



## **Fire and Rescue Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 11 September 2013  
Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

**Present:**

Mr S Agnew	Mr W Northam
Mrs J Brociek-Coulton	Mr W Richmond
Dr A Boswell	Mr M Sands
Mrs J Chamberlin	Mr N Shaw
Mr J Childs	Mr P Smyth
Mr N Dixon	Mrs A Thomas
Mt T FitzPatrick	Mr J Timewell
Mr B Hannah	Mrs C Walker
Mr B Iles	

**Cabinet Member:**

Mr D Roper

**Also Present:**

Mrs K Palframan – Brigade Manager  
Mr R Harold – Brigade Manager

**1. Election of Chairman**

Mrs A Thomas was elected Chairman for the ensuing Council year.

**2. Election of Vice Chairman**

Mrs C Walker was elected Vice Chairman for the ensuing Council year

**3. Apologies and substitutions**

Apologies were received from, Mr J Dobson (Mr Richmond substituting) and Ms Gihawi (Mrs Brociek-Coulton substituting).

**4 Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 12 June 2013 were agreed by the Panel and signed by the Chairman subject to clarification at 10.2, last sentence in the first bullet point, to add the final words to state re firefighters “in training” – only partake in those activities for which they are trained - in place of the words - only be sent to those which they were qualified to attend.

**5. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations were confirmed:

- Mrs Walker noted that her son in-law was a retained firefighter

- Mrs Thomas noted that her daughter's boyfriend was also a retained firefighter.

## **6. Items of Urgent Business**

- 6.1 The Chairman reminded the Panel that this meeting fell on 11 September, the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. She asked those present to pause and recognise the dangerous and courageous work undertaken by firefighters on a daily basis on that day and every day.
- 6.1 Mrs Walker advised the meeting that she had sent an email of condolence to the New York Firefighters in Manhattan every year since the tragedy. She added that she had visited New York some years ago and from that had build up a lasting relationship with Ladder 16. She confirmed that she always sent the best wishes of Norfolk and had done the same this year.

## **7. Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

## **8. Local Member Issues/Questions**

There were no Member questions.

## **9. Cabinet Member Feedback**

- 9.1 In response to a request for an update in relation to Minute 9.2, the Cabinet Member for Public Protection advised members that there was a Workshop planned at Hethersett Fire Station on 23 September at 2pm relating to the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) at which all Panel members would be able to see at first hand, with the software available, the programme used to model Norfolk's fire and rescue service. He added that he had not yet met with Party Spokespersons, given the current budget planning issues underway, but he was pleased that this meeting would given members an opportunity to see and influence service delivery based on evidence, risk and public feedback. He raised the issue of budgetary implications and public comment to date which was indicating that there was a much bigger appetite for radical change that might otherwise be expected.
- 9.2 The Cabinet Member also reported that a proposal had been approved by Cabinet in August establishing a Norfolk Community Interest Company within the fire service. He added that this was an excellent opportunity to develop innovative ideas.
- 9.3 He told members that, following a successful grant application, all fire stations across the county (save for two) were now being fitted with charging points for electric cars as a standard and this increased the opportunity for further electric cars on the county's roads.
- 9.4 The meeting was informed that all fire and rescue appliances were now fitted with defibrillators.
- 9.5 The Cabinet Member noted that the USAR Team were national Champions in the water rescue challenge, having beaten all the competition this year to win this accolade.
- 9.6 He referred to press comment on August Bank Holiday Monday suggesting that there could be a merger between the police and fire services in Norfolk. He wished to record his view that this reporting was very premature and indeed would require legislation for any final solution to be achieved. Nonetheless, he confirmed that he was actively exploring the range of services available to the public, as part of the budget consultations and confirmed

that nothing was off the table, in terms of not being for consideration. Lastly, he explained that he had held a productive meeting with the Police & Crime Commissioner the previous Friday, and discussions had centred on improved collaboration. He had also spoken to the Ambulance Service, therefore, it was true to say conversations were being had but not to the extent reported by the EDP article.

- 9.7 Lastly, he reported that the Fire Brigade Union had balloted its members on industrial action and the result was announced on 29 August. He noted that this was a national dispute between the Fire Brigade Union and the government and did not in any way reflect on working relations at Norfolk County Council. As yet, he was unclear as to the action which might be taken, but if action did arise then plans were well advanced to respond to the potential risks and impact within the county. Discussions were underway regarding contingency plans but no further steps would be taken at this time and the Panel members and Group Spokespersons would be briefed in full at the appropriate time.

