



Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority

MINUTES of the meeting held at Joint Fire / Police HQ, Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on 13 December 2024 from 10.33 am - 12.08 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Michael Payne (Chair) (minutes 38-45 inclusive)
Councillor Audra Wynter (Vice Chair)
Councillor Callum Bailey
Councillor Richard Butler
Councillor Robert Corden
Councillor Sybil Fielding
Councillor Tom Hollis
Councillor Anwar Khan
Councillor Salma Mumtaz
Councillor Nick Raine
Councillor Samina Riaz
Councillor Nigel Turner
Councillor Roger Upton
Councillor Gul Nawaz Khan
Councillor Pauline Allen

Absent

Councillor John Lee
Councillor Tom Smith
Councillor Jason Zadrozny
Gary Godden (PCC)

Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner Angela Kandola (Substitute for Gary Godden)

Colleagues, partners, and others in attendance:

Craig Parkin - Chief Fire Officer
Damien West - Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Bev Bull – Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority
Malcolm Townroe - Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority
Catherine Ziane-Pryor - Governance Officer

38 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor John Lee (personal)
Councillor Tom Smith (personal)
Councillor Jason Zadrozny (other Council business)
Police and Crime Commissioner Gary Godden (Deputy PCC Angela Kandola substituting)

39 Membership

Resolved to note the following changes to membership for this meeting only;

- 1) Nottingham City Council has changed its membership of the Authority with Councillor Gul Khan replacing Councillor Nayab Patel;**
- 2) Nottinghamshire County Council has changed its membership of the Authority, with Councillor Pauline Allen replacing Councillor John Clarke.**

40 Declarations of Interest

Although not required to do so, Councillor Tom Hollis informed the Authority that in relation to agenda item 8, Local Firefighter's Pension (minute 45) that his father-in-law is in receipt of the Fire Fighter's pension. This did not preclude him from speaking or voting on the item.

41 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2024 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

42 Chair's Announcements

The Chair, Councillor Michael Payne MP, made the following announcements:

- a) The Service has received a reply to its letter to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding funding concerns. The Chief Fire Officer and Chair will continue to meet with MPs to seek longer term support for the Service, and as an MP, Councillor Michael Payne will continue to lobby in Westminster. The local government funding settlement will be considered by the Finance and Resources Committee in the New Year.
- b) His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) has been consulting upon the future inclusion of governance arrangements for fire authorities. As previously agreed, and further discussed at Group Leaders meeting, a review of governance has now commenced, led by the Clerk. It is anticipated that a fuller update will be provided at the January Members' Seminar and any subsequent recommendations agreed at the 2025 AGM;
- c) Members are again reminded of the seminar taking place on 31 January to focus on the Community Risk Management Plan and financial position of the Authority, for which diary invitations have already been issued. As the Authority is currently projected to experience continued financial challenges in coming years, it is vital that members attend;
- d) the Service Awards night took place on 13 November at the Crowne Plaza, Nottingham and it was pleasing to see members attending. The evening was a great

success and celebration, hearing first hand a range of amazing things staff and members of the community do day in and day out;

- e) the Service was shortlisted for four awards at this year's Fire Magazine Excellence in Fire Awards and we were all delighted and proud that NFRS was announced as "Emergency Service Of The Year", which is a massive achievement. NFRS also received three other nominations for Service Development Centre Team and Corporate Communications Team, both for Teams of the Year, and Sophie Winterbottom who was nominated for Most Influential LGBTQIA+ Individual in Fire.

Members joined the Chair in congratulating staff on their nominations for awards, and also all staff across the Service for the well-deserved achievement of Emergency Year.

- f) as this is the last meeting of 2024, the Chair thanked Fire Authority Members and staff across the Service for their continued hard work and dedication during a difficult year, but looked towards 2025 with enthusiasm and anticipation, regardless of the challenges ahead, and wished everyone a merry Christmas;
- g) congratulations to our Chief Fire Officer, Craig Parkin, who has been appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant under the current Lord Lieutenant, Professor Veronica Pickering. Craig has made significant contribution to both the Fire Service and separately to the community of Nottinghamshire.

Members of the Committee also extended their congratulations to the Service as a whole for achieving Emergency Service of the Year, those nominated for awards, and Craig Parkin for his appointment as Deputy Lieutenant.

43 Chair

The Chair of the Authority agreed that this item, although not on the agenda, could be considered as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, to support the robust governance of the Authority.

Councillor Michael Payne MP, as Chair of the Authority, announced that due to the focus required for his role as a Member of Parliament, and other personal reasons, it is now appropriate that he stand down as Chair of the Authority after today's meeting, and to shortly stand down as a member of the Authority.

