



## MINUTES

### **POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX AND ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY BOARD 29 July 2024 14:00 – 16:00**

#### **Present:**

Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair)
Tim Bartlett (TB)	Performance Analyst (ECFRS)
Colette Black (CB)	Director of People Services (ECFRS)
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	CEO and Monitoring Officer, PFCC's Office
Moira Bruin (MB)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer (ECFRS)
Emily Cheyne-Guess (ECG)	Assistant Director Communications, Marketing & Brand (ECFRS)
Neil Cross (NC)	Finance Director and Section 151 Officer (ECFRS)
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services (ECFRS)
Craig McLellan (CM)	Area Manager (ECFRS)
Sarah Smith (SS)	Procurement Manager (ECFRS)
David Walpole (DW)	Group Manager – South East Command (ECFRS)
Jeremy White (JW)	Finance Manager, PFCC's Office
Helen Notman (HN)	Scrutiny Officer (minutes), PFCC's office.

#### **Guests:**

Danny Partridge (DP)	Area Manager (ECFRS)
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#### **Apologies:**

Emily Bownes (EB)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny – Fire, PFCC's Office
Lucy Clayton (LC)	Performance, Business Planning and Policy Manager (ECFRS)
Suzanne Harris (SH)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny – Police, PFCC's Office
Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Heather Kinzett (HK)	Strategic Advisor (ECFRS) seconded from the Home Office
Janet Perry (JP)	Chief Financial Officer / Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's Office

#### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

- 1.1. JG welcomed all to the meeting and noted the apologies recorded above.

#### **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

- 2.1. The previous minutes were discussed, and MB requested changes to section 11.2 to reflect a representative body position with the FBU. Heather Kinzett's job title should be Strategic Advisor (seconded from the Home Office). Also, Craig McLellan was a permanent area manager not temporary. With those amendments the previous minutes were accepted as an accurate record.

14.07 DW joined the meeting.

### 3. **Action Log**

#### **23/24 Deep Dive Update**

MB confirmed with SH that the Service are happy with Deep Dive topics suggested, dates to be confirmed. ToR for the Deep Dive to be agreed.

**Open.**

#### **25/24 Finance Report**

NC to establish a schedule of transfers in and out of the earmarked reserves within the Finance Report over the next few months.

**Open – due September 2024.**

#### **26/24 Response Strategy Update**

NC and JW reviewed the pack in detail, but JP to follow up further outside of the meeting.

**Open.**

#### **28/24 Forward Plan**

SS and EB are gathering key contract dates to link in with Decision Boards and then the Strategic Board to present back an upcoming list of expected contracts that will require a decision sheet to be approved. SS updated the meeting to explain that she was awaiting EBs return to discuss and progress this. In the meantime, SS & KE had been compiling this information together, with the plan to then share and discuss this with EB. It was agreed to leave this action open for this Board, as should the action be transferred to the Strategic Board it would not be seen for several months, whereas this way it could be revisited at the next P&R Board meeting. KE suggested liaising with SS and together bringing something back to either the next P&R Board or the one in September 2024.

**Open.**

#### **29/24 Performance Report**

The PFCC's Office via the collaboration board to promote the use of what3words to police colleagues expressing the benefits of utilising this method of incident location when requesting the attendance of Fire Colleagues.

**Open – due September 2024.**

#### **33/24 Performance Report**

LC to amend Performance Report and re-issue before publication. JW indicated this report was still to be circulated and would be required now minutes have been agreed.

**Open.**

**34/24 Performance Report**

AS/LC to investigate the data for the response times to understand why the averages were declining. Response times had shown an overall increase in recent months, primarily due to longer travel times, the increase in travel times was likely due to lower station availability requiring appliances to travel greater distances to cover stations with reduced availability. While core station coverage remained stable, other stations faced availability challenges relying on those stations with higher availability.

**Closed.**

**35/24 Performance Report**

LC & AS to investigate the FS040 data in May 2024 to understand the reasons behind the differences in the referral and completion rates and to present the data at the July P&R Board. This had been completed.

**Closed.**

**36/24**

LC & AS to investigate the average response times before the Panel meeting, see action 34/24.

