



## **Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority**

**MINUTES of the meeting held at Dunkirk and Beeston Suites - Highfields Fire Station, Hassocks Lane, Beeston, Nottingham. NG9 2GQ on 24 February 2023 from 10.30 am - 12.32 pm**

### **Membership**

#### Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair)  
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Callum Bailey  
Councillor Steve Battlemuch  
Councillor John Clarke MBE  
Councillor Robert Corden  
Councillor Sybil Fielding  
Councillor Nicola Heaton  
Councillor Tom Hollis  
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan  
Councillor John Lee  
Councillor Mike Quigley MBE  
Councillor Nick Raine  
Councillor Dave Trimble  
Councillor Roger Upton  
Councillor Jonathan Wheeler  
Councillor Jason Zadrozny  
Police and Crime Commissioner Caroline Henry

#### Absent

Councillor Nigel Turner

### **Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:**

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

### **48 Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Nigel Turner - personal reasons

## **49 Declarations of Interest**

None.

## **50 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **51 Chair's Announcements**

One year commemoration of the Russian /Ukrainian war. Today marks the anniversary of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. A national one minute silence will be held at 11 am to show our solidarity with and support for the Ukraine.

Firefighter Barry Martin. Firefighter Barry Martin of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was seriously injured whilst fighting a large-scale fire with colleagues in a building in Edinburgh, sadly passed away on Friday 27 January as a result of his injuries. The Chair, Vice-Chair, and Chief Fire Officer joined Fire Service colleagues at headquarters and across Fire and Rescue Services nationally, in observing a one minute's silence in his memory on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2023. The thoughts of the Service and Authority are with his family, friends and colleagues.

Pay offer. Central government has presented a revised pay offer for the grey book establishment of a 7% pay increase for 2022/23, and a further 5% increase effective from July of this year. The FBU has recommended acceptance but are now balloting their members. It's decision is anticipated by 6 March 2023.

The Chair took part in negotiations and requested it be noted that credit was due to both sides in negotiating and reaching a compromise and a sensible way forward. It is hoped that this example, and the importance of discussion will be a catalyst for similar issues across the country.

The Firefighter's Charity. In 2022 alone, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service raised over £111,000 for the Firefighter's Charity, from a range of fundraising events and activities. This included the climb of Mount Toubkal where a team of female firefighters raised over £12,000, and a donation of £1,000 by former Chief Fire Officer John Buckley. The Chair congratulated all fund raising colleagues for their excellent work.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Uche Ihiekwe, the new Service Liaison Lead, visited the Service on 7 February, ahead of the next inspection which is anticipated in the autumn of 2023, and was briefed on current delivery activity, including Futures 2025 and the Fire Cover Review. The Service has made huge progress since the initial inspection and the Chair requested that his thanks to everyone involved in this achievement are recorded.

Recent serious incidents. Since the last Fire Authority meeting, firefighters have attended serious incidents, including one in Mansfield in which a woman in her 50s died, and another in Sutton in Ashfield, in which a man in his 80s perished. The Service has engaged with affected communities and is supporting the welfare of firefighters who attended the incidents.

The last full Authority meeting before local elections. The Chair thanked all members of the Authority, regardless of political persuasion, for the good work, which has evidently been carried

out in good faith and for the benefits of the Service and the citizens they represent. Councillor Dave Trimble and Councillor Nicola Heaton, were specifically thanked for their service to the Authority and their local authority, as they were not standing again for election

Later in the meeting, prior to exclusion of the public, Councillor Dave Trimble commented that whilst he had been a Councillor for many years, he had only fairly recently joined the Fire and Rescue Authority but recognised the high level of passion for the Service and commitment to citizens that shines through across the board by Fire and Rescue Authority members, the Service staff, and the Trades Unions, and acknowledged this as truly fantastic, first class and achieving great work.

