



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

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 22 January 2014  
Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

**Present:**

Mr S Agnew	Mr B Iles
Mrs J Chamberlin	Mr T Jermy
Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh	Mr W Northam
Mr J Childs	Mr N Shaw
Mr D Collis	Mr P Smyth
Mr A Dearnley	Mrs A Thomas (Chairman)
Mr N Dixon	Mr D Thomas
Ms D Gihawi	Mr J Timewell

**Cabinet Member:** Mr D Roper

**Also Present:** Mrs K Palframan – Brigade Manager  
Mr N Williams – Chief Fire Officer  
Mrs K Haywood – Scrutiny Support Manager

### **1. Apologies and substitutions**

Apologies had been received from Dr Boswell (Mr Dearnley substituting), Mr FitzPatrick (Michael Chenery substituting), Mr Sands (Mr Collis substituting) and Mr Dobson.

The Chairman welcomed the two new members to the Panel, Mr Jermy and Mr Thomas.

### **2. Election of Vice Chairman**

Mr Northam was nominated and duly elected as vice Chairman for the ensuing year.

### **3. Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 20 November 2013 were agreed by the Panel and signed by the Chairman subject to the following clarifications:-

Item 1. The Chief Fire Officer noted that his name had been missed from the attendance list.

Item 7.6. should read:- “The Fire and Rescue Awards evening had taken place on 13 November 2013. This had marked the achievements of firefighters, staff, volunteers and the public. . . “

### **4. Declarations of Interest**

The following declaration was confirmed:

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

## **5. Items of Urgent Business**

5.1 There were no items of urgent business.

## **6. Public Questions**

6.1 Appendix A to these minutes sets out the public questions and replies received for this meeting.

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

The Chairman mentioned that Mr Spratt had emailed her to thank the Fire and Rescue Service for attending a fire at his farm.

## **8. Cabinet Member Feedback**

8.1 The Cabinet Member for Public Protection gave the following updates:-

8.2 Following the tidal and storm surge in December 2013, thanks were passed to the Fire and Rescue Service staff who had helped to keep communities safe through both emergency responses and with rebuilding after the event. The Cabinet Member paid tribute to colleagues from across the country who had assisted with the emergency response in Walcott, Norfolk. The Cabinet Member also noted that a team from Norfolk had been mobilised to South-West England on 2 January 2014 to assist with flooding issues. The Cabinet Member and Chairman asked that the Panel's gratitude be passed to all of those who had been involved.

Members asked what lessons had been learned from the tidal and storm surge. The Cabinet Member responded that a number of meetings had been held between the County Council and district councils during and since the incident. A briefing had been held for Members the previous week. In addition it was suggested that a formal report could be brought to the next meeting of the Panel.

It was noted that there were plans to replace the flood gates in King's Lynn with new gates of the same size. As the tidal surge had almost breached the current gates it was suggested that higher gates should be purchased instead. The Cabinet Member agreed to follow this up.

Seven High Volume Pump resources had been made available during the flooding to pump surface water away. Each pump could remove up to eight tonnes of water per minute. Members raised concerns that the water had been put back into local rivers which had caused additional flooding and that not enough water had been removed. It was clarified that the priority of the pumps had been to protect local electrical sub stations in order to keep power to homes, businesses, hospitals, other essential infrastructure and to keep roads running freely. For the most part these defences had worked.

8.3 The Cabinet Member continued that there had been several periods of industrial action since the last meeting. As on previous occasions, emergency response cover of approximately 50% had been maintained. On New Year's Eve a local agreement had been invoked when a fire started at the Great Hospital in Norwich, and fire fighters had left their picket lines and attended the incident. There had been no notice received of any additional strike action

since this date

- 8.4 A tender document had been submitted regarding working with Norfolk Police more collaboratively in the future. Responses had been received and were in the process of being evaluated.
- 8.5 The Suffolk and East Coast Partnership had met to work on a series of collaborations. The Cabinet Member would shortly meet with his counterpart from Suffolk County Council in order to look at how services could be improved and how spending could be reduced by working more closely together.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member clarified that he hoped there would be a large amount of cross-county collaboration but that the Fire and Rescue Services (NFRS) in Norfolk and Suffolk would continue as two separate services for the foreseeable future.