**Closed.**

**37/24**

LC & AS to investigate the FS040 data and report back to the meeting the reasons for the fall in referrals, see action 34/24.

**Closed.**

**38/24**

LC & AS to bring the tables in the monthly report into the quarterly report to better show the progress towards completion of RBIP. Charts have now been added to the quarterly reports.

**Closed.**

**39/24**

KE to deliver a quarterly report on key themes and metrics to the P&R board for the complaints and compliments process. This would be presented at August P&R Board meeting. JG requested this to be added to the forward plan for the next meeting.

**Open.**

**40/24**

JG and AS to liaise offline to discuss the PFCC's scrutiny around the complaints and compliments process with ECFRS. Further to AS leaving the Service, JG suggested that herself and KE could take this offline and discuss, along with PBI. KE said this would be really helpful, particularly because ECFRS had advertised the Professional Standards role, which would take on an element of complaints, so it would be timely to have that conversation.

**Open.**

**41/24**

JW to complete and distribute the Fire and Rescue Plan Closure Report before the Panel meeting. Completed and JG confirmed that this was well received by the Panel.

**Closed.**

#### **4. Forward Plan**

- 4.1 JG advised that the Forward Plan had been updated and was now a rolling 12-month plan. PBI explained that there had been a request to move the Quarter 2 Performance Report from November to December meeting, but that this would not be possible because the Quarter 2 Performance report was due to go the Police Fire & Crime Panel in December. MB confirmed that they would be able to provide this in November. JW then explained that there was a query on the Working Well Together Paper, which had been delayed by a month throughout the year and whether this was to be a permanent change, CB confirmed that this did not need to be a permanent move.

#### **5. Finance Report**

- 5.1 NC provided the finance report showing performance until June 2024. Key points were that YTD staffing costs were £900k over budget for the first three months. The report contained the impact of the increase in Firefighter pension scheme employer contribution rate, which was leading £700k of the overspend. That took effect from 1 April 2024 and was 9.5% increase, which had not been expected and therefore not budgeted for, however Government grants would cover this cost at £700k. There was also a number of ill-health pension costs that had been unbudgeted for. In terms of non-pay costs, the Service were currently £133k underspent. The Community Wellbeing Officer recharge was now going all the way through the entire financial year, rather than just up to November, as the agreement had been extended, which was good news. In conclusion at the end of Q1 the Service had £1million surplus, against £0.5m. NC then discussed the appendices which included a revised income and expenditure statement. NC summarised the financial projection, which had been presented to the Strategic Board, with the only difference being the line for the green book pay offer, which was a cost pressure of £60k, which had now been added into the projection. NC concluded that the Service were projecting a financial deficit of £566k to the end of financial year.
- 5.2 JW asked whether the shortfall on the pension increase was going to be funded or not? NC explained that on the receipt of the pension forecast submissions there could be more money available. However, the caveat on this was that it would be given out on a formula basis, so the Service would probably not get the full amount to cover this. NC was hopeful that this would become clearer in the next couple of months.
- 5.3 JG wished to clarify what the Service were doing to close the £0.5m predicted overspend gap? NC responded that the Service continued to work on this, that through their in-year plan and the P&E Board they had identified £300k that could help to plug this. Interest received is above budget and has not been built into the forecast and NC anticipated that the benefit would continue for the next one or two quarters. NC accepted that this was not a permanent sustainable measure, but that all these contributions would help to close the gap. JG thanked NC for the reassurance that the Service were focussed on this issue. PBI then highlighted that there was an underspend on premises, and that if they expect this spend to be back-ended, then why does the Service not profile it as such? NC explained that the Service may do this going forward, adding that the Service had not always flat phased some

cost items. The Service had phased out some of the electricity and utility costs, which they did not normally do. KE added that although it had been done that way historically, the aim was to better prepare the plan and be consistent. For example, his aim was to have all of Q1 and Q2 2024/25 plan worked up, and the Service were getting closer to this. KE then highlighted that this should improve with the appointment of a Category Manager in Procurement who would work closely with members of the Property team to better plan, in order that the Service do not store things up for last few quarters of year, so this was an area the Service hoped would improve.

