

Minutes of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meeting held on 12 February 2024

Present: Bernard Peters (Chair)

Attendance	
Charlotte Atkins	Zdzislaw Krupski
Adrian Bowen	Vince Merrick
Richard Cox (Vice-Chair)	David Williams
Gill Heesom	Jenny Barron (Substitute)

Also in attendance: Ben Adams, Louise Clayton, David Greensmith

Apologies: Councillors Jo Elson and Dan Maycock

Part One

39. Declarations of interest

No declarations were made at the meeting.

40. Decisions published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)

No decisions had been posted on the Commissioners website since the last meeting.

41. Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public

No questions were submitted in time for this meeting.

42. Proposed Fire and Rescue Budget and Precept 2024/25

The Commissioner introduced his report which set out the proposed budget and precept proposals for the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2024/25.

The Commissioners s151, Chief Finance Officer gave a short presentation which was considered along with the Fire Revenue Budget Report (including the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Precept).

It was explained that the total budget requirement for the service was £50.065m and including part fund the balance from Council Tax funding of £31.746m and a proposed increase of 2.99% (£2.52) per annum (£86.77 pa per Band D property).

The Panel also considered the following documents:

- The **Capital Strategy and Capital Programme Report.**
- The **Reserves Strategy**
- The **Treasury Management Strategy.**

The results of the Commissioners consultation were included in the report.

During the meeting and discussion, the following information was shared in addition to that in the report:

- The Commissioner informed the Panel that at the present time, no transformation savings were needed. He felt that the budget was in a healthy and secure place.
- Investment was needed in essential maintenance such as new vehicles.
- There was still a level of uncertainty regarding pay costs, inflation, pensions and a further single year settlement which made planning longer term challenging.
- The service had delivered savings in 2023/24 and along with the additional s31 grant and a higher rate of interest received on the cash which the service held, had contributed to the need to use less reserves in 2024/25.
- It was noted that there was an assumption to increase the precept in 2025/26 by a further 2.99% and then revert back to the lower rate of 1.99%.
- The additional funding which had been announced on 24 January (listed in the executive summary) was noted.
- Risks were listed as pay awards; cost increases; pensions (employer contributions); and the funding guarantee.
- The main points in the Capital Programme and Reserves Strategy were highlighted along with the investment proposals for 2024/25. These were listed in the report.
- The Commissioner felt that Industrial relations were very positive locally.
- The Capital Programme was now on track but had been delayed and faced challenges due to events such as Covid, Brexit and product availability. Delivery of, for example, the ariel ladder platforms and other appliances as part of the Capital programme were due soon and good progress was now being made. The Commissioner felt that more may need to be done in the technology area in order to maintain service and stability in future years.
- The Commissioner sent his condolences to Wayne Browns (West Midlands Chief Fire Officer) family and friends and colleges at the Fire Service.
- A restructure of the Estates Team had taken place and projects around shared estates would be progressing.
- The Commissioner was confident that the finances available would enable the pace of change to continue.

- The budget included assumptions of pay increases of 5%. An agreement above that would put pressure on future budgets, but there was a reserves strategy to deal with such events if needed.
- Staff vacancies had been reviewed. On call staff was an area which always carried vacancies and was always recruiting.
- Workforce diversity had been discussed at the recent Commissioner/ Chief Fire Officer performance meetings. COMMISSIONER'S PUBLIC PERFORMANCE MEETING STAFFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE - Tuesday 14 November 2023, 1:00pm - Staffordshire County Webcasting (public-i.tv)
- The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) was the provision of debt repayment which had historically been set at 4%. It was now set on an asset method basis to ensure that the amount was repaid during the life span of the equipment that the amount had been borrowed to purchase.
- In the Risk assessment of general reserves document, there was a provision of £550k for 'insurance loss data breach'. It was felt that if actions were taken to prevent a breach, then the reserve wouldn't be required.
- Council tax surpluses for each council, showed considerable differences. It was explained that this reflected individual councils' policy and collection rates. The Commissioner would ask for detail but felt that a consistent approach across the authorities would be fairer for residents.

The Panel adjourned to consider their response to the Commissioners budget and precept proposals. Upon reconvening, the Panel unanimously agreed:

Resolved: 1

- a) The total 2024/25 net revenue budget requirement of £50.065m, including the council tax requirement for 2024/25 of £31.746m before collection fund surplus/deficits, be noted.
- b) That the funding for 2024/25 is based upon the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, and includes the estimated business rates information for the nine billing authorities, be noted.
- c) That the proposed budget and Precept increase of 2.99% (£2.52 per annum equivalent to 4.8p per week, increasing the council tax to £86.77 for a Band D property be supported and the Commissioner be notified accordingly.
- d) Council Tax base increase to 365,868 properties equivalent to an increase of 1.5% and the Council Tax collection fund delivering a surplus of £401k be noted.
- e) The MTFS summary financials and MTFS assumptions be noted.
- f) The MTFS balanced position for 2024/25 (£0.1m) and 2025/26 (£0.4m) be noted.