With regard to the ferocious fire in Edinburgh in which firefighter Barry Martin was seriously injured and died as a result, Councillor John Clarke MBE requested that a breakdown of the incident is presented to members, not necessarily in a formal context, as there was serious concern that the building in question and its contents appear not to have been appropriately managed, and provided a very hazardous environment in which to fight a fire. It is suggested that once further information is received consideration be given to lobbying for legislation to require the controlled management of vacant properties, including building and storage sites. It is not reasonable that the lives and safety of firefighters are potentially put at risk by unnecessary fire hazards. It is important that lessons are learned as a result of this tragic incident.

## **52 Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24**

Becky Smeathers, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report which sets out the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for the new financial year, as is a statutory requirement.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) Overall, there were no major changes applied to the strategy which was updated to reflect the CIPFA Code of Practice which was revised in December 2021;
- b) The Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Policy is newly adopted by the Service with regard to ethical investments, and is attached to the report. It is noted that with some elements of financial activity, such as short-term cash investments, it is difficult to measure the ESG criteria. ESG consideration should only be given once security, liquidity and yield principles are applied;
- c) Members are assured that any level of borrowing is carefully considered, alongside the capital programme and interest rates, and whilst borrowing in advance is possible to benefit from lower interest rates, the criteria and limits are set out in the Prudential Code, which is included as a later item within the agenda.

The Chair commented on the national financial position in that inflation remains higher than 10%, with the cost of food increased by 16%, and neither likely to reduce in the near future. Not only is inflation having a significant impact on the Service, but also impacting on the cost of living, including for those who work for the Service, which is reflected in the pay award. Unless inflation reduces substantially, there will be a longer-term impact on the Service with significant budget pressures again next year.

**Resolved to approve**

- 1) **the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 as set out in the report;**
- 2) **the Policy on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations as set out in Appendix F to the report;**
- 3) **the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy 2023/24 as set out in paragraphs 2.53 to 2.57 in the report.**

**53 Prudential Code for Capital Finance 2023/24**

Becky Smeathers, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report which sets out the Authority's obligations under the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance, and seeks approval of the proposed capital plans, prudential limits, and monitoring processes.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) This report is closely linked to the Treasury Management Strategy and demonstrates the affordability of the capital programme proposed as part of the budget report prior to setting the budget;
- b) The objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure that:
  - capital plans and investment plans are affordable and proportionate;
  - all borrowing and other long-term liabilities are within prudent and sustainable levels;
  - risks associated with investment are proportionate to financial capacity;
  - treasury management decisions are in accordance with good professional practice;
- c) One additional indicator of 'liability benchmark', is included, as directed by CIPFA, and references the amount of borrowing compared to the life of assets against which the borrowing is placed. A more detailed explanation is provided in paragraph 2.3 of the report. The Authority is complying with the requirements of this indicator;
- d) All borrowing is within planned limits, although the Authority has approved borrowing funds slightly in advance of planned borrowing, to ensure that the most efficient interest rates could be achieved;
- e) Following several rounds of efficiency consideration, there is very little scope to increase income from the Service's assets. With the exception of a site at Clifton, for which the Finance and Resources Committee received a report, all other buildings are operational. However, efficiency considerations are ongoing, including if services can be provided differently. As such, the life of some vehicle asset lives had been extended, and then reassessed due to balance against maintenance costs.

Members of the Authority commented that just because there is capacity to borrow, doesn't mean that the Authority should borrow, and that the best income and return must be achieved from assets.

