



MINUTES

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

21 December 2020 15.00 – 16.08, Teams Video Conference

Present:

Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair)
Jo Turton (JT)	Chief Fire Officer
Rick Hylton (RHy)	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Moira Bruin (MB)	Director of Operations, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI)	Chief Executive, PFCC's Office
Janet Perry (JP)	Strategic Head of Performance and Resources
Neil Cross (NC)	Chief Finance Officer, ECFRS
Christine Butler (CHB)	Minutes, PFCC's Office

Apologies:

Jo Thornicroft (JTh)	Head of Performance & Scrutiny, PFCC's Office
Dave Bill (DB)	Director of Prevention of Innovation, Risk and Future Development

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies have been received from Jo Thornicroft and Dave Bill, Rick Hylton will be joining late due to the SCG meeting

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 2.1 PBI highlighted action 29/19 on Page 2 – “JG had a briefing from NC who had done a tremendous job in bringing it under CIPFA rules of 5%” - PBI assumes that “it” means reserves.
- 2.2 PBI said re action 5/20 Page 2 – “IRMP Decision sheet signed off on 31.07, action to remain open”. Unclear as to why the action is to remain open if decision sheet is to be signed off but has come off the action log.

Rick joined at 10.04

- 2.3 PBI said that regarding action 15/20 “the draft accounts were submitted to the PFCCP” this is incorrect as they were submitted to the audit committee.
- 2.4 PBI re final bullet point at bottom page 3 “RH re item 8 Collaboration Update including fleet. There is a reference re RHy to having a briefing on Friday with PBI, should be Pippa Mills.

- 2.5 PBI referred to paragraph 5.6, DB would expect it expect it to inform station plans rather than stations. JTh to check for accuracy on this item with DB.
- 2.6 Minutes approved with the amendments above,

3. Action Log

JP ran through the action log in the absence of JTh.

- 06/19 Prevention Paper coming to this meeting – Propose close.
- 29/19 KE to oversee and come back to next Strategic Board with a paper re balance sheet and reserves with timelines and resources. JP had a meeting on 21.12 and will draft the scope. Remain Open.
- 39/19 DB to speak to Senior Leadership Team for all papers to come to meetings by deadlines and ensure that relevant meeting title and information has been updated. JG added that RH, JT & JTh had a discussion around forward planning. JT confirmed and said that this also was for item 14/20. A meeting took place in terms of aligning the plan for Strategic and P&R and the first version of the plan is on the agenda for the meeting today. JG confirmed that the Revised Forward Plan was on the Agenda for this meeting Propose Close both actions
- 02/20 Protection Strategy. Propose Close
- 03/20 Propose Close
- 05/20 IRMP Propose Close 07/20 RH - Day Crewed Houses we have signed off but not yet the end of the program- NC confirmed that there is a listing of the initial house sales and then there will be another paper that will finalise the transfer of those. – Propose Close
- 10/20 Annual Plan and Change program. Presentation to be shown at PFCC teams meeting. Propose Close
- 12/20 Annual plan updated – Propose close
- 13/20 Decision paper signed off in August – Propose Close
- 17/20 Diversity and Inclusion – on Forward Plan for next year Propose Close
- 18/20 RH to take on JT comments into the annual report for next year. Propose Close
- 19/20 Annual report, Fire and Rescue Statement – Propose Close
- 20/20 Completed - Propose Close
- 21/20 Workforce Plan – KE confirmed actioned – Propose Close
- 22/20 Immediate Remedy. Meeting has been held Legal advice is being sought, next steps to be defined. KE to have an update with PBI and move forward quickly. KE anticipates coming back to the board in January. KE to discuss with PBI and to send to legal team. RH understood that this would be resolved by Christmas. The new deadline needs to be 15.01.21. RH is concerned by employees being unable to retire. This our scheme and our staff. JT there is a need to ensure that all information is obtained for RH to make a decision. RH said at the SAB meeting The LGA were not prepared to stand up to the letter that we had received from Bevan Brittan JP then said that 23.20 supersedes this action. Propose Close
- 23/20 Remain Open
- 24/20 KE to amend Workforce Plan with RH's Comments – Propose Close
- 25/20 Propose Close

4. Forward Plan

- 4.1. There were no outstanding items on the Minutes of 23 September 2020 or Action Log that is not captured on the Agenda. (This relates to matters arising not the Forward Plan

5. Draft Budget 2021/22

NC talked the Board through the key points of the draft budget for 2021/22 and the points from the supplementary paper, which was requested by RH.