In response to a question regarding the deployment of armed services fire teams, Brigade Manager Harold explained that there was an option to access armed services teams in the fire dispute of 2002 but this provision no longer existed. A limited military response was today reserved only for the most serious of incidents.

## **10. Fire and Rescue Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013/14**

- 10.1 The Fire and Rescue Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013-14 (Item 8) was received. The report provided a balanced view of performance and presented information on managing change, service performance, managing resources and delivering improved outcomes for residents in Norfolk.
- 10.2 During the ensuing discussion the following points were noted:
- The report identified an 18.3% reduction in the number of unwanted false alarms. In explanation, the Panel noted that there had been a drop in the number of unwanted hoax calls. In addition, defective alarm equipment had reduced and so there was a fall in the figures reported. This was a national reality as agencies and organisations handling queries were increasingly screening out problems with faulty alarms etc prior to passing them onto the relevant fire authority.
  - Query was raised in relation to trauma care, at para 2.10, and it was explained that steps were taken to ensure that any equipment was integrated with the Ambulance Service and training practices were compatible between the two authorities. Further discussions were underway with regard to increased collaboration, joint training events and shared equipment.
  - In relation to Youth Development, at para 3.4, Table 2, it was clarified that this was a self financed service, with the Fire & rescue service acting simply as the bank account. There was no cost to the Council. Invoices could only be raised at certain points during the year and hence this snapshot showed apparent rather than real problems with invoicing, however the issue was being addressed through programme delivery.
  - Operation Readiness, was queried at para 2.13 of the report, and it was explained that this was a tough target to achieve but equally, it should not be an easy target.
  - At para 2.7 of the report, members queried priority based budgeting (PPB) and asked what saving was likely and what the latest was on this form of budgeting. In reply, the Cabinet Member explained that all Group Leaders and spokespersons

had been briefed on the potential areas of Fire & Rescue service savings, however, now was not the time to release this information into the public domain. PPB, now in its third year, would continue in 2014/15, with internal budgeting being the first area to be reviewed for savings from areas which would not impact on the front line. In addition, the Panel was advised that the Integrated Risk Management Plan was responsible for the delivery of public services and work was already underway to identify savings to meet budget targets.

- At para 3.19 of the report – relating to RM14117 and a failure to implement the action plan following the safety management audit - it was explained that further work was indeed needed with certain station managers to ensure that planned works were completed and this was now in hand.
- At para 3.19 of the report – relating to RM14119 – failure to secure availability of operational and individual crews – it was explained that a report on this matter was on this agenda.
- Query was raised as to why sprinklers were still not standard in all new NCC office construction, including schools. In reply, it was confirmed that central government were not so minded because of the impact on the school estate. However, representations were made by the Fire Service at the design stage of developments as the cost of installation was more than offset by the safety improvement gained. The Fire Service strongly supported installation but developers presented arguments of cost and added burden, therefore, the commercial argument was still to be made.
- Para 3.9 of the report addressed the issue of sickness absences and, in reply to a query asking whether others around the country experienced the same issues, members were advised that anecdotally they were. In response, it was requested that comparator data be included in the forthcoming report on this subject.
- A member asked whether personnel were trained in the handling of fire safety gases such as halon as it was dangerous if not handled carefully. In reply, the Panel was assured that its use was banned, with some rare exceptions for high risk sites. However, today, research was still ongoing to identify alternative gases.
- The promotion of carbon monoxide detectors was raised as a question and members were advised that work was in the main with the boating industry in Norfolk, in relation to boat bilges and also caravans in holiday parks where gas heating systems were used. This work was undertaken as part of the community safety team workload.
- Mention was made of plans for a New Control Unit being purchased about one year ago and it was noted that this was due for replacement during the current financial year. However, members were advised that the current intention was to seek to move to a more integrated Command and Control system to monitor appliances from a distance. A report would come forward to Board with proposals in due course.

10.3

- It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 11 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

11.1 The Scrutiny Forward Work Programme (item 8) was received by the Panel. This asked the Panel to consider and develop a forward work programme for 2013-14.

11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- Members noted that there seemed to be a light workload for this Panel. However, it was explained that this had been discussed at a recent Spokespersons Meeting and members had agreed that there would be work arising from the Integrated Risk Management Plan proposals, therefore, no new scrutiny was added at that time, although there was an opportunity to reconsider this at the next Panel meeting. Members did then identify issues which might be investigated as future scrutiny items, including:
  - The crewing of pumps
  - Comparisons against neighbouring fire authorities including the reducing numbers of call outs for appliances
  - The gender mix of Norfolk's firefighters
  - The Fire Service Community Interest Company, noting that this was identified for scrutiny next May.