## **9 Fire and Rescue Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013-14.**

- 9.1 The Fire and Rescue Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report for 2013-14 (item 9) was received by the Panel. This monitored the priorities of the service and provided an update on performance, finance and risk monitoring information.
- 9.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-
  - There had been an increase over the last year in the number of domestic fires. The previous year had been particularly low and it was usual to see year on year fluctuations.
  - Officers would provide information on how many of the properties which had experienced domestic fires had smoke alarms fitted.
- 9.3 It was **RESOLVED** that:-
  - The report be noted.
  - The integrated risk management plan be agreed

## **10 Norfolk Putting People First Consultation Responses.**

- 10.1 The Cabinet Member for Public Protection presented the findings from the Norfolk: Putting People First budget consultation and the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessments, attached to the minutes as Appendix B.

## **11 Putting People First – Service and Budget Planning 2-14/17**

- 11.1 The Putting People First – Service and Budget Planning 2014/17 report (item 11) was received. This set out the latest information on the Local Government Finance Settlement and specific information on the financial and planning context for Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) for the next three years. It also set out changes to the budget planning proposals and the proposed cash limit revenue budget for the service based on current proposals and pressures.
- 11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:
  - It was regrettable that the suggested approach was one of making savings from the

NFRS budget rather than an emphasis being placed on generating income and revenue. It had been hoped that projects such as the purchase of the former RAF Coltishall site and the Community Interest Company would have been generating income by this time.

- The cost of buying and fitting smoke detectors for vulnerable residents of Norfolk totalled £80k a year. It had been suggested that this service should be cut in order to meet the targeted budget savings. Officers advised that standard smoke detectors were purchased via a frameback contract at approximately £10 per item, which included a battery life of ten years. However specialist alarms for the deaf and the blind could cost as much as £100.
- In rented properties landlords had the responsibility to fit fire alarms. However if the service visited and there was not one in place, one would be fitted.
- A fire and rescue volunteers scheme had been introduced in 2012 and had attracted 46 volunteers to date. Volunteers were able to carry out home fire risk checks and install the free smoke detectors, in addition to other prevention and education initiatives. Volunteers offered an alternative to using wholtime crews to do the job, particularly in rural areas where there the service had limited resources. It was an example of the Service looking for the most efficient ways to carry out this work and offered a more cost effective option than deploying whole crews.
- Various companies, such as insurance companies, could be contacted to ascertain whether there were any who would be interested in sponsoring the smoke detector service, which would enable the NFRS to make the budget saving whilst still offering the free smoke alarms.
- £0.605k savings would be achieved from staffing changes. A significant part of this had been fulfilled by an appliance being removed from Norwich and subsequent turnover of staff. In addition savings would be required from managing vacancies and recruitment to posts. The number of call-outs had reduced and so more efficiencies had come from that.
- Officers would continue to look for opportunities to adapt how the NFRS worked, in order to make more budgetary savings and generate additional income.
- Front line services had been maintained despite the proposed cuts. The amount of fire stations would increase by one and the number of appliances would remain the same.

11.3 Two options for achieving the required budget savings of £2.7m were presented, at Appendix A and B of the Panel report. Both options would achieve the same savings overall but would be achieved by allocating the savings differently in each year. Following discussion it was proposed and seconded that option B be accepted. This would make best use of the purchase of more cost effective fire engines, the ending of leases and the ICT refresh, all of which would occur in 2017. The Cabinet Member confirmed that this was the working proposal which Cabinet had been using and was a realistic basis on which to achieve the savings. This proposal was AGREED.

11.4 It was proposed and seconded that proposal 56 – to stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors – be held until such time that alternative funding streams had been examined and a further report provided to Members. It was suggested that this could be supported by a working group to look into the options for providing the free smoke alarms and that this group should draw on those who could offer solutions to the problem. In this regard, it was noted that Mr Childs and Mr Dixon had expressed particular interest in supporting this work and that a contribution should be invited from Mr Taylor, a volunteer with the NFRS.

11.5 It was **RESOLVED** that:

- The provisional finance settlement for 2014/15 and the latest planning position for Norfolk County Council be noted.
- The updated information on spending pressures and savings for NFRS and the cash limited budget for 2014/15 in context with the feedback from the Putting People First consultation be noted.
- The option at Appendix B of the Panel report be agreed as the model by which savings would be delivered.
- The proposed list of new and amended capital schemes and the proposed capital programme for NFRS be noted.
- The proposal to stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors be held until such time that alternative funding streams had been examined and a further report provided to Members.

