



**MINUTES**  
**POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX AND**  
**ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**  
**STRATEGIC BOARD**  
**13 September 2023 14:30-16:30**

**Present:**

Jane Gardner (JG)	Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair)
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
James Durrant (JD)	Pensions Manager, ECFRS
Karl Edwards (KE)	Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS
Rick Hylton (RH)	Chief Fire Officer, ECFRS
Janet Perry (JP)	Strategic Head of Performance and Resources, PFCC's office
Andy Smith (AS)	Director of Operations, ECFRS
Jo Thornicroft (JT)	Head of Performance and Scrutiny (Fire), PFCC's office
Samantha Bardsley	Minutes, PFCC's office

**Apologies:**

Roger Hirst (RH)	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Colette Black (CB)	Director of People Services, ECFRS
Emily Cheyne (EC)	Assistant Director Communications, ECFRS

**1. Introductions**

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

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

2.1. The date on the previous minutes was noted to be incorrect and requires amending, otherwise the minutes of the previous meeting were approved and agreed.

2.2. There were no matters arising

**3. Action Log**

**38/22 PFCCFRA Constitution - Anti-Fraud & Bribery Policy**

NC there was no policy currently in service, so one has been drafted. It was recommended this goes to the December 23 audit committee and then through the March 24 Strategic Board.

**Propose Close**

**61/22 Proposed Budget & MTFS - Cascade**

This is due to come in the finance report in Septembers P&R Board  
**Close**

**67/22 Building Risk Review - interim update**

Still awaiting publication, due date to move to December 23  
**Remain Open**

**03/23 Annual Equality Compliance Report**

Decision Sheet received and being processed.  
**Remain Open**

**11/23 Risk Based Inspection Program**

04.07.23: Decision Sheet 024-23 approved  
**Close**

**12/23 Joint Fleet Workshops**

04.07.23: Decision Sheet 027-23 approved  
**Close**

**13/23 ECFRS Training Centre**

Letter written 19.07.23. Response received 27.07.23. In principle, ECFRS can stay on the Wethersfield site for the duration of the Asylum Accommodation Centre  
**Close**

**14/23 ECFRS Training Centre**

04.07.23: Decision Sheet 029-23 approved  
**Close**

**15/23 Annual Plan Closure Report**

29.06.23: Decision Sheet 021-23 approved  
**Close**

**16/23 Strategic Assessment of Risk**

24.07.23: Workshop carried out  
**Close**

**17/23 Strategic Assessment of Risk**

21.07.23: Decision Sheet 023-23 approved  
**Close**

**18/23 Risk Management Strategy**

04.07.23: Decision Sheet 008-23 approved  
**Close**

**4. Forward Plan**

4.1. KE requested that we receive the Old Harlow Relocation paper at the December 23 strategic board, JG approved.

**Action 19/23**

**Old Harlow Relocation to be added to the December 23 Forward Plan.**

## **5. Annual Report/Fire and Rescue Statement**

- 5.1. RHy presented the report, the purpose being to seek the PFCCs approval for the publication of the annual statement of assurance for 2022/23 which is a statutory legal requirement. The statement of assurance has been through the Panel workshop this week, all feedback has been captured and amendments have been made where possible – some were not possible due to accessibility concerns. The report also includes the statement of accounts for 2022/23. Thanks were extended to Darren Horsman, EC and her team for the good work completed.
- 5.2. JG praised the document and also extended thanks to JT for her involvement.
- 5.3. PBI advised in terms of sequencing, the PFCC cannot sign the DR until it has been to the Panel as it is an agenda item there – it is possible they may raise things at that meeting that they didn't raise previously at the workshop; so, final processing needs to hold off until then. There is also a statutory requirement for the PFCC to publish their response to any recommendations that the panel makes. If the panel asked for things to be done and they could or couldn't be completed, it would be helpful if the decision report could set these out; the decision report can then serve the purpose of being the PFCC's published response.