Budget Paper 2021-22

- 5.1 Covid-19 has had an impact on the proposed budget, the Service have been collating information from the Districts on Council Tax and Business Rate collections. The government announcement for 75% support for funding deficits with any balancing deficits being phased over a three year period has also been accounted for.
- 5.2 The budget would normally include a Council Tax collection surplus, which has been removed from the 2021/22 budget as well as the assumption of year on year growth in the tax base of 1.5%.
- 5.3 The proposed budget shows a precept increase of 1.99
- 5.4 It was noted that the Spending Review announced a public sector pay freeze.
- 5.5 There have been savings built into this budget for day crew conversion costs and non-pay savings.
- 5.6 The Capital Program is proposed as £7m for 2021/22. which included
 - £1.8m for appliances,
 - £1m for the redevelopment of Shoeburyness Station.
 - £1m for investment in training facilities,
- 5.7 NC summarised the key risk to the budget
 - Council Tax – This has been built into the budget with the best information provided by the Districts on both Covid and on the collection accounts. the Service received £6m in Section 31 grants, those are renewed on an annual basis, there is not currently any confirmation of those grants for next year
 - There is no pay award allowed for in the budget
- 5.8 RH said in comparing the budget paper for this board and the draft for the panel, he noted that in the draft for the panel the old format was used for table 3. RH feels that the panel should have the same clarity and asked that table 3 in the panel paper is replaced with table 1 from the budget papers being presented at this meeting

Action 24/20

NC to replace table 3 in the panel paper with table 1 from the Strategic Board budget paper once finalised, to provide clarity and consistency.

Supplementary Paper

- 5.9 NC shared this paper on screen, which was based on the precept being 1% and to look and would fund the additional investment in fire protection.
- 5.10 1% in the precept equates to just under £500,000 of additional funding.
- 5.11 RH said that JP had also forwarded a scenario spreadsheet and asked NC if there is anything that has changed? NC said it was the same information,

- 5.12 RH said that that the Fire Protection increasing by £480,000 in the 2021/22 budget is justified by the information we have so far from the Grenfell enquiry. This is a material step up in how to make our county safe. We should be anticipating being able to do this year over year going forward. RH if we did not fund that we would be building ourselves a widening financial problem going forward
- 5.13 RH showed concern regarding a 1.99% Precept increase Every year there is an underspend on employment costs as we budget for a full establishment That does not happen. The Service consistently run 2-2.5% below that, which means that if we continue in this way a 1.99% precept increase would just create an underspend
- 5.14 RH said that If you then look at the Investment in Productivity Improvement, that is contingent upon the negotiations with the NJC. We may not be able to spend that money. In which case we could end up running a significant surplus on the back of the 1.99% tax increase
- 5.15 RH commented that in a year where we have such an extraordinary external environment where employment is up in the County three fold and much of the County is working for 80% of its previous salary. Family incomes are also down, which hits the self-employed and the small business sector which is 90% of the employers in the County. RH is uncomfortable about raising the precept any more than is needed.
- 5.16 RH made a proposal for discussion to look at the sustainable investment that is needed year after year in Protection which is around £480,000 that would be covered by a 1% precept increase. The Service will have a balanced budget at the end of the year and so we are at a good starting point. The other elements in this budget for 2021/22 beyond Fire Protection piece are essentially one off that we can decide to do or not during the year. It is incumbent upon us to manage our way through this year against that background given the strain on the local Council Taxpayer. RH proposed that the Service go with a 1% Council Tax increase, so that there is the sustained increase in the base budget but at the minimum level required to fund the Fire Protection investment.
- 5.17 JT said that the Service are looking at an uncertain future as all public sector organisations are. For the Service, the uncertainty is around the Rate Support Grant and what the Rate Support Grant will look like, given the impact on the economy and the necessity for some time of reduction in terms of public spend. The Service are setting a budget for this year with a view on what are likely to be the emerging significant risks next year and in future years as we have not got a 3 year settlement. JT added that our key priority in terms of investment that cannot be met from reserves, is in Fire Protection. JT would be comfortable as Chief Fire Officer with a 1% precept increase which would allow the Service to cover the need for that investment and allow us to consider over the year, what the future and the future budgets will look like. 1% covers the priority investment area, it does allow an opportunity for future budgets, but it does also leave us clearly with a gap which we will need to come back to you as to how we are going to close that gap.
- 5.18 RH asked PBI & JP whether we were within a reasonable risk profile PBI and JP agreed it was. JP added that the Service were able to justify the 1% increase on Protection, rather than looking to build up more reserves.
- 5.19 JG thanked NC and colleagues for the work involved in bringing the Budget to the Board. JG agreed with the investment being made in Protection and thought that in future years, we will be wanting to make even more investment in that area. JG stated that there will still be opportunities to talk about the gap when we set next year's and future year's precept. It would be remiss if we did not respond to what the Service was saying and secondly remiss if we did not act with integrity around the difficulties that residents of Essex are facing over the next 12 months. Invest in Protection, keep a