## **6. Procurement Report**

- 6.1 SS provided an update on the Procurement Act, all final guidance documents including supporting training manuals would be issued by the end of July. The procurement section on ECFRS website would be updated with the link to the Bluelight Commercial Supplier page, which would save the Service from having to duplicate all that information, while also providing a great resource for the new regulations. Alongside Finance the Service were working to update the Constitution to reflect the change from the Public Contract regulations to the Procurement Act and NC would be in touch with PBI to set up a meeting regarding that.
- 6.2 SS, NC and the Category Managers had met to go through the pipeline of upcoming procurement activity for the coming financial year to plan workloads and ensure all tenders were run in plenty of time. SS then explained that ECFRS held a review on Corporate and ICT, with another planned on Property at the beginning of August. This process had been useful in order to keep everyone informed of what was coming up, while allowing NC & SS to ensure everything was aligned.
- 6.3 SS explained that there had been one STA in June, for Scania training. This was essential training that could only be provided by Scania. However, it was recognised that this did mean the Service could carry out warranty repairs themselves, minimising the downtime of the appliances. This was also an STA last year and was something that the Service had proposed as a change to the Constitution, as the Service wished to look at whether they could have an exemption for training when it comes to the proprietor and its specialist training.
- 6.4 JG requested an update on the Business continuity desktop exercise and whether there were any areas of learning that the PFCC needed to be aware of? SS explained that this was the first one that had occurred since she had started the role. It was lead by Claire in Business Continuity, and SS felt that the most important issue was ensuring links with other departments. JG stated that it was good that plans were being exercised in regard to this. PBI highlighted that she had recently been made aware of emergency planning scenarios involving a PCC's Office looking at how they would scale up their victim support services if there were another major emergency along the lines of Grenfell or Manchester Arena. Her aim was to obtain the scenario and materials if possible, as this seemed like a useful training exercise for the PFCC, Police and Fire Services. This in turn led PBI to question whether the Service's procurement and other support services would have the right things in place to support the operational side of the response. PBI confirmed that she would circulate the scenario's and materials more widely assuming these were not protectively marked.

#### **Action 42/24**

**PBI to circulate scenario and materials for major emergency planning training, if not protectively marked.**

- 6.5 JW then asked how the fleet workshop contract tied in with the joint fleet workshop plans, and whether there were break clauses? KE responded that the Service already linked in with Kent and Essex Police with joint procurement activity. For example, when rolling out telematics into Essex Fire Service they procured the same system as Essex and Kent Police use, so that when they come together to do joint fleet workshops, the systems would be aligned, to prevent any problems further down the line.

SS left the meeting at 14:41.

#### **7. Performance Report**

- 7.1 TB provided the update in LC's absence, advising that it had been a fairly calm month compared to the previous ones with no significant weather-related incidents. Total incidents were down 11% from the same period last year, and in-line with the five-year average. There had been a slight increase in special service incidents, however, they were still fairly in line with five-year averages, as were total false alarm incidents at 1% above last year. There had been one fatality, which was deemed to be accidental. Core station coverage remained at target level of 97%. Call handling times had improved, however average travel time for June was graded red at 06:40. There were drops in coverage for Rayleigh Weir and Colchester. The Safe and Well team were significantly impacted by abstractions due to sickness and one member of staff reducing their hours.
- 7.2 In terms of Protection there had been a good increase in the number of very high-risk visits completed, however there had been a planned decrease in high-risk visits due to shifting priorities, because of training, a conference and a significant workload arising from a prohibition notice. Within Information Governance there were 17 FOI requests with 100% completion and no significant trends noted. There were five breaches of information recorded, one was moderate, and the three remaining were minor. Mitigation had taken place around these with onward training offered or provided. RTCs remain stable, with no significant activity to report. JG thanked TB for his report.
- 7.3 JG asked for more information regarding the drops in coverage for Rayleigh Weir and Colchester, as they were whole time stations. MB requested to take this away as an action in order to provide the answer.

