

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel held at the Great Hall, The Guildhall, St Giles Street, Northampton NN1 1DE on Thursday 27 July 2023 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Councillor David Smith (Chair)
Councillor Fiona Baker
Councillor André González De Savage
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Zoe McGhee [to item 157]
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Russell Roberts
Councillor Winston Strachan
Mrs Anita Shields [to item 157]
Miss Pauline Woodhouse

Substitute Members:

Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Ian Jelley

Also Present:

Stephen Mold, Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Simon Tuhill, proposed candidate for appointment as interim Chief Fire Officer
Deborah Denton, Joint Head of Communications, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Helen King, Chief Finance Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Stuart McCartney, Governance and Accountability Manager, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
James Averill, Communications Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Councillor Adam Brown, West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor John McGhee, North Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Bob Purser, West Northamptonshire Council
Catherine Whitehead, Director Legal and Democratic and Monitoring Officer, West Northamptonshire Council
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council
Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Council
Tracy Tiff, Democratic Services Deputy Manager, West Northamptonshire Council
Ed Bostock, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Council
Craig Forysth, Deputy Head of Communications, West Northamptonshire Council
Adam Taylor, East Midlands Executive Council member, Fire Brigades Union
Chris Kemp, Northamptonshire Brigade Secretary, Fire Brigades Union

There were also 33 members of the public in attendance.

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Gill Mercer

Councillor Jon-Paul Carr

156. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Mercer and Carr with Councillors Jelley and Irwin substituting respectively.

157. Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting

The Director Legal and Democratic advised that two requests to address the meeting had been received from members of the public. Neither had provided sufficient detail to establish the relevance of the addresses to the business of the current meeting and they would therefore be deferred to a future Panel meeting.

Mrs Shields stated that if the Panel was not able to hold to account the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) for his recent decision regarding the appointment of an interim Chief Fire Officer (CFO) she would not participate, and left the meeting.

Councillor McGhee stated that she also would not participate until the Panel could have an open discussion of these matters, and left the meeting.

The Director Legal and Democratic provided further advice to the Panel, making the following points:

- The Panel's business at the current meeting was to carry out the statutory function of holding a confirmation hearing for the proposed appointment of Simon Tuhill as interim CFO.
- Panel members would meet following the confirmation hearing to discuss how the Panel would carry out its scrutiny function in relation to recent events and address concerns that had been raised. It was right to deal with matters in that order.
- Members of the public who had requested to speak at the current meeting had been provided with information about the relevant rules of procedure. No clarification was received regarding the nature of their addresses, therefore the relevance of the addresses to the agenda item could not be established. The Chair had declined to accept their requests on this basis. They had been advised that there would be an opportunity to speak at a future Panel meeting if the nature of their addresses was established.

Due to a public disturbance the meeting was adjourned at 10.15.

The meeting reconvened at 10.21.

The Chair respectfully asked members of the public to allow the Panel to carry out the confirmation hearing without further interruption. If there were further disturbances he would adjourn the meeting again and ask for the public gallery to be cleared.

158. **Declarations of Interest**

In response to a Panel member's question the Chair confirmed that Panel members would hold a planning meeting following the confirmation hearing to discuss how the Panel would scrutinise recent events. If it was decided to convene a further Panel meeting this would be open to the public and the standard procedures for public participation would apply.

Councillor Gonzalez de Savage declared a general interest as an active supporter and fundraiser for Northamptonshire Search and Rescue.

159. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair announced that the meeting of the Panel was intended to carry out the statutory function of conducting a confirmation hearing for the proposed appointment of Simon Tuhill as interim CFO for Northamptonshire.

The Chair acknowledged the concerns raised over recent events and advised there would be a separate discussion to enable the Panel to decide how it wanted to address those concerns.

160. **Proposed appointment by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire of an interim Chief Fire Officer**

The Chair welcomed Simon Tuhill to the Panel meeting and to Northamptonshire. The Chair noted that he had been in London when the 7/7 bombings had occurred, although had not been affected, and he commended Mr Tuhill for his involvement in the response by the emergency services.

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager introduced the report outlining the purpose and format of the confirmation hearing and invited Panel members to raise any questions on these matters. There were none.

