

MINUTES
POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX AND
ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE
STRATEGIC BOARD

14.00 – 16.30

7 September 2022

Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair)
Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive Officer, PFCC's office
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Colette Black (CB)	Director of People Services, ECFRS
Chris Parker	Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Director of Operations, ECFRS
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Finance Officer, ECFRS
Emily Cheyne (EC)	Assistant Director Communications, ECFRS
Janet Perry (JP)	Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's office
Jo Thornicroft (JT)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny (Fire), PFCC's office
Christine Butler	Minutes, PFCC's office

Apologies:

Moira Bruin (MB)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
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1 Welcome and apologies

RH welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from MB. JG will be joining later in the meeting.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting and any matters arising

RH asked if there were any matters for accuracy or matters arising on the action log or forward plan regarding the previous minutes.

- 2.1 Typo on page 10, should read Devon and Somerset and Hereford and Worcestershire. CB has contacted them for the related action.

The minutes were agreed subject to the amendment above

- 2.2 RH asked if there were any matters for accuracy or matters arising on the action log or forward plan regarding the extraordinary meeting on 11th July

The minutes were agreed for accuracy.

3. Action Log

JTh took the Board through the action log

35/22 Fire Legal Network - PBI to share the findings of the report re Immediate detriment which has yet to be received. Open

36/22 Forward Plan - Extraordinary Strategic Board was scheduled for July. Close

- 37/22 PFCCFRA Constitution – This was endorsed at the June Meeting. Close
- 38/22 ECFRS Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy. Janet is working with EP on this once this is finished then work can be undertaken on the ECFRS version. Open
- 39/22 Budget Timetable - The first panel meeting is now part of the budget setting timetable. Close.
- 40/22 MTFS Update – NC to quantify Scenario 2 to demonstrate what we needed from the council tax increase and to be added to the latest budget setting paper. Close
- 41/22 CIPFA PM Code Assessment - NC investigate obtaining an external quality mark this is ongoing.
- 42/22 Annual Improvement Strategic Assessment of Risk Continuation of Approval - Amendments have been made. Close
- 43/22 Annual Improvement Strategic Assessment of Risk Referral & IRMP - The same changes have been made to the Constitution. Close
- 44/22 To make changes to workforce data on the Strategic Assessment & IRPM so that aligned with information that had already been published. Close
- 45/22 Annual Plan Mixed Crewing Policy - CB has contacted Devon & Somerset, Hereford and Worcestershire. Close.
- 46/22 Training Centre Update - JTh to add the training needs assessment to the Forward Plan for December. Close.
- 47/22 Approval of New Appliances – Decision sheet amended. Close
- 48/22 AOB Fire Finance System Collaboration for JP & RHy to discuss any potential collaboration with Essex police. JP asked for a system that might at some point offer collaboration with EP. NC suggested a separate catch up with JP on this.

4. Forward Plan

- 4.1 JTh has received a request to add the Assurance Strategy to the December Forward Plan. RHy explained that the assurance framework would be part of the HMI which is how the Service would assure itself going forward, MB is currently pulling together the station reports which will go through both P&R and Strategic board
- 4.2 RH noted that item 11 re Training Facilities on the Agenda, will be addressed as a workshop directly after this meeting. This is the largest single most important item on the Agenda which has not yet been shared with the Rep Bodies and a workshop is needed to go through as ECFRS not quite in the position for it to be presented to the Strategic Board to discuss it formally, which also gives the Rep Bodies a chance to review and comment on the document. This item will be added to the Forward Plan for the September Extraordinary Board on 29 September. CB said that there was no urgency on the People Strategy Action Plan if this needed to move due to timing. JTh to note this on the Forward Plan.
- 4.3 CP said that the Funding for the Protection Update and Building Safety Bill can be amalgamated into one item. The Building Safety Regulator is to go on to the December Forward Plan.