close eye on budgets this year re underspends, and Investment in Productivity Improvement to see where we get to.

- 5.20 RHy welcomed the investment in Fire Protection, He said it is vitally important for us to invest in this area which will enable us to respond to the risks that will continue to come from the Building Risk Review and a move towards enforcement action which is more expensive and time consuming to do, but it is the right approach to take.
- 5.21 RH pointed out that the medium term financial plan was predicated on a reduction in Revenue Support Grant. RHy said this was because for the cost of Covid for the Country, will need to be funded and government are likely to reduce Revenue Support Grant. The Service has not had the Council Tax precept flexibility that has been afforded to others. If the Revenue Support Grant is cut, then we may struggle to make up the ground in other areas. RHy fully supports the decision that has been made today on 1% precept.
- 5.22 RH stated that there is not an easy way through this, and we are looking at the risks to the service, the public in different areas, and the risk to our reserves. RH asked if MB or KE had anything further to add. MB had nothing further to add. KE said that it was the most pragmatic way forward and fully supported his colleagues.
- 5.23 RHy asked as the next CSR is developed, whether the Service could have as much information as possible from the Home Office and MHCLG. RHy said he understood that RH is having conversations with his colleagues and asked from a Fire and Rescue perspective the further ahead we can plan the better. RH said that he would hope the next CSR would take us through the remainder of this parliament.
- 5.24 RH confirmed all agreed on the 1% precept increase and everyone showed their agreement
- 5.25 RH asked that NC prepare the budget paper for the Police Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) on the basis of a 1% precept increase, specifically to fund the investment in increasing our provision for fire protection in line with the outcome of the Grenfell Enquiry, the recommendations of HMICFRS and our Fire & Rescue Plan. NC agreed and will action.

Action 25/20

NC to prepare the budget paper for the PFCP based on a 1% precept increase, specifically to fund investment in increasing our provision for fire protection in line with the outcome of the Grenfell Enquiry, the recommendations of HMICFRS and our Fire & Rescue Plan.

- 5.26 RH asked JT if she needs to put anything in writing regarding this recommendation or does this meeting fulfil that requirement. PBI does not believe that there is a requirement to follow that process if the action that NC has been instructed to do has been appropriately minuted in the minutes of this meeting.

6. Prevention Strategy

MB talked the Board through the Prevention Strategy.

- 6.1 JP asked if MB and JTh had a conversation about this paper before JTh went on holiday. MB replied that discussions had not be held recently.
- 6.2 RH said that the paper has been read and the part that needed more clarification is the linkage with the Fire and Rescue Plan.

