has completed 24. For many of the outstanding actions the Service is waiting for national changes to take place before enacting. There is lots of information still being fed back at a national level and guidance being issued;
- (b) It is likely that the actions taken by the Service in response to the Inquiry will be a focus of the upcoming Inspection. The Service has a detailed action plan in place for outstanding actions, based on the current guidance, this may change through legislation and/or national guidance;

- (c) The recommendations look at safety measures in buildings as well as response to an incident. Fire Services have no power to enter domestic properties, with only an ability to enter communal parts of buildings and so refurbishments and buildings of multiple occupancy may present challenges. The Joint Audit and Inspection Team was established between the NFRS and Nottingham City Council to offer advice and support to responsible persons of buildings with identified issues;
- (d) Following receipt of a Government grant specialist equipment has been purchased to aid in safer evacuations. These include smoke hoods and are now available on all frontline appliances. Remaining funds from the grant will be used for additional resources to aid controlled evacuations from high rise buildings;
- (e) Further training has been given to control room operators to enable them to give effective fire survival guidance to anyone involved in a fire. Modifications to buildings of multiple occupancy buildings increases the difficulty in this, however fire crews attend high risk buildings to ensure that they are familiar with the site ;
- (f) The Fire Safety Act 2021 has now gained royal ascent, this will give further remit to fire safety inspections, for example, front doors, balconies and external cladding.

During discussion and following questions from Members the following additional information was highlighted:

- (g) Vulnerable buildings have been identified through joint work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office. The Fire Safety Act 2021 will grant the Service more power around enforcement;
- (h) The Fire Authority is not a statutory consultee for planning applications. Layouts of buildings are being altered through the planning process and the Fire Authority may be unaware of them, this can cause issues when attending an incident and knowledge of building layout is outdated due to these changes. When the Fire Service is consulted advice given does not have to be taken. This is an issue that is being pushed nationally through the National Fire Chiefs Council;
- (i) Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service are working hard to improve its prevention and protection offer focusing on a holistic approach. The upcoming inspection will check the work being done and assurance can be given that at a local level the service is learning;

Resolved to

- (1) Note the actions being taken by the Service in response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations;**
- (2) Note the Content of the report; and**
- (3) Agree to receive further updates as the Service concludes the outstanding actions.**

17 Committee Outcomes

Resolved to note the report and minutes of the following meetings:

Community Safety Committee	19 March 2021
Finance and Resources Committee	26 March 2021
Human Resources Committee	23 April 2021

Policy and Strategy Committee	30 April 2021
Community Safety Committee	11 June 2021
Policy and Strategy Committee	02 July 2021
Human Resources Committee	02 July 2021
Finance and Resources Committee	02 July 2021

18 Exclusion of the Public

The Authority decided to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of this/ the remaining agenda item 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(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act

19 The Disposal of Property Assets

Councillor Michael Payne declared an interest in this item because he is Deputy Leader of Gedling Borough Council which is the relevant planning authority. He left the meeting prior to discussion and voting on this item.

Councillor Jason Zadrozny declared an interest in this item as a member of the planning committee of the relevant planning authority. This did not preclude him from speaking on the matter and he did not leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.

As Councillor Michael Payne, Chair of the Authority had declared an interest and left the room, Councillor Toby Neal, the Vice-Chair, chaired the rest of the meeting.

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, introduced the report on Disposal of Property Assets.

Resolved to agree the recommendations set out in the exempt minute