

## MINUTES

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

#### Strategic Board

13 June 2024 14:00 – 16:00

#### 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
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Finance Officer, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Darren Horsman (DH)	Strategic Head of Policy & Public Engagement, PFCC's office
Rick Hylton (RHy)	Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
Janet Perry (JP)	Chief Financial Officer/Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's office
Jeremy White (JW)	Finance Manager, PFCC's office
Helen Notman (HN)	Minutes, Scrutiny Officer, PFCC's office

#### Guests:

Daniel McManus (DM)	HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead
---------------------	------------------------------

#### Apologies:

Emily Bownes (EB)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny (Fire), PFCC's office
Emily Cheyne-Guess (ECG)	Assistant Director Communications, ECFRS
Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

### 1. Introductions

- 1.1. RH welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from those above, JG was attending the APCC event for Right Care, Right Person, so was unable to attend.

### 2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

- 2.1. The minutes of the previous three meetings (Strategic – 6 March 2024, Extraordinary - 18 April 2024 and Extraordinary - 30 May 2024) were all approved and agreed. The "Stand in for Chris Parker" note to be removed from the attendees list.
- 2.2. There were no matters arising.

### 3. Action Log

## **20/23 2024/25 Proposed Budget – including MTFS – MRP projections**

Independent review to be carried out by CIPFA in 2024/25. Due date to be set at Q2 next year.

**Remain Open**

## **J01/23 Joint Fleet Workshops**

Reliant on completion of J02/23; awaiting cost information for DR. Azets have pulled out which has caused a delay. RSM now working with us.

**Remain Open**

## **J02/23 Joint Fleet Workshops**

Work has been commissioned from Arlingclose and Azets to provide the financial advice and modelling required. Awaiting cost information. Azets have pulled out which has caused a delay. RSM now working with us.

**Remain Open**

## **03/24 Forward Plan**

Fire and Rescue Plan to be added as an item on September agenda and an item on the Constitution added to the December meeting. It was further agreed that an Extraordinary meeting will be set up for October/November to discuss the CRMP. JW/EB to check and update Forward Plan. JW/EB to check and update Forward Plan regarding the Fire and Rescue Plan, Constitution and CRMP.

**Remain Open**

## **04/24 Reserves Strategy**

DR 007-24 to be submitted to the PFCCs office for sign off. Submitted.

**Close**

## **05/24 Capital Strategy**

DR 008-24 to be submitted to the PFCCs office for sign off. Submitted.

**Close**

## **06/24 Treasury Management Strategy**

DR 005-24 to be submitted to the PFCCs office for sign off. Submitted.

**Close**

## **07/24 Risk Strategy Refresh**

DR 001-24 to be submitted to the PFCCs office for sign off. Submitted.

**Close**

## **08/24 Any Other Business**

DR 012-24 to be submitted to the PFCCs office for sign off. It was confirmed this was the Replacement of Thermal Image Cameras. Submitted.

**Close**

## **09/24 Publication of Draft 2023/24 Accounts**

Option two agreed to publish the 2023/24 accounts with a note to state the Service could not commence the formal inspection period due to not being able to name the incoming auditors until they were formally appointed. Published.

**Close**

## **10/24 Publication of Draft 2023/24 Accounts**

JP to check what communication had been sent to the Home Office regarding delays in publishing the accounts.

## **Remain Open**

### **11/24 Publication of 2022/23 Accounts**

JP to look into arranging a meeting with Parris Williams and RH to discuss with Grant Thornton about completion of the accounts including the modified opinion issue. Grant Thornton had declined this meeting. The modified opinion had now been issued.

**Close**

### **12/24 Publication of Draft 2023/24 Accounts**

NC to update DR to reflect decisions agreed at the meeting today to take forward option two and return that today. The draft accounts have now been published.