11.3 

- It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 12 Emergency Response performance Review in the Great Yarmouth Area

12.1 The report at item 10 was received by the Panel. The report explained that, within the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Integrated Risk Management Plan 2011/14, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service emergency response standards could be improved in Gorleston by making better use of existing resources. The recommendation had been to relocate one of the two Wholtime Crewed Pumps based at Great Yarmouth to Gorleston Fire and Rescue Station between 0930 and 2330. This had now been in place for a year and the proposal was to increase the trial to 24 hour cover.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- This new trial would run for at least a year, to provide a good body of evidence.
- There was a range of equipment in Great Yarmouth which, rather than being split, was managed between the stations to get the best out of the resources available.
- The members noted the proposal at para 2.4 of the report, set out as a recommendation to the Panel and unanimously

12.3 **RESOLVED:**

1. To note the overall improvement in emergency response across the Great Yarmouth and Gorleston areas
2. To support the further development of this initiative by further extending the trial by locating a wholtime pump at Gorleston on a 24/7 basis for a pre-determined

period in order for a complete assessment to be made.

## **13 Retained Availability Report**

13.1 The Panel received the report (item 11) regarding retained station availability as part of the Scrutiny Forward Programme. It recognised that availability presented continuing challenges for the Service and members had asked for a review of the position in 2013.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- In response to advice on what areas were most affected, it was clarified that the availability and circumstances for the supply of retained fire fighters changed all the time but that in Norfolk, the Service was fortunate to have a good supply, which at any one time hovered at 90%. This situation was not simply accepted and the Operation Readiness Project was looking for an intelligence led approach with efforts focussing on struggling stations. However, recruitment efforts and lead in times meant that it took up to a year to recruit and train fire fighters to the required level.
- The approach to fire call outs was determined not on a station by station basis but through the best use of the spread of resources county wide, ensuring that the nearest available response met the emergency response standards. This was managed through Mobile Vehicle Tracking software.
- The relative performance of one side of the county to another (shown on the map at para 2.1) would be addressed at a Workshop scheduled for 16 September. However, in general terms this could be due to differing management and leadership styles/ economic factors and geographical impact.
- The potential for predicting hotspot stations which might pose potential issues, was an issue for further investigation but on the whole, managers should be best placed to know what issues were coming up to affect staff turnover.
- The issue of declining call outs was raised as a specific factor and was an ongoing piece of work, separate to availability investigations.
- Query was raised as to whether raising the time for first arrival of fire crews beyond 5 minutes might assist, but it was noted that nationally this was a variable target with some Fire Services responding within a 3 minute target, whilst specialist equipment responses had a more generous timeframe to respond. Equally, urban Fire Services had a 1 minute turnout time and some also used different models of crewing. However, all such data on turnout times was modelled across Norfolk, to determine the best outcomes.
- In response to a query on whether the current economic climate was impacting on the ability to retain firefighters, it was noted that training did take three years but not continuously and work was underway to streamline the training. However, with a firefighter's work commitments this might have an impact on some individuals.
- The Panel noted that further scrutiny was needed to link the outcome of the Operation Readiness Project to this current scrutiny.
- In addition, the Panel requested further information to put para 2.2 into context and in particular the point that "5 pumps were below 90% in 2009 and their performance had worsened". Concern was raised that no clarification was given as to the location of the pumps and this information was specifically requested by the Panel.
- It was confirmed that the skills for many emergency services were transferrable, including the RNLI, and efforts were ongoing to work with such voluntary

- organisations to encourage retained firefighters from this resource of volunteers.
- The Chairman made reference again to the Scrutiny Work Programme, with regard to the IRMP and suggested that, in light of the fact the Panel did not next meet until November, a Working Group be established in principle to look at the IRMP after the outcomes from the Workshop, if party spokespersons decided it was needed.

13.3 It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The scrutiny which had been undertaken be noted
2. The scrutiny work be linked to the Operation Readiness Project, having first seen those outcomes, to inform action for the future
3. A Working Group be established, in principle, with party spokespersons confirming membership etc, to review the outcomes from the Integrated Risk Management Plan Workshop.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on 20 November 2013 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 12.10pm

#### **CHAIRMAN**



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