Since his initial appointment to the Authority in 2013, and appointment as Chair in 2019, he had welcomed the opportunity to be able to work with both front-line and less visible Service staff at all levels. Appreciation was also expressed for the support and dedication of the Service's Senior Officers (past and present) and the courteous and collaborative cross-party approach taken by elected members towards the Service and its benefits for the city and county's communities.

The Chair confirmed that he is committed to continuing to champion the Fire Service through his role at Westminster.

Members of all political parties thanked the Chair for his work, dedication, and even-handed and courteous Chairing of the Authority.

Malcolm Townroe, Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority, requested nominations for the appointment of Chair.

Councillor Audra Wynter, Vice Chair, was a nominated and appointed without opposition. At the request of the retiring Chair (who would have to leave the meeting early), and as the current Vice-Chair, Councillor Audra Wynter proceeded to Chair the meeting.

In response to the request for nominations of a County Councillor for the position of Vice-Chair, Councillor Sybil Fielding was nominated and appointed without opposition.

Resolved that from the close of today's meeting;

- 1) that Nottingham City Councillor Audra Wynter is appointed Chair of the Authority;**
- 2) that Nottinghamshire County Councillor Sybil Fielding is appointed Vice-Chair of the Authority.**

44 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 To 2028/29 And Budget Guidelines 2025/26

Bev Bull, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report which informed Members of the likely budget position for 2025/26 and requested that the Fire Authority set general guidelines within which the Finance and Resources Committee will develop a detailed budget proposal for 2025/26.

Commentary within the report included summaries on:

- a) issues impacting on the budget;
- b) the Efficiency Strategy;
- c) Council Tax, including the anticipated local government settlement and potential Council Tax increase for citizens;
- d) The reserves strategy;
- e) Medium Term Financial Plan;
- f) Capital Programme;
- g) Members' Allowances.

Members were reminded that should they have any questions regarding the Service finances, or require further explanation, that they were free to contact Bev and members of the Finance Team.

Responses to members' questions included:

- a) whilst the Service is tasked with identifying and implementing its own emergency service communications system, it is a requirement that any such system will be compatible and communicate fully with the national ESMCP. Funding has been earmarked within reserves, but continues to be monitored through risk management;

- b) where the 8% prudential Indicator limit is being removed, this was a long-term target. An annual target for debt charges as a % of net revenue expenditure will remain to be set as part of the prudential code. Other authorities generally don't have a long-term target but follow the approach of setting the target annually. In the longer term the level of debt charges needs to be considered in the context of the overall budget position and affordability;
- a) members should be assured that the Service continues to drive the work around the Grenfell Tower report and recommendations, but this work is very complex with multiple streams of activity, including inspections, monitoring of remediation work, revision of elements of both prevention work and operational response approaches, along with the Service linking and interacting with Government consultations. The issue of evacuation plans is being worked on with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and national Government consultations are ongoing as it is a concern that residents of such 18m and soon 11m buildings can be vulnerable, including possibly with mobility issues, and that specific measures and evacuation plans should be considered. Completion of the plan within the given timescale is incredibly ambitious, but the Service is working with Mayoral Office to try and achieve additional funding to build capacity for the additional work of the 11m buildings and accelerate the plans. Progress updates will be provided to the Full Authority;

Members commented as follows:

- b) at this point in the year, there still remains much financial uncertainty with many financial assumptions for the Finance and Resources Committee to scrutinise and report back on;
- c) clarity is sought regarding additional Central Government funding to support the response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and resulting recommendations, particularly requirements relating to the current 18m building recommendations that are yet to be fully completed, and further requirements relating to 11m buildings that are to be implemented. This, alongside the implementation of the Building Safety Regulator, it's a concern that only very limited funding is showing as earmarked by the Authority for this work, it is assumed this isn't the only funding to support this work as it appears insufficient for the extent of work to be completed within the set timescale, but potentially the skills and capacity of the Service. The work with the National Fire Chiefs Council, regulating authorities including the Local Resilience Forum is welcomed, but to ensure consistent monitoring, it is requested that the Full Fire Authority continue to receive regular updates.