## 12 LGA/CFOA Peer Challenge

12.1 The LGA/CFOA Peer Challenge report (item 12) was received. The peer challenge would take place from 28-31 January 2014 and the visit would examine the completed self-assessment by NFRS.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Few responses had been received to the invitation which had been circulated to Panel members asking them to participate. The Chairman reminded Members that it was important to engage with the peer review and asked that party spokesmen ensured that one Member from each party would attend the review.
- The NFRS was already very financially self aware but always looked for ways to improve. This would include looking for opportunities to work in a more collaborative fashion with other counties.
- The service had worked to ensure that procurements were predominantly undertaken from framework contracts.
- The East of England Ambulance Service were charged for their use of fire stations as a base.
- The self-assessment demonstrated how the NFRS worked as a partner.
- A merger with another service had not been ruled out, if it would benefit the communities of Norfolk. If parliamentary agreement was received for a merger the NFRS would stand apart from the County Council and raise its own council tax as a precept authority.

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

## 13 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

13.1 The Scrutiny Forward Work Programme report (item 13) was received. This considered any outstanding scrutiny work which should be completed by April 2014 and asked the Panel to consider whether there were any additional scrutiny issues which should be considered.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- An additional meeting would be held on 2 April 2014, at which the following items of

scrutiny could be considered:

- Closer working with other fire authorities
- Lessons learned from the tidal and storm surge
- Feedback from peer review

13.3 It was **RESOLVED** that the following items be added to the Scrutiny forward work programme:-

- Closer working with other fire authorities
- Lessons learned from the tidal and storm surge
- Feedback from peer review

## 14 Retained Availability

14.1 The retained availability report (item 14) was received. This updated Members on actions which had been implemented regarding retained fire station availability and further work which was underway to improve operational performance.

14.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- For Heacham and Hunstanton, a pilot was being run to use dual riding was used when there were not enough retained firefighters available at one fire station to run a full crew. Crews would be used from across the two stations to provide cover.
- Swaffham fire station had experienced staffing problems over the past three years which had impacted on the service available. New crew were in the process of being trained which would manage the problem.
- There was no link between fire stations with poor retained availability and the new compact appliances which are to be purchased. Stations receiving the new appliances had been chosen due to risk profile and location.
- The establishment for a one pump fire station was typically twelve retained firefighters. However the NFRS were able to allocate more or less staff if circumstances occurred which could justify the change.

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

### Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 2 April 2014.

The meeting ended at 12.25pm

## CHAIRMAN



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## 6. Public Questions

### 6.1 One question from Mr D. Taylor

I am a Fire and Rescue Service Community Volunteer. I wish to be able to continue giving support to the vulnerable residents in the community who do benefit from a Home Fire Risk Check and the provision and installation of a FREE Smoke Alarm. I understand that this Free provision is likely to be withdrawn.

I would like to find a solution to this dilemma.

My question is:-

If funding is unavailable for Smoke alarms, could this be delayed, (for an agreed period), until a small working group, 4-5 people, is set up to explore and implement alternative funding?

#### **Response by Mr Dan Roper, Cabinet Member for Public Protection.**

As part of the funding reductions the option to cease funding for free smoke alarms has been considered as part of the public consultation of proposed changes. There is no statutory duty to make provision for free smoke alarms. Between 2004 and 2008, every Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) was allocated additional funding from a £25 million grant to deliver Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC). During this period they collectively conducted two million HFSCs and fitted 2.4million smoke alarms free of charge. After 2008 most, if not all, FRS continued to make provision for HFSC and free smoke alarms targeted at those most vulnerable from fire.

It is for the Fire Authority to determine if they wish to withdraw the funding to provision of smoke alarms, either in part or completely. If it is their will for this to continue, in part or in full, then Norfolk FRS (NFRS) will either have to be provided with the necessary budget to undertake this, currently up to £80k per year, or find this sum from other parts of its budget. The latter may result in further consultation on reduction of front line FRS provision.

The service is working with other agencies to seek opportunities to provide free smoke alarms and other safety related items, where these are deemed necessary on a case by case basis, for teams working with vulnerable people. NFRS will also be looking at opportunities to support the provision of smoke alarms through other funding streams. These may include, sponsorship, payment by individuals for the items with fitting provided by NFRS or others working on our behalf. We are always willing to seek assistance from those able to help us achieve our prevention aims and therefore welcome the question and offer made by Mr Taylor.

Mr Taylor asked a supplementary question. He noted that vulnerable people within the community would suffer without this service and asked whether a solution could be found through use of community or business funding?