Action 49/22

Funding for the Protection Update and Building Safety Bill can be amalgamated into one item Building Safety Regulator which JTh is to add to the December Forward Plan.

JG joined the meeting at 14.17

5. HMICFRS Inspection Report

- 5.1 RHy said This is the HMICFRS report on the ECFRS 2nd full inspection which was 12 months ago. The paper sets out a summary in terms of what is in that report, the full report for information is attached. There is also a separate appendix which will set out the process that the Service is adopting to underpin and make sure that we take forward the areas of improvement that have been identified as well as the one outstanding cause for concern.

- 5.2 RHy feels that there is still improvement to be made in the Service and the team knows there is still a long way to go. The Service are “good” in the risk category, which has set a benchmark in understanding the communities and the work that needs to be done. RHy also feels that the grading on some areas have been a little harsh, however it is a fair reflection of where the service was 12 months ago.
- 5.3 This report will be embedded in the Annual Plan, some of those actions will be seen in the appendix and the others will roll into the Annual Plan for future years. RHy thanked the team, the Service, PFCC office and especially MB for their hard work.
- 5.4 RH would like to see a focus on outcomes not only the activity i.e., what is the process to evidence closing off these activities and how do we tie this back to the HMICRS Report and future reporting to P&R. RHY said those items taken forward this year will be embedded into this year’s Annual Plan and will go through the Continual Improvement Board and the new Assurance Framework Strategy. These will be brought to the next meeting and will demonstrate how we make sure that something is closed and how that is achieved in the Service’s internal assurance processes.
- 5.5 RH asked how the outcomes can be understood. RHy replied that having a consistent SLL from HMICFRS will help the Service be able to do that and provide support. RHY would like to see consistency in the support from HMICFRS and has requested this.
- 5.6 PBI presumes that the Assurance Strategy will focus on columns 2 and 3 in the document. A discussion followed regarding outcomes and demonstrating how they are being adhered and that staff are appropriately trained. There were some areas that required clarification i.e timescales and delivering those outcomes and demonstrating how the Strategy works.
- 5.7 RH clarified the route for a new CRMP with first steps for the revised Strategic Assessment of Risk and to make transparent for RH for his manifesto on the relevant parts to write a new Fire & Rescue Plan and the CRMP will follow from that. CP will start working on this, RH will need the outputs for this in September 2023.

Action 50/22

RHy would tidy up the Annual Plan to reflect the outcomes/details and timescales.

Action 51/22

CP to work on the revised Strategic Assessment of Risk providing transparency in readiness for September 23 for input into RH’s manifesto for the 24/28 election

6. Annual Report/Fire Rescue Statement

- 6.1 The Annual Report and Statement of Assurance is produced annually and follows the Fire and Rescue Plan Priorities and demonstrates how the Service are performing against both of those priorities
- 6.2 EC went through the headlines to include accessibility and the feedback received from PFCC and from the Panel workshop. EC to come back with a table early next week with the changes for transparency. EC to reframe HMICFRS into the two intros from RH and RHy with a paragraph on how this is done and to update the outcome and how that mirrors over to the financial report. RH asked that the section on Road Safety is aligned with what SERP are saying.
- 6.4 RHy said that the Service is working as a team to provide consistency in terms of the data sets and that 5 years data is being used as standard. This document is very well read around the service and with partners and thanked EC and her Team for their hard work.
- 6.5 JP asked if the 2022/21 financial statement would be checked, EC confirmed that there will be a full final proofread.
- 6.6 EC said that Panel Workshop was very good session, they talked about the governance section and looked to moving that to the end of the report so that the flow fed better in so far as the public reading the document. John Gili-Ross finished by mentioning the huge amount of work done by the Service over the years and the high regard that the public hold them in. JG

suggested moving the governance piece after the CFO review so that it starts off with RH & RHy which seems to flow.

