



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

Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters - Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PD on 13 May 2022 from 10.00 - 10.45

Membership

Present

Councillor Toby Neal
Councillor John Lee
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor John Clarke
Councillor Tom Hollis

Absent

Councillor Michael Payne
Councillor Sybil Fielding,
Councillor Roger Jackson
Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Craig Parkin – Chief Fire Officer
Becky Smeathers – Treasurer to the Authority and Head of Finance
Malcolm Townroe – Monitoring Officer and Clerk to the Authority
Catherine Ziane-Pryor – Governance Officer

25 Chair

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Michael Payne, the Vice-Chair of the Authority, Councillor Toby Neal, Chaired the meeting.

26 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Michael Payne (substituted by Councillor John Clark)
Councillor Roger Jackson – other County Council business
Councillor Sybil Fielding (substituted by Councillor Nicola Heaton)
Councillor Jason Zadrozny (substituted by Councillor Tom Hollis)

27 Declarations of Interest

None.

28 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair presiding.

29 Futures 2025 Efficiency Strategy

Craig Parkin, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides an overview of the proposed approach to the efficiency savings required by the Fire and Rescue Authority.

The following points were highlighted:

- a) this report marks the start of a strategic process which will report back to the Committee later in the year and has emerged against a background of austerity and global issues which are compounding the issues around reduced funding;
- b) this year's funding gap has been eased with temporary measures and in year savings, but there are significant ongoing issues and so a longer term efficiency strategy is required to ensure the Service can continue to balance the budget, meet its statutory duties and support communities to the best of its ability;
- c) table 1 of the report sets out the budget requirements for the years 2021/22 to 2024/25, in line with the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) timeframe;
- d) in addition to reduced funding and external negative influences, the Fire Reform white paper will potentially see further change in the sector whilst maintaining the expectation that the Service continues to operate as required and improve, under the influence of the HMICFRS;
- e) 2 areas which will need further focus are the Service's pay budget and service non-pay budgets, with it being noted that 75% with the Service's entire budget is spent on pay and staffing;
- f) as an increase in funding is highly unlikely and the pressures on budgets are increasing, it is inevitable that cuts will be required and these will include cuts to the workforce which has already reduced 25-30% during the past ten years;
- g) it is people who provide the Service to our communities and the Service does its level best to ensure that they are capable of doing the job required of them, whilst aiming to look after its workforce with regard to terms and conditions and their physical and mental health, so Managers will need to work hard to manage the change process;
- h) as is common across the whole of the Public Sector, the Service has been struggling to recruit and has an ongoing 11% vacancy rate which, although providing in year savings, isn't sustainable and does impact on the staff who are then relied upon to cover the work of the vacant posts. This also results in less capacity to deliver against the CRMP;
- i) as part of compiling the CRMP, the Strategic Assessment of Risk has considered the operational response demands City and County. An assessment of where fire

appliances need to be placed with regard to where the greatest response needs are, is underway;

- j) a staffing review has also started and is currently considering management numbers, levels and responsibility. There will also be consideration of the level of ridership required to meet the needs of the potentially revised appliance numbers and siting, and also a review of support staff requirements;
- k) prevention and protection work is key and the Service will have to be realistic when considering the competing needs of the CRMP. Although the Fire Service Reform heavily focuses on prevention and protection, as does the HMICFRS inspections, it is anticipated that further demands will be placed on Services as the focus expands within the built environment, so a balance will have to be met if foreseeable future issues are to be avoided;
- l) a report with further detail will be submitted to the full Fire Authority and any recommendations to amend fire cover will be subject to public consultation. Any required consultation is likely to last up to Christmas, the outcome of which will then inform budget and council tax setting in the new year;
- m) recruitment of Whole-time firefighters was already pushed back but advertising for On-Call firefighters continues.

