



**POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX AND
ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

Strategic Board
13 December 2023 14:30 – 16:30

Present:

Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair)
Colette Black (CB)	Director of People Services, ECFRS
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	Chief Executive Officer, PFCC's office
Moira Bruin (MB)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
Emily Cheyne (EC)	Assistant Director Communications, ECFRS
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Finance Officer, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Rick Hylton (RHyl)	Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
Heather Kinzett (HK)	Strategic Advisor, ECFRS
Janet Perry (JP)	Chief Financial Officer / Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's Office
Adam Smith (ASm)	Project Manager, Inner Circle
Jo Thornicroft (JT)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny (Fire), PFCC's office
Samantha Bardsley	Minutes, PFCC's office

Apologies:

Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Andy Smith (AS)	Director of Operations, ECFRS

1. Introductions

1.1. RH welcomed all to the meeting, apologies were noted from those above.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and agreed.

2.2. There were no matters arising.

3. Action Log

67/22 Building Risk Review - interim update
Awaiting publishing
Remain Open

03/23 Annual Equality Compliance Report
DR was approved 18th October 2023
Close

19/23 Old Harlow Relocation

Being discussed at this board
Close

4. Forward Plan

4.1. The 11 March 2024 Strategic Board discussed amendments as follows;

4.1.1. The strategic property update is to be removed, this was carried forward from the previous year and is not required again.

4.1.2. The Efficiency and Productivity Plan will be instead of the Efficiency Statement.

4.1.3. The risk strategy refresh was suggested to move to June 2024, EC raised that a commitment was made to advise the Commissioner ahead of the Election if there were any changes, as this review is happening anyway and it is likely there will not be any changes; this could be a paper that states the methodology used for reassurance. RH agreed and asked this remain in the March 2024 meeting.

4.2. JP raised that the Final Accounts for last year needed to be input into the Forward Plan. RH agreed to put into the Forward Plan for Strategic Board.

5. 2024/25 Proposed Budget – incl MTFS

5.1. NC presented the proposed budget for 2024/25 which covered an overview of the paper and updates since the paper was published. It was noted that the budget has been set in difficult circumstances noting the current position of the budget for 2024/25 including a deficit of £1.78m.

5.2. NC confirmed the main pressure is pay, with around £4.2m of pay pressure, two key notes that being there are unbudgeted pay pressures carried forward from the current financial year and assuming a 4% pay awarded to all staff groups for next year. There is also £400k of pressure for ill health pensions because of inflationary increases on payments in process and several new cases.

5.3. NC continued in terms of non-pay there was around £1.4m pressure, £600k under premises and equipment, mainly IT. £250k relates to the Firelink contract that is recharged from the home office. There were also increases in property maintenance costs and rates. In support costs there was £200k of pressure relating to training and £250k in other costs and services, predominantly related to the costs of the external auditors and some increases in insurance costs. Finally, £200k for the capital finance charge.

5.4. NC went on to discuss investments advising a £600k investment into on call, covering additional training and activity.

5.5. NC discussed revenue investment for additional roles within the budget with receipt of £1m of revenue bids. Roles within the IT team, HR and Pensions were prioritised. RH asked how much of the £1m was actually allocated for prioritisation and NC confirmed this was circa £250k.

5.6. NC confirmed there was £1.2m of earmarked reserves which was predominately one off spend within the year and the net budget requirement is £96m up from £90m in the past year.

- 5.7. NC moved on to funding citing an uplift of 2.91% to the precept giving an additional £2.13m in funding from the current financial year. RH advised we would need the narrative on what this £2.13m would be spent on.
- 5.8. NC went on to discuss the MTFs noting the £1.8m deficit for 2024/25, over the 5 year period there is shown an accumulative £7m gap. Included is a 3% precept stopping in 2026/27 when it moves to 2%, in line with the autumn statement of the prior year. Pay assumptions of 2% have been included as well as £500k of cashable savings. RH stated he did not believe he could agree this as it had been very clear that the requirement from the PFCC to achieve between 1.5-3%. RHy agreed this would be revisited.
- 5.9. NC moved on to the capital programme, in terms of 2024/25 there are investments of £8.3m of which there £650k relating to reserve funded projects, primarily the fleet workshops and fire training. Larger investments included £4m in new appliances ordered over a two year period. £1.1m of investment in ICT for end-of-life equipment, £1m in operational equipment and £800k in asset protection works. This has been modelled and the MRP charge has gone up by £250k compared to the previous year. RH asked to what extent do we need to increase the MRP charge this year to ensure the MRP will meet the full debt repayment schedule. NC advised they have gone through an exercise where they have looked at the sustainability of assets and what MRP is being charged on and this is aligned, it is believed the current trend will level out. RH asked if you forward project the depreciation on our assets and the debt repayment schedule and interest charges from today and pursue no further capital expenditure at what point does the MRP provision on the balance sheet reach. NC did not have this to hand but advised there is a very clear system that forecasts this all forward and this exercise can be completed.