#### **Action 43/24**

**MB to check why there were drops in coverage for Rayleigh Weir and Colchester.**

- 7.3 In terms of Prevention, JG asked why the staff member was allowed to reduce their hours when someone within the team was already off on long term sick? JG also asked whether when resources were depleted, how did they decide where to extract from, would staff normally be taken from prevention, when this was an area which was a primary focus of the Service? MB responded that within Essex, it did not usually happen in that way, in fact it was more likely to occur where staff were abstracted from station-based roles into departments, with stations continuing to operate with slightly depleted numbers.

#### **Action 44/24**

**MB to check the reasons behind allowing a staff member to reduce their hours when someone within the team was already off on long term sick.**

- 7.4 JW then raised a question regarding response times, asking what the Service were doing to improve availability challenges, as there was a lot of red within the travel time stats. MB explained that a lot was happening regarding this, including looking at the numbers on stations and how to address that. They were also aware of skill gap issues that needed addressing. MB added that this was quite an in-depth topic, and JG thanked MB for her response, highlighting that the PFCC had continued concerns around availability, but that they understood the Service was aware this was an issue and were taking action on this.

**8. Enforcement & Remediation on Clad Buildings Update**

- 8.1 MB provided a background to the report explaining that this report commenced back in August 2020, and was now in three parts. Part one was the update on the NFCC building risk review, and what actions were still outstanding from this. Following the completion of the BRR, part two evolved to update the Board and keep them sited on the premises updates identified since January 2022, which was now managed by the high-rise task force. Part 3 covered enforcement and prohibition across all premise types. MB highlighted that there was some commercial sensitivity within the report, with redactions clearly highlighted. JG thanked MB for this lengthy but very necessary report.
- 8.2 JW raised a question as to whether the team was now fully staffed and trained, as there had been a paper to the board in January which mentioned that resources had been redeployed to enforcement works and other buildings in January, and that more staff would be joining in February, however at the meeting in April, Andy Smith had been unsure whether those new staff had started. MB agreed to look into this to provide a response.

**Action 45/24**

**MB to look into whether the team was now fully trained and staffed.**

- 8.3 JG then highlighted that several of the updates regarded the continuing conversations between ECFRS & DLUCH, and wished to understand how these were progressing? MB confirmed that relationships were felt to be good. DP added that conversations had been positive, there were some notable buildings within the County that the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government were interested in and ECFRS were keeping them well informed, and the County had been highly praised for the proactive work that had been done.
- 8.4 JG then requested whether the PFCC could have further specific detail about some of the buildings mentioned within the report, including Sycamore fields, and whether Harlow council had now decanted the premises so they could be demolished. MB explained that ECFRS would have to get confirmation on this which DP would provide. JG explained that it would be good to get clarity around this. JG then asked whether in relation to the Icon building, there were still risks to residents. MB requested whether in future if the PFCC would like detailed responses, whether questions such as this, requiring a level of detail, could be submitted in advance, and

it was agreed by JG that this was a fair request, in order to gain a full response. It was agreed that this would be passed onto EB on her return.

**Action 46/24**

**JW to email MB & DP with the specific questions regarding properties in order to gain a full response.**

**Action 47/24**

**EB to provide any complex and detailed questions in advance of the meetings to MB in future in order to ensure full responses are able to be provided at the meetings.**

8.5 JW then asked for an understanding of the prohibition notice process, and who's responsibility it was to enforce these? MB provided a caveat that no one at the meeting was a specialist in this area, however the process was that ECFRS would serve notice to the Responsible Person, and this would then be enforced through the courts. DP added just for reassurance to the Board that moving to prohibition was the very last step, and that ECFRS worked closely with building occupiers, as well as the Responsible Person, before ultimately moving to prohibition. DP also explained that through that prohibition process matrix, ECFRS would work through a peer review to get a second opinion and to sense-check and keep in-line with legislation. ECFRS would also discuss this with the NFCC, so this was not something the Service would take on as a sole authority. JW outlined the concern of whether ECFRS had the resources to follow these cases through to the end and how often the Service ended up in court in these situations? MB explained that these cases did cause an awful lot of pressure on the team, highlighting that when the Service went to prohibition, for example in this case, it really did impact on their ability to do other tasks. However, MB did state that was not a reason not to enforce though. JG asked whether there had been any times where the Service had not had the resources to proceed with these. MB replied that had not happened, and if it was to come to that the PFCC would be informed. JG added that she felt that the Service had become more in-tune with its responsibilities around this, and worked hard to make sure the enforcements did happen in a timely way to keep people safe, but that this was an area of learning for all. PBI added that there did seem to be more enforcement activity than there used to be, and asked whether this was because the Service was more proactive than in the past, or whether the Responsible Persons were being less compliant, for example, for economic reasons? MB replied that this was a sector-wide trend, that scrutiny levels had improved, and that the Service were discovering things that had not been looked for before. PBI suggested that this would be an area that the Board should monitor. MB added that next the building risk review would be focussing on mid-rise buildings, so more demand was expected in this area. The problem was that the Service required people to have certain training to conduct these reviews, which would push the demand up at a time when everyone in the sector would be requiring them.