7. Communications Strategy

- 7.1 EC said that this is the updated communications strategy, it outlines the overarching principals of how we do best practice marketing communications, management as a Service including internal communications and employee engagement as well as our external communication, marketing, and internal affairs. As communications move at quite a pace, in terms of the years that it expands, and there is another internal review next year which aligns with the Fire & Rescue plan and the CRMP in 2024. There is a focus of where we are moving to on the digital side in terms of metrics as well as the need for accessible and inclusive communications under the legal duty.
- 7.2 The role of all the employees and best practice communications is to be rolled out across the organisation i.e., how we work with internal stakeholders and how we work with Prevention and Protection on how we are getting the most of those campaigns and also how through being a budget holder providing value for money and measuring against that.
- 7.3 RH recognised the role that Comms played over the summer and kept the public informed, it was of the right tone and supportive of our firefighters and staff at a difficult time.
- 7.4 JG noted a typo OPFCC and asked that in future it is called the PFCC.
- 7.5 DH asked as there was a large amount of work done in terms of the prevention perspective given the importance of protection what are the thoughts in terms of how you get equal visibility, and do you have capacity to deal with where that is going? EC said that there is a lot of work around prevention, the Service are partnering with ECDA, and they are currently looking at specific resourcing for the Prevention and Protection team specifically where they have a dedicated person for that.
- 7.6 DH noted that in the Strategy it talks about the long term and the plan for next year introducing the longitude measure of public and partner perception and that is something that DH would be interested in as an office and as the thinking develops on that in the Service. EC said that there is a two stage approach taken with the partner and public perception piece where Comms have been running campaigns so that the people understand the broader role of fire and we can measure that before doing the public perception. RH added that it would be good to get some metrics and feedback on this.
- 7.7 JG interested to hear about the partnership piece as this ties in with CSPA and Safer Essex agenda, JG commented on the strength of the relationship of the Comms Team for ECFRS and PFCC which has gone from strength to strength, Emma T working in the ECFRS department has given a different view and a positive relationship.

8. Budget Setting Paper

- 8.1 NC said that there was no direct decision required for this paper. The background to the paper, is that budget has been set over the last couple of years with Covid in the background and now we have the current economic situation and cost of living situation and the cost of living pressures. Green book pay award has been offered in July and it will be mid-September before we know whether it has been accepted or not. The award is based upon a £1,925 increase to each scale point for Green Book staff which causes an unbudgeted cost pressure. The Grey Book Award that was offered in June was rejected in July and here has not been a subsequent offer made.
- 8.2 The paper sets out in the background section the trends of the Outturn and last year there was the challenge for a reduced balanced budget which was achieved. It also outlines the current pressures for this financial year and the waterfall chart demonstrates the key movements, there was a balanced budget and a projection of £800,000. There has been one significant Council Tax Collection.
- 8.3 The Focus at the moment is on the unbudgeted pay award of £500,000 and some additional costs of approx. £400,000 for is estimated for the utilities in the second part of this financial year.

