

**Minutes of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meeting held on 15
February 2019**

Present: Stephen Sweeney (Chairman)

Carl Bennett	Brian Edwards
Randolph Conteh	Simon Gaskin
Paul Darby (Co-Optee)	Peter Jackson
Stephen Doyle	Mr K. Walker (Co-Optee)
Ann Edgeller	Jill Waring

Also in attendance: Susan Finney – Observer (representing Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel)

Apologies: Ashley Yeates

PART ONE

40. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

41. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2019

The minutes of the Panel meeting held on 28 January 2019 were circulated.

The Commissioner was questioned on the allocation of Locality Deal funds to District and Borough Councils as it was understood that proposed allocations for 2019/20 were reduced by 25% contrary to the Commissioner's previous indication that funding levels would be maintained.

Responding the Commissioner reported that a review of the use of the Locality Deal funding had shown approximately 25% was being allocated by authorities to schemes which duplicated or overlapped with schemes run by a neighbouring authority. Consequently 25% of the total allocation would be withheld for allocation to joint schemes proposed by authorities in order to maximise the overall benefit of the funding.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

42. Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public

There were no questions to the Commissioner on this occasion.

43. Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority - Proposed Budget and Precept 2019/20

The Commissioner presented his proposed Fire and Rescue Service Budget/Precept for 2019/20 which showed a net revenue budget requirement of £40.936million of which

£26.247million would be funded from the Precept. This equated to a 2.99% (£2.20 per annum) increase on the previous year's Precept. This was below the inflation rate being built into budgets and therefore did not provide a real cash increase.

The Commissioner reported that during formal consultation on the Precept, 61% of respondents supported an increase in funding for the Fire and Rescue Service. That consultation had been a website based exercise supported by promotional activities by himself and his officers.

The remainder of the budget would be funded from a combination of Settlement Funding (including a reduced Revenue Support Grant), Business Rates Top-up grant and 1% share of Business Rates.

The Commissioner explained that 2019/20 was the final year of a four year funding arrangement agreed between the former Fire and Rescue Authority and the Home Office under which grant allocations had been guaranteed in return for the delivery of an Efficiency Plan to enable a £4.8million reduction in the Revenue Support Grant. The proposed Budget/Precept was therefore a continuation of the former Fire and Rescue Authority's four year financial plan with minor amendments to help facilitate the Commissioner's proposals for the Service in future.

The Efficiency Plan required savings of £0.5million in 2019/20 (after taking into account revised Council Tax assumptions). Savings of £0.2million had been achieved from a review of the Prevention and Protection Programme (including Safe and Well visits). The Panel discussed in detail the operation of the Prevention and Protection Programme, the criteria used to target visits to those at most risk, breadth of information obtained from participants and the links with other agencies. The Commissioner reported that, subject to fulfilling the requirement to prioritise funding for the Response Service. He wished to expand this area of work, potentially in conjunction with Staffordshire Police.

Reference was made to the uncertainty around public sector funding, including that for Fire and Rescue Services, post 2019/20. A Comprehensive Spending Review was due to be undertaken in 2019 along with a Fair Funding Review. The Commissioner stressed the importance of securing funding arrangements for a minimum of 3 years to allow for service planning and development. He reported that along with fellow Fire and Rescue Service Commissioners he was pursuing involvement in national level discussions on funding and other issues affecting the Service, such as pay negotiations.

The Commissioner submitted his Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2023/24 which included an assumed increase in the budget gap to around £3million by 2023/24. The accuracy of all assumptions depended on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. He detailed the main areas of risk in the budget, including increased employer contributions to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and the amount allocated for pay awards which did not equate to the 17% increase currently being sought for Firefighters. Referring to the costs of the PFI contracts under which 21 of the 33 Fire Stations in the County had been funded, the Commissioner indicated that a review of their terms had shown them to be generally favourable to the Service but that he wished to discuss with the Contractors the Terms relating to the use of the Stations with a view to facilitating greater collaboration between the Police and Fire and Rescue Services.

The Commissioner detailed the levels of Reserves provided in the MTFs which included a £1million allocation for future Integration, Collaboration and Change Programme which would be reported to Panel later in the year. No potential savings from collaboration had been included in the 2019/20 Budget.

The Commissioner also submitted his Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2019/20- 2021/22 and his Treasury Management Strategy. The Capital Strategy reflected a reduced level of debt and lower interest payments which resulted for decisions to directly fund components of the Capital Programme. Details were given of areas of major investment. The Treasury Management Strategy detailed the methods employed in managing cash, borrowing and investments and the associated risks in accordance with Guidance issues by CIPFA.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That the Panel's option to veto the Fire and Rescue Service Budget and Precept for 2019/20 not be exercised and that the proposals be supported. The information provided in support of the proposed Precept, including the Council Tax Base, collection fund performance and funding of the remaining net revenue budget be noted; such decision to be formally reported to the Commissioner and posted on the Panel's website.
- (ii) That the Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2019/20-2021/2021/22 and the Treasury Management Strategy 2019/20 be noted
- (iii) That a Panel Workshop(s) be held on the Prevention and Protection workstreams and on potential areas for collaborative working between the Police and Fire and Rescue Services.

44. Fire and Rescue Authority - Statement of Assurance 2017/18

The Commissioner presented the Fire and Rescue Service Statement of Assurance for 2017/18 explaining that this fulfilled a statutory requirement to evidence the financial, governance and response arrangements for the period covered. The report related to the Service prior to him taking governance responsibility.

The report summarised the legislative background within which the Service operated and managed its financial affairs and detailed activity undertaken under each of the 3 Priorities of the Service during 2017/18 namely Education and Engagement, Community Safety and Well Being and, finally, Planning, Resilience and Response.

RESOLVED – That the Statement of Assurance be noted.

45. Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members

The Commissioner was asked for a view on the effect on policing resource of the perceived need for officers to support people with mental health issues. Responding the Commissioner was confident that having introduced mental health support services to assist officers, there was no longer a disproportionate amount of officer time spent on situations involving individuals with mental health issues.

46. Dates of Future Meetings and Work Programme

RESOLVED – That with the addition of Workshops on Prevention/Protection and on Collaboration Opportunities, as agreed by members, the schedule of meetings and proposed Work Programme 2019/20 be approved.

Chairman