The Chair then invited the PFCC to introduce Mr Tuhill as his proposed appointment as interim CFO. The PFCC made the following points:

- His priority as PFCC was to ensure that Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue (NFRS) had the leadership and resources to continue to improve and modernise in order to support and protect communities.
- NFRS had made improvements over recent years but still needed to improve its organisational culture.
- NFRS would benefit from Mr Tuhill's vast frontline knowledge and experience.
- Investment in the fleet and recruitment of firefighters had improved service provision, and the pace of change in NFRS would continue.
- Mr Tuhill had undergone a robust recruitment process for the role of Deputy CFO. He had stood out as a candidate and his extensive experience and frontline skills would enhance the existing strategic operational management to support the delivery of the service.
- The PFCC had made a public apology for mistakes made regarding the previous appointment of an interim CFO and was prepared to answer Panel members' questions relating to the background issues involved.

- The permanent CFO position would be advertised from August 2023.
- As PFCC he had always sought to work with the Panel whilst addressing areas for improvement in order to deliver a more positive, inclusive Fire and Rescue service that valued staff and was committed to excellence.
- The Panel had an important role in relation to the proposed appointment of Mr Tuhill and he was confident the Panel would carry it out with vigour and insight.

In response to questions from the Panel relating to the proposed appointment the PFCC provided additional information as follows:

- NFRS currently only had one Assistant CFO in post. The PFCC's assessment was that Mr Tuhill was the best option to carry out the role of interim CFO. The recruitment process for Deputy CFO had recognised Mr Tuhill's capability and potential to be a future CFO.
- It was anticipated that the recruitment process for the permanent CFO post would run between August and October, with interviews in November and a Panel confirmation hearing in December.
- The Deputy CFO's duties included deputising for the CFO when required.
- Mr Tuhill had applied for the CFO role as part of the recruitment process that had resulted in the appointment of Mark Jones. Mr Jones's additional experience had made him the preferred candidate at the time. However, Mr Tuhill's potential had been apparent and it was very positive that NFRS had been able to attract him.
- The CFO role required experience in a variety of settings. Mr Tuhill had worked in both urban and rural areas as well as on major incidents.
- HMICFRS had reported on the organisational culture of Fire and Rescue services across England and Wales. NFRS was good operationally but needed to change its culture and become more inclusive. That was why the PFCC had sought a candidate who would effect change.

The Panel then asked Mr Tuhill a series of questions relating to his professional competence and personal independence.

Mr Tuhill was asked what his response was to being asked to carry out the role of CFO for a temporary period and what he would take from his previous professional experience to help him carry out the role. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- He was very honoured to be asked to lead the firefighters of NFRS. He had been a firefighter for 25 years: CFO was the highest rank that could be achieved and the appointment as interim CFO would be the highlight of his career.
- His professional ethos had always been to leave a service or team in a better place than when he started a role.
- During his career he had moved from working with individuals to now potentially running a whole service. His focus throughout was on professionalism, compassion and delivering an effective service to residents.

Mr Tuhill was asked what he saw as the main challenges facing NFRS and how he would seek to contribute to addressing these challenges effectively. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- In the short term he needed to meet with staff members to ensure they knew their interventions made a difference to the lives of the residents of Northamptonshire, in all areas of work that they carried out. This should also be

conveyed to members of the public. Recent events had created uncertainty that did not reflect the jobs that NFRS staff members carried out.

- NFRS faced various wider challenges. The Fire and Rescue Service operated in an extremely difficult financial climate, which created a challenge to provide all the services that might be offered. He would always advocate for resources where possible.
- There were issues with culture in various large organisations and the Fire and Rescue service was not an exception. The perception of prejudice and bigotry within the service could erode the public's trust. Therefore ensuring staff members' actions reflected society and demonstrated integrity was essential and was being addressed.
- The station visits he had undertaken had shown that NFRS firefighters were passionate and cared about both their communities and the service they provided. He would seek to further cultivate that ethic.

Councillor Gonzalez de Savage commented that firefighting was a vocation not just a job. He thanked firefighters who had attended the current meeting, which reflected their passion for the role. Mr Tuhill commented that his own 25 years' service had been a privilege and there was no better profession.

Mr Tuhill was asked how as CFO he would seek to ensure that NFRS continued to improve its performance and progress towards providing 'outstanding'-rated services for local residents, including responding to the needs of different areas within the county. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- It was vital for staff members to invest in the journey of improvement but they also expected investment in them from their leaders. There was a need to invest in people, provide them with the equipment and support to do their job and to build trust and confidence in his leadership. He expected to be held to account by NFRS staff members as part of this.
- The measure of improvement was ultimately via HMICFRS ratings. NFRS had made good progress in improving its effectiveness and efficiency. Frontline and operational delivery was superb, and it was recognised that the service needed to continue to innovate and improve.
- As the leader of NFRS he would set the tone for cultural change and ensure accountability for unacceptable behaviour.