- 8.4 NC talked through the scenarios of the Grey Book Pay Awards, utilities and the MTFS and the impact the budget would have on the service. A lengthy discussion followed around the various scenarios and the impact on the precept charge as there would be between a 3.44 – 11.2% increase, The Service will be better informed over the next few months which will inform this process and the discussions going forward.
- 8.5 The Local Government finance settlement that is in place for 1 year, when this comes out in December there will be a longer term view but there is no further information at this stage.
- 8.6 The employers NI cost are around £0.5m p.a. for the 1.25% increase that started his year. There was an announcement at the time that this would be Local Authority funded to compensate and there was a service grant to cover that for 1 year, but this may change with any political appointments.
- 8.7 Section 31 Grants, the pension top up grant of £3.5m would be rolled into Base funding, last year that did not happen, but it should happen this year which would provide that certainty. There is no current confirmation of the USAR grant.
- 8.8 There are key deliverables in the Capital Program, the program needs to continue to be affordable and as we work through the budget program, some scenarios will also be produced.
- 8.9 PBI commented that in terms of assumptions around levels of government funding could/should the Service include in any of the assumptions around latest census statements presumably that would show Essex's population is increasing whilst the rest of the Country is decreasing. RH does not feel it would make much difference but may be significant as how we do revise business rates.
- 8.10 RH noted that there are no assumptions on savings being made. NC said that the MTFS is updated and there is a Savings and Efficiencies Group and there is a Savings and Efficiencies tracking register in place going back over a couple of years to encompass the work that has been done. There was an update meeting to look at some work around it with sessions in the Productivity and Efficiencies forum and would welcome attendance from the PFCC office.
- 8.11 PBI asked around the impact of current rates of inflation and the impact on ECFRS pensions and the budget setting and planning that surrounds this. NC replied that there are indexation implications depending on when you leave the service and when you receive your pension. This is more advantageous for senior officers and will not be beneficial for those on lower pay grades. RHy confirmed that if a Firefighter left the Firefighter Pension Scheme, any payment would be deferred until they were 65.
- 8.12 RH said that this is a very informative piece of work and uses the information in various forums and is better informed that most of his counterparts and we have MPs' on side in Essex, who have agreed to send a letter to the new Home Secretary as a group. RHy added that the Service need to know if the Home Office are willing to help or not, if not the Service will be walking direct into industrial action and is nervous about the uncertainty as if some of the assumptions were to massively shift and we get a central government grant and we have a £1m underspend this year as to £800k deficit, we could have a credibility issue on our hands. RHy said that the Service need that assurance to plan for significant reductions in budget including that in staff, how we are going to do that which will potentially turn a national dispute into a local one.
- 8.13 RH the information is welcome, but the timeframe is extremely tight, we have a new Home Secretary today. This information feeds into discussion with the panel as well. There will need to be some confirmation on precept as to what we need, is it £5.49, now we need £7.00, maybe to add another line in the report.
- 8.14 DH is working out how to sell to the public, we need to have comms with our staff, rep bodies also with the public and the earlier we talk about it the better. The efficiencies messaging show that the service is tightly run. SH and EC are working on the precept survey.

9. Procurement Strategy

- 9.1 NC there has been a lot of work done in procurement and there is still a way to go and there has been some significant strides made. SS said thank you to comms for helping to put this together and thanks for Jo for the engagement and feedback.
- 9.2 The purpose of the Strategy is to inform our suppliers and interested parties of our key principals of what drives our procurement and gives us a governance framework for procurement. If this

approved the Strategy will be published in October and will be in line with the new website. The documents contain links that are not there yet as they will be added once the new website is live. The Strategy will also be further updated in 12 months' time and after a full transition of the category management process and when the full team will be in place. There will be changes to the Public Procurement Regulations next year.

- 9.3 In October 2021, there was a transformation in the Procurement department, and it moved to a category management structure which means that the procurement resources are organised to look after specific areas i.e. ICT, Property and Facilities Management, by the Category Team.
- 9.4 The Strategy talks about the Procurement Procedure Section; this links back to the Constitution which has full procurement procedures. It also talks about the contracts register and pipeline that we are currently working on make sure that we maintain tracking for that activity across the service and it also details how the strategy links into the Fire and Rescue Plan, the Risk Management Plan and the Annual Plan. Also being looked at are collaboration opportunities frameworks and other ways to procure outside of the framework.
- 9.5 RH asked if the Strategy effectively brings our procurement together and to what extent is the Contracts Register it is user friendly and to what extent are we engaging with the process, SS replied that the new structure has a dedicated Category Manager for each area and it is their responsibility that the Contract Register is up to date, and the pipelines.
- 9.6 RH asked if this Procurement Strategy would enable to us to tighten up those services, SS replied that the Service are beginning to work through inflation into the contracts which go to NC and look for savings depending on the value due to Public Contract Regulations. Category Management relationships are being developed with the stakeholders and the Service can look at other areas for improvement. NC said that is not necessarily about savings but almost cost avoidance to see where we are and how to capture that.
- 9.7 KE feels on the last point that whilst undertaking this property review and the early information that the is that it will fundamentally need to change the way we move our estates and property, but it will mean that there will be fundamental structural changes that will be required, and we will not be doing procurement in house as a team and the resources that will manage the estate will be managing strategic facilities.

