

Minutes of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meeting held on 13 February 2023

Present:

Adrian Bowen	Bryan Jones
Richard Cox (Vice-Chair)	Dan Maycock
Ann Edgeller	Keith Walker
Stephen Sweeney (Substitute)	

Also in attendance: Ben Adams, Ralph Butler, David Greensmith and Bob Simpson (ETAP)

Apologies: Jackie Barnes, Tony Holmes, Philip Hudson, Roger Lees and Bernard Peters

PART ONE

37. Declarations of interest

None were made at the meeting.

38. Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public

No questions were submitted in time for this meeting.

39. Proposed Fire and Rescue Budget and Precept 2023/24

The Commissioner introduced his report which set out the proposed budget and precept proposals for the Fire and Rescue Authority for 2023/24.

The Panel received a supplementary paper, circulated at the meeting, which set out the revenue budget and precept proposals, should the pay offer made by the National Employers (NJC) be accepted. The offer was 7% on basic pay rates and Continual Professional Development payments from 1 July 2022 and 5% from July 2023. Members were informed that this did not have an effect on the net budget requirement which remained the same at £46.465million

The Commissioners Chief Finance Officer gave a short presentation which was considered along with the Fire Revenue Budget Report (including the MTFS and Precept).

It was explained that the Settlement Funding for 2023/24 had been confirmed at £15.704million, made up of; Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which had been set at £5.422million; Local Business Rates revenue of £4.070million and Business Top up of £6.212million. The total budget requirement for the service was £46.465million and including part fund the

balance from Council Tax funding of £30.761million and a proposed increase of 4.85% per annum (£84.25 pa per Band D property). This includes a Council tax Surplus of £0.405 million.

The Panel also considered the following documents:

- The Fire Authorities **Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2025/26** (Including Minimum Revenue Provision Policy).
- The **Reserves Strategy update** paper considered the overall level of reserves held by the Authority at 31 March 2023. The paper focused on two key areas of reserves that impacted on the future financial strategy. These were the General Reserve balance forecast as at 31 March 2023 was £1.9million and Earmarked (specific) Reserves, to meet future or predicted requirements balance at 31 March 2023, this was forecast to reduce to £6million by March 2028.
- The **Treasury Management Strategy** for 2023/24 which set out proposals for the management of the Fire Authorities cash flows; borrowing; and investments and the risks.

If savings could not be made or income generated, it was reported that reserves would have to be used in the short term and the Strategy would be reviewed, particularly Service Transformation options.

During the meeting and discussion, the following information was shared in addition to that in the report:

- It was explained that co-location of services at Stafford was not an income generator specifically but did give greater flexibility for services. More information on specific sites would be available shortly.
- Regarding the latest, as yet unaccepted pay offer, it was felt that in the past there may have been inconsistencies in pay awards and that fire services had not always been in line with other public services.
- The total level of debt (capital financing requirement) was forecast to increase from £20.8m to £29.3m by 2026 due to investment in fleet/estate/equipment etc. This was being managed but was increasing in the medium term. This debt included loans from the Public Loans Board which incurred interest.
- There was an environmental strategy which looked at moving towards a greener fleet when appropriate.
- Premises costs had increased due to a predicted increase of energy costs of approximately £1m over the two years 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- The level of borrowing in the capital strategy was due to investment but was affordable and for essential capital equipment.
- Service transformation was not an immediate pressure and options were being fully considered. However, the additional £700,000 savings on top of that in the budget paper (total £1.4million savings) would be considered in by the Commissioner before any decisions were made.

- The Commissioner was comfortable that the service would be able to cope with any large regional accidents/incidents and held £1.9m in General Reserve, however, if financial reserves were not in line with national guidance, there would be more concern.
- Contingency plans were in place within the Service should industrial action take place.

The Panel adjourned to consider their response to the Commissioners budget and precept proposals. Upon reconvening, the Panel unanimously agreed:

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) The total 2023/24 net revenue budget requirement of £46.465m, including the council tax requirement for 2023/24 of £30.355m before collection fund surplus/deficits, be noted.
- c) That the proposed budget and Precept increase of 4.85% (£3.90 per annum equivalent to 7.5p per week, increasing the council tax to £84.25 for a Band D be supported and the Commissioner be notified accordingly.
- d) Council Tax base increase to 360,299 properties equivalent to an increase of 1.46% and the Council Tax collection fund delivering a surplus of £405k be noted.
- e) The MTFS summary financials and revised use of reserves as shown in the supplementary report be noted.
- f) The MTFS balanced position for 2023/24 after the use of earmarked reserves be noted. This revised position included a saving requirement increasing to c.£1.4m during the MTFS period and a net use of earmarked grants/reserves of £1.142m.
- g) The proposed three year Capital Investment be noted.
- h) That the funding for 2023/24, based upon the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, which included the business rates information received from the nine billing authorities by 31 January 2023 be noted.
- i) The business rates for 2023/24 from the nine local billing authorities, including the recovery of the collection fund deficit position included within the 2022/23 returns be noted.
- j) That the outcome of the Staffordshire Commissioner's budget consultation be noted.
- k) That the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 be noted.
- l) The delegation to the Director of Finance for the Staffordshire Commissioners Office to make any necessary adjustments to the budget as a result of late changes to central government funding (including changes due to the final funding settlement being announced) via an appropriation to or from the general fund reserve be noted.

- m)** That the Statement from the Director of Finance / S151 Officer on the robustness of the Budget and adequacy of the proposed financial reserves be noted.

The Chairman thanked the Commissioner and his officers for the information they had provided and asked that the Panels support for the service be passed on.

40. Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan 2020-2024 - Update report

The report provided the Panel with an update on the delivery of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service Safety Plan (SP), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

The Safety Plan was designed to underpin the Staffordshire Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan and four priorities for the Service were determined following consultation across Staffordshire in 2020.

The four priorities outlined in the current Commissioners Fire and Rescue Plan were:

- A flexible and responsive service
- Protect people and places
- Help people most at risk stay safe
- A fire and rescue service for tomorrow

Detail on the priorities and the progress to date was contained in the report.

With regard to the Falls Response Team and their work with partners, the time patients were left lying on floors was questioned and if there was medical follow-up after assistance was given. It was explained that this was prior to Christmas when the NHS was at its busiest. Medical assessments were carried out by appropriately trained officers who are sent depending on the type/level of call out and were in contact with partners if additional advice was needed. Having access to individuals homes provided an opportunity to offer guidance/support or access to other services that may be available. Funding was provided by the SSOTICB but there may, in the future, be discussions for opportunities to work with partners to relieve pressure on response teams. This was a different service to that provided by the Police who responded to emergency's involving mental illness. Defibrillators were normally fitted into response vehicles, including the falls teams.

The prevention and education service were discussed and the move from classroom physical teaching to online. There was also funding for PSE officers who pass on Safety and police initiatives.

The HICFRS report findings and the progress made to address issues raised was noted. The Panel was reminded that the Commissioners performance meetings with the Chief Fire Officer were public and available on his website.

The information on access arrangements for sheltered or assisted living sites in case of emergencies, would be shared with members of the Panel after the meeting.

The Panel noted the positive OFSTED inspection result which rated the service as Good (with 2 areas of outstanding) for the apprenticeships scheme.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) information on access arrangements for sheltered or assisted living sites in case of emergencies, would be shared with the panel.

41. Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members

No questions were asked under this item.

42. Date of Future Meetings and Work Programme

The reserved date of 21 February meeting was to be held to consider the peel Inspection report.

RESOLVED – That the dates of future meetings be noted.

Chairman