- g) The proposed three year Capital Investment Programme be noted.
- h) The business rates for 2024/25 based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement be noted. This would be adjusted within the Earmarked Business Rates adjustment reserve when compared to the actual Non-Domestic Rates Income Returns (NDR returns) from the nine local billing authorities.
- i) That the outcome of the Staffordshire Commissioner's budget consultation be noted.
- j) The delegation to the S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority, to make any necessary adjustments to the budget as a result of late changes to central government funding (including changes due to the final funding settlement being announced) via an appropriation to or from the general fund reserve be noted.
- k) That the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 be noted.
- l) That the Statement from the S151 Officer for the Staffordshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority on the robustness of the Budget and adequacy of the proposed financial reserves be noted.

2. **Commented** that more data would have been useful to show how the risk assessment and general reserves for 2024/25 (Appendix 3) had been arrived at. This could have included any mitigating actions.

43. Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan - Update report

The report provided the Panel with an update on the delivery of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan (SP), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

The Safety Plan was designed to underpin the Staffordshire Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan and four priorities for the Service had been determined following consultation across Staffordshire in 2020. It was reported that the plan had been extended to December 2024.

The four priorities outlined in the current Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan were:

- A flexible and responsive service
- Protect people and places
- Help people most at risk stay safe
- A fire and rescue service for tomorrow

The plan had been updated and the changes were listed in paragraph 3.6 of the report. Details on the progress to date was also contained in the report.

The main issues discussed by the Panel were:

- The three person crewing for on-call staff. The Commissioner felt that nationally the Fire Unions didn't generally like the concept of three person crews. However, locally their members supported it and no safety concerns had been raised. It was reported by members of the panel that they had heard locally of safety concerns. The Commissioner explained that the type of incident that the three person crews attended should not be high risk and no safety concerns had been raised locally through the Health and Safety system. Details of the number and type of incidents was included in the report. It was reported that the national trend was for crews of three particularly in rural/urban mixed areas such as Staffordshire. Members felt that was too early to say that staff felt safe as it was a relatively short trail, and many staff had not been call upon to attend as a team of three. Communication with the public on levels of safety was a message which needed to be considered. Questions raised by the Panel which could not be answered at the meeting were:
 - How had waiting times been affected?
 - How many times had crews had to wait for back up;
 - detail on the internal focus groups and their remits and findings;
 - Information on the experiences of the local support groups.The Commissioner agreed to continue to share information with the Panel on this issue and to answer the questions above in their next report.
- With regard to the Falls Response Team and the Home from Hospital (HfH) scheme, it was confirmed that full training was provided to the Falls team and that calls were triaged by the NHS so if there was a medical need, the call would be attended by NHS staff. The Commissioner hoped that the HfH service would continue. It was currently due to run to the end of April 2024 to cover winter pressures.
- Defibrillators were now in all front line fire vehicles.
- The HMICFRS reinspection was currently taking place and would report back in summer. The Panel felt that the table in the report which tracked actions, would benefit from more detail to explain some of the actions which had not been met and what dates progress was expected by.

The HICFRS report findings and the progress made to address issues raised was noted. The Panel was reminded that the Commissioners performance meetings with the Chief Fire Officer were public and available on his website.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That more information on the three person crewing for on call staff be reported back to the panel, and include responses the the Panels questions/concerns as listed above.

44. Police Misconduct and Complaint Regulations 2020 - annual report

The report updated the Panel on the implementation of Police Misconduct and Complaints Reforms, as set out in the Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2020 which came into place on 1 February 2020. The Staffordshire Commissioner became the Appropriate Authority for reviews (formally known as appeals). The Commissioners office now received all reviews unless they were about a senior officer, criminal or misconduct proceedings, or article 2/3 (Human Rights), the review body for these was the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

The report outlined the type of complaint and the length of time taken to investigate. Lessons learned from the reviews were fed back to the force for organisational learning. Training in standards and the wearing of body cams was proving important.

Work was underway to bring the Fire and Rescue service under the review of the Commissioner in the same way as Police service.

The Commissioner thanked his officer, Mrs V Powell for the support she provided in this challenging role.

The Panel felt that although benchmarking information was available on line, it would be useful in future, if comparison information could be added to the report. Also examples of how complaints had helped to improve organisational learning.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the contents of the report.

45. Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members

Question: With regard to the Fire fighters pension scheme, when would the second option scheme (where on call fire fighters could buy back pension from when they first started) take place?

Response: The second option exercise had started and the service had until March 2025 to deal with this. The cost would be pickup by the Government.

46. Appointment of Co-opted Independent Member

A recruitment process had been followed and a panel of 4 members (Councillors B Peters, C Atkins, R Cox and independent member Mr A Bowen) had met to interview candidates for the vacant position of independent co-optee. The Interview Panel recommended that Rebecca Rendina be formally appointed for a four year period.

Resolved – The Panel unanimously agreed to formally appoint Rebecca Renina as co-optee member for a four year term.

47. Dates of Future Meetings and Work Programme

The Chair informed the Panel that the reserved date of 19 February meeting was no longer needed, and the 22 April meeting would fall during Purdah so needed to be cancelled. If an urgent item needed to be considered, a special meeting would be arranged.

Resolved – That the dates of future meetings be noted.

Chair