- 6.3 MB said that HMICFRS identified a lack of a coherent Prevention Strategy which the Service are addressing. It is known from the inspection timetable that there will be a document submission in January which includes a request to see the Prevention Strategy as well. The Prevention Strategy give us a direction of travel and ensures that the Strategy for responsibilities of the organisation is met and how the Service supports the Fire and Rescue Plan. The Prevention Strategy outlines how the Service intends to identify risk in the community with their risk model and the activities that will be carried out to mitigate the risk.
- 6.4 The Strategy covers the period 2020-2024 and sets out a mission and vision. It gives an overview with some statistics that set the scene broadly and outlines objectives and gives a prevention promise. The Prevention Promise is set through a series of “We Will” statements: -
- Identify Risk
 - Work in Partnership
 - Be Inclusive
 - Evaluate our Activity
 - Be Intelligence Led and Utilise Technology
 - Responsibility for All.
- 6.5 The strategy has been set out in terms of the four main Prevention Workstreams: -
- Live Safe
 - Be Road Safe
 - Be Water Safe
 - Safeguarding
- 6.6 There is an Outcome of the Strategy table in the document where we are working to as the Service’s definition of vulnerability. (I am not sure what this means)
- 6.7 For each of the four main Prevention Workstreams there is a “Why” statement over why we want to do it and a statement around what we want to achieve and how we will do the “We Will” statements.
- 6.8 There is a statement on how to measure success, which is about performance management and was lacking from previous documents around community safety.
- 6.9 There is a section on “Governance” which highlights the owners and their responsibilities for fulfilling the Strategy. The service has gone for a full review period of 4 years or when there is a new IRMP. MB acknowledged that this would be visited annually to ensure that it is fit for purpose and the evaluation to enable us to learn and improve from what we are doing.
- 6.10 There is the Strategy on a page at the end of the document which sums up the Strategy and invited comments from the Board.
- 6.11 MB located the section which contained information regarding the linkage with the Fire & Rescue Plan as per RH’s request at 6.2 above. RH stated that he could see some fit especially with “We Wills” as part of our prevention response, road safety, vulnerable people etc, but he would like it to be more explicit over which of the “We Will” commitments map to the Fire and Rescue Plan. MB to pick this up and action.
- 6.12 JG said that this was the reason that JP had asked if you had spoken to JTh as we wanted to know if there were any specific comments about it. It is there but it needs to be more explicit. We need to work with you to enable you to do this and so that we are all comfortable in that space but am also conscious of the timeframe for submission of papers to HMICFRS. JG is happy to work with MB on this.

Action 26/20

MB to action more detail on links between the Prevention Strategy and the Fire and Rescue Plan, particularly on linkage with “We Wills” as part of our prevention response, road safety and vulnerable people. JG to assist MB with this

- 6.13 RHy thanked MB, Jim Palmer and the team for putting this together. RHy agreed with the point that it is very respectful of the Fire and Rescue Plan and does not try to cut across it or the organisation in a different direction. RHy does feel that the Fire and Rescue Plan is the Commissioner’s Plan and the Strategy is the Plan that we are seeking to deliver as a service. RHy feels that it is important the delivery of the strategies are owned by the service and people in the service recognise and buy into. He said he thought it was not helpful to continually quote the Fire and Rescue Plan but agreed that the Strategy did need to point towards it. If our strategies are right and we are held to account by the delivery of the Fire and Rescue plan. The Prevention Strategy is forward thinking and moves us from where we were as a service to where we are now. It talks about our focus on risk which is a key priority. There is a significant section in relation to vulnerability, safe living with regard to supporting the vulnerable, road safety also picks up the ambition of that plan, all of these are key to the Strategy. We are looking to set out very clearly why we do what we do, what we do and how we do it. Within how we do it, is an increase of operational crew delivery. RHy felt that moving into “Broadening of the Role” we will perhaps begin to lose some traction on what we are trying to do. We will get in the debate of what firefighters are paid to do which is protecting the public.
- 6.14 JP asked about the four workstreams, safeguarding is a familiar term for those who work in public services, but maybe not so familiar to the public.
- 6.15 JG commented that there has been an amazing deep dive meeting around safeguarding last week but there is so much prevention that goes on in a safeguarding context that JG quite liked the term “Safeguarding” as it implies feeling safe. There is a tremendous amount of prevention work being done.
- 6.16 RHy answered JP’s point at 6.14, and said the document was very much internal. He said there are two external facing documents, the Fire and Rescue Plan and the IRMP, the others are internal Strategies on how we leverage the resource we must deliver against those two plans.
- 6.17 RHy said that for reassurance the key measures for success are built into the monthly performance reporting that comes to the monthly P&R board.
- 6.18 RH confirmed that the paper will be submitted to the HMICFRS as part of the papers in their next inspection. MB agreed.

7. AOB

- 7.1 There were not any items under Any Other Business.

ECFRS Strategic Board meeting was closed at 16.08