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection agreed that he would like to see the service continue, but that it could not be justified through the revenue budget. Some underspend had been identified in the current year's budget which would enable the service to continue in the short term by the bulk purchase of smoke detectors, whilst an alternative solution was sought. It would be less viable to charge people for the service as there would then be an additional cost to administer the scheme.





# Feedback

## 'Norfolk Putting People First' Budget Consultation 2014/17

Public Protection – Norfolk Fire and Rescue  
Service – Cllr Daniel Roper

# The overall consultation – a quick overview

- Responses received by email, letter, online, telephone and social media
- Over 4,400 respondents submitted over 15,000 comments
- These figures don't include petitions with over 2,100 signatures
- Panel feedback will form part of the consultation and will inform Cabinet's recommendations to be presented at their meeting on the 27th January

# Financial background

- £189 million gap to make up by 2016/17
- Proposals amounting to over £134 million savings identified so far – with more to be identified in years 2 & 3
- Around 56% of these are from “cutting our own costs” including efficiency measures, better procurement, improved technology and income generation

## **The council's priorities (Excellence in Education, Real Jobs, and Good Infrastructure)**

- General support for priorities but council challenged to deliver them
- Many respondents felt that supporting vulnerable people, public safety or the environment should be a priority

# **The council's approach and strategy for bridging the funding gap**

- Some support for the approach – “sound”, “pragmatic”, “common sense” – but should the council be more radical?
- Divided opinions on outsourcing services, technology and selling assets
- The council should reduce bureaucracy and “red tape” through more collaboration, better processes and improved procurement

# Overall package of proposals

- P27 Reduce the transport subsidy for students aged 16-19 generated the most responses
- Responses about libraries generated a lot of responses – making up 6 of the top 10 responded-to proposals
- Many respondents felt that overall the council's package of proposals affected vulnerable people the most

# Freezing Council Tax

- Around 26% of respondents supported the freeze – usually on principle or on the basis of affordability
- Around 55% of people favour of an increase in Council Tax. The vast majority of these suggest a small increase (1-2% or in line with inflation)
- Many respondents wanted clarity about what any increase would be spent on

**Feedback on Public Protection –  
Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service  
budget proposals and the draft  
NFRS Integrated Risk Management  
Plan 2014/17**



# Proposals

2 proposals that had to be consulted on, out of a programme of efficiencies and savings relating to £2.171 million total for the next 3 years:

- P55 Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations (£1.125 million)\*
- P56 Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors (£0.080 million).

\* Revised down to £0.864 million for option A and £1.025 million for option B, as per Service and Budget Planning Report.

# Strength of opinion

- Overall, there were 403 responses, made by 268 individuals and organisations
- 19 organisations made formal submissions
- 150 responses to P55 Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations, 109 supporting and 7 opposing
- 253 responses to P56 Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors, 118 supporting and 77 opposing.

Note – there were a number of responses in each case which were more general in nature and so it was not possible to categorise them as either supporting or opposing.

## **P55 Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations - themes**

- Do not reduce cover and response times
- Seek agreement from firefighters
- Practicality – assurance that the vehicles are suitable and fit for purpose
- Technical issue - unable or unqualified to comment

(25 responses related to alternatives for this proposal).

## **P56 Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors - themes**

- Smoke detectors cheap and easy to fit
- Personal responsibility
- Protect the vulnerable and most at risk
- Target preventative activity
- Unable or unqualified to comment on cost effectiveness

(102 responses related to alternatives for this proposal).

## **P55 Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations - alternatives**

- Charging, sponsorship and advertising to generate income
- Cooperation with other Fire and Rescue Services
- Defer the vehicle purchase and reduce the overall number of vehicles
- Change the vehicle specification to a 'special'.

# **P56 Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors - alternatives**

Maintain part or all of the service:

- Sponsorship and advertising
- Charging
- Scale back and target the service
- Supply but do not fit.

# The outcome of the Equality Impact Assessments

- P55 Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations – this will not result in any change to the overall number of fire and rescue vehicles used for emergency response or affect our service standard. No adverse, disproportionate impacts have been identified for this proposal
- P56 Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors - this proposal is most likely to impact upon vulnerable residents, including older and disabled people who we know are less likely to have a working smoke detector in their homes, and are slower to react should a fire break out in their homes.

# Finally

- Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the consultation
- Lots of time spent preparing and submitting written views and attending events
- Every response has been read and considered
- Responses have, and will continue to, inform how we shape services and mitigate risks as we make savings.