

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

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 2 April 2014  
Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

**Present:**

Mr S Agnew	Mr T Jermy
Mr J Childs	Mr W Northam
Mr A Dearnley	Mr M Sands
Mr N Dixon	Mr N Shaw
Mr T Garrod	Mr P Smyth
Ms D Gihawi	Mrs A Thomas (Chairman)
Mr B Iles	Mr D Thomas
	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  
Miss S Blythe – Committee Officer

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

Apologies had been received from Dr Boswell (Mr Dearnley substituting), Mrs Chamberlin (Mr Garrod substituting), Mr Collis and Mr Dobson.

### **2. Minutes**

2.1 The minutes from the meeting held on 22 January 2014 were agreed by the Panel and signed by the Chairman.

### **2.2 Matters Arising**

Item 11.4. Members requested an update on progress in setting up a Working Group to look at options for free smoke alarms. Officers advised that the Working Group had not progressed further as yet. They were currently in the process of purchasing sufficient smoke alarms to last throughout 2014-15 to cover the immediate problem and Officers were also talking to a range of voluntary agencies, carrying out preliminary conversation regarding funding opportunities. The Integrated Risk Management Plan had been agreed by Full Council the preceding week and so now the Working Group could be taken forward.

**RESOLVED** that the decision at the previous meeting to create a Working Group be reconfirmed.

Item 14.2. Members requested an update on the dual riding trial. They were advised that

the trial was still ongoing as to date there had been insufficient operational opportunities to assess the trial properly.

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

The following declaration was confirmed:

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

### **4. Items of Urgent Business**

- 4.1 The Chief Fire Officer gave an update on the recent fire at Downham Market Fire and Rescue Station. Members were assured that the same level of protection was still available to the area as robust business continuity plans had been in place – a reserve vehicle and equipment had been moved to the adjacent police station which was now being used as a temporary base.

It was noted that the fire and rescue station, which had been built in 2006, had not had sprinklers fitted. This complied with fire safety regulations. An independent fire investigation by Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service had been commissioned to ensure that Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) had followed all guidelines and that they were not investigating their own fire. Early indications were that the fire had started within the fire and rescue engine; following this all similar engines belonging to NFRS were being checked for possible faults.

Full insurance arrangements were in place. It was possible that the NFRS would have to pay the first £500k of any claim depending upon how causation of the fire was determined – this would be for the insurance company and legal team to determine. If this did happen a different cost model would be developed for the Service to work within. A separate financial cost centre had been put in place for all costs relating to the incident.

### **5. Public Questions**

- 5.1 There had been no questions received.

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

There had been no questions received.

### **7. Cabinet Member Feedback**

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

- 7.1 Further to a question at full Council from Mrs Thomas regarding co-responding and requesting an update on the progress for Norfolk, particularly working with the East of England Ambulance Trust, the Cabinet Member advised that Brigade Manager Roy Harold had attended a meeting with the East of England Ambulance Service. The Trust had been keen to work closely with NFRS but had no funding or management time available to assist with this, as their main priority was to train and fund more paramedics. NFRS would apply to the Government for funding from a transformation fund for collaborative working to aid this.
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member asked the Chief Fire Officer to provide an update on the recent tidal

surges which had affected parts of the country. He advised that NFRS was part of the national resilience mutual aid network and was considered to have expertise in flood response. The Service had provided assistance to other flood affected counties over a period of two weeks with volunteers from Norfolk firefighters.

## **8 Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Finance Monitoring Report for 2013/14**

8.1 The Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service Finance Monitoring report for 2013-14 (item 8) was received by the Panel. This provided the fourth finance update for 2013/14 to the Panel.

8.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- USAR and Dive Team equipment had been purchased with ring fenced funding from the Government New Dimensions grant.
- Generators had been purchased in order to ensure that the eight key fire and rescue stations could be kept operational during emergencies affecting power supplies both for NFRS and other key stakeholders, such as fire, police and ambulance services.
- NFRS had a duty to mitigate any actions which could be damaging to the environment whilst attending incidents and already has an environmental protection unit based at Sprowston. Through further work with the Environment Agency, the Service was establishing an additional environmental protection unit vehicle in the west of the county. NFRS would contribute by training staff to use the vehicle but Environment Agency money would be used to purchase and maintain the vehicle.

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

## **9 Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2013/14**

9.1 The Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2013/14 (item 9) was received. The annual statement of assurance covered what NFRS would do to implement the local Integrated Risk Management Plan and to meet the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2012.

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

## **10 Fire and Rescue Service Plan 2014/15**

10.1 The Fire and Rescue Service Plan 2014/15 report (item 10) was received. This covered the next stage of delivery of the Service Plan, following the initial view which had been given to the Panel at previous meetings.

