

## **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, Northampton NN1 1DE on Wednesday 6 July 2022 at 1.00pm.

Present            Councillor Gill Mercer (Chair)  
                      Councillor Andre Gonzalez De Savage (Vice-Chair)  
                      Councillor Adam Brown  
                      Councillor Dorothy Maxwell  
                      Mrs Anita Shields  
                      Councillor David Smith  
                      Councillor Winston Strachan

Substitute  
Members:        Councillor Philip Irwin  
                      Councillor Anne Lee  
                      Councillor Greg Lunn

Also in  
attendance       Stephen Mold, Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner  
                      Mark Jones, proposed candidate for appointment as Chief Fire Officer  
                      of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service  
                      Deborah Denton, Joint Head of Communications, Office of the Police,  
                      Fire & Crime Commissioner  
                      Helen King, Chief Finance Officer, Office of the Police, Fire & Crime  
                      Commissioner  
                      Nicci Marzec, Director for Early Intervention, Head of Paid Service and  
                      Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner  
                      Stuart McCartney, Governance & Accountability Manager, Office of  
                      the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner  
                      Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire  
                      Council  
                      James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West  
                      Northamptonshire Council  
                      Paul Hanson, Democratic Services Manager, West Northamptonshire  
                      Council

There were also two members of the public in attendance.

### **61. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Carr, McGhee, Pritchard, Roberts and from Miss Woodhouse. Councillor Irwin substituted for Councillor Carr, Councillor Lee substituted for Councillor McGhee and Councillor Lunn substituted for Councillor Pritchard.

### **62. Appointment of a Chair**

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager invited nominations for a member to chair the current meeting, ahead of the appointment of the Panel Chair and Deputy Chair for 2022/23 at the first regular meeting in the civic year. Councillor Mercer was

proposed and seconded by Councillors Gonzalez De Savage and Lee respectively. There were no further nominations.

**RESOLVED that: Councillor Gill Mercer be appointed as the Chair of the current Panel meeting.**

63. **Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting**

None received.

64. **Declarations of Interest**

None declared.

65. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair advised the Panel that the regular Panel meeting that had needed to be rescheduled from 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 would be held on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

66. **Proposed appointment by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire of a Chief Fire Officer**

The Chair welcomed Mr Mark Jones to the meeting and Panel members introduced themselves.

The Chair invited the Democratic Services Assistant Manager to outline the purpose and format of the confirmation hearing as set out in the report provided to the Panel and he highlighted the following points:

- The Panel was required to review and make a report on the proposed appointment of a Chief Fire Officer by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) as one its statutory functions.
- The Panel was required to hold a public confirmation hearing to put questions to the candidate. Guidance recommended that these questions should focus on the areas of the candidate's professional competence and personal independence.
- The confirmation hearing was not intended to repeat the recruitment and selection process carried out by the PFCC to identify the candidate but served more as a safeguard in the overall process.
- The confirmation hearing could result in recommendations by the Panel as to whether the proposed appointment should be made or not or a decision by the Panel to veto the proposed appointment, provided that this was supported by the required two-thirds majority of Panel members. A recommendation not to appoint a candidate or a decision to veto a proposed appointment should not be made lightly.
- The Panel's report resulting from the confirmation hearing would be sent to the PFCC by the end of the next working day and would be published in liaison with the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner.

The Chair invited Panel members to raise any questions regarding the confirmation hearing process. There were none.

The Chair then invited the PFCC to introduce Mr Jones as his proposed appointment to the role of Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) and to comment on the background to the proposed appointment. The PFCC made the following points:

- He was confident that the Panel would be impressed by the knowledge and experience that Mr Jones could bring to the role, which would support NFRS in its continuing improvement journey.
- Since the creation of the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority NFRS had received additional investment that had supported improvements in response times and enhanced its vehicle fleet. He was proud of the progress that had been made and paid tribute to the contribution of the outgoing Chief Fire Officer.
- The proposed appointment was the result of a comprehensive and robust recruitment process. This had identified that Mr Jones would be the right person to take forward NFRS and to develop it as an inclusive organisation that was able to embrace change and to make good use of the skills of its staff members.
- Mr Jones was a strong leader with a clear approach that would help to deliver the priorities set out in the PFCC's Police, Fire & Crime Plan.
- Reviewing and reporting on the proposed appointment was a significant responsibility for the Panel. He was sure that the Panel would carry it out with appropriate vigour and robustness.