**9. Health & Safety Annual Report**

9.1 MB outlined the report which had an increase of 25 accidents from the previous year, although comparisons to RIDDORS over the past 10 years severity is stable. Both accidents and RIDDORS were on the increase. However, the Service perceived this



as an indicator of a positive Health and Safety culture. The new safety management system Assure had now been implemented, which would make reporting easier, and the Service therefore expected to see an increase in reporting because of this, alongside the new system helping to raise the safety culture across the Service.

- 9.2 JG questioned whether with the BA training finger injury all the outstanding actions and action plan had been signed off? CM confirmed that all learning actions had been implemented, the Service were just awaiting on the final response from training, but that the Firefighter was already back at work.

## **10. Employee Engagement Survey Update**

- 10.1 CB explained that the One Survey was due to open on 31 Oct 2024. This was a proposal to renew their partnership with People Insight to continue to gain the benefit of longitudinal data. The proposal included enhancing participation through digitisation and incentivisation. CB added that there was still some detail to work out regarding questions, which they were linking to the priorities. The core questions would stay the same to allow longitudinal comparisons, as well as to enable comparisons between other Fire and Rescue Services, which had proved useful in the past. CB outlined that the increased price point this time reflected the fact that the Service had asked People Insight to provide further analysis, in order to assess hot spots that required additional support, and to allow for triangulation of data, to ensure the Service can further target their efforts. JG concurred that the analysis was critical when it came to surveys like this. CB acknowledged this and added that the precursor to this was starting with the 'We Said, You Did' work to show the changes that had been made coming out from the previous survey, to help to improve confidence in staff to engage with the process, because it would ultimately make a difference.

## **11. People Strategy Update**

- 11.1 CB explained that the paper was in two parts, with part one as an update on actions that followed on from the Assurance Review – People Strategy Action Plan (PSAP) that was presented to the Board on 20 March 2024, which had all been achieved. The second part was an update against the actions for the interim People Strategy Action Plan for 2024/25, where all the pillars continued to be on track for completion within the established action plan schedule on 31 March 2025, although some minor delays had been encountered, CB reassured the Board that these were all recoverable and would not affect the overall timeline or objectives.
- 11.2 JW asked whether the new AD of culture was now in role? CB confirmed that Donna Bentley was now Head of Safeguarding, covering that role for two days a week, and then covering Culture, Inclusion and Wellbeing for the other three. CB then highlighted the Day of Inspiration would be coming up on 11 September 2024 relating to culture, with some external speakers and then the next phase would be real practical action planning looking forward five years.