**Close**

## **4. Forward Plan**

- 4.1 JW provided an update on changes to the forward plan, stating that the Procurement Strategy, the Health and Safety Statement of Intent, Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy and the Interim People Strategy Action Plan had been moved to the September 2024 meeting. Regarding the CRMP update, a workshop had been held on 13 June 2024. RNC confirmed that the final financial statements for 2023/24 will require an extraordinary board. It was still unknown when the audit would commence or complete for 2023/24. RH said we needed to get an idea of the Auditor's realistic expectations regarding completion as it was clear the statutory deadline was not achievable. NC noted that most organisations had not yet published 2023/24 and at least ECFRS had been transparent in their position and what they had published.
- 4.2 KE provided an update that in September there would be an update on Fire Training and a DR on Workwear Procurement. RH suggested that EB be advised that an extra half an hour be allowed for the September meeting in view of this. RH advised the Board that PFCC would now be using a 12-month rolling forward plan.

### **Action 13/24**

**JW/EB to allow an extra half an hour for the September meeting due to number of items on Forward Plan.**

## **5. Medium Term Financial Strategy**

- 5.1 NC presented the report and explained that at the time of finalising the 2024/25 budget no pay offer had been made by NJC to Operational (grey book) or Non-Operational staff (green book). A 3% pay rise had been assumed. As of April a 4% pay offer had been made to Operational staff. The subsequent green book pay offer had not yet been accepted, but the impact of this, if accepted would not be as large as the grey book offer. The cost pressure resulting from the grey book pay offer was £0.68m with £0.7m one-off funding from Local Government Finance Settlement. £0.3m was the assumption for the cost of the Response Model for 6-month period, and there were £0.3m savings projected from the in-year Director's efficiency plan. RHy confirmed that the Service were typical of other Fire & Rescue Services in terms of financial pressures.
- 5.2 NC provided an update on the key financial movements for 2024/25, the latest projection was £0.5m deficit due mainly to £3.1m estimated impact of 8.5% increase in Employer firefighter pension contributions offset by £2.6m Pension Grant to compensate for the increase in employer contributions to the Firefighter Pension Scheme. The Home Office have informally said more funding may be provided to

cover this shortfall, which would be issued on a funding formula basis, so at this stage the Service was unsure if this would cover the shortfall. RH requested a note for the next Fire Services Management Committee outlining this.

#### **Action 14/24**

**NC to provide RH with information on the funding gap for Firefighter Pensions for Fire Services Management Committee meeting.**

5.3 NC noted the savings requirement for 2025/26 has increased since March from £0.5m to £2.2m. This is mainly due to the £0.5m pensions pressure already noted, and full-year impacts of the £0.6m for the on-call pay award and £0.5m for the grey book pay award.

5.4 RH thanked NC for the clarity of the report and asked what the plan going forward was? NC explained that the figures would be taken to the Product and Efficiencies Group to work through the plans, including other elements that would come into effect next year. RHy stated that the Service needed to have a longer-term plan for efficiencies to get a better handle on this, although the hope was to close the gap in funding as much as it could. RH added that the important aspect of a one-off gap would be to have a plan on how to try and close that gap. Going forward it would be important to look at the budget setting in December, in terms of closing this gap, as there might be more funding coming into the Service, but the Service also needed to bear in mind future challenges. RHy requested NC to explicitly state what figures in the reports were assumptions, so that these were clear. NC agreed to amend the paper and resubmit this to the Board.

#### **Action 15/24**

**NC to update and resubmit the MTFs with clear indications of which figures within this were based on assumptions.**

### **6. CIPFA FM Code Assessment**

6.1 NC presented the report outlining that 2023/24 was the third full year of compliance. He provided an updated assessment against the 17 standards; 16 were green, and one was amber. There had been two changes since 2022/23, which were Standard A - Demonstration of Value for Money: improved from amber to green. Then Standard E - Financial Sustainability: the Authority had received a good rating from HMICFRS relating to future affordability. This was now amber from green, and having made changes within the Monitoring Team Staffing it was hoped that this would improve in the next financial year. RH clarified whether the assessment was annual and whether this was frequent enough. RHy confirmed that this was annual. NC felt that an annual assessment was frequent enough. JP questioned whether the assessment was done in-house. NC confirmed that it was, although external auditors normally reviewed this as part of their assessment. RH highlighted how positive these results were to have 16 standards at green and only one as amber.