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

Mr Jones was asked what particularly attracted him to the role of Chief Fire Officer of NFRS, what he saw as its main current challenges and what he would take from his professional experience to enable him to address these challenges effectively. Mr Jones made the following points:

- He had originally not been looking for another chief fire officer position in Britain but had been attracted to the challenges involved in continuing the improvements being made by NFRS. His service history showed that challenging roles held a particular interest for him and that he had record of delivering improvement.
- NFRS faced the challenge that affected all Fire & Rescue services of dealing with the gap between stakeholder expectations and available resources, even though Northamptonshire had benefited from additional investment since the PFCC had become the Fire & Rescue Authority. He had gained considerable experience in previous roles of improving services within financial constraints.
- As Chief Fire Officer he would seek to maximise the funding streams available to NFRS. People also needed to be brought along when there was an agenda for change. Firefighters were generally enthusiastic and receptive to change when

they felt it was being done with them. Members of the public needed to be engaged as well.

Mr Jones was asked how as Chief Fire Officer he would seek to ensure that NFRS continued to improve its performance and progressed towards providing outstanding-rated services for local residents. Mr Jones made the following points:

- His initial task would be to identify where NFRS stood in relation to its aims and ambitions, based on tangible performance measures.
- It would then be necessary to ensure that NFRS had the appropriate mechanisms to deliver performance improvements in future. These would form the basis for reporting to the PFCC that showed evidence of improvement in outcomes and standards. They would also enable the PFCC to hold to account the Chief Fire Officer for the progress being made.
- He would seek to communicate with people when there was a need for NFRS to change to set out the reasons for this and what difference it would make to members of the public.

It was noted that there was a possibility of industrial action in the future connected with the national pay offer for firefighters. Mr Jones was asked how he would seek to manage the impact in Northamptonshire and to maintain continuity of service if this was to occur. Mr Jones made the following points:

- All chief fire officers were required to plan for and manage contingencies that could affect fire cover. He would scrutinise NFRS's existing plans to ensure that they were effective. He would also seek to enhance public safety measures to mitigate the impact of contingencies on the community as far as possible.
- He recognised the legitimate right of firefighters to take industrial action. A short period of action should not have a detrimental effect on public protection.

Mr Jones 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 Jones made the following points:

- Fire & Rescue services generally had some latent capacity as a result of a reduction in acute demand over time.
- He would be keen to look at how NFRS could work with partners, particularly Northamptonshire Police but also others in the public and private sectors, to maximise value for money.
- NFRS should publicise the range of services it provided in order to maximise the wider appreciation of their value. This would help to encourage partners in joint working and possibly also investment.

Mr Jones was asked how as Chief Fire Officer he would seek to ensure that NFRS made good use of opportunities for partnership working, both with the emergency services and with partner organisations in broader areas of activity. Mr Jones made the following points:

- It was necessary to have a clear picture of the partnerships in which NFRS was involved and their respective aims. NFRS should then focus on those partnerships that produced most value.
- NFRS should explore options for further inter-regional partnerships with neighbouring services, particularly to the south, rather than being bound by geographical restrictions.
- The opportunity to improve partnership working with other public and emergency services in particular should be embraced.

Mr Jones was asked to give an example of when he had led a major service transformation project and how he had sought to ensure that it was successful. Mr Jones made the following points:

- He had served as the Director of Strategic Reform for the Australian Capital Territory Emergency Services Agency from 2016 – 2018. The Agency was investing AU\$100ms in a range of projects in areas including workforce diversity, industrial relations and facilities development. However, projects were not being planned effectively enough.
- He had reset these projects based on PRINCE2 methodology and had produced other processes to support effective programme management. He had also coached colleagues to develop as project managers to oversee projects beyond the end of his tenure.
- The success of this approach was demonstrated by the fact that projects were still running well four years on.