## **12. Response Strategy Update**

- 12.1 MB outlined that the Service continued to use the Strategic Station Strategy, which sought to maintain operational coverage across all 12 strategic stations and seven joint key stations had been maintained at 97% in the last month and had hit the target of 98% in May 2024. The Service had developed a new response time modelling tool to inform future response standards, with the focus on moving people rather than appliances, the aim of which was to make the Service more efficient and effective. MB added that there was quite a lot in the report about streamlining development pathways and therefore allowing firefighters to do more prevention work, with the paper covering the governance around this. MB outlined the workforce planning update, which herself and CB were going to revisit, looking at recruitment, key skills, and retention. The Strategy also covered the use of the Day Duty Officer Riding (DDOR), where operationally qualified Departmental staff would go and base themselves at the on-call station and ride the appliances. The Resource Management Unit (RMU) were being more proactive around moves and making sure they happened. Finally, the report covered the productivity of operational Firefighters on stations, which was largely around prevention work, home safety visits and protection work.
- 12.2 JG agreed about the importance of understanding the resources the Service had and the best way to deploy these locally, and that this should help with home safety checks, as these were a Home Office target, which had been below target for the last three months, so it would be interesting to see how that area continued to develop. MB confirmed that the feedback they received from the stations was that it was difficult to plan day by day when staff were being asked to do a standby somewhere else, and CM was working hard with DP to ensure that when a crew was deployed to a station on standby, they could still access the workload that was existing for that station so that some of that work could be picked up. JG asked whether in due course the PFCC could have a demonstration of the response time modelling tool, to see how that aligned with resources. CM and MB confirmed they would be happy to provide this, CM acknowledged the work of Tim Gardner on that tool and as soon as it was in place they would be keen to show how it worked. JG thanked everyone for their work on this.

#### **Action 48/24**

#### **Demonstration to the Board of the response time modelling tool once up and running**

### **13. Converted Stations Transitional Group Update**

- 13.1 MB outlined the report explaining that Dovercourt's availability was up to 99%, and that there had been an increase in availability of both the first and second appliances at that station. CM had been working hard to target the factors that were impacting availability, which had been discussed in previous papers. Canvey's availability was above 89%, and the Service had maintained coverage there by making cover moves. The station at South Woodham Ferrers revealed the impact of taking one person with skills out of the station, where one person who was both the Crew Manager and a driver was away on a course, leading to reduced availability at that station. Similar issues had then also occurred at Waltham Abbey as well. JG understood that the Service were working hard in this area to maintain availability as best they could, but

if there was anything the PFCC could assist with in this area then a plan to improve this would be welcomed. MB confirmed that herself and CM were looking carefully at this and looking to understand what would work best for the Service under the CRMP going forwards, but that they would bear this in mind.

#### **14. Estates Strategy Update**

- 14.1 KE summarised the highlights within the report, advising that the ECFRS Estate Strategy 2021-26, outlined the forward-looking vision, ambition, and commitment for the Fire Estate in Essex. KE highlighted the joint fleet workshops as one of the Service's top priorities, the DR had just been approved for the commissioning of RSM to conduct the options appraisals for different business models that need to be considered in terms of building ownership. RSM had already commenced that piece of work, with the hope of turning this around within four weeks, which would enable them to present back to the Board in September. KE would liaise with PBI to set up a joint strategic Board to align with that.
- 14.2 KE then provided an update on the next biggest capital spend being Hot Fire training, with RIBA stage three nearly completed. This would then be presented at the September Strategic Board for discussion of the different options to hopefully reduce the cost further, although it was recognised that the Service had already achieved significant reductions from £14m to £11.5m, the original budget had been £10m. A DR would then be brought to an extraordinary Strategic Board which would look to commission RIBA stage four of Hot Fire training.
- 14.3 KE outlined the whole-time station works, where the Service were hoping to accelerate this from 10 years (completing one station a year) to four years, or sooner, depending on the review of the capital programme. The other element the Service were focussing on was their zero carbon footprint, with the aim to present the cost to upscale the full estate to net zero, at the next Strategic board meeting. KE admitted that this was considerable, but that it was worth being sighted on. KE then concluded the update to explain that the Service now has a clearer visibility of projects, which assists in tracking their capital spend, allowing Neil in finance to understanding what has been committed. JG thanked KE for the comprehensive update, adding that she was really pleased by the maintenance programme, and the importance of bringing the stations up to a better standard. JG also confirmed that she would be interested to see the paper to Strategic Board regarding net zero.

#### **15. AOB and publishing**

- 15.1 There being no further business the meeting closed slightly ahead of schedule at 15:48. It was noted that paper 8 already contained the necessary redactions and all other papers were for publishing.

#### **Future meeting dates**

- Tuesday 27 August 14:00-16:00
- Tuesday 24 September 14:00-16:00
- Monday 28 October 14:00-16:00