10.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- A successful bid had been made to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for significant funding to link the East Coast and Hertfordshire control rooms. The control rooms would use a single mobilising system and common ways of working to enable Services within the collaboration to effectively cover for each other. This built on existing 'buddying' arrangements with Hertfordshire and provides greater resilience to the Service. This collaborative partnership did not include any proposal to merge control rooms but provided an opportunity to build on joint working. It recognised that Norfolk had invested heavily in control room technology and practices and was able to bring this expertise to the partnership. Norfolk remained a relatively safe county in terms of risk from fire. In the absence of a national response standard, the Service operates a countywide standard under our Integrated Risk Management Plan of aiming to attend life risk fires within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions. However, whilst death rates from property fires remained similar in rural or urban areas, response in rural areas was inevitably affected by travel distances and sparsity factors. Any change to the distribution of rural stations could also affect response times. Different sized fire and rescue vehicles were being purchased for some stations, including lightweight and compact vehicles. This would be a move away from standardised appliances which helps make the fleet more flexible and allow a more targeted deployment of resources to different types of incidents.
- The Service had seen a decline in retained availability during 2013-14 which had been the subject of two reports to the Panel. This was an ongoing challenge which would continue to be a focus of attention. It was important to note that the Service focused on first pump attendance in terms of its Emergency Response Standards (ERS) and overall first pump availability had held up, whilst the availability of second pumps on some stations was having a significant impact on performance.
- The Service was looking to move to a more intelligence-led approach to vehicle mobilisation. This would help ensure that the most appropriate type of vehicle and number of crew were dispatched to each incident.
- Evidence suggested that it was difficult to keep motivation up amongst crews when incidences were reducing and this had an impact on availability.
- Sickness absence was still high but an improvement was expected in the next quarter as the number of long term sick cases had declined.

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

## **11 Automatic Fire Alarm Reduction – 2014/15**

11.1 The Automatic Fire Alarm Reduction – 2014/15 report (item 11) was received. This looked at progress which had been made since the Panel agreed to require confirmation of a fire at certain in scope premises between 7am and 7pm, before the automatic mobilisation of resources.

11.2 During the discussion Members noted that the report laid the process out very clearly and put the responsibility with the premises and not the Authority.

11.3 It was **RESOLVED** that the Panel agreed with the proposed implementation of phase 2 of the AFA reduction arrangements as previously approved by Cabinet.

## **12 5 December 2013 East Coast Flood Response by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**

12.1 The 5 December 2013 East Coast Flood Response by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service report (item 12) was received. This looked at the new flood rescue resources which had been deployed to a local major incident for the first time in December 2013.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- The flood rescue resource was funded by the County Council and Defra until 2017. Members would need to consider if it intended to keep this capability for Norfolk and if so to how to continue with this after this time as the resources required were outside of the normal budget.
- The performance speed of the internet for local premises could lose strength during the high level of activity associated with emergency periods. The emergency services used the ACOCS system as its main way of making contact, which allowed access to all masts in the area, although mobile phones were carried for a back up. There were still areas within Norfolk with a poor or non-existent signal. These issues were monitored by the Service but could only be fully resolved by signal providers.

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

## **13 Collaborative Opportunities**

13.1 The Collaborative Opportunities report (item 13) was received. This set out the basis and scope for collaborative and joint working initiatives involving NFRS.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- Any opportunities affecting the governance of the Service would be a matter for Members and the public to consider as and when opportunities arose.

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

## **14 Outcome of the LGA (Local Government Association)/CFOA (Chief Fire Officers Association) Peer Challenge – 28 to 31 January 2014**

14.1 The Outcome of the LGA/CFOA Peer Challenge – 28 to 31 January 2014 (item 14) was received. This gave the findings of the recent four day site visit by the assessment team which had carried out a comprehensive review of both operational and organisational aspects of NFRS and the Fire and Rescue Authority.

14.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:-

- The report was very encouraging and confirmed that the NFRS offered an excellent service and that the management was held in high regard.
- Staff had raised concerns regarding an increased project and programme management focus, which caused a heavy workload that could not be sustained. Officers confirmed that this was the product of being an ambitious Service but they were going through a process with managers to divide and prioritise work over a three year period.
- A 25% reduction in support staff had been achieved which was significant in terms of the size of the workforce.

- An action plan had been created as a result of the findings and key actions integrated into the Service Plan.
- The County Council was moving to a committee system from the Cabinet system. This would be a different way of operating for the Service.
- The review process was consistent with that delivered across all Fire and Rescue Services and had looked at all areas, particularly to identify whether the Service's self-assessment was consistent with the Peer Team's observations.

It was **RESOLVED** that:-

- 1) The report be noted.
- 2) The Action Plan be circulated to the Panel.

The meeting ended at 11.55am.

#### CHAIRMAN



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