Action 20/23

NC to provide detail to RH on MRP Projections.

- 5.10. NC spoke on the reserve position advising that general reserves forecast this year are at £3.2m and pointed out the assumption that the current projected £600k financial deficit will be offset by reserves. They are looking to close this out in year with a preference not to fund the in-year pressures with general reserves and looking at measures through the productivity and efficiency board regarding this. It is estimated that £1.27m of earmarked reserves are planned to be utilised in 2024/25 for one off investments, £650k is for the innovation and transformation reserve including the finance system and combined fleet workshops; other uses include updating the OCAT suite and investment in Learning and Development.
- 5.11. NC covered new and emerging topics noting on the 5th of December the finance policy statement was published ahead of the local government finance settlement, this confirmed the council tax precept referendum limit being 3%. Revenue support grant is confirmed at the CPI increase and in line with estimates. There is a pension grant of £3.5m confirmed to roll into baseline funding into revenue support grant. This means this is subject to CPI increases in the future but for 24/25 they are going to roll it in after CPI is applied to the baseline level of revenue support grant.
- 5.12. RH asked what the process from here was to locate the £1.78m deficit? NC advised they had worked up scenarios and a plan to review, there are some items that aren't confirmed such as the services grant, so they need to validate that the gap doesn't change. The Service need time to work through a little more detail around the plan and contingencies around closing the gap and review things such as the assumptions made including the 4% pay award. Then the service can bring this back through, in agreement with SLT, in a workshop and strategic board in January. RH confirmed he cannot set a budget without knowing where the savings come from, so that this would be needed

before the precept decision. It was therefore raised that the date for the extraordinary board on the 29th January 2024 would be set too late and the date was agreed to move to the 17th January 2024 with the workshop being the week of the 8th January 2024. PBI raised for completeness there is an option to go for a referendum, RH however ruled this out.

Action 21/23

PBI to arrange the workshop and strategic board with all interested parties

6. Pension Board Annual Report

- 6.1. MB presented the Pension Board Annual Report covering the period from 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023, the board covers membership, meeting dates, the training undergone by the members, the KPI's worked to and the outcomes and recommendations.
- 6.2. RH noted it was good to see that the ECFRS pension scheme continues to demonstrate and set the pace for best practice across the country and praised James Durrant and the team in their hard work getting to where they are in this complex landscape.
- 6.3. JP raised that she normally attends the board but was not listed in the membership. MB agreed to have the paper amended.

Action 22/23

MB to amend the Pensions Board Annual Report to include JP

7. Energy Procurement (2024-2028)

- 7.1. KE presented the Energy Procurement paper outlining the services intention and requirement to renew its energy provisions which are currently provided through LASER using their flexible procurement framework. The contract comes to an end in Sept 2024, however The Service wants to be able to use the flexible framework again enabling LASER to fix the energy prices in advance of the contract ending, if not the Service revert to a variable tariff which is considerably more expensive.
- 7.2. RH asked if the forecast papers were already in the financial modelling and NC confirmed they were.
- 7.3. PBI spoke about the forecast figures and suggested it looked as though there was around a £100k budget pressure on Gas and asked if it could be clarified how this would be managed in the report. KE noted this.
- 7.4. RH asked if KE himself believed this was a good deal and KE confirmed that he did. RH therefore agreed this as the way forward.

8. People Strategy Action Plan Update incorporating comparison of Equality Frameworks

- 8.1. CB presented the people strategy paper advising there were 3 items for noting and 1 for potential approval.