**Resolved to:**

1) approve the Prudential Limits for 2023/24 as follows:

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Maximum ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream</b>                   | <b>8.0%</b>                 |
| <b>Estimated Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream</b>                 | <b>5.0%</b>                 |
| <b>Estimate of Total Capital Expenditure to be Incurred</b>                     | <b>£3,995,000</b>           |
| <b>Estimate of Capital Financing Requirement</b>                                | <b>£30,646,000</b>          |
| <b>Operational Boundary</b>   | <b>£36,901,000</b>          |
| <b>Authorised Limit</b>   | <b>£41,591,000</b>          |
| <b>Upper limit for fixed rate interest exposures</b>                            | <b>100%</b>                 |
| <b>Upper limit for variable rate interest exposures</b>                         | <b>30%</b>                  |
| <b>Loan Maturity:</b>   | <b>Limits:</b>              |
| <b>Under 12 months</b>  | <b>Upper 20% Lower 0%</b>   |
| <b>12 months to 5 years</b>   | <b>Upper 30% Lower 0%</b>   |
| <b>5 years to 10 years</b>  | <b>Upper 75% Lower 0%</b>   |
| <b>Over 10 years</b>  | <b>Upper 100% Lower 0%</b>  |
| <b>Over 20 years</b>  | <b>Upper 100% Lower 30%</b> |
| <b>Upper Limit for Principal Sums Invested for Periods Longer than 365 Days</b> | <b>£2,000,000</b>           |

2) approve the following local indicators for 2023/24:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Upper limit for internal borrowing as a % of the Capital Financing Requirement</b>        | <b>20%</b>  |
| <b>Limit for proportion of net debt to gross debt</b>  | <b>Upper 85% Lower 50%</b>  |
| <b>Investment security benchmark: maximum historic default risk of investment portfolio</b>  | <b>0.08%</b>  |
| <b>Investment liquidity benchmark: maximum weighted average life of investment portfolio</b> | <b>0.40 years</b>   |
| <b>Investment yield benchmark</b>  | <b>Internal returns to be above 3 month compounded SONIA rate</b> |

54 **Budget Proposals for 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Options for Council Tax 2023/24**

The minute's silence for Ukraine was observed by the Authority and those in attendance during this item.

Becky Smeathers, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report, the main purpose of which is to provide the Authority with the broader projected financial information of the Service for the next three years, to enable members to determine the level of council tax precept required by the Authority for the 2023/24 financial year to enable the Service to function effectively and provide a balanced budget, as is legally required under S25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) The Medium Term Financial Strategy report was presented to the Authority at its December meeting, when it tasked the Finance and Resources Committee with proposing options to ensure that a balanced budget could be achieved;
- b) Since the last report, further financial information has been provided, including anticipated slippage in the budget, the announcement of the Central Government funding provided a small additional increase of £17,000, an agreed grey book pay rise to 7% this year and 5% next year which results in increased costs by nearly £1 million. It is noted that the offer is yet to be accepted by the trades union membership. Council Tax income was as predicted, but business rates income had increased with growth and revaluation of businesses, providing an additional £430,000 of income, which is very welcome, particularly when a deficit was initially predicted. Holding vacant Firefighter posts until recruitment is possible has brought costs down by approximately £0.5 million;
- c) £1.126m budget support is set aside in Earmarked Reserves to support the deficit for this and future years;
- d) Inflation remains a concern but is predicted to start to drop during the next few months;
- e) There is uncertainty with regard to future years grant funding from Central Government which is still only provided on an annual basis;
- f) Three options were presented to the Finance and Resources Committee for Council Tax and are set out in the report and are summarised as follows:
  - i. a zero increase/freeze in Council Tax would result in a deficit of £2.064m in 2023/24. This will rise to £3.717m in 2024/25 and increases further to £5.7m by 2026/27. This would put the Service in a severe financial position if chosen;
  - ii. a 2.95% increase in Council Tax would still result in a significant deficit of £1.237m in 2023/24 rising to £2.014m in 2024/25 and to £2.4m in 2026/27, with insufficient reserves held in the Budget Pressure Support Reserve to cover even the first year's deficit;
  - iii. if Council Tax is increased by £5 in 2023/24, 2.95% for 2024/25 to 2025/26 and 1.95% for 2026/27, the estimated deficit position for 2023/24 would reduce to £404k, but based on current known information, this would increase to £1.1m in 2024/25 and £1.5m by 2026/27.
- g) Having fully considered the options, Finance and Resources Committee recommend to the Authority, that a £5 Council Tax increase is applied;
- h) Further recommendations include the approval of fees and charges for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix D to the report, and the approval of the payment of Members Allowances for 2023/24 in accordance with the approved scheme;
- i) The report also includes the statement of the Treasurer, as is required under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, regarding the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of calculations, and the adequacy of reserves.