Mr Tuhill was asked what he saw as the key factors in enabling NFRS to operate as effectively as possible in a demanding financial environment and how he would seek to address these factors. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- NFRS had been on a journey over the last five years. It had been at a low base when governance responsibility had transferred from Northamptonshire County Council. However, it was now seeing the benefit of subsequent investment. He would continue to seek further funding, accepting of the current challenging financial environment.
- At the same time NFRS needed to be innovative and identify opportunities to improve efficiency and to maximise resources.

Mr Tuhill was asked what approach he would take as CFO to NFRS's involvement in partnership working, both with other emergency services and in broader areas of

activity, to support the delivery of national and local priorities. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- Working in partnership was key. He had seen evidence of a close working relationship with Northamptonshire Police, with a joint command unit and a fully integrated team of fire officers and police officers. He sought to identify further areas of collaboration to deliver better public safety.
- Fire and Rescue services could add value across public safety throughout the community. One example of this from his service in Hertfordshire was the contribution that the Fire and Rescue service had made to the response to COVID-19, which included working with the local authority, health organisations and the armed forces to set up a mass vaccination centre.
- The Fire and Rescue service had worked with adults and children's services to add value and help to make a difference to vulnerable people. He was keen to continue this approach in Northamptonshire. Schemes such as Fire and Rescue cadets were beneficial both to young people and to the service.

The Chair noted that Fire and Rescue services were often in a position to enter situations that other partner organisations could not.

Mr Tuhill was asked to give an example of when he had led a major service transformation project, what challenges he had faced in doing so and how he had ensured that the project was delivered successfully. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- NFRS had commissioned an emergency cover review and he had experience of producing a similar piece of work in Hertfordshire. It was essential that an emergency cover review looked at the three key areas of response, prevention and protection and the interrelationship between them.
- The Hertfordshire review had looked, in detail, at how services were provided and whether resources were suitable and sufficient. As a result of this data-led exercise, new appliances were introduced in the county that included some different types of vehicle tailored to the specific requirements of the areas they were serving. He had acted as the senior sponsor of all the projects involved.

Mr Tuhill was asked how he would seek to work with the PFCC to reflect that the PFCC and the CFO had distinct responsibilities but must also work well as a team in the interests of Northamptonshire. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- The relationship between the CFO and the PFCC was clearly important. It should be based on open discussion. The PFCC set strategy and the CFO was responsible for operational delivery. He would expect to be held to account robustly for this.
- He may not always agree with the PFCC but they should be able to disagree agreeably. He would provide professional advice to the PFCC. If there was a disagreement it should be addressed through open and constructive discussion with a view to agreeing a way forward.

Mr Tuhill was asked how he would take into account the differences between urban and rural communities in delivering services. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- Hertfordshire had a similar mix of urban and rural areas to Northamptonshire with a similar number of full-time and on call stations. The emergency cover review had considered risks in the county and the capacity to respond: if it was accepted

that it was not always possible for an appliance to reach some rural areas within the standard response time what options were available to mitigate this situation.

- Data should be used to identify higher risk areas and to focus prevention activity in rural communities to mitigate risk there.

Mr Tuhill was asked how as CFO he would work to support cultural transformation in NFRS that enabled it to develop into a fully inclusive workplace that was representative of the communities that it served. Mr Tuhill was also asked whether he would visit and meet local councillors who might not otherwise be able to engage with the CFO. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- He would provide clear visible leadership. It was important that staff members had trust and confidence in him as the interim CFO and in his substantive role of Deputy CFO. Meeting staff members and giving a clear picture of what they could expect of him was important.
- Setting a standard would enable staff members to hold him to account and vice versa. All fire officers, regardless of rank, were held to account to the same National Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue.
- There were some related structural issues that needed to be addressed. Some older buildings may not support inclusion and diversity, for example, if they did not provide changing facilities for female staff members. Resources to address this needed to be identified.
- Policies and procedures should be reviewed where necessary to ensure they were inclusive to support people from diverse and under-represented groups.
- As CFO he would meet with local councillors. He hoped that there were already strong relationships between locally based NFRS officers and the community but he was happy to reinforce this by engaging as CFO.
- The CFO should be held to account by Northamptonshire residents in the most practical way.

Panel members commented that the Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils (NALC) could provide a practical way for the CFO to engage with local community representatives. Mr Tuhill responded that he would be happy to meet with NALC. NFRS would engage with all areas. It was on an improvement journey that should involve challenge but that should ultimately be led by evidence and data to produce a sound basis for future service plans.