### **7. Budget Timetable**

7.1 NC provided an overview of the budget timetable and explained that the majority of dates were set, although there were several dates that the Service still needed to schedule with the PFCC. JP suggested that it should be noted that the Panel workshops are indicative, but have been agreed in principle. RH noted that the new membership of the Panel will not become clear until October/November and then the new members would need some guidance, and ECFRS would need to provide a narrative of where the Service had come from, and the progress that had been made.

PBI added that with the Police Service the PFCC usually signed the budget timetable off. RH recognised that the Fire Service was different to the Police Service and following discussion it was agreed that this would not be formally signed off.

## **8. HMICFRS Report and Follow-up Proposals**

- 8.1. MB provided an overview of the report following the third HMICFRS Inspection into the Service. The final report was published on 8 March 2024 and the Service was credited with positive practise for its Safe Share Scheme. The cause for concern against protection issued in the inspection in 2019 was cleared and HMICFRS praised the Protection Team on the excellent work they had done to improve this area. During the inspection the Service managed to clear 14 areas for improvement that had previously been identified.
- 8.2. MB explained that there was a total of 17 areas for improvement detailed within the report, and it was proposed to embed these into the Continuous Improvement Plan 2024/25, so progress could be monitored through both the Continual Improvement Board and then scrutinised through the PFCC Performance and Resources Board. RH confirmed that the Service had made great improvements, and that the process in place was transparent. However, RH highlighted that it would be useful to have an understanding of where the Service needed to get to in order to be 'good'. RH suggested perhaps setting up workshops with other external organisations to better understand this. CB explained that the Service had an event planned in September that was a Culture Day of Inspiration, where external speakers would be invited from other Fire and Rescue Services and outside organisations, and that this could be a positive event to move this forward. PBI suggested that in terms of other sectors the previous Chief Constable of Humberside Police spoke powerfully about turning that Police Service around, and Steve Watson from GMP was also a fantastic speaker. CB explained that she had spoken to Manchester extensively regarding the service that they had turned around. RH added that it would also be good to hear from a Service that just was 'good', rather than necessarily focussing on Service's that had been turned around.
- 8.3. RH asked whether there were any thoughts about the five new areas that HMICFRS had identified. CB explained that new training programmes would begin in September, in terms of ensuring that people had the key technical skills, the Service had also had conversations with accredited programmes and other Fire Services in terms of ensuring they provided the right leadership and development programmes. The Service was also looking at specific programmes that would target those who were underrepresented in the Service. In relation to safety critical skills the Service were continuing to collate the information to demonstrate how this was being met on a monthly basis. The focus now was on utilisation and productivity efficiency, and improving this every month over the next 12 months. RH stated that those were ambitious targets, and CB agreed that they were but that she felt they were achievable. RH added that in terms of policing inspection reports he would write to the Home Secretary outlining a response to the report, and asked whether this would be a suitable way forwards for the Fire Service? RHy confirmed that this had not been done before for the Fire Service, but that he would be happy with this. DH suggested the PFCC could share what they would normally send for the Police Service, as a letter template. RH suggested that the PFCC and Essex Fire Service look into this in terms of seeing it as a friendly thing to do.

### **Action 16/24**

**DH to share with RHy the letter template to Home Secretary that the Essex Police use post-inspection report, to assess whether to do something similar.**

8.4 The recommendation was agreed for the PFCC to accept the Cycle three HMICFRS report and the proposed approach to the areas of improvement identified was noted.