The Chair thanked Becky Smeathers and the Finance Team for their work, acknowledging the great difficulty in setting a budget due to the wide range of unpredictable and unknown elements.

Authority members' comments included the following:

- j) Cross-party support for accepting the recommendation of the Finance and Resources Committee to apply a £5 Council Tax increase is urged. It would be remiss to have lobbied Central Government so hard and then not apply the £5 increase;
- k) It is recognised that citizens are experiencing a difficult financial period, but the consultation has shown that citizens are willing to make a small further contribution to support front line Services;
- l) It is acknowledged that in the longer term, budgets will remain under significant pressure;
- m) It is not helpful that the Authority can only assume future funding settlements from Central Government whilst they are set on an annual basis. Multi-year settlements need to be known in advance, so lobbying for this needs to continue;
- n) having lost 5.26% of core spending power since 2011, this Authority is still the seventh worst affected Service in the country, whilst other services, such as Hampshire, Bedfordshire and Shropshire have all seen significant rises in core spending power, up to an additional 14.6%. This disparity needs to be addressed;
- o) There is currently £1.45 million inflationary pressure on the Fire Sector, but with no further help or support from Central Government, which places the burden of funding on citizens through Council Tax. Members are urged to agree the £5 increase and to continue lobbying for improved funding. The Service requires an uplift in the settlement or other funding from Central Government to balance next year's budget deficit of £1.3 million;
- p) The all-party, Trades Union and CFO lobbying of Central Government is appreciated, but needs to continue with regard to adequate funding;
- q) Unless additional funding is made available, in future years, the Service will need to make cuts as there are no other routes available if the funding model doesn't change. All members of the Authority are needed to lobby for a funding model change, for the benefit of residents;
- r) Central Government funding is gathered by taxing citizens, so citizens are contributing by either method;
- s) Gathering of national taxation is fairer than relying on local taxation, which hits residents harder. Regardless of which political party is in Government, Central Government needs to be properly funding the Fire Service as there aren't any additional funding streams available unless a new funding model is introduced;
- t) It's difficult to ask people to pay more when they can't see what they are getting. However, as a result of this funding decision, members can assure citizens that the Fire Service cover across Nottinghamshire will be fairer as a result, including in Ashfield where Service cover options will be explored;

- u) Thanks are given to Becky and the Finance Team for their hard work whilst in a difficult position;
- v) All members of the Authority, regardless of political party, can justify to residents that the increase is being applied as a result of support from the consultation of citizens;
- w) Further lobbying is supported, but the Authority needs to provide robust evidence that it has done everything it can with regard to efficiencies, prior to approaching Central Government for further funding;
- x) The Authority has already had to make some very hard decisions to achieve £9.6 million efficiency savings over the past few years and can proudly make that case to Central Government. The active unified support of all Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City Members of Parliament, regardless of political party, is needed in lobbying Central Government to achieve appropriate funding for the Service;
- y) Whilst the £5 increase is supported, this is an unenviable decision and it is recognised that many citizens, particularly those on lower income, including those working, will feel a more significant impact from the rise of any bills or taxes, not only in the current financial climate, but as a general fact. The issue of reduced funding is ongoing year after year. Our residents deserve better;
- z) Whilst agreeing with the recommendation, the actual increase in the contribution to the Fire Service through Council Tax per property is generally less than a cup of coffee or a pint of ale for most citizens and still presents excellent value for money to citizens, for the service provided. This is a fair deal for citizens and any cuts would reduce the quality of service. It's unlikely that if citizens were asked directly, that they would want a reduction in the Service and to reduce the safety of our staff, who put their lives on the line in their role every single day;
- aa) The sensible approach of the Fire Brigades Union in negotiation for a deal needs to be acknowledged, as does their realisation that there is not an infinite amount of funding to draw on;
- bb) Next year's budget now needs to be considered urgently, including looking forward beyond that, even if future settlement totals have to be assumed. Unless the funding model is changed, there are undoubtedly still very difficult times ahead. We need to defend the people who work for us, and our citizens;
- cc) The work and dedication of the Chair and CFO in meeting with individually, and lobbying each Member of Parliament in the County, needs to be acknowledged in achieving the current outcome, but continued lobbying will be necessary;
- dd) The 80% of respondents to the consultation agreeing to a one-off £5 increase in Council Tax validates the increase.