10. Approve Public Sector Equality Duty Objectives

- 10.1 CB said that the ask is to approve the recommendation of 4 new PSED objectives, ECFRS have worked in partnership with 2 consultants from AFSA, the Asian Fire Service Association, and there has been an excellent consultation process. The consultation comprised of a desktop review, engagement workshops, and a survey. The outcome of the engagement workshops is the recommendation of 4 objectives, two of which are Internally focused and two are reorientated into a community focus, which is a change from the 6 objectives that have been in place since the 1st March 2018. The Service are demonstrating due regard to our internal people and those that we serve.
- 10.2 RH asked that the recommendations be re written in plain English and CB agreed.

Action 52/22

CB to arrange for the Approve Public Sector Equality Duty Objectives to be rewritten in plain English.

- 10.3 DH asked the question on how to measure the outcomes and what difference it is making and asked for clarification if there are specific measures to track over a four year period? CB said that this was the next step is that they form part of the project which is the Fair Kind and Inclusive workstream of the Strategy. This is monitored through the Portfolio Management Board which will give measurable objectives and outcomes and provide evidence of this. Indicators of this are in appendix 5.
- 10.4 DH asked for clarification on the social economic section. CB explained that much of the conversation that took place with AFSA in the workshops was about not focussing the objective on any demographic group but rather talk about the mobility across all groups. DH asked what the outcome was and the positive change that was being made. CB said that an example around ECC to the changes to those particular care leavers etc and use our influence to make a difference to those mainly for support with a regard to a community based placement working with the partnership board.

Action 53/22

RH asked for the plain English recommendations in the Approve Public Sector Equality Duty Objectives will also need to be reflected in the Decision Sheet. CB will finalise this and work with EC's team and resubmit the Decision Sheet

Action 54/22

CB to bring a baseline to P&R regarding monitoring the progress against the duty going forward. CB to agree timing with JTh to see what the metrics. This can be seen through the Annual Quality Compliance Report due in March 2023

- 10.5 JP on the DR it talks about it being identified in the following protected groups, but it does not they are not groups but characteristics.

11. Outline Business Case for Training Facilities

This item is to be dealt with separately via a Workshop meeting.

12 Modernisation of Wholetime Stations

- 12.1 KE informed the board that a high-level assessment has been undertaken of the 12 wholetime stations to assess their requirements to modernise them i.e. personal space areas and removal of the bar and social space rooms and convert them in a different useable space such as training areas.
- 12.2 Several of the stations have air conditioning issues which have not been addressed for many years and this is a £4.6m program over a course of 4 years updating 3 W/T stations per year, the work undertaken will be prioritised on a need basis. The Asset Protection Category Program will fund some of this in recognition as there are several other capital projects that equally have a high value. This is all part of the Estate Strategy; this needs to be done to make our workplaces inclusive.
- 12.4 Proposals have been put forward to the Strategic Board but will come back to the Board once the full design plan and costings have been agreed
- 12.5 RH said this needs to be pulled together in the budget for next year and asked KE to clarify what is being requested to approve i.e., £250,000 to scope it or to sign off. KE to be more explicate on the request.

Action55/22

KE to clarify the request finish the Decision sheet for RH to sign off £250,000 to scope the project.

- 12.6 JP noted that the Medium Term financial Plan referred to in the document is a Strategy and not a Plan.

Action

KE to change the wording in the document/decision sheet to reflect the change from MTFP to MTFS.

13 AOB

The meeting ended at 16.17