Members' questions were responded to as follows:

- n) Members comments that Whole-Time firefighters should be the very last area to be considered for changes are noted, but realistically, at this point it is not possible to say where any red lines/protected areas will be as Central Government are placing more focus on protection and prevention. The best possible advice will be provided to members in the report to the Autumn meeting of the Authority;
- o) with regard to collaboration of support services, introducing shared services had previously been investigated and although providing more resilience, it will provide little cost benefit. However, it will be considered again within the review;
- p) the non-operational pay bill, including public facing service delivery roles, cost £2.5 million a year. It should be noted that some prevention work is also undertaken by operational staff, and that support services work on the frontline. One of the areas to consider to find savings is management capacity where a saving of £250,000 per year will be sought;
- q) with 12 of the 30 appliances staffed by Whole-Time firefighters, 18 appliances staffed by On-Call firefighters at night, NFRS is predominantly an On-Call Service;
- r) the suggestion of an emergency summit, to which all MPs are invited is welcomed and will be further discussed with the Chair of the Authority. Plans were already in place for the CFO and Chair to lobby MPs regarding local funding settlements, but combining this with an introduction to the new Joint Headquarters is a good idea. Councillors, staff and MPs need to work together in all directions to support the Service;
- s) with regard to recruitment and retaining staff, public-sector pay as a whole is not keeping pace with the private sector, so is not as attractive. It is acknowledged that the

public sector needs to look at pay scales and/or benefits to try and retain and attract staff;

- t) in addition to lobbying from the Chief Fire Officers Council, local MPs have been lobbied by the Service as it is recognised that in these times of austerity and the rapidly increasing cost of living, many hard working staff are struggling financially;
- u) the suggestion for the Authority to show its appreciation of staff taking on additional duties to cover vacant posts by providing additional support and/or pay is welcome and can be discussed further with Chair of the Authority;
- v) the request for members to have sufficient time to consider the Efficiency Strategy report prior to its submission to the autumn Fire Authority is noted and time will be allocated at the 6 September Member's Seminar to ensure that members are fully briefed and able to freely discuss the paper and its implications;
- w) the ambition of the Service is to be outstanding by 2032 is very much a decision of the staff attending Staff Workshops. The Inspection's focus is on how well the Service knows, understands and reacts to our communities, how the Service uses resources, use of regulations, and what we say to citizens that we'll achieve, and being clear to the public. The Service does need to strive for ambition to be outstanding. The level of funding determines the range of choices available but the Service can't lose the ambition to improve, even during difficult times;
- x) last year 13,000 Safe and Well visits took place and the Service is on working to achieve 13,000 this year even with fewer staff. The Service needs to look at how things are done to achieve the best outcomes. The level of success of the Service's work to prevent situations and minimise risk is difficult to capture, whereas Police have a different quantifiable demand against their resources;
- y) Service staff are very much better informed than previously and most disagreements revolve around how change is made, rather than the actual change. The Service needs to be sure that it looks after staff along the way, but the change process will be a challenge;
- z) the Service will work with trades unions and undertake staff briefings and middle managers will be briefed on what changes may mean. The forthcoming challenges will be fully explained to, and discussed with, union representatives, ensuring they are informed. Communications will be maintained as work progresses.

Comments from members of the Committee included:

- aa) looking forward, the Service will be in a lot of financial trouble if nothing changes but if our Service doesn't do what we know we need to do/provide, citizens will die;
- bb) it is important to bring MPs together and for them to fully understand what this paper highlights is coming. Also, the additional risks due to rising cost of living, particularly home heating, needs to be understood, such as people opening up old fireplaces in their homes and the dangers and increased incidents around that needs to be taken into consideration;

- cc) the current difficult financial position is affecting staff and citizens, but also increasing demands on the Service, including needing new strains of preventative work.

Resolved

- 1) to support the proposed approach detailed within the report;**
- 2) to receive a further report at the Fire Authority meeting in September 2022, preceded by a Member's Seminar to discuss the paper in advance of the meeting;**
- 3) to note the intention of the Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Authority to lobby MPs regarding:**
 - i. Service funding levels;**
 - i. the need to increase public sector pay to ensure that staff are retained and can be recruited.**