The Chair thanked everyone in the room for their work, engagement and contributions.

**Resolved:**



- 1) **unanimously to agree the recommendation of the Finance and Resources Committee to the Fire Authority that there be a £5 Council Tax increase;**
- 2) **unanimously to approve the 2023/24 precept level to be notified to the Billing Authorities based on the information set out in Section 2 and Appendix C as required by statute;**
- 3) **approve the fees and charges for 2023/24, as set out in Appendix D to the report;**
- 4) **approve the payment of Members Allowances for 2023/24 in accordance with the approved scheme.**

## **55 Futures 2025: Efficiency Strategy Update**

Prior to consideration of this item, representatives of the Fire Brigades Union asked the following 2 questions:

### Question 1

In September's Fire Authority meeting, we asked 'Will the Authority agree to postpone all recommendations currently proposed until after the financial budgets have been officially announced by the government'. This request was denied. Firefighters, and members of the public have been put into a position that has caused an enormous amount of stress and anxiety, a situation which was completely avoidable.

The proposals contained within Futures 2025 paper were based on estimates and assumptions and not fact. There was another way, a way that has now been proven to be correct.

We thank the members of this Authority that stood with the FBU to campaign and lobby for funding and an increase the Council Tax precept. The FBU will continue to lobby.

This should be a lesson to all that giving up and accepting what seems inevitable is never the right approach. We deserve more and so do the public that we strive to protect.

The increase in the allowable precept rise buys us time, time to consider future options and continue to work together to secure the funding we require for the future.

We commend the Fire Authority for accepting the recommendations of a precept rise to the £5 limit. We ask that this Fire Authority commit to working together in the future to secure funding to protect our Service and give assurances that before announcing proposals with such wide reaching implications in the future, that real consideration will be given to the impact on firefighters and the public.

The Chair responded:

The last year has been a challenge for all involved. The Chair is very much aware of and also the stress and anxiety caused, and has strived for an outcome which prevented the need to make Service cuts. This position is a reflection of the last decade, not one that anybody wished to experience, however, the futures 2025 strategy and pre-planning approach has ensured that the Fire Authority has been able to balance its budget, as is legally required, and have a plan as to how it can operate in a sustainable way. On behalf of the Fire Authority, I would thank all stakeholders, including the Fire Brigades Union, for the unified lobbying that you undertook and pressure that has been applied both locally and nationally to highlight the issues facing Nottinghamshire, particularly the joint lobbying of Parliament and campaigning reasonably and in good faith.

I said at the time that we would wait until the outcome of the consultation before making a decision and listen to what is said. It would have been remiss of me as Chair to delay the consultations until this meeting. At that point, despite of consistent personal and joint lobbying, there was no additional flexibility on Council Tax. If that hadn't been provided, this budget would have been close to providing a deficit in excess of £2.3 million. The ability to provide a balanced budget has only very recently become evident with the additional Council Tax flexibility and the unexpected additional income from Business Rates, along with a small uplift in the settlement.