## **9. Continuous Improvement Plan 2024/25 and Annual Plan 2023/24 Closure Report**

9.1. MB opened the item by explaining that this was a complex item with five papers and two DRs. The recommendations sought were to close the Annual Plan 2023/24 and Closure Report and open the Continuous Improvement Plan 2024/25. MB explained how they anticipated the Continuous Improvement Plan would work going forwards, that it would be monitored by the Continual Improvement Board and scrutinised by the Performance and Resources Board. The aim was to remove the artificial deadline of 31 March, and allow activities to roll over into the actual financial year that they were anticipated to complete in. RH highlighted that the Annual Plan had required an awful lot of effort and he was concerned about moving from a good long-term strategy to a new plan that would not be in place until August 2024. RH confirmed that he understood the reasons behind this but was concerned that this change might lead to a lack of drive to complete things within the financial year. MB reassured the Board that this would not happen, but that it would allow for more intelligent timescale setting, rather than artificial deadlines. RH requested to see the document and how this was proposed to be changed from the current Annual Plan and requested that this be part of the DR. MB agreed to complete this. PBI added her concern regarding the closure report and the schedule of each of the items, requesting that these required evidence of the fact that they were completed. PBI pointed out that currently there was a clear opening of the new plan and closure at the end of the financial year, what would be the plan for signing this off at the end of the financial year? PBI requested more detail within the DR to explain proposed activity and highlighted the importance of the delivery plan being under the strategic priorities with clear deadlines and resources to deliver those. It was agreed for MB and PBI to meet to discuss and clarify the changes required.

### **Action 17/24**

**MB and PBI to meet to discuss and clarify changes to the Continuous Improvement Plan before it can be forwarded for PFCC approval and sign off.**

9.2. RHy suggested it would be useful to have a discussion once the new Fire and Rescue Plan was in place and the new CRMP, to look at what the strategies were underneath this to enable that plan for 2025 onwards. PBI suggested that the PFCC would need better sight of the resources required to meet the objectives, highlighting that one of the reasons for having rolled items over across the years was the lack of resources. RHy agreed that optimism bias was probably an issue for the Service, with things taking longer than they hoped. RHy hoped that the Service was moving away from this and towards understanding the pressure points within their plans, and requested further information be fed into this plan even if it was to roll over in order that the PFCC had sight of what was going on. MB clarified that DR 030-24 the recommendation that the Annual Plan 2023/24 be closed was approved. RH confirmed that this was the case.

### **Action 18/24**

**DR 030-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

## **10. Strategic Assessment of Risk**

10.1 MB explained that the PFCC had been asked to approve DR 023-24; the Strategic Assessment of Risk for publication. MB outlined the key changes that had been updated. RH thanked MB for this, and asked whether there was a feel for what areas

seemed to have more risk going forwards? MB suggested that the impact of new technology, and AI were where the fastest changes that appeared to be occurring, with the expectation that these areas would move quickly within the next two to four years. KE added cyber security was another risk that they had seen the impact of. The recommendation was to approve DR 023-24 for publication.

**Action 19/24**

**DR 023-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing with the PFCC's office.**

**11. Biofuel Pilot**

11.1. KE presented the Biofuel Pilot Paper to the Board, which was to advise of the intended ECFRS pilot programme to evaluate the feasibility, benefits, and operational impact of using HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) as an alternative fuel. KE explained that this was planned for Chelmsford main station with one appliance as a pilot. RH recognised the importance of conducting the pilot in order to understand whether this was something that could work for the Service but highlighted the need to think about being able to reach those in remote areas. KE added that the potential costs for this in terms of infrastructure would be an important part of this work. The recommendation was for KE to submit a new DR for formal approval and signing within the PFCCs office.

**Action 20/24**

**A new DR to be requested and progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

**12. Compliments and Complaints Policy and Whistleblowing Policy**

12.1 KE presented DR 021-24 to the Board, which sought the following recommendations, the PFCC to approve the update to both policies to enable them to be republished. KE explained that these had gone through a review process to ensure they were updated with current legislation. PBI had provided informal feedback and her amendments were incorporated within the report, that consisted of two elements around timescales and how the Service shares its legal compliance. KE explained that there was no statutory legal compliance for the Fire Service around this, but that they set their own KPIs. The other area was around what a complainant could do if they were unsatisfied with the result of their complaint, and KE clarified that this was set out within the response to complaint letter.