Resolved to:

- 1) approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as set out in Appendix A to the report;**
- 2) approve the Capital Strategy and Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy contained within the MTFS;**
- 3) approve the capital programme for 2025/26 included in the indicative 10-year capital programme within the MTFS;**

- 4) **approve the Reserves Strategy contained within the MTFs;**
- 5) **approve the proposed minimum level of general fund reserves of £4.25m as set out in the Reserves Strategy;**
- 6) **approve the re-allocation of Earmarked Reserve as detailed in the Reserves strategy and set out in the table below:**

Reserve	Balance 01-Apr-23 £'000	Required 2023/24 £'000	Required 2024/25 to 2026/27 £'000	To be Reallocated £'000
Fire Cover Review	53	0	0	53
On Call Pay and Contracts	38	0	-37	1
Crisis Team - ARA	10	0	0	10
External Evaluations	32	0	0	32
Occupational Therapist	104	0	0	104
Additional iTrent Support	33	-16	-15	2
System Extension/Disaggregation				172
Domestic Homicide Reviews				20
Community Advisory Group				10

- 7) **task the Finance and Resources Committee with providing guidance to the Fire Authority in February in respect of:**
 - a) **the options for council tax limited to either a council tax freeze or an increase in Council Tax within the referendum limit;**
 - b) **the options for addressing any budget deficit to enable the Fire Authority to approve a balanced budget, as required by law;**
- 8) **approve the Member Allowance increase at 3.37% based on the average pay increase across the NJC pay spine for all staff.**

45 Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2024/25

Bev Bull, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report, which provided Members with an update on treasury management activity during the first half of the 2024/25 financial year.

It was noted that the Service is not anticipating the need to undertake any borrowing this year, but if this changes a report will be brought to the Authority.

The Chair commented that the net debt breach of the Authority's own prudential indicator is only as a result of receiving an unpredicted grant of £8 million which removed the need for

the level of expected borrowing. However, the delayed sale of the former Headquarters site may have further implications on borrowing for capital financing requirement.

Resolved to note the update on treasury management activity during the 2024/25 financial year as required under the Local Government Act 2003.

46 Local Firefighters Annual Pension Report 2024

Bev Bull, Head of Finance and Treasurer to the Authority, presented the report, which informed Members of the activities of the Local Firefighter Pension Board and Scheme Manager up to 30 November 2024.

In addition to the annual update summary, the report provided detailed summaries and updates on both the transitional protection for Firefighters Pension Scheme 2015 claims (McCloud), and the Matthews and O'Brien case (modified scheme), including action taken to remedy historic issues.

The Pensions Regulator has been informed of the missed deadline for the Scheme Administrator to issue statements to pension members, as is the case with other Fire and Rescue Services, but the statutory deadline of the end of March 2025 will be met.

Members' questions were responded to as follows:

- a) although the additional pension remedy costs relating to the McCloud and Matthews and O'Brien cases are being funded by Central Government, due to the Authority 'proceeding at risk' to minimize impact on affected pension members, rather than delaying progress and waiting for revised guidance, an earmarked reserve of £200,000 was established and it would be wise to retain the reserve for many years to come, to protect the Service from any future liabilities or potential challenge from Central Government of initially impacted pension members;
- b) The Local Government Pension Scheme sits separately from the Firefighters Pension Scheme and there is nothing at present to indicate that this will change.

Members commented as follows:

- c) pensions are really important, and as the Service moves towards greater numbers of retained staff, the Authority needs to encourage all staff across the Service to join the current scheme, particularly in light of the national drive to rationalise pension schemes;
- d) Members should be assured that the Pensions Board has historically exercised due diligence at every stage of its activity.

Resolved to note of the activity of the Pension Board and Pension Scheme Manager, along with the update of current pension issues.

47 Health and Safety Statement - Statement of Intent

Damien West, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report, which informed Authority members that the Service's written Health and Safety Statement of Intent had recently been reviewed and that no substantive changes are required at this time.

Minor contextual changes have been made but the basic strategic content of the Statement remains the same. If approved, the Strategy will be amended to the signature of the new Chair.

The Authority was requested to consider changing the reviewing and reporting of this statement from annually to once every two years, but members were assured that should any significant incidents arise which need to be addressed, the policy will be reviewed and reported to members.

Resolved to:

- 1) note the report and approve the continuing use of the current Health and Safety Statement of Intent;**
- 2) approve the proposal to move this report from annual to two yearly reporting.**

48 Environmental and Sustainability Statement

Damien West, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report, which informed Authority members of the Service' that the 'Environmental and Sustainability Statement', which is a non-statutory requirement but one which the Service wishes to be considered in its activities, had recently been reviewed.

Minor contextual changes have been made but the basic strategic content remains the same. If approved, the Strategy will be amended to accommodate the signature of the new Chair.

Resolved to:

- 1) note the report and approve the continuing use of the current Environmental and Sustainability Policy Statement;**
- 2) approve the proposal to move the reporting of the Statement from annual to two yearly reporting.**