The public consultation, although stressful and causing anxiety, did draw attention to the difficulties of the Fire Service, both here in Nottinghamshire, and nationally and resulted in influencing the Central Government position. It would have been wrong to wait until today to see if what we hoped would come to fruition. We spent the time between the last meeting and now jointly lobbying which has provided the outcome before us today. The FBU should be proud of the role it has played and the contribution to the joint lobbying.

## Question 2

The FBU is disappointed with the recommendation to allow Ashfield Fire Station to remain on a Day-Shift Crewing Model.

The FBU has expressed its concerns on multiple occasions surrounding this crewing model on any station, especially one with such a diverse geographical area and level of risk. This Authority should be striving to reduce attendance times and improve the level of cover we provide to our communities across the whole of Nottinghamshire.

Will this Fire Authority make a commitment to explore all available options in order to revert Ashfield back to a 24hour whole-time station, without any further cuts or detrimental proposals to other station areas?

The Chair responded:

As the report details, the CFO has already committed to explore viable options to resource to risk, but the extent of this approach will clearly only be achievable within the available financial envelope. The Authority continues to face a budget deficit regardless of the ability to raise Council Tax by £5 and we look forward to the advice of the CFO on potential options. The independent assessment report clearly identified gaps in the resourcing to risk to the community with current provision at Ashfield and this will not be ignored but the CFO can only work within the current financial envelope. Further information will be provided in the report.

Craig Parkin, Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides the outcome of the public consultation on the Futures 2025 Efficiency Strategy proposals.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) The anxiety caused to staff, citizens and elected members by the Futures 2025 proposals is recognised, but the proposals reflected the situation at the time with the Service facing a £2.2 million deficit, rising to £3.3 million (revised in the summer). It would not have been appropriate to wait for the settlement announcement, the current position may not have been achieved if consultation had been delayed until today, which was requested;
- b) Thanks are extended to everyone involved in lobbying the Central Government, Thanks are also noted to the Senior Leadership Group, Becky Smeathers and the Finance Team,

all of whom have provided phenomenal support and worked hard on a very difficult report;

- c) There were nine recommendations within the Futures 2025 Efficiency Strategy, many reaching more broadly than the main issue focused on so far today;
- d) The first two recommendations have already been identified with £0.25 million savings in the past 12 months by reducing the number of non-operational staff;
- e) Consideration of revising future demand and response resources will be considered on an ongoing basis';
- f) Reviewing response times has started and the review of the Community Risk Management Plan with regard to commitments to communities is ongoing;
- g) Limited use of reserves has been agreed, and investigating sustainable longer term strategic options for funding the Service is ongoing;
- h) There is still further work to be done with regard to longer term strategic collaboration;
- i) The outcome of the public consultation was as predicted at the September meeting of the Authority, although response numbers were low at just over 1,800, this is not unusual for public sector consultation but further consideration will be given as to how to improve future response rates;
- j) Although now not required to be considered within the recommendation, a lot of work went into assessing realistic assumptions around the potential variance of the national pay offer, council tax precepts, and the final settlement sum to ensure the budget could be balanced;
- k) The majority of current vacancies will be kept open for the moment, to help support the deficit with £440,000 of savings;
- l) It should be noted that since 2016, the Service experienced disparity with an 11% reduction in firefighter posts, against the national average of just 3%;
- m) As quoted in paragraph 2.5 of the report, Central Government have informed Chairs of Fire Authorities that if the £5 Council Tax levy is applied, there is an expectation that budgets are re-prioritised, and efficiencies sought to maximise productivity, and the evidence of this is provided;
- n) The Service is broader than just its emergency response and aims to be outstanding in all areas, including protection, prevention and building inspection;
- o) The Scheme of delegation, which provides the Chief Fire Officer with the authority to manage staffing, has been beneficial and assisted in balancing budgets;
- p) Even following the consultation and its outcome, the Fire Cover Review is ongoing as referred to in report, and is likely to present further areas for discussion;