12.2 The second recommendation was for the PFCC to approve the decision for ECFRS to move away from the current Independent Charity 'Protect' for Whistleblowing due to not being able to obtain key data requirements. The PFCC to approve for ECFRS to adopt 'Speak Up' which is the service powered by Crimestoppers. This was a well-established and trusted path, already successfully adopted by several other Fire and Rescue Services with the ability to view a range of anonymous data feeds providing key trends to disclosures. PBI explained that in DR 021-24 in section 11 under Equality and Diversity Implications there was a phrase about the Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard being 'fully incorporated' into the proposals outlined in the paper and she stated that she felt that this was worth expanding on, with regard to the Code. DH clarified that the trends of complaints came to the Performance and Resources Board for scrutiny, and wondered if it was worth adding this fact into the policy to show that there was a mechanism for scrutiny of this process and identifying areas of learning. KE had no issues with incorporating this. The recommendation was to progress DR 021-24 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

#### **Action 21/24**

**KE to look at expanding on how the Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard had been fully incorporated under Equality and Diversity Implications into the proposals outlined in DR 021-24.**

#### **Action 22/24**

**Decision Report 021-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

### **13. Waste & Wastewater supply & Billing Services (2024-2027)**

- 13.1 KE presented DR 017-24 FRA to the Board, which sought the approval of the PFCC to award the contract to Wave Utilities for the supply of water and wastewater services to building assets owned by Essex Police Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority, commencing mid-June 2024 subject to contract signature from all and Forces. This was a three-year contract with an estimated contract value of £338,492. The second recommendation was for the PFCC to approve the appointment of LASER's bureau service for water and wastewater services and billing services, and for the PFCC to provide an electronic signature for the call-off contract order form for water and wastewater services as specified under framework reference Y22013. RH voiced his concern that the procurement process was led and evaluated by LASER, who were instructed by 7Forces, and that LASER had been successful in gaining the new contract for the supply of water and wastewater and billing services. KE explained that they were independent. NC added they he had not noted this as a potential conflict of interest. PBI stated that the DR talks about there being alternative frameworks available, but that the Service did not go with CCS because of a potential conflict of interest, but 7Forces recruitment already had a good relationship with LASER. KE agreed that he was happy to look into this in order to provide reassurance. RH added it would be good to ensure scrutiny into this. PBI pointed out that the DR proposed the contract starts in mid-June, but that her copy was missing appendix two with the detail. KE confirmed he would tidy that up. Once this was completed the recommendation would be to progress DR 017-24 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

#### **Action 23/24**

**KE to look into concerns of possible conflict of interest in the procurement process of LASER's Bureau service for water and wastewater services and billing services. Following clarification DR 017-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

### **14. Fire & Rescue Plan**

- 14.1 DH explained that the purpose of the report was to agree the process through which the Fire and Rescue Plan 2024-2028 would be developed. That the Strategic Board endorsed or amended as necessary the proposed approach to developing and consulting on the Fire and Rescue Plan 2024-2028, including the proposed approach to stakeholder engagement. The aim was to complete the workshops and public consultation in mid-July/August 2024, with a design version of the plan going to the Strategic Board in September 2024. The plan would then go to the Police Fire and Crime Panel in late September/early October 2024 to be signed off. This aligned with CRMP development. MB confirmed this was going well. RH confirmed that the legislation made it clear that there was a new approach that the Service was taking with CRMP. CB highlighted that she had not received the EQIA. DH confirmed that he



would circulate this. The recommendation was agreed to process the Fire and Rescue Plan 2024-2028.