## **6. Budget Setting Paper**

- 6.1. NC presented the paper which covers the economic background we are in and highlights the point that the green book pay award is not currently approved.
- 6.2. Pg7 gives an update on the savings plan, the service presented a budget gap at the June strategic board of £1m, the productivity and efficiency group identified £0.42m of savings to plug this, the update now is that we are looking at projecting near £0.7m for those savings.
- 6.3. Pg8 looked at current year forecast, the projected core budget deficit 2023/24 closed to £0.2m, Table 2 highlighted the impact on any unbudgeted Green Book pay award.
- 6.4. The budget setting headcount has been based on the same as last year, there are a number of budget bids that have been submitted for review. During the budget setting process, staff establishments will be further reviewed with budget holders and directors.
- 6.5. Transitional resources on the day crew stations have funding until the end of the current financial year and are due to be withdrawn by 1st April 2024. These resources are being reviewed alongside the budget process and a specific update paper will be prepared.
- 6.6. The budget setting for 2024/25 includes an increase in Council Tax Precept of 3% which is in line with the Autumn Statement and a budget assumption of 1.1% increase in our council tax base. The 2024/25 budget will include a 2% increase in the Revenue Support Grant and for the S31 Business Rates Relief grant.
- 6.7. Pg12 details the MTFs, the main pressures in 2024/25 are the pay award, the service have included some new investments relating to additional ICT pressures/obligations and an increase in the auditor's fee. They have included as an additional pressure a further investment in on-call activity. There is included in the budget just over £0.7m of cashable efficiencies including £0.3m as a council tax surplus. In 25/26 the £0.6m services grant is removed as there is no indication it will continue.

- 6.8. JP asked on the pay award, do you know what other Services are doing, are they also at 2%? NC advised there is a finance network face to face meeting in October where this can be confirmed.
- 6.9. JP asked is it the assumption that budget bids that go in will be covered by savings? NC Agreed this was currently the case.
- 6.10. JG Noted one of the questions RH wanted raised was regarding the investment in Net Zero changes to the fleet which is not reflected in the paper. KE advised we have liaised with our energy supplier who are working through this. The fleet strategy needs building around this. It was confirmed any vehicle replacements are going Net Zero first, we are not making purchases of fossil fuel vehicles.
- 6.11. RHy raised that the service will need to refine the assumptions they have made as they go forward. If the 2% assumptions are not realistic, should they still be using it because it balances the budget, or do they go for a more realistic figure and recognise the gap? That gap would give the quantum to lobby back into central government. There is going to need to be some investments into the budget for next year, the service will try to balance those against efficiencies, but the reality is they are going to need to see some additional investment.
- 6.12. JP brought up the recent issues with concrete roofing and asked if any of the services buildings were affected? KE advised that in-house surveyors have done an initial assessment of all sites and determined that they do not believe there is any impact to the buildings. It needs more invasive scrutiny to be fully assured of this however, which is being progressed externally.

## **7. Immediate Detriment**

- 7.1. JD presented the paper which advises that various legislative changes have now been made to remedy the discrimination identified in the McCloud and Sargeant legal cases. Those category 2 members will be remedied under the legislation which takes effect on and from 1 October 2023. These cases will be processed with high priority. Once the remedying legislation takes effect on 1 October 2023, the discrimination will have been removed and the immediate detriment process will no longer be required. The report requests that the immediate detriment process formally ends on and from 1 October 2023. Immediate detriment will continue up until this time to ensure a smooth transition and so that there are no delays from a person retiring and receiving pension benefits.
- 7.2. JP commented Essex was the first to allow people to retire on the moral standpoint that it was the right thing to do, and this was a brave decision. JG commented what was good about this process was the collective thoughts and the appropriate challenges and agreements that were made based on these challenges. It was a difficult process to navigate which required clear expertise from JD and others. RH had to make a decision, RHy and colleagues implemented that to the letter, and we are in a better place now with more creditability because of it.

## **8. Pensions Forecast**

- 8.1. NC presented advising the forecast on the Firefighter's Pension Scheme was submitted on 25th August as per the Home Office deadline. The service are required

to do so on an annual basis. An internal audit around pension scheme forecasts was completed which came out as substantial assurance around the process.

8.2. NC confirmed that the submission we make now influences the amount of money we receive next July, the Home Office will look at the forecast we make for 24/25 and they will pay 80% of that next July alongside looking at what we submit for this financial year and pay that balance. There is no risk if we get this wrong, as we do get the full amounts, there may however be cash flow implications in the meantime.

8.3. The paper covers the array of different assumptions we make in conjunction with home office guidance.

## **9. Decisions Sheets**

9.1. 031-23 Cleaning Contract Procurement was acknowledged as signed.

9.2. 032-23 Electrical Planned Preventative Maintenance was acknowledged as signed.

## **10. Any Other Business**

NC apologised that it was still unknown when the final financial statements that are approved through this board as an extraordinary item would be able to occur.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:45 hours

## **Future meeting dates**

- Wednesday 13 December 2023 1430-1630
- Monday 11 March 2024 1400-1600