- q) The low response in consultation has been disappointing. Further consideration will be given to future consultation, including clarification of what the Fire Rescue Service does beyond firefighting;
- r) Consultation, including focus groups were in favour of £5 Council Tax increase and also required evidence of value for money, providing assurance that those involved were well informed;
- s) £5 Council Tax increase is beneficial to the Service, but the broad issues are not resolved and ongoing consideration of resources is required, alongside ongoing examination of value for money, which will be scrutinised by the Finance Resources Committee;
- t) The Community Safety Committee has been considering reducing attendance to unwanted five signals. Additional work will be done to assure members that operationally this is a sound approach, but management of public expectation will also need to be considered and appropriately managed;
- u) Phase 2 of Futures 2025 will now continue, not just regarding the efficiency of finance, but also process and increased productivity, with a dedicated Area Manager leading on this work and information being fed to the HMICFR Inspectors;
- v) Balancing a budget with balancing resources to operational and non-operational requirements is necessary, including statutory functions in prevention work and building inspections;
- w) Maintaining good, long-term strategic partnerships is important. Even with the potential for national industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union, the Service has maintained a good working relationship with representatives and hopes that this will continue;
- x) Recognising changing risks between departments was evidence when the potential for strike action was identified and planning for such an event required significant departmental additional effort and resource planning;
- y) It is not recommended that cuts to the Service are made at this time, but it should be noted that they remain a potential option to achieve the necessary savings required going forward;
- z) The CFO has drafted a letter to MPs, which will be shared with the Chair, highlighting where the Service is currently and raising concerns going forward. Pro-active challenge has proven valuable and successfully provided results, so must be continued.

The Chair thanked the Chief Fire Officer and Senior Leadership Team for working very hard on a difficult report but stated that whilst the Service has won a temporary reprieve, further Service efficiency improvements are required, otherwise further examination of service cuts will be necessary as future flexibility around council tax will not be enough to prevent future cuts to the service. In addition, the national disparity between Fire and Rescue Services needs to be addressed by Central Government.

The Chair proposed an additional two recommendations to those listed in the report, which were agreed and welcomed by Authority members.

Members commented as follows:

- aa) The Additional recommendation requiring action to address the evidenced based resourcing-to-risk gap at Ashfield Fire Station is welcomed by members, particularly residents and firefighters. Implementation of solutions as swiftly as possible is essential;
- bb) It is very disappointing that not all Nottinghamshire County Members of Parliament openly supported the Service in its consultation, but Authority members are grateful to those who did;
- cc) The way in which the Ashfield Independent members have engaged in and supported the multi-party lobbying approach is welcomed, as is that of the Fire Brigades Union representatives;
- dd) Whilst setting a urgency timescale within which the Chief Fire Officer is to address the resourcing-to-risk gap issues at Ashfield, would understandably be welcomed by some members, an arbitrary time line to implement changes at Ashfield Fire Station is not necessary as the Chief Fire Officer is very much aware of the need to act as swiftly as possible;
- ee) The Authority has consulted citizens and listened to what they have to say. Councillors local to potentially affected fire stations were lobbied by residents and firefighters, and welcome the additional recommendations removing the current potential of reducing capacity at those stations. However, the Service remains in a precarious state with possible cuts required next year, so a longer term solution is required;
- ff) Changes at Ashfield Fire Station need to be applied within the existing financial envelope. The results will be reported to either the Fire Authority or one of its committees to ensure that citizens can clearly see that the Authority has responded to public consultation;
- gg) For several years the Fire Authority has been requesting a longer term notice of the settlement funding, beyond the current annual notification. Ongoing lobbying of Central Government for this, alongside an increased settlement figure, is clearly required;
- hh) This is a brief reprieve, but the Chair and Chief Fire Officer have already stated that the Service will be in the same position next year unless funding arrangements and amounts change. Members of the Authority need to encourage long term lobbying of Central Government and elected members at all levels and from all directions, including Local Authorities and citizens, to achieve a better settlement with a longer term financial settlement;
- ii) There needs to be some sort of information circulated at the time of Council Tax increase to ensure citizens are clear on what the Service is providing for the additional money;
- jj) People who work for the Service are among the best to advocate for the Service and highlight where the issues are and support campaigning to save Services and get a better settlement;
- kk) Devolution may provide further changes going forward, but disappointingly the Fire Authority was not included in the initial devolution discussions. It's highly unlikely that the Fire and Police Services will be rolled into the Mayoralty within its first term, but that may