8.2. CB confirmed the items for noting included the update on delivery of the people strategy action plan 2020-2024, the plan for reviewing the next people strategy for 2024-28 and the HMICFRS spotlight report on culture and values. RH noted the level of activity was busy and that the recommendations were being tracked; but asked what the metrics for improved outcomes were? CB confirmed for the existing people strategy there have been milestones all the way through. For the HMICFRS Spotlight Report metrics have not been suggested, instead internally the culture dashboard has been implemented and utilised since June 2023 as a developing piece. RH noted that he could not see this in the update and CB confirmed it was not included but she could certainly send it separately or present it at the next meeting. RH requested this be sent as an update that could be noted at the next meeting.

Action 23/23

CB to provide RH with metrics from the Culture Dashboard regarding the People Strategy and HMICFRS Spotlight Report.

8.3. CB went on to discuss the proposal and request to approve fully transitioning from the use of the Local Government Association Fire and Rescue Authority (LGA FRA) Equality Frameworks as a governance model and move to 3 alternatives presented in 1 dashboard. RH asked if the LGA would have any concerns, CB confirmed there are no returns to the LGA so this is unlikely. RH asked if we could give feedback that we are seeing a lot of services move away from using their equalities framework and CB agreed this would be helpful as it is known that nobody in our region is using it. RH agreed to going ahead with the new modelling.

9. Old Harlow Relocation

9.1. KE presented the Old Harlow Relocation update bringing to the attention of the board the latest position The Service are at, being that an outline planning application has been submitted to Harlow council to possibly extend the current facility utilising land provided by the Marigold Trust. The Service needs to receive the planning application report which will identify any restrictions that may be encountered and based on this there will be an exercise to look at feasibility to extend the current site to accommodate a modern-day appliance and a few other facilities lacking in the on-call station today. This report is hoped to be received in the new year.

10. Community Risk Management Plan Update

10.1. EC presented the CRMP update paper, this report outlined the project activities, timelines / roadmap, and an update against the CRMP Fire Standard.

10.2. EC advised the #TellECFRS questionnaire is currently live giving people the opportunity to share their feedback with the service.

10.3. EC proposed for the 11th March 2024 Strategic Board, presentation of the first round of themes, what is being explored and the public perception survey. RH noted this might be late and asked if he was allowed to have a workshop on this before the papers are published to understand this. EC confirmed this could be fitted into the first week of February.

10.4. RH noted that the Strategic Assessment of Risk was agreed in June, but that he could not locate this on the ECFRS Website. EC confirmed this was an oversight that has

already been picked up and a redacted version has been uploaded. RH asked why redactions were needed, this was not immediately known and MB agreed to pick up.

Action 24/23

MB to explain the redactions to the Strategic Assessment of Risk (SAoR)

ASm joined the meeting at 16:20

11. Training Facilities

- 11.1. ASm presented a PowerPoint presentation relating to the new Training Facilities project covering work to date, current stage, finances and next steps.
- 11.2. ASm covered the work to date including ECFRS appointing Carter Jonas to develop an Options Appraisal to identify the different scenarios for relocation of the Wethersfield Training Centre facilities. The preferred option to relocate to Kelvedon Park was then progressed into a RIBA Stage 1 and RIBA Stage 2 report produced by Pick Everard. A outline business case has been instigated for which ICC has been appointed.
- 11.3. ASm advised on the current stage and key points covered that the site was limited with utilities and a lot of work is needed to bring the capacity up to standards required for live fire training, this is in the plan. Options on live configurations were also presented.
- 11.4. ASm discussed the financials with it noted these are rising to just shy of £14m with an explanation as to why this has happened in the report, however it is recognised that the budget envelope is £10m and they are looking currently to deliver to this. Options where then shown for the difference between the £14m and £10m project.
- 11.5. ASm noted that the RIBA Stage 3 was to be the next step with the costings in and contract recently signed. This will allow moving on to procuring a contractor and coming back with a full business case in the middle of Q3 2024 (calendar year).
- 11.6. JP asked regarding the financial modelling and who is completing it. ASm confirmed this was completed by ICC (Inner Circle), JP stated she had concerns that there were non-financial entities completing financial modelling and asked if NC and herself could be more engaged.

ASm left the meeting at 16:40

12. Any Other Business

RH asked how the next stage of the Joint Fleet Workshops was being approved and it was confirmed this was being discussed at the Extraordinary Joint Strategic Board on the 19 December 2023. RH advised he would ideally like both ECFRS and EP Unisons consulted prior to this.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 16:45 hours

Future meeting dates

- Tuesday 19 December 2023 – Extraordinary Joint

- Monday 11 March 2024
- Thursday 06 June 2024