Mr Tuhill was asked how as CFO he would seek to work with staff representative organisations to build and maintain constructive working relationships whilst also reflecting the need to deliver an appropriate level of service to the community. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- The current meeting provided a further demonstration that NFRS staff members were passionate and cared about their service.
- He would work as closely as possible with the representative bodies to build relationships, to develop a mutual understanding of respective positions and to maintain a continual and open dialogue.
- There would not always be agreement on decisions. Changes would be made based on data and evidence and as CFO he would seek early engagement with staff groups to explain the reasons for change and to enable them at least to be understood.

- Relationships between Fire and Rescue senior managers and representative groups had improved over recent years as had been evident during negotiations for a pay increment for firefighters. His challenge was to build further on this whilst recognising that the CFO may need to take unpopular decisions.

Mr Tuhill was asked what key principles he would seek to apply as the operational leader of NFRS in order to inspire confidence and respect in his leadership amongst staff members. Mr Tuhill responded that staff members' safety was paramount. As CFO he aimed to provide staff members with the right equipment, training and facilities with the expectation in return that they would be receptive and committed. He wanted staff members to recognise how seriously he took this issue.

Mr Tuhill was asked what relationship he thought that CFO should have with the Panel, given the respective roles of the Panel and PFCC. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- He had had a good relationship with similar panels in the past and wanted this to continue. He anticipated open dialogue with the Panel and with councillors in the county.
- The Panel could formally request that he attend a meeting but he would also propose to offer informal briefings and similar sessions on emerging national issues and how they affected Northamptonshire that could assist the Panel.
- The CFO had a role in assisting the Panel to understand the duties of the Fire and Rescue service.
- The public perception of a firefighter's role needed to be addressed to recognise the breadth of tasks actually involved in the prevention and protection elements.

Mr Tuhill was asked what he would most like to achieve during his time as CFO if he was appointed. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- The short term aim was to deal with some of the recent turbulence and move the focus back onto service delivery and prevention and protection work, reinforcing the sense that NFRS was one organisation working together to deliver services to Northamptonshire. NFRS senior managers would be carrying out visits to stations to listen to staff members and explain priorities. Building trust and confidence amongst staff members was an immediate priority.
- In the longer term he would seek to help to address other issues concerning organisational culture, service delivery, provision of facilities and the emergency cover review.

Mr Tuhill was asked what issues had been raised with him by staff members during visits to fire stations in the context of the recent situation. Mr Tuhill made the following points:

- His experience of recent visits had been so positive that it further reinforced his pride at being asked to carry out the role of interim CFO.
- Visits to stations that were the base for functions such as large animal rescue and swift water rescue had shown staff members' pride in specialist capabilities.
- Issues raised by staff members during some visits were operational, relating to additional equipment or better uniforms. These would be collated to enable possible action to be considered.
- Staff members were generally proud to be working for NFRS.

Miss Woodhouse welcomed the focus on nurturing staff members and on them being able to question the CFO that Mr Tuhill had shown in his answers to the Panel's questions. Mr Tuhill commented further that staff development and enabling staff members to be invested in NFRS was important. As CFO he aimed to take a 'you said; we did' approach and to enable staff members to understand decisions and actions taken.

The Chair thanked Mr Tuhill for his responses to the Panel's questions and asked if he wished to make any further comments or ask any questions to the Panel. Mr Tuhill had no questions for the Panel but reiterated that he was deeply honoured to be given the opportunity to lead NFRS. He would carry out the role to the best of his ability for as long as he could.

Councillor Gonzalez de Savage noted that if appointed Mr Tuhill would become interim CFO at a challenging time and would have five months to make an impact. He encouraged Mr Tuhill to be proactive about engaging with partners if he saw the need to raise issues. Mr Tuhill responded that he needed to learn about Northamptonshire but was looking forward to doing so. As well meeting staff members he needed to understand NFRS's governance processes. Ensuring that the organisation ran as effectively as possible also contributed to delivering the best outcomes.

161. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

162. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

The Chair requested the Panel to agree that the remainder of the meeting be held in private session.

RESOLVED that: under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that if the public and press were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 1 Paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to the act of the descriptions would be disclosed to them.

The remainder of the meeting took place in private session.

163. **Report and recommendation to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire on the proposed appointment of an interim Chief Fire Officer**

The Panel considered its report and recommendation on the proposed appointment.

At the conclusion of discussion the Chair invited the Panel to reach a resolution on the proposed appointment and it was unanimously:

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RESOLVED that: the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel recommends that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner appoints Mr Simon Tuhill as the interim Chief Fire Officer for Northamptonshire.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____