change in the second or later. Devolution could have a massive impact and place a lot of responsibility, pressure and power on an individual, rather than the shared responsibility, engagement and debated opinion, such as with the Fire Authority. Where services are co-terminus, it would be easier to incorporate them into a mayoral model, but this is not currently the case for either the Police and Fire Services of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire;

- II) Citizens of the Ashfield community will welcome the assurance that they are valued and respected, the same as all other communities, and receive the same level of service.

**Resolved unanimously to:**

- 1) **note the outcomes of Phase 1 of the Workforce Review including the associated exempt report relating to discretionary compensation payments to affected individuals;**
- 2) **receive further reports from the Chief Fire Officer;**
- 3) **agree not to remove the second appliance from London Road and Stockhill Fire Stations, and agree not to convert West Bridgford Fire Station from one whole-time appliance to one dayshift crewing appliance;**
- 4) **task the Chief Fire Officer to swiftly work up and implement proposals at Ashfield Fire Station to address the identified gap in resourcing to risk faced by the community.**

**56 Appointment of Assistant Chief Fire Officer**

The Chair, also being the Chair of the Appointments Committee, presented the report which recommends that the Authority approve the recommendation of the Appointments Committee following a thorough selection and interview process, overseen by independent professional HR consultants.

The Appointments Committee met on 18 January 2023 and following very thorough and extensive screening, assessments and interviews, have recommended to the Authority, the appointment of Damien West as Assistant Chief Fire Officer, with effect from 16 April 2023.

Members of the Authority congratulated Damien West on his achievement and also extended their heartfelt thanks to temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Mick Sharman, who has done a fantastic job during his time in post, with the Chair extending his personal thanks to Mick for the personal support and advice he had provided as a first class public servant, with other members echoing this sentiment and stating that Mick had been an exceptionally communicative and supportive officer.

**Resolved to approve the appointment of Mr Damien West to the position of Assistant Chief Fire Officer, with effect from 16 April 2023, as recommended by the Appointments Committee.**

**57 Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel**

Malcolm Townroe, Clerk and monitoring Officer to the Authority, presented the report which provides the final recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel regarding the application of the inflator to be applied to Members Allowances following settlement of the national Local Government pay award 2022/23.

It is noted any increase in members' allowances is usually linked to the percentage increase of white collar staff. However, as a flat rate amount was last awarded, and this would not be appropriate to apply to members allowances, the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel have proposed a 4.04% increase, which follows the remuneration model also applied by the County Council.

**Resolved for Members' Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances be increased by 4.04%, backdated to 1 April 2022, in line with the proposal put forward by the Independent Remuneration Panel.**

## **58 Committee Outcomes**

**Resolved to note the following minutes:**

**Community Safety Committee 06 January 2023  
Human Resources Committee 13 January 2023  
Finance and Resources Committee 20 January 2023  
Policy and Strategy Committee 27 January 2023**

## **59 Exclusion of the Public**

**Resolved to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the remaining item in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, under Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraphs 1,2 & 3, on the basis that, having regard to all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.**

## **60 Exempt Minutes**

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **61 Proposed Compensation Payments - Futures 25 Phase One Outcomes**

Candida Brudenell, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report.

**Resolved to agree the recommendations as set out in the report.**