**Action 24/24**

**DH to ensure circulation of EQIA to the Board.**

**Action 25/24**

**The process for the Fire and Rescue Plan 2024-2028 was agreed.**

**15. Fire Link**

15.1 KE presented DR 026-24 to the Board, which sought approval by the PFCC to undertake the purchase order for the renewal of the Firelink Contract and payment of the Service Fees for the financial year 2024/25, to the value of £1,060,286.28. The PFCC provided authorisation for the Chief Financial Officer to raise the purchase order on their behalf. To note that the Service had received confirmation from the Home Office of the value of the Annual S31 Firelink Grant for 2024/25. This was placed at £293,381.20 which was based on the amount included within the 2024/25 budget. RHy explained that the funding was being removed gradually over a period of time and was now a pressure for the Service, originally this was supposed to be billed-based, but never was and was part of the national contract, however the concern was that those costs might just get passed to Fire and Rescue. RH agreed that he would raise this with the FSCMP. JP asked for clarification of the shortfall, which NC confirmed was approximately £700k. PBI stated that the report is very clear, there are no risks for renewing this, but if the PFCC chose not to renew this there would be large risks, which should be made clearer. RH asked if this could be added in, KE confirmed that this would. The recommendation was therefore agreed to progress DR 026-24 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

**Action 26/24**

**RH to raise issue of funding for Firelink with FSCMP.**

**Action 27/24**

**KE to add into the DR the risks for not renewing the contract and then DR 026-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

**16. Thermal Imaging Cameras**

16.1. KE presented DR 029-24, which sought the PFCC to approve the procurement of 170 replacement thermal image cameras and 70 vehicle charging mounts procured through the UK Fire and Rescue Service Emergency Response Equipment framework Lot 5 Ref – C002687 at a total cost of £541,800. The cameras would be in use during financial year 2024/25. KE explained that the Service had to re-tender the entire contract. JP raised the issue that if the cameras were all coming at the same time would this cause an operational issue? KE agreed that there was a training implication, and that the training would be completed before the new cameras were rolled out. The recommendation was approved to progress DR 029-24 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

**Action 28/24**

**DR 029-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

**17. Council Tax Sharing Agreement**

17.1. NC presented the DR for the PFCC to enter into a two-year Council Tax Sharing Agreement with the Essex Districts for 2024/25 and 2025/26. The cost of this for 2024/25 was £379,461, which was an increase of £18,285 from the prior year. The Cost of the Council Tax Sharing Agreement for 2024/25 was included within the Authority's budget. There was no cost increase expected in 2025/26 and therefore the total cost of the contract was £758,922. RH agreed that although this was a significant cost, the Service do tend to get this back, and therefore there was no real sense of wanting to withdraw from this agreement. The recommendation was approved to progress DR 013-14 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

**Action 29/24**

**DR 013-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

**18. Firefighter Pensions Administration Contract**

18.1. NC presented DR 032-24 which sought the approval of the PFCC of the extension of the three-year contract with Essex Pension Fund for administration of firefighter pension schemes. This would cover 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27 at a cost of £518,560.62. The agreement may be extended by up to two years with at least six months written notice before the expiry of the initial term (31 March 2027). NC explained that this previously had not been to the Board as a DR because previously it was rolling one-year agreements. NC highlighted that it would be useful to have a longer contract in terms of risk, but if the Service ever moved pension suppliers it would take a long time to find an alternative provider, and in fact ECFRS had led the way in this sector. RH asked whether there were any particular concerns, or substantial cost change? NC confirmed that there had been some increases in there of £14kpa, because it was done based on Local Authority as a cost basis. RH questioned whether this should have gone out to competitive tender? NC confirmed that they had sought advice regarding this, because it was a local partner the Service were able to do this on a cost recovery basis and he would add information in regarding that. The recommendation was to progress DR 032-24 for formal approval and signing by the PFCC's office.

**Action 30/24**

**DR 032-24 to be progressed for formal approval and signing within the PFCC's office.**

**19. Any Other Business**

19.1. RHy advised that he would like to formally thank Andy Smith for his work for ECFRS and the Board and RH endorsed his thanks.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15:59.

**Future meeting dates**

- Wednesday 26 June 2024 12:45-13:45 virtual (extraordinary)
- Thursday 19 September 2024 10:00-12:00 at FF33 Kelvedon Park
- Thursday 12 December 2024 10:00-12:00