It was noted that the Chief Fire Officer and the PFCC must work as a team in the interests of Northamptonshire but do so in a way that recognised that the Chief Fire Officer was responsible for operational leadership of NFRS and was held to account by the PFCC for its effectiveness. Mr Jones was asked how he would seek to maintain the right balance between these different factors in his working relationship with the PFCC. Mr Jones made the following points:

- He was accustomed to reporting to a senior authority, whether that was a minister or a combined fire authority.
- He believed in open dialogue and maintaining a professional relationship, through both regular communication and formal meetings. There should be a clear understanding of the political and operational boundaries between the PFCC's and Chief Fire Officer's respective roles and how any transgressions would be addressed.
- Agreed strategic objectives and priorities would provide a good basis from which to work.
- He recognised that the Panel could also request the Chief Fire Officer to attend meetings to provide information.

Mr Jones was asked how he would communicate with local councils as Chief Fire Officer. Mr Jones made the following points:

- As Chief Fire Officer he would seek to engage regularly with all local elected representatives. He would quickly aim to build a good understanding of the area and of local stakeholders.
- He wanted NFRS to be seen as an organisation with which stakeholders wished to be associated.

It was noted that NFRS served two different local authority areas and Mr Jones was asked whether he would seek to provide an equal level of service in both. Mr Jones made the following points:

- In his latest professional role he was responsible for services covering an area that was larger than France and Germany together.
- It was not possible for a Fire & Rescue service to provide the same service in all parts of an area. However, he would guarantee the minimum standard of service that NFRS would aim to provide throughout Northamptonshire.

It was noted that NFRS should have an organisational culture that engaged and empowered staff members. In this context Mr Jones was asked how as Chief Fire Officer he would handle a dispute with staff members, in order to engage with them and to produce a fair outcome, and was asked how he would respond should such a case involve a court decision. Mr Jones made the following points:

- He was a strong believer in employee rights and was a longstanding union member himself, whilst also recognising the rights of non-union members.
- National and local disputes were relatively rare. If a dispute was within his power to resolve it was usually possible to do so. This would involve working together with the PFCC in cases where resources were involved.
- He believed in employee engagement as standard practice and in sincere consultation. Views would be listened to when they were sought.

Mr Jones was asked what key principles he would seek to apply as the operational leader of NFRS in order to build and maintain confidence and respect in his leadership and in the future direction of the organisation amongst staff members, partners and local residents. Mr Jones made the following points:

- The first key principle was public service and public safety: NFRS personnel were public servants and the organisation existed to support public safety. The safety of NFRS personnel would be his other key principle.
- NFRS should then deliver good value and outcomes and be an accountable organisation. It should treat everybody with dignity and respect: firefighters generally did this readily, which maintained positive perceptions of the profession.
- All chief fire officers were custodians of their respective services and should reflect this in the way they carried out the role. He would also seek to be a strong defender of NFRS where necessary.

Mr Jones was asked what relationship the Chief Fire Officer should have with the Police, Fire & Crime Panel given the respective roles of the Panel and the PFCC. Mr Jones made the following points:

- He recognised that the Panel had the power to request the Chief Fire Officer to attend formal meetings to answer questions. However, he would seek to engage with Panel members whenever this was useful to enable the Panel to be informed about relevant issues.

The Chair invited Mr Jones to raise any questions that he wished to ask the Panel. Mr Jones advised that he had been well-informed about the Panel's role during the recruitment process and thanked members for their time.

67. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

68. **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 I, 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.

69. **Report and recommendation to the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire on the proposed appointment of a 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. On a vote of 9 members in favour and one against it was:

**RESOLVED that: the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel recommends that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner appoints Mr Mark Jones as the Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service.**